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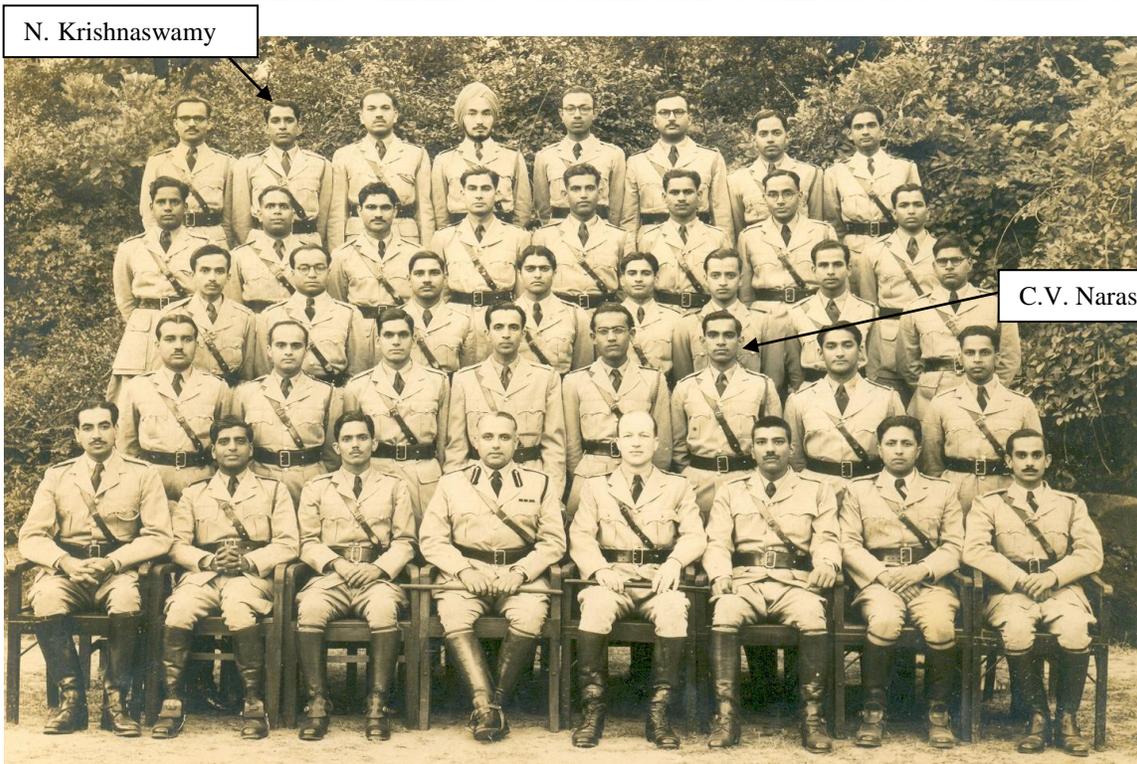
SNIPPETS – I
(BITS & BYTES OF SHARED MEMORIES)

BY
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1948 – At Mount Abu

We may best begin with the following image of the hostel and our batchmates in Mount Abu who largely comprise the dramatis personae of this narrative and who provided the foundation on which many of our warm friendships were built.



Here we are, the members of our batch in the main group photo above, Above it is a glimpse of our hostel at the top, an ancient building reminiscent of the Cellular Jail in the Andamans, though originally intended as barracks for soldiers. This had about 10

rooms to a floor on two floors, and with two of us allotted to each room,. Facilities were primitive and included a cot, one bucket for water and one commode (the less finicky called it a shitpot) for each of us. The above photograph was taken on the day of our passing out from Mount Abu on completion of our training, or the day of our release from jail, if one might refer to it in the context of the rigour of the year that we spent there – yes, one year R.I.

Our batch had 39 members, drawn from all over the country, and each different and unique in his own way. Some of them, of course had kinks and mannerisms, that drew our critical attention, as a constant and never-failing source of fun or occasion for leg-pulling, as will become apparent from much of the account that follows. In our references here, to oddities of individuals, of course, no offence is meant, and they do not detract from our warm affection for those whose legs we pulled.

Many of our batch-mates have passed on, and we miss them greatly. We have also presented here a few entries relating to the post-Mount Abu years, essentially to illustrate that personal kinks and oddities are quite universal. A few entries in our narrative are marked anonymous wherever the descriptions were striking but not quite complimentary.



C.V.Narasimhan



N.Krishnaswamy



M.S.Heble

Three of us, CVN, NK and M.S.Heble, formed the Leg-Puller Triumvirate of the batch, who were bound by the same Wodehousian brand of humour. It was our eye for the odd, the unusual and the comical that threw up much of what we have documented.

Heble, of course, was the master wag and mimic of our batch. In our cricket matches with outside teams, his favourite gag was to limp into the field to bat, to induce the opening bowler to take him lightly, and then proceed to thrash him with lusty hits to the fence.

In later years when guests at his home would compliment him on the food that was served, Heble would, instead of transferring the compliment to his wife, startle them by saying that he had married a cook



P.L.Mehta, Commandant of the Central Police Training College, Mount Abu. An old timer of the Indian Police, brought up in the old British tradition, he had much concern that we should acquire not only professional competence but also all the social graces of an elite class, which did not come easily to the rabble of unsophisticated youngsters that came into his care.



J.R.de Chazal, the Assistant Commandant. One of the last British IP officers – a mild, soft-spoken man who, not surprisingly, became a priest after retirement. He had difficulty with Indian names. To him, our batchmate Bhinge was always “Bingley”



Much of the rigour of our lives at Mount Abu derived from our outdoor activities, specially the physically exacting drills, that expected blind, unquestioning response to commands, which made for a traumatic transition for youngsters like us just out from the liberal easy-going environment of Universities. Here you see our squad at drill under the command of Pratt, our Chief Drill Instructor, the blast of whose stentorian voice could knock you off your feet; under the watchful eye of Mehta, our Commandant (on a horse in the picture), making sure that no pains were spared to turn us into polished automatons



The one delightful component of our outdoor activities was horse-riding, which we enjoyed, despite the occasional fall we had from a bucking horse – occasions which our genius of a Riding Master, Bahadur Singh, taught us to take in our stride.

Our Northern friends accepted our Southern mastery of law and classroom subjects, but were surprised that this lean and lanky Madrasi called Narasimhan could excel as a horseman.



Our Indoor training was largely centred around a study of law and jurisprudence, which many of us were studying for the first time in makeshift classrooms as seen in this picture.

There was often a mismatch in some of the instructors between their grasp of the law and their facility in English, which often broke the tedium of our classes.

Mr Banerji, our Chief Law Instructor, for instance, had his problem with pronunciation, He pronounced “girl” as “geral”, and if we attempted to correct him, he would say “some may pronounce it as ‘geral’ but I insist that it is ‘geral’ ”

Then there was Mr Ahuja, whose Punjabi contribution to pronunciation of “measure-pleasure-treasure-lawyer” was “meyyar-pleyyar-treyyar- layyar” – the last word suggestive of “liar”

As our training came to a close, Mr Bhatnagar, our Law Instructor, wished us good luck with the words “I wish you could all pass”. Of course, his choice of words arose from his seeing no difference between “could” and “should”



Our Mess : Where we were trained to match our skills in the use of rifle and lathi with skills in the use of knife and fork. The Mess was also the scene of many a record breaking eating performance, with Onkar Singh from UP setting high standards for a hearty meal.



P.A.Rosha from Punjab : Tall, fair and handsome, he had a striking personality that was the envy of our batch. Already with a good UPSC examination ranking, and with a good performance in all branches of training and all the social graces that made him popular with the local elite, he was expected to be the Commandant's choice for the best cadet prize. Finally, on overall performance, that prize went to CVN.



S.N.Mathur from Punjab : Every inch a gentleman. The only occasion when he let his hair down in our whole year at Mount Abu was when he joined in the revelry of a Holi celebration. CVN and NK were much disturbed in their sleep that night by the noise of the merry makers. But Mathur was the first to call the next morning to offer a profuse apology. Yes, without doubt, every inch a gentleman.



V.V.Naik from Madhya Pradesh : He used a very slow and deliberate way of speaking to make abundantly sure that he was clearly understood. However sometimes, the listener would get lost in the middle of his sentences, like the waiter-bearer at our Mess. By the time Naik had finished his ordering breakfast, "Do ----- ande --- ka --- - ek ---- omelette ---- banao", the bearer was left undecided whether what was wanted was "Do ande ka ek omelette" or "Ek anda ka do omelette"



A.B.Chakraborty from West Bengal : Like some from Bengal, he had difficulty distinguishing between the consonants 'ba' and 'va', both of which he pronounced as 'ba'. One could not, for instance, make out whether he was talking about a bill or a will. His classic explanation of the difference between Hindi and Bengali was "In Hindi you have 'ba' and 'va', but in Bengali you have only 'ba'".

He had difficulty too with vowel forms, invariably elongating the short ones and shortening the long ones. For instance, the phrase "if a thief...", became "i-i-i-i-f a thif".

He was a diligent student, always reading his law book with a pen in hand, and he meticulously underlined and double-underlined important words or phrases. We were of course, puzzled how he handled the book at the end of the year, by which time, ALL THE LINES in the book had been fully underlined.

Our most unforgettable (or forgettable) experience was the day we were standing behind him watching him at target practice with a machine gun. When one of us called out to correct his posture, he turned around to check what we had said, with the machine gun now pointed at us and his finger still in the trigger. In a split second all of us dived like rabbits into the trench behind us to take cover. The shouting that Chief Drill Instructor Pratt later gave him, left Chakraborty shivering for long afterwards.



R.L.Bhinge from Maharashtra : One of our batchmates who set Olympic standards at the dining table. Heble, the chief wag of our batch, would always offer him a plate of biscuits with the words, "Bhinge, have a biscuit or six".



B.K..Roy from Orissa : The other competitor for Bhinge at the dining table. Many in our batch would therefore refer to him, not as Bijon Krishna Roy, but as "Bhojan Kashta Roy".



R.N.Sheopory from UP : Well remembered for his "absence of mind" at drill on the parade ground. At a point when our squad was standing, lined up facing a wall, and he had first to order "Squad, About Turn" and then order "Squad, Quick March", he reversed the order of the commands too late to realise that the squad was hitting the wall. His command and immediate exclamation were delivered together as a single unforgettable command

“Squad, Quick March, OH HELL !”.

Sheopory was remembered no less for his habit of chain smoking, which he sustained largely on borrowed cigarettes. In a lampooning programme in the format of a convocation, conducted by CVN, NK and Heble, to celebrate the end of our course, Sheopory was awarded the FRCS Diploma, standing for “Free Ration of Cigarette Stubs”



K.V. Subramanian from undivided Madras (later Kerala) : Unforgettable for his total inability to adhere to tune in singing and to step in marching. His singing tended to be a monotone recitation of prose, that defied description. In fact, even as he prepared himself to sing on occasions, we used to give him a drill-like command, “Prose Order, March !”. His marching of course, admits of some description – it simply was an inability to establish the alternating movements of the feet and arms into a natural synchronised rhythm, despite his conscious attempts every now and then to force a change of their rhythm, by a more rapid shuffling of the arms.



H.R.K. Talwar from Punjab : His body had a physical form that he could not control and that the drill instructors could not understand. Basically if he stood upright as expected of him during drills, his stomach would bulge well beyond the line of the front line of the squad. If the instructor called on him to draw his stomach in, he would do so at once, but the bulge got transferred from the front to the back, at his bottom.



G.V. Narayanan from the undivided Madras (later Tamil Nadu) : A talented cricketer, talker and eater, with a penchant for the theatrical and for sometimes stretching arguments well beyond the limits of absurdity.

A simple catch at silly mid-on in a cricket match would have him contrive a fall and a tumble to make it look spectacular.

Once NK had to be away when GVN came on a visit, and hence NK had to arrange for him to have his food at a local hotel. A bill for 3 meals was later sent by the hotel to NK. It was promptly used as documentary basis for pulling GVN’s leg that he needed three meals per meal. Of course, the meals were for him and his driver and orderly.

In one argument GVN insisted that K & J Cooper, the name of a publisher of a well known grammar book, referred to, not two persons, but only one person who had just used two initials in that style. In that case, said CVN, G.V. Narayanan could also be referred to as G & V Narayanan, GVN lost his composure but saw the point.

Our Finger Print Expert Mr Lahiri explained that no two persons could have identical finger prints and that even the composition of the sweat on the fingers were unique to each person. GVN proceeded to insist that, if not the finger prints, at least the sweat could be chemically replicated and that it is possible that some day, bottles of readymade sweat might become available in the market. It was only derisive laughter of

the whole class that finally silenced GVN.

When our Law Instructor Naunihal Singh illustrated the significance of “knowledge” and “intention” as ingredients of a homicide charge, GVN’s question was whether the assailant would be liable for murder, if his victim died of heart failure just a few moments before actually receiving the stab injury. Our Instructor was simply non-plussed.

And on the parade ground, GVN would be very particular about a smart click of his heels when he had to march up to the Commandant to come to attention and salute. For this, he would march towards the officer, up to a point, not directly facing him, but two feet to a side. He would then step sharply sideways to come face to face, essentially to enable him to bring his heels together with the greatest visible and audible effect. Heble had a truly hilarious mimicry version of GVN’s action.

And finally there was GVN’s effort to solve the “Case of the Missing Ten Rupee Note”. When the dhobi, Hiralal, declined to own up to taking the ten rupee note that GVN left in the pocket of the shirt he had given for wash, GVN decided to take matters in hand. Addressed to Hiralal in his fluent Anglo-Indian style of Hindi, GVN’s harangue ended thus : “Naam bada hai ya paisa bada hai ? Paisa nahin dhega, tumara naam bloody well kharab ho jayega man !. GV’s exhortation did not work, but a later strong arm intervention by Mr Pratt did. The money was restored and the event gave us our first lesson on ground level realities in the detection of crime !!!



N.K.Verma from UP. who rose suddenly in everyone’s estimate, from a low to a high profile, when his high connections became known, on the occasion of a visit to the College, of V.Shankar, a senior Secretary to the Govt. of India, to whom he was related.

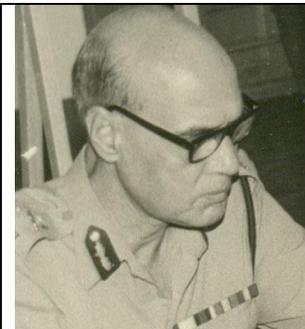


M.V.N.Rao of erstwhile Madras, later allotted to Andhra State. His tendency, like many Telugu speaking people to pronounce “government” as “governament” and of Tamil speaking people to add the elongated vowel “aa” after words, always prompted Heble to mimic South Indian pronunciation with the sentence “Bombay Governamentaa, bad Governamentaa – apply, apply, no reply. Madras Governamentaa, good Governamentaa – today apply, yesterday reply”



S.N.Gupta from UP. Remembered for sometimes making tall claims till one occasion when he was deflated. On one of the weekly guest nights at the Officer's Mess, Commandant Mehta recounted vividly how he took off his shirt and grappled successfully with a violent offender. Taking his cue from the end that narration, NK who was sitting next to Gupta, said in deliberate measured tone "Gupta here says he can also match that performance to the point of taking off his shirt, but on the later part, he has to think." After a few moments of pregnant silence, the house came down in uncontrollable laughter.

Part 3 : Post Mount Abu years :



E.L.Stracey : dearly loved by several later batches of IPS trainees who came into contact with him when he joined as Deputy Commandant at Mount Abu. He had a great sense of humour, often expressed with an unusual turn of phrase. Examples : his description of someone as "a gentleman, every other inch"; or his description of others as "crooked as a corkscrew" or "stinking against the wind"

LP Singh, a stalwart of the ICS, known as workaholic and hard task master, who made a great mark as Home Secretary in the Government of India. When someone in Delhi referred to seeing LP Singh on an early morning walk in Lodi Gardens, NK corrected him to say it was more likely that LP Singh was returning home from office after the day's work



R.A.Gopaldaswami, one of the great luminaries of the ICS, as Chairman of the First Tamil Nadu Police Commission, listened carefully as NK, the Member-Secretary, described the police wireless network in Tamil Nadu which enabled any Headquarters Officer to speak at any time to any police station or group of police stations of the State. Greatly excited, RAG asked “Would it then become possible in an emergency for the Chief Minister to address local people assembled in all police stations of the State ? NK’s polite reply was, “Yes sir, but I imagine that the Chief Minister would prefer to do that over the All India Radio”. RAG looked non-plussed for a moment, before breaking into laughter !

A.C.Madhavan Nambiar : a master raconteur full of infectious laughter, who would always have his listeners in splits. There was, for instance, his description of an occasion when a VIP became suddely very uneasy in the midst of a discussion, due, it turned out, to one end of his native underwear (langote) having dropped loose, requiring him to adjourn to a corner to set matters right, in a process that Nambiar, in his inimitable style, described as “restoration of order”

Anonymous State Civil Service officer on his first posting as Collector in Tamil Nadu, dealing with a law and order situation for the first time, felt it necessary to start by reading out the provisions of Section 144 from the Cr.P.C to his Tahsildar and then asking him to frame a notification under that Section to meet that situation. The Tahsildar produced a draft which made the Collector go red in the face, when he found that it’s opening sentence read “Whereas a situation has arisen, as per instructions of the Collector, that is likely to lead to a breach of peace.....”

ANONYMOUS Civil Service officer. At a public police function, he waxed eloquent on the undertaking of major programmes of “modernizing, humanizing and womanizing in the Tamil Nadu Police Force”. He was, of course, referring to the expansion of the Women Police setup

ANONYMOUS officer in Tamil Nadu whose peculiar mode of walking prompted CVN to describe it as “walking sideways in order to go forward”

V.Natarajan, outstanding officer, who retired as Deputy Superintendent of Police, whose thoughts and words proceeded at different speeds. Undecided whether to

describe a decision as hard decision or tough, he would finally articulate it as a “hard tough”. Likewise, “paying right through the nose” would emerge as “paying through the right nose”.

C.J.Dharmarajan, Inspector of Police : Reporting after a spell of leave for celebrating his daughter’s marriage, and asked how the function went off, his reply was “it went off peacefully sir” Clearly the effect of years of conditioning by law and order situations !

ANONYMOUS Deputy Superintendent of Police : always claiming speedy response to situations by writing that he rushed to scenes of crime : though the rushing might be three days later !! A fairly common claim with police officers, where their “rushing” referred to the speed of travel, not the date.

P.R.Padmanabha Ayyar, P.A to the Superintendent of Police, Madurai North. Well remembered for his frequent requests for leave to go to his village where his family lived, for the simple purpose of “having homely meals” at home

Subramania Ayyar, Accountant, Office of the Superintendent of Police, Madurai North, whose pompous English noting on files invariable used the phrase “In this connection, I had occasion

Gandhi, orderly constable at NK’s home at Madurai ; often remembered for answering a telephone call for NK to say that the master was having his lunch, and would the caller call back two hours later. Of course the caller was greatly amused at the thought of a lunch lasting two hours.

ANONYMOUS Accountant, Office of the Superintendent of Police, Tirunelveli, whose deafness occasioned a deputation of his staff to seek the SPs help for a grant to get him a hearing aid. After this was provided, the satisfaction of staff turned out to be shortlived leading to another deputation to complain that he would invariably switch off his hearing aid during office hours to ward off the pestering of staff.

ANONYMOUS representative of that large class of persons guided by the Tamil saying

சோழியன் குடுமி சும்மா ஆடாது

This is loosely translated in English as “The knotted tuft does not shake without purpose”, and refers to persons whose actions spring from some selfish motive. In time, this expression entered into our regular usage for reference to such persons as “Tuftists” and to their philosophy as “Tuftism”. Another word that joined this lexicon

similarly was “Buddist”, referring to one given to the “buddi”, a colloquial Tamil word for the liquor bottle

ANONYMOUS representative of that large class of persons whom we have designated as belonging to the Lake School, (a name borrowed from the Lake School of English Poetry)

An old Tamil folk tale tells of a person who visited a nearby lake every morning for his ablutions, till one day a gust of wind threw up a lot of water and drenched him. He got so angry with the lake that he vowed never to come there again to clean himself. The story poses the question “Who is the loser – the person or the lake ?” At Abu, by reason of his often getting angry with us for pointing out his illogical arguments, we appointed GVN as the Founder of the Lake School of our batch.

ANONYMOUS representative of that large class of persons with a glad eye for girls. Learning of this officer’s frequent application for leave on compassionate grounds, but really for having a gay time, Hamilton, a well-remembered officer of the British days, recorded his order as “Leave sanctioned on passionate grounds”

ANONYMOUS senior veteran seated at a Police Station late in the evening, on the reason for his waiting there : “I am waiting for the return of our constables who have been sent out into the station limits to collect persons for the necessary “spot arrests” of that morning’s rioting”

ANONYMOUS seasoned veteran remembered for opening fire on a rioting mob, resulting in many with bullet injuries who were found not only in the claimed line of fire, but also, unaccountably, in many distant side streets

ANONYMOUS officer : His body had the huge dimensions worthy of a landmark : leading CVN to coin the unforgettable expression that he “was suffering from good health”

ANONYMOUS officer : His squint prompted the comment that he could not see eye to eye with his colleagues. He puzzled his listeners, as someone said, by “looking here but seeing there”.

