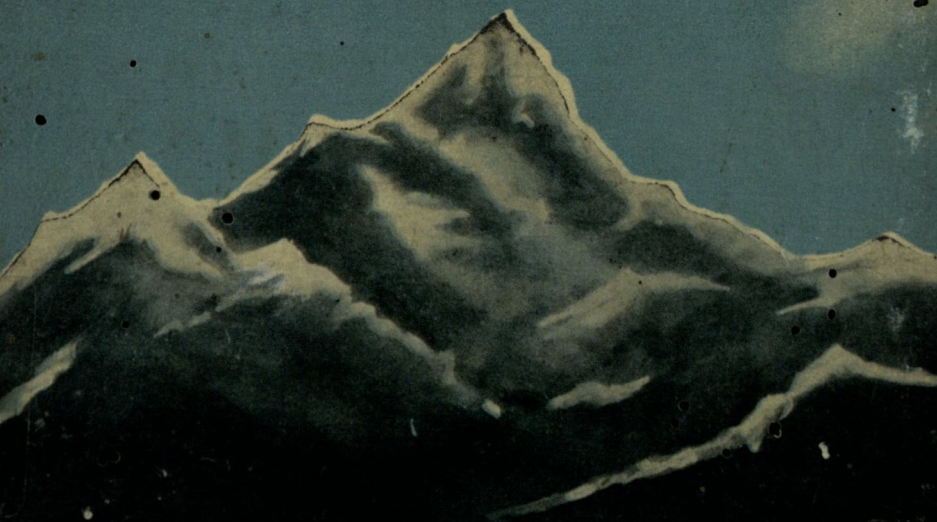


NEHRU'S EMISSARY *to* KASHMIR

(OCTOBER 1947)

"I THINK THE BOOK IS A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION
TO HISTORY."

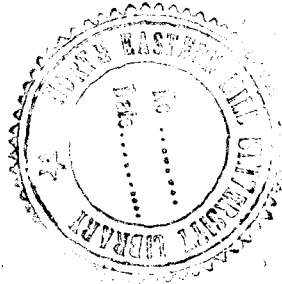
—Earl Mountbatton of Burma



MAJOR GENERAL HIRALAL ATAL

NEHRU'S EMISSARY TO KASHMIR

[October 1947]



by

MAJOR GENERAL HIRALAL ATAL

"The book is a valuable contribution to History"
—Earl Mountbatten of Burma



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DEDICATED

to

**the memory of my late younger brother,
Brigadier Kanhaiya Lal Atal, M. V. C.**

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Preface

This narrative would not have seen the light of day but for the constant persuasion of my well-wishers and particularly that of my son. They were eager that I should, on the basis of my personal knowledge and experience, write an account of the crucial days of the invasion of Kashmir by the raiders from the North-West Frontier and other matters soon after the division of the country into Pakistan and India.

I had been especially assigned, by our Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, to proceed to Srinagar to investigate and report on the situation prevailing in the Valley, as the Government of India was receiving near negligible information about the actual happenings and the development of the political and military situation.

He personally briefed me as to the guidelines I had to follow and adhere.

Being posted on a significant mission, I thought it would be in the fitness of things if I kept with me

copies of all messages and reports that I would be submitting and maintaining the records of letters I would be receiving and the replies I would be giving.

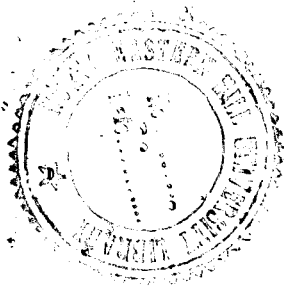
It is fortunate that I did so, though I have never kept any diary or notes throughout my service. It is from these records that I have been able to compile this narrative of Kashmir in peril.

I wish to offer my thanks to Dr. I. Topa, a noted historian and former Registrar of Osmania University of Hyderabad, for his encouragement, assistance and guidance in the compilation of the narrative.

I am also obliged to those comrades-in-arms who have helped in the typing of my manuscript and to my wife for the indulgence whilst I was closetted, putting pen to paper.

7, Hazrat Mahal Road,
Lucknow-2.

Hira Lal Atal



THE KASHMIR ISSUE

The question of the division of the country into India and Pakistan was in the forefront of Indian politics for a long time because of sharp ideological differences between the Congress and the Muslim League, the two major political bodies.

The Muslim League was basing its demand that those areas which had a majority of the population belonging to Muslim faith should be separated from the rest of the country to form Pakistan which, in its view, comprised the North-West Frontier, Baluchistan, Sind, the Punjab, Bengal and the Princely State of Kashmir.

The Congress was, however, of the view that the country should not be divided merely on a religious basis and decried the claim of Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League, that the Muslims were a nation

THE PRIME MINISTER'S EMISSARY

I was then Director of Personal Services of the divided Indian Army and our own Headquarters was styled "Army Headquarters (India)" for the time being and, to a certain extent, we were under the control of 'Supreme Headquarters', though perfunctorily.

It was in the evening of October 26 that, whilst having my tea, my mind was musing over all these events—thinking of my past associations with the people and places now in Pakistan and wondering what the future held out for us. My dream of a free and united India had thus been shattered.

To wake me up from this reverie was the sudden

INDIAN ARMY TOWARDS SRINAGAR

We took off from Palam at approximately 0630 hours but before doing so I wrote a hurried personal note to the Prime Minister briefly informing him about the episode between me and the Brigadier General Staff of D. E. P. Command and requested him to relieve me of my assignment after I had fulfilled my mission and permit me to retire from the service. I gave this pencilled note to my younger brother to be delivered to the Prime Minister and I also sent an official letter, written in pencil and addressed to the Chief of Army Staff (India), a copy of which is reproduced below.

“I have the honour to report that I am leaving for Kashmir as A. H. Q. Liaison Officer to the Government of Kashmir under protest,

THE EMISSARY AT SRINAGAR

I then went to Nedou's Hotel where I was put up by the State Government. I left my travel bag in the room and with my map case I made many attempts to contact a member or members of the Kashmir Government but was unable to do so; they were just not traceable and as far as I could make out there was no government at all functioning.

During my two visits to Srinagar the Kashmir Government had detailed Major Kak, a Veterinary Officer of the State Forces, to act as a guide to assist me in contacting the people I wished to see and places I desired to visit. He was also in close contact with the so-called State Government, then existing in Srinagar, and with Sheikh Abdulla's party.

CRUCIAL EVENTS ON OCTOBER 28

On the morning of October 28, after having made my contacts, I sent the following message to the Prime Minister, by name :—

“Very evident that Kashmir Maharaja Government not functioning (.) so-called Governor Major Pritam Singh and Rao Ratan Singh I.G.P. are supposed to constitute the Government, they are completely demoralised and the mass exodus of their families and those of other high officials has caused panic (.) National Conference with Abdulla and Bakshi a tireless worker are virtually running the administration in the city of Srinagar and are doing yeoman work (.) personally consider it essential that some form of recognised Government be formed early am meeting Mahajan today and will discuss (.) I think I have

HAPPENINGS ON OCTOBER 29

I remained at the airport for the remainder of the night in bitter cold since we had no shelter and most of the time had to pass in suspense, smoking cigarettes and drinking innumerable cups of tea which gave us a little wanted comfort.

I was anxiously awaiting wireless contact with the Battalion and repeatedly kept on asking our wireless operator why he was not able to regain contact. He said that despite his best efforts there was no response from the Battalion Headquarters Set—a contingency which he was unable to comprehend.

In such a situation one's mind is likely to wander into wild fantasy and weird foreboding, and that is

BACK IN DELHI

We landed at Safdarjung airport at about 1430 hours. I deposited my kit at home and then went straight to see the Prime Minister, at his residence at York Road, to inform him of the latest development in Kashmir and to lay stress on the formation of a de facto government, the despatch of certain essential items, at least a brigade group—a battery of mountain gunners—two troops of armoured cars, a number of civilian drivers and fighter aircraft with adequate aviation fuel to be stationed at Srinagar. The troops had to be self-sufficient in rations particularly flour. Vegetables and fruits were plentiful in the Valley and the setting up of a well organised evacuation cell was the need of the hour. The road Pathankot-Jammu was usable but required urgent repairs for making full use of this transport link.

I also wished to impress upon the Prime

A CONTRETEMPS

When I went to report verbally about the military situation and the political conditions prevailing in the Valley, as also my general impressions, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff handed me a letter from the Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. Bucher, which had a reference to my official letter sent to him from Palam airport on October 27, just prior to our flight to Srinagar, in which I had requested him that I should be relieved of my appointment as Liaison Officer and be permitted to retire from service.

He indicated in his letter that my going to Kashmir was the outcome of the Prime Minister's request to the Commander-in-Chief through the Defence Minister and that it would seem peculiar in such circumstance that I, as a senior officer of the Indian Army, should ask to be relieved of an assignment given to me at the request of the Head

RETURN TO MY ASSIGNMENT

Meanwhile, events were on the move in the Valley. A brigade headquarters and some aircraft, for close co-operation and air reconnaissance, were flown in from Delhi and 161 Brigade was ultimately formed and came under the command of Brig. L.P. Sen. Closely following on the heels of the 1 Sikh Regiment, a company of the 4 Kumaon Regiment under the command of Major Somnath Sharma, had been flown in on November 3 and were sent out on a fighting patrol towards Badgam, a small village about half a mile from the air-field. It ran into a hoard of raiders, totalling about 600, who attacked it under cover of mortar fire. A fierce encounter ensued and heavy casualties were inflicted on the raiders. The Brigade Commander, sensing that the Kumaonies were outnumbered, decided to send some more reinforcements but before

ON TO SRINAGAR

I left for Srinagar on November 11 and on my arrival I was informed that our Defence Minister was there. Our Prime Minister arrived the following day and received a warm reception and great ovation from the people of Srinagar. Thousands had congregated at the air-field and lined the route leading into the city where he addressed a large crowd who assembled at Mujahid Manzil.

Thereafter, he left to see Baramula which had been recaptured on November 9 by our advancing troops. On the way, we witnessed the casualties inflicted on the raiders by our troops, mostly by the 2 Armoured Cars of the 7 Cavalry. Dead bodies were lying on and beside the road and the burnt-out shells of lorries that had been strafed by our aircraft.

BACK TO THE VALLEY

After having fulfilled my mission, I returned to the 'desk' and continued to function as Director of Personal Services for a short period of time.

The officers of my seniority, belonging to the same service-group, were constantly being shifted to fill up gaps left by the departing British officers. They had to take charge under short notice and had hardly settled into the saddle, so to speak, of their appointment, when off they went to assume new assignments. Such conditions were tolerated by them for the sake of the country and the profession to which they belonged. I also had to hold such four different appointments within a period of five years before I found myself back in command of troops in Kashmir.

ARMY'S COMPLICITY

Trouble really started on May 18, 1953, when Sheikh Abdulla in a speech to the Working Committee of the National Conference had opposed the continuation of Indo-Kashmir relations on their present basis and objected to any financial integration, the acceptance of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court etc.

Since then the Praja Socialist leader Prem Nath Dogra and others had been pointing out the need of full integration of the Kashmir State with India and highlighting Abdulla's utterances on Independence etc. and openly blaming Pandit Nehru for his weakness, for Abdulla who they alleged had placed blind reliance on the Sheikh—a trust which was being misused. They further alleged that Sheikh Abdulla was delaying the

THE ARREST

At about 0400 hours on the night of the 8th/9th August a district magistrate and a party of police officials and constables, woke up Sheikh Abdulla from his slumber, much to his annoyance, and handed him over the warrant for his arrest which shook him to the core; he fumed and abused the officers concerned and attempted to evade arrest which he eventually could not. When he calmed down a bit, two letters from the Sadar-e-Riyasat were given to him.

The first letter contained a communique, issued and timed at 0430 hours, which said "The Sadar-e-Riyasat has been pleased to dismiss Sheikh Mohamed Abdulla from the Prime Ministership of Jammu and Kashmir State and has dissolved the Council of Ministers headed by him. The Sadar-e-Riyasat later called on Bakshi Ghulam Mohamed,

ARMY EDUCATIONAL STORES
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