

Farrer Park

by Peter Ward Fay

Professor of History Peter Fay's book, *The Forgotten Army*, from which this chapter is excerpted, had its start in Kanpur, India, where for two years in the middle 1960s Fay taught at an institute of technology just getting under way with Caltech's help. In Kanpur, Fay met Prem Sahgal and his wife Lakshmi. He managed a mill; she had an obstetrical practice. Two decades earlier, however, both had played important roles in the "forgotten army" of the title. Their stories fascinated Fay. Years later he returned to Kanpur and taped their recollections, work that led eventually to a broader study of that army—why it was formed, how, and with what result.

It has long been widely believed, particularly in the West, that India did not fight for her freedom from the British Empire—because she did not need to. The nonviolent tactics of Gandhi and Nehru sufficed, and on August 15, 1947, Britain "transferred power" in the manner of a father handing the car keys to his son. But in the persons of Prem and Lakshmi, Fay encountered Indians who believed that struggle had, in fact, been necessary; they were among those who seized an opportunity the Japanese offered and took up arms. (Prem commanded a regiment in the field, and Lakshmi had organized a women's unit.) More than 10,000 Indian soldiers made prisoner when the Japanese overran Malaya early in 1942, together with some 5,000 recruited on the spot and trained, moved early in 1944 to Burma, which the Japanese also held. There this Indian National Army (INA), commanded by a charismatic, sometime Congress Party leader named Subhas Chandra Bose, prepared to break into India on the flanks of the Japanese and ignite rebellion. Prospects were good—anti-British feeling was rising. Then in mid-1944 the Japanese were stopped dead on

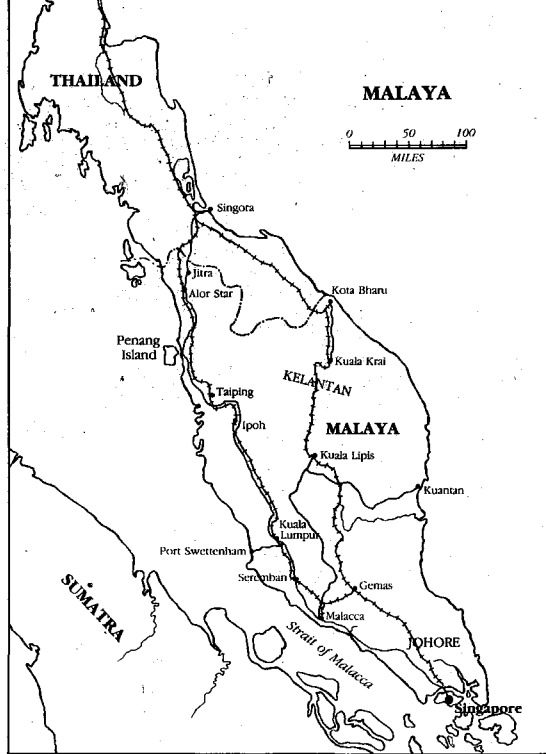
An army for an independent India, a true Indian Army, was offered that afternoon at Farrer Park.

the border. By early 1945 they had lost Burma itself, and the INA lay beaten and scattered. Bose died in a plane crash. Prem (who, like Lakshmi, was close to Bose's high command) was brought back to India and, with fellow officers Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Shah Nawaz, put on trial for treason. But by this time the war was over, censorship had been lifted, and the trial (in Delhi's Red Fort) was public. All India, learning for the first time what the INA had attempted, rocked with excitement and indignation. Even the Indian Army—the old British Indian Army, ultimate defender and enforcer of the Raj—was shaken. Officers and men alike grew restless. Headquarters concluded that they were ceasing to be reliable. And that, Fay argues, not prior British commitment, made the prompt granting of independence inevitable. It was a defeated INA that gave freedom its decisive push.

When "Farrer Park" (chapter 4 of the book) opens, in mid-February 1942, Malaya has fallen. Prem, having fought the Japanese the full length of the peninsula, has just been captured by a ruse. And Lakshmi is still with the clinic that had brought her to Singapore 20 months before.

Kate Caffrey's *Out in the Midday Sun* is a vivid account of how Malaya fell, one of the best I've seen, based largely on the recollections of men who fought in that miserable campaign. There is something odd, however, about the names. You notice a Braddon and a Brereton, a James, a Morrison, a Russell-Roberts. The units are the Bedfordshires and the Cambridgeshires, the Royal Norfolks, the 18th Australian Division.

The Forgotten Army: India's Armed Struggle for Independence, 1943-45, by Peter Ward Fay was published by the University of Michigan Press, 1993. © University of Michigan, all rights reserved.



Early on the morning of December 8, 1941, in a strike timed to coincide with the December 7 attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese went ashore at Kota Bharu on the northeast coast of Malaya, fought their way inland (against Prem's 2/10th Baluch battalion, among others), and began the campaign that by mid-February gave them Singapore.

You come across "Painter's men"—it is only when you look closely that you realize these are actually the Sikhs and Garhwalis of the 22nd Indian Brigade, whom Caffrey prefers to call after their British commander. Indeed, all through the fighting Indians as *Indians* rarely appear. And when the fighting is over, when Singapore has surrendered and Caffrey starts to tell us what happened to the survivors, they become utterly invisible.

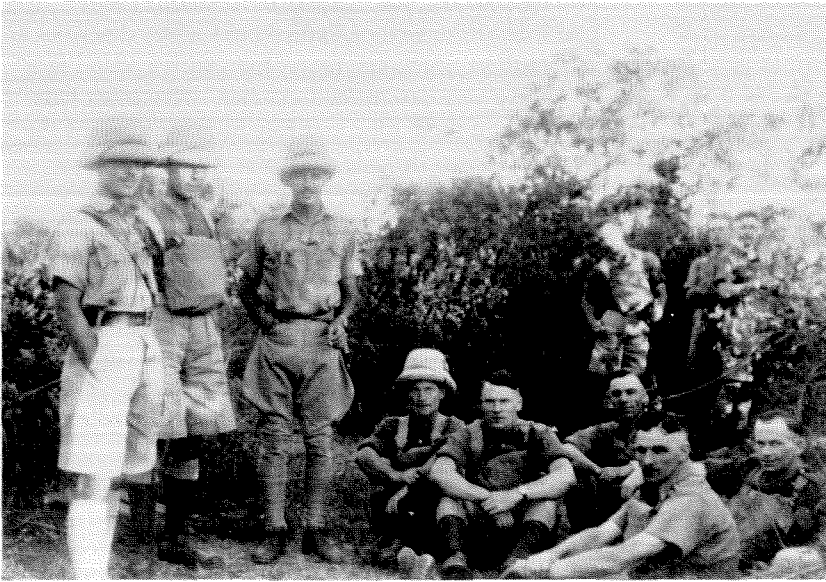
In her account of the campaign we do meet a few Indian units. It will please any veteran of the 2/10th Baluch, and also startle him since the regiment had long ceased to recruit from that part of the subcontinent, to read that "heavy fighting went on . . . around the village of Nee Soon, the Imperial Guards hammering away at a regiment from Baluchistan that gave a good account of itself in spite of being faced by tanks. . . ." The fighting over, however, units and men alike quite disappear. "The British and Australian troops," Caffrey writes, "were given until five in the evening of February 7—44 and a half hours from the official cease-fire—to assemble in the Changi area." Changi being at the eastern tip of the island, the men would have over a dozen miles to walk. So on that Tuesday, which Caffrey says dawned clear and hot, "the long, long column set off, headed by at least four files of brigadiers and full colonels, with here and there a lorry on which some soldiers hitched a ride for part of the way." What she does not say is that many of these brigadiers and colonels had commanded Indians. (There were more Indians in Percival's army than British and Australians

combined.) Key, for example, whom Prem thought so well of, and whom Caffrey describes as "a short, thick-set, hearty man with a round face" and a very determined manner—Key must have been in those files, and Key had commanded the 8th Indian Brigade, and later the 11th Indian Division. But none of Key's jawans (common soldiers) were in the long, long column. None of his VCOs (Viceroy's commissioned officers, invariably Indian) and ICOs (Indian commissioned officers) were in it either. Prem himself, had he surrendered with the others instead of being tricked into captivity a day early, would not have trudged off behind Key. Virtually no Indian did.

This was not because they did not wish to. The Japanese gave them no choice. Already Prem had discovered, when his English second in command was beheaded and he was not, that the Japanese intended something special for their Indian prisoners. In fact, the process of distinguishing Indians from the British and the Australians had begun early in the Malayan campaign. It had begun with a Sikh captain of much personal and political restiveness named Mohan Singh.

Japanese tanks had shattered Mohan Singh's 1/14th Punjab Battalion at Jitra, on the west side of the peninsula, early in the fighting. After a day spent wandering in jungle and swamp, and several days hiding while the fighting moved farther and farther away, Mohan Singh was in a frame of mind to listen (it owed something to his longstanding dissatisfaction with the way the Army had treated him) when by chance he was picked up by the Japanese Army *kikan*, or agency, charged with making friendly contact with Indians. A certain Pritam Singh, expatriate Sikh and founder in Bangkok several years before of an Indian Independence League, did the talking. But the driving force in this *Fujiwara Kikan* (sensibly, the Japanese called these agencies after the men who led them) was Fujiwara himself.

By all accounts Major Fujiwara Iwaichi was a remarkable man. Young, newly promoted, hardly two months on his assignment, with no Hindustani, little English, and supported by only a tiny staff, he had nevertheless already managed to set up a joint *Kikan*-Indian Independence League office at Alor Star, near Jitra, and to collect several hundred Indian stragglers. He had the confidence of Pritam Singh and the other Indians from Bangkok, though he had met them only in October. More surprising, he believed in the overtures he was instructed to make with a sincerity not to be doubted. (Years later he was to refer to himself as the Lawrence of the Indian



National Army.) Japan must capture the hearts of the Indians, a thing she had signally failed to do with the Chinese. Japan must help them obtain their freedom. And she must do so for the reason that it was right to do so, not simply to advantage Nippon.

The fighting had left Alor Star behind, there was a good deal of looting, Fujiwara lacked the means to stop it—and turned to Mohan Singh. Mohan Singh assembled a few score fellow Indians and did the job. The two hit it off well (they were both 33), and in a short while Mohan Singh was organizing Indians all over northern Malaya. At the end of December, after meeting the Japanese commanding general and receiving assurances that Fujiwara spoke for more than himself, Mohan Singh agreed to raise an army to fight alongside the Japanese. Though it might eventually draw upon Indian civilians, for the time being it must be recruited from captured Indian soldiers. A headquarters was established and volunteers called for. As they came forward they were issued rifles, given arm bands bearing the letter F, and sent south to collect more of their kind.

Of all this Lakshmi had some inkling; “at the aid post our position became very awkward, because some of these Britishers said, ‘oh, we’ve been let down by the Indian troops, they’ve gone over to the Japanese.’” But she did not really believe it. As for Prem, he was quite unaware of the rumor. Much later, it is true, he allowed himself to wonder whether the message that had brought him up the fatal *nullah* (ditch) into the arms of the Japanese had not been the work of Fujiwara

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Volunteers. If it had, it had worked only because it concealed a ruse. Units that avoided being trapped or broken and retained their confidence and fighting spirit, as Prem’s had, offered few stragglers and therefore few prospective recruits for Mohan Singh’s roving parties. And so long as the fighting continued, the men in such units had little time or inclination to question the politics of the war, or to ask themselves what India and Indians should do.

With the fall of Singapore, however, things changed. Prem was identified as an Indian, which saved his life. He was separated from the British officers of his battalion. His captors of the Imperial Guards Division kept him with them, though more as a guest than as a prisoner. And when, after several days, he grew restless and asked to rejoin his battalion, they gave him a vehicle and let him go find it himself.

It was while he was the guest of the Guards Division that the Farrer Park meeting took place, the meeting that more than any other single act set the Indians in Malaya on the road to active war against Britain-in-India.

Singapore surrendered on Sunday, February 15. Next morning the 1/14th and 5/14th Punjab, amalgamated as one battalion because of the losses suffered at Jitra and Slim River, piled their arms near Bidadari, a mile or so south of Paya Lebar. In the evening an order was received—a British order—that all Indians were to march the following day to Farrer Park, a sports ground a few miles away. That meant jawans, noncommissioned officers, VCOs, ICOs, the lot. The 14th Punjab had no British other ranks or NCOs. But it did have British officers—and they were not covered by this order, they had their own. It directed them not southwest to Farrer Park but east to Changi.

To Shah Nawaz, a captain in the 1/14th, this was disturbing. Shah Nawaz came from a large family in Rawalpindi, close to the Northwest Frontier; a Muslim family, but one conscious of Rajput origins; an old military family of the sort that generation after generation had sent its sons to be jemadars [equal to lieutenants] and subadars [captains] and subadar-majors [majors] in the Indian Army. Shah Nawaz’s father had served for 30 years. Shah Nawaz himself was later to say that not one of his able-bodied male relatives had failed to wear the King-Emperor’s uniform in one World War or the other. Indianization permitted Shah Nawaz to lift himself above the VCO level. In 1933 he entered Dehra Dun. Though three years Prem’s senior (he was the 58th Indian cadet to receive a commission, Prem the 226th), circumstances kept him at the

Left: Prem Sahgal (standing, right) with an unidentified British battalion in India some time in 1940.

Right: Lakshmi Swaminadhan (later Sahgal) leads her Rani of Jhansi Regiment on parade—an INA regiment of women named after a heroine who fought in the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion against the British.



regimental depot long after Prem had gone overseas. Asked for at last by his British battalion commander, he reached Singapore at the end of January in time to join the amalgamated battalion on the island's north shore and withdraw with it to Bidadari. The experience galled him. "To have brought me to Singapore so late in the fight, only to be ordered to lay down my arms and surrender unconditionally, I considered to be extremely unjust to myself and to my sense of honour as a soldier." But what bothered Shah Nawaz now was the order to proceed to Farrer Park. For "according to the laws of civilized warfare, all captured officers, whether Indian or British, are kept together, and separate from rank and file," and this the order proposed not to do.

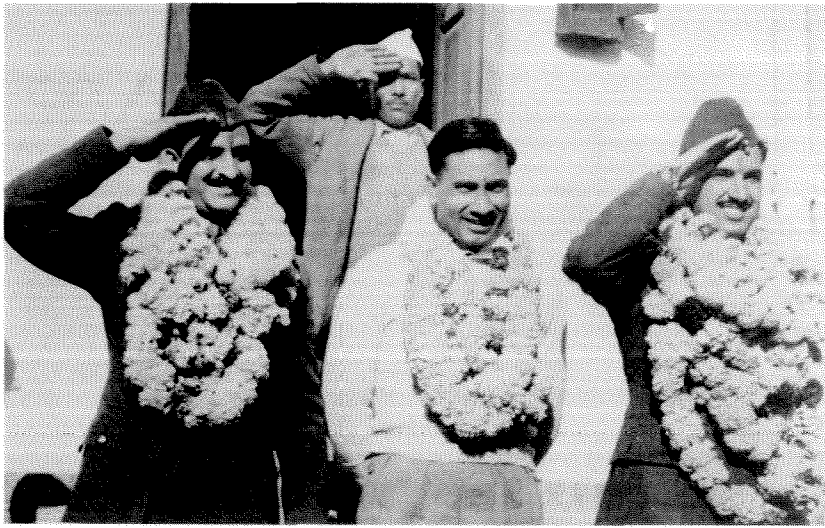
Another officer of the 1/14th, Lieutenant Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, was similarly bothered. Dhillon, too, came from a military family, a Sikh family of Lahore. His father was a veterinary surgeon at a cavalry remount depot, one brother was a jemadar in the Service Corps, another was an army clerk. Dhillon himself was marked for medicine. Failing the entrance examination to medical college, however, and with the cloud of family disappointment heavy about his head, he enlisted in the army as an ordinary recruit. By this time he had a wife. Married life on a sepoy's pay (he himself uses the term sepoy instead of the current jawan) was difficult. Dhillon was over-educated for the men he rubbed shoulders with, and overqualified for the tasks he was set. For a time he thought of quitting. But his wife's encouragement, and his own determination and exuberance, drove him instead to search out every

possible avenue of training and advancement, with a commission his goal.

Inclined from his youth to imagine slights and fancy himself insulted, his path upward was by his own account marked by scuffles. Nevertheless he rose, qualified for the two-year course at Kitchener College, and went on to the Military Academy at Dehra Dun. Emerging in 1940 number 336 on the ICO list, at a time when the war had put a stop to the practice of placing graduates temporarily with a British battalion, he was posted to the 1/14th Punjab at Lahore "in the very lines where I had stayed as a Sepoy." When the battalion went south to Secunderabad, he went with it.

His recollections of his first months as an officer, however, read very differently from Prem's. At Lahore he was refused admission to the swimming club. Of Secunderabad he remembers not polo (he did not play), not mess nights (he was probably ill at ease), but how some senior British officers ignored him socially. "When I told my feelings to some of my brother officers," he adds after making this brief but bitter observation, "I was surprised to learn many more stories of discrimination." In March 1941 the 1/14th sailed for Malaya. As he went aboard, Dhillon exchanged angry words with an English sergeant-major of the embarkation staff. "The result was the C.O. did not talk to me throughout the voyage." In Malaya, where the battalion was quartered first at Ipoh, later at Sungei Patani, there was further unpleasantness: when the Indian officers tried to introduce Indian food into the mess; when they protested emergency-commissioned tea planters being given companies over their heads. Like Mohan Singh—a fellow Sikh, and in the same battalion, who had also worked his way up from the ranks—Dhillon carried with him a considerable baggage of resentment, a load he was temperamentally unable to lighten by riding with these Britishers, drinking with them, compelling them by the sheer force of his assurance (as Prem could) to amend their British ways.

Shortly after the battalion reached Malaya, the adjutant, an early Dehra Dun graduate named Zaman Kiani, fell ill. Temporarily, Dhillon took his place. Later he was sent back to India to do a signals course. Leave followed. He rejoined the 1/14th a few days before the Japanese attack. At Jitra his experiences were much like Mohan Singh's, but turned out differently, for with others he managed to escape down the coast by boat and rejoin what remained of the battalion. That, however, was for him the end of the fighting. He fell sick and went into hospital in



The three defendants in the first Red Fort trial—from left, Shah Nawaz, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, and Prem Sahgal—were found guilty of waging war against the king-emperor and sentenced to dismissal from the service, forfeiture of pay and allowances, and transportation (in effect, imprisonment) for life. The last, however, was remitted and they were released. Here, only hours later, Shah Nawaz and Prem salute INA (also Royal Navy) style, while the unidentified man behind them salutes as the British do.

Singapore, where characteristically he noted and protested the habit of refusing Indian troops access to British canteens. Though he was discharged before the final battle began, he had not managed to rejoin his battalion when the surrender came.

So when, on the morning of Tuesday, February 17, the combined 1/14th and 5/14th paraded under Zaman Kiani and marched off without their British officers to Farrer Park, Shah Nawaz marched with them. Dhillon marched with a unit to which he had been temporarily attached. Prem did not go at all. Of the three men who not quite four years later would be brought to trial in Delhi on a charge of treason, of the three defendants in the first Red Fort trial, two would remember (because they were there) the symbolic act by which the bond binding Percival's Indians to the King-Emperor's service was severed. Not that the guilt or innocence of Prem Sahgal, Dhillon, and Shah Nawaz would necessarily turn on the issue of allegiance. In the concluding address that old Bhulabhai Desai, chief counsel for the defense, delivered in late 1945 at the court-martial of these three, the point was early made that allegiance was not the issue. "Here is a case in which I venture to say—and the evidence supports it—that it is not at all a case of what you might call three individuals waging war against the king." It was not a case of personal allegiance at all. "I quite agree," Bhulabhai continued, "that if ten persons in a village declare war on Britain, they are rebels," and may be dealt with individually. But here was another matter. Here was a provisional government and an army.

Sahgal, Dhillon, and Shah Nawaz were members of that army. It was not they who were on trial, it was that army, the Indian National Army. More exactly, what was on trial was the right of the Indian National Army to wage war for the liberation of India.

Of course those who waged a war of liberation, Bhulabhai admitted, began that war still bound by the previous allegiance, "the *prima facie* allegiance if I may so call it." And this allegiance could not wholly disappear until the war was won and liberation achieved—which, in this case, had not occurred. But neither had it occurred in the case of the American South, whose soldiers had nevertheless not been charged with breach of allegiance and put on trial for their lives. Win or lose, a war for the liberation of a people, if properly declared and conducted, gave to men fighting that war the rights and immunities of belligerents. Bhulabhai would demonstrate this with examples drawn from international law and history. And he proceeded to do so, in parts of an address that lasted ten hours and consumed two days.

Had not these rights and immunities passed, at England's insistence no less, to the South American rebels of Bolivar's day? to the Greeks for whom Byron died? to Garibaldi and The Thousand? In the European conflict just ended, fleeing remnants of Dutchmen, Poles, and Yugoslavs had taken refuge in England and constructed governments in exile there, governments possessing "not an inch of territory they could call their own. . . . And the fact that they were deprived of their territory temporarily, or the fact that the Indians were deprived of their territories for 150 years, makes not the slightest difference to the point that we are submitting to the Court." Belligerent rights had been successfully demanded for the one and could not reasonably be denied the other. Even the fragmented and frequently furtive French Resistance had qualified. Indeed, "if the Maquis," Bhulabhai pointed out, "were entitled to all the privileges and immunities of a fighting force," as Eisenhower himself had warned the Germans they were, "I cannot see how you can fail to accord a similar treatment to the Indian National Army." Allegiance was irrelevant. It was for the court simply to determine whether there had been "a *de facto* political organization sufficient in numbers, sufficient in character, and sufficient in resources to constitute itself capable of declaring and making war with an organized army." If the court found that such there had been, Sahgal, Dhillon, and Shah Nawaz must go free.

Bhulabhai knew, however, that the prosecu-

tion would not agree with him. Bhulabhai knew that the seven officers of the court, three Indians and four Englishmen, were not going to dismiss from their minds all considerations of loyalty. They were not going to rule inadmissible the question, were these three renegades? For the principal charge against the three was treason.

To be exact, they were charged with waging war against the King-Emperor contrary to Section 121 of the Indian Penal Code. But that in common parlance was treason, it being understood by every Englishman that to set oneself against king and country was a traitorous act. The good subject was loyal to king and country both. It was a common, an undivided, allegiance.

Suppose, however, that king and country did not coincide, so that a person's allegiance, if he was not to be utterly faithless, must desert the one and attach only to the other. Such cases existed. From his historical stock Bhulabhai chose a celebrated one. It was the case of America. Bhulabhai had already borrowed the Civil War to demonstrate that even a rebellion that fails confers belligerent rights. Now, to seven officers perhaps a little tired of history anyway and certainly not eager to receive further instruction from the far side of the Atlantic, he proceeded to recite the Declaration of Independence, from the self-evident truths and inalienable rights of the opening paragraphs to the colonists' solemn repudiation of allegiance to the British crown at the close. Seventeen seventy-six, he submitted, was "a classical instance of a case where the choice between allegiance to the King and allegiance to the country was presented to the world, and men of honour chose allegiance to their own country." And who were these men of honor? The same Americans whose descendants were now the friends and allies of England, "and if I may say so, their warmest and greatest supporters in the task of saving civilization. You could not have a stronger instance than that."

It was at Philadelphia, in 1776, that the Americans resolved the dilemma of their divided allegiance. At Farrer Park, on the 17th of February, 1942, the Indians of the Indian Army in Malaya did the same—or discovered that willy nilly it was being resolved for them. What happened was this.

On that Tuesday morning the combined 1/14th and 5/14th paraded at Bidadari. The British commanding officer shook hands with Kiani and the other Indian officers, remarking (Shah Nawaz remembers him saying) "I suppose this is the parting of the ways." The battalion moved off. Across the island, in all the places where the fighting and the surrender had

deposited them, battalions, companies, and smaller packets of the defeated did the same.

Captain R. M. Arshad of the 5/2nd Punjab remembers that his battalion, reaching Farrer Park shortly after nine o'clock, found a considerable number of men already there. By noon the ground was thick with uniforms. Had every Indian soldier alive in Malaya that day answered to the roll, an observer might have counted some 55,000 men. As it was, though there were jawans on the island who did not receive the order, and jawans on the mainland to whom it was not sent, perhaps 40,000 had collected on the great open space that in better days had been used for horse racing when, early in the afternoon, word went around to assemble before the stadium building on one side of the park.

Officers (there were not many of these, less than 250) came to the front. The men stood behind, grouped some say not by units but by classes, Dogras here, Punjabi Muslims there. On the second floor of the stadium building there was a sort of balcony on which loudspeakers and a microphone had been set up. A number of Japanese and Indians were on this balcony. Some of the Indians wore white arm bands bearing in red the letter F.

"When the parade was ready," continues Arshad, "a British officer—later I learned his name was Colonel Hunt from Malaya Command Headquarters—came in front of the microphone, brought us to attention, and addressed us." Exactly what Hunt said is uncertain. Though he survived the war, he was in England on medical leave when the Red Fort trials began, and so was not asked. Arshad first testified that he told the Indians, "from now on you belong to the Japanese Army" and would have to obey its orders. Later, under cross-examination, he decided that he had said no more than that they were all prisoners of war, and that he was turning them over to the Japanese. But whatever Hunt said he said briefly, in a simple, almost perfunctory manner, with no indication that he was bothered or uncomfortable. "After that," remembers Subadar-Major Baboo Ram of the 1/14th, who was near the front with the other VCOs, "he handed over certain papers to Major Fujiwara, a Japanese officer." (As each unit arrived that morning it had given its strength in writing to Hunt. These, presumably, were the papers.) "Then he saluted him and went back. And after that Major Fujiwara came to the microphone and made a speech in the Japanese language which was translated into English and then retranslated into Hindustani." Fujiwara said a number of things with great and obvious sincerity. He ended by announcing that he was

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turning the officers and men over to Mohan Singh. Then Mohan Singh came to the microphone and made a speech too. So each handed over to the next, not as one speaker making way for another speaker, but as one command surrendering men to another command.

Much later, in the chorus of anger and embarrassment that rose among Englishmen on the subject of the INA, no one was heard to suggest that Percival should have refused to let himself and his colleagues be separated from their brothers in arms, the Indian officers. No one was heard to suggest that Hunt, on coming to the microphone that February afternoon, should have declined to announce what he was instructed to announce, or should at least have told the men that he spoke because compelled to, and with a heavy heart. At the Red Fort no one charged Hunt with anything (of course the British were not in the dock). No one even asked, of the affair, what had those who sent him intended?

Yet it is perfectly clear that the purpose in addressing those thousands of officers and men just two days after the fall of Singapore cannot have been simply to tell them that the battle was lost and that all of them, British and Indians together, were now prisoners of the Japanese. They knew that well enough. There had to be another purpose. And the purpose that was perceived, conveyed not just by the words "and I hand you over to the Japanese authorities" but by the arrangements that had gone before, and particularly by the separating without protest of the British officers and other ranks—the purpose perceived by these men whose discipline and loyalty Malaya Command had no reason to doubt, and who had fought bravely, some of them the full length of the peninsula, was the deliberate, formal, one might almost say ceremonial, abdication of a responsibility. In good times, in victorious times, the two races of the Indian Army (to use the traditional term) were bound to each other in "a matter of honour." Now times were bad. So the British were backing out.

"I had a feeling of being completely helpless, of being handed over like cattle by the British to the Japs and by the Japs to Mohan Singh." That was how Shah Nawaz later remembered it. Dhillon, too, felt "like one deserted." Yet at this very moment these men, so recently defeated, so thoroughly abandoned, so far from home, were being offered (by the speakers who followed Hunt) the means of reversing that defeat, of overcoming that abandonment, even of returning to India. Speaking slowly because what he said had to be translated first into English and then into Hindustani, Fujiwara welcomed the soldiers, by this

time seated on the ground. They were, he said, to consider themselves not prisoners but friends. In Malaya the British had been thoroughly trounced. In Burma they soon would be. Through her victories, Japan was creating for the peoples of East Asia a co-prosperity sphere based on amity and equality. That sphere would not be secure without an independent India on its western flank. So Japan wished India to be free. To that end she was cooperating in the formation of an army that should liberate her, an army he hoped all would join. And Mohan Singh, following Fujiwara to the microphone, put the new loyalty, the fresh allegiance, squarely to his listeners. "We are forming an Indian National Army that will fight to free India. Are you all prepared to join the Indian National Army?" Were they? As Baboo Ram remembers it, "the audience lifted up their arms, threw their turbans in the air, and showed great pleasure."

Just how great the pleasure, and by how many experienced, it is impossible to tell. Dhillon reports "a feeling of hope and joy by all of us present," and Fujiwara himself says that Mohan Singh's short speech left some men weeping. He spoke in Hindustani, so that almost everybody understood him instantly. And he was an effective speaker. Lakshmi, who of course was not present, remembers of the time she first heard him, months later, how impressed she was: "He had an emotional way of talking. He seemed convinced he had taken the right step, he didn't have any doubts of any kind." At Farrer Park that certainty of tone and manner was directed at men who were beginning to realize that in this part of the world the Raj was finished, and that acquiescence in Japanese wishes was probably their only choice.

For that the British might some day return to Singapore did not seem remotely possible—or particularly desirable, either.

We in the West are so used to regarding the Second World War as a critical contest for the possession of civilized society's body and soul; a contest nearly lost by mismanagement, kept alive by England's stubborn refusal to capitulate, and at last won when America and Russia met in the center of Europe—we in the West are so used to looking at the war in this way, that its Asian dimension never rises in our eyes above the level of a sideshow, an enormous and shameless irrelevance. Germany began the conflict. It would be over, and the world safe again, when Germany was smashed. Meanwhile Japan's entry, like Italy's earlier but on a much larger and more dangerous scale, was an act of the grossest opportunism, a monstrous and unforgivable diversion,

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Lakshmi and Prem Sahgal in later years. Prem died suddenly in 1992.

for which she would be duly punished when the work of saving civilization in Europe was done.

That is the way we view the war now; that is the way we of the North Atlantic community looked at it then. And seeing it thus gave to military events east of Suez a decidedly lower level of significance than attached to events west of it. Even the most chilling disasters in the Pacific theater, even Pearl Harbor, Singapore, and Bataan, struck us as inconclusive. Thrown out of this place or that by the Japanese, we, all of us, like MacArthur, knew that we should return. When the real business of the war, the European business, was finished, we should come back to Asia. And then everything would be as it had been before. Or if there had to be changes, as for example in India where some form of independence would have to be arranged, it would be seen that the war had nothing to do with it. Japanese victories had nothing to do with it. They were an interruption, a damned nuisance of an interruption, which, far from initiating or accelerating those changes, had actually prevented us from getting on with them.

Things, however, did not look this way to Asians. Perhaps Bhulabhai Desai meant it when he complimented the British and their "supporters" the Americans for undertaking "the task of saving civilization," but he was speaking after the war had ended, from Delhi which the Japanese had never occupied, and to a British court he was determined to sway. Indians at the time cannot have thought the task urgent, or Britain the indispensable agent. Whose civilization, anyway, were the British trying to save?

East of Calcutta the Japanese did not appear as usurpers of lands, lands to which the British, French, Dutch, and Americans must triumphantly return when more pressing business elsewhere had been attended to. The Japanese were fellow Asians, with as much right to those lands as westerners had. They offered their fellow Asians, if not equality of status, at least a secure and honorable place in an ordered hierarchy of Asian peoples. As for triumphant return, it was one thing for an Englishman with the Battle of Britain behind him, or an American from a continent that had never been invaded and never could be, to believe in its inevitability. It was quite another for someone on the spot—for an Indian or Malay, say, observing from Singapore's waterfront one April morning a great fleet of battleships and aircraft carriers lying in the roads, the same battleships and carriers that had delivered the crushing blow at Pearl Harbor four months before, and that had given Japan mastery of the waves from Hawaii all the way to the Indian Ocean.

Never much interested in Europe's war except, perhaps, as it might advance a military man's professional career. Accustomed to seeing, where Britain was concerned, not gallant little England of Dunkirk and the white cliffs of Dover but the great, unbending Empire of the Gateway, the Viceroy's Palace, and the Jallianwala Bagh. Confronted, suddenly, with the swift and complete collapse of the eastern portion of that empire and its replacement by a new imperial power both Asian and irresistible. And then invited, with apparent warmth and sincerity, to join in a march westward that should expel the British, obtain *purna swaraj* [full independence] for Mother India, and (no small point) bring themselves home—how could officers and men fail to be swept away by such a prospect? An army for an independent India, a true Indian Army, was offered that afternoon at Farrer Park. What is surprising is that, even so, there were some who had doubts and held back.

Peter Fay's own World War II experience, in Italy, was limited to a few months' action with 8-inch howitzers just before VE day, and occupation duty thereafter. Returning to Harvard (AB 1947), he won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford (BA 1949), and received a Harvard PhD in 1954. In 1955 he joined the Caltech faculty, where, except for the two years in Kanpur, he has taught ever since. His previous book, The Opium War 1840–42, was published in 1975.