

Ludhiana redeems a promise

By M. S. Gill

Today the Chief Minister of Punjab will unveil in Ludhiana a 10 ft. high bronze statue of Major Bhupinder Singh, M.V.C., of Hodsons Horse, who gave his life for the country in the Sialkot sector in the 1965 war. For me, personally, it is the fulfilment of a long cherished wish.

My memories flow back, over the years, to the time when Bhupinder came to Hodsons Horse as one of the first officers commissioned after Independence. We were in school then. Hodsons always attracted the cream of cadets from the Indian Military Academy because of its distinguished past as a cavalry regiment and I remember those handsome proud young lieutenants. Any regiment would have been proud of a bunch like Narender, Duggal, Iqbal and Bhupinder. But even among them Bhupinder stood out. Tall, slim and handsome, modest of manner but with a firmness of purpose that his charm concealed, he was obviously destined to go far. Today Narender is a distinguished Major-General. Had he lived, Bhupinder would not have been less.

A HAPPY LOT

As young schoolboys we only saw a part of their life in the regiment. My father loved to organise cricket matches and we often played with these young officers. They were a happy care-free lot in those days.

When Bhupinder got married, it was in a family from Tarn Taran. We just walked across to spend an informal evening with him and his charming wife. The regiment moved from Ahmednagar to Meerut and then to the Patiala-Sangrur area. We grew up with it. And so did men like Bhupinder. I saw him shaped into a fine squadron commander, respected both by his colleagues and by the jawans. At home he was a contented man, watching happily his three daughters grow up.

The years passed. Though I kept my links with the regiment, I did not see him often. Then came the 1965 war. The regiment formed part of the major thrust in the Sialkot area. True to its traditions, it fought gallantly and made a name for itself. But among all its brave men, Bhupinder was easily the most outstanding. He led his squadron in a superb manner, causing immense losses to the enemy. Finally, he paid the price of his daring at Alhar railway station. Severely injured, he was evacuated to New Delhi. Prime Minister Shastri visited him in hospital and was

visibly moved by the bravery with which he waged the battle for life.

EMOTIONS DIE FAST

In the first flush of enthusiasm and respect for their protectors, the citizens of Ludhiana named a chowk after Bhupinder, who hailed from the town. They made tall promises of setting up a memorial, but in the tropical

ing into disuse and once again everybody tended to call it Bharat Chowk instead of Bhupinder Singh Chowk. I felt sad at the indifference to the memory of a brave man.

It is, therefore, with a peculiar personal sense of satisfaction that I view the inauguration of this memorial. Bhupinder Singh was a brave man who gave his life for the country. A



climate of this country emotions die fast and memory fades quickly. The war was over and there was no need to remember our defenders! That could be left to the next crisis, it seemed.

Fourteen years went by and nothing happened. Whenever I passed the square, I saw a battered picture of Bhupinder, hanging on a little tin sign-board. Slowly, even his name (given to the chowk) was fall-

man can do no more. But as long as he lived he was a gentleman to his very finger-tips: a man who would be remembered with affection by all those who knew him.

The city of Ludhiana is repaying a long overdue debt by putting up this memorial. But in honouring Bhupinder they honour themselves more, for they had the privilege of producing such a fine man and such a noble patriot.