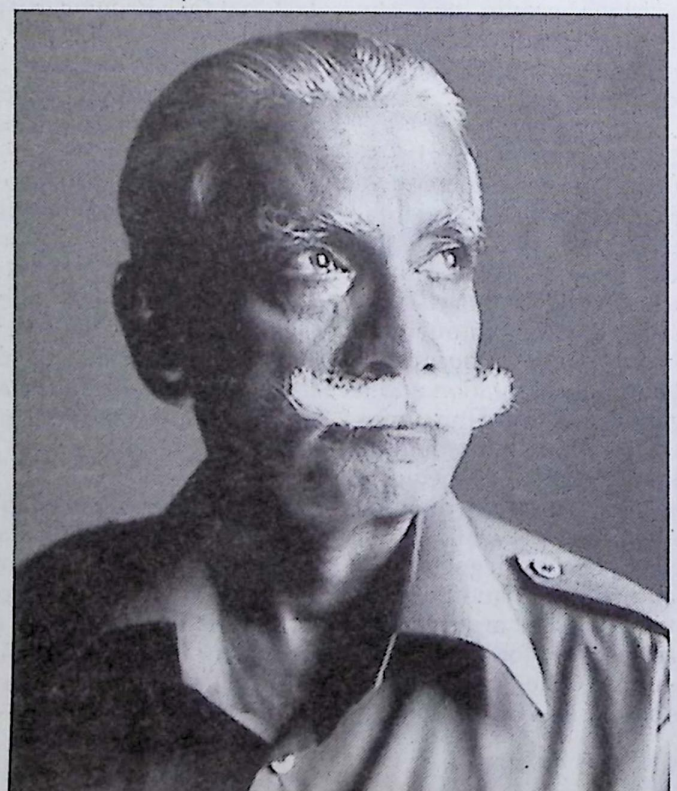
Banga Bir M.A.G. Osmany
A True Hero

SYED ZAIN AL-MAHMOOD

He was not a tall man, but he towered above everyone around him. His seniors respected him, his comrades revered him. Those who knew him were struck by his passion and his integrity. General M.A.G. Osmany, Commander in Chief of the Mukti Bahini, lived by the watchwords of honour, freedom and service. Throughout his colourful life, regardless of his personal circumstances, he never hesitated to heed his country's call.



Banga Bir M.A.G. Osmany

On April 9, 1971 Captain Azizur Rahman, commanding a unit of the Bangladesh Forces, was engaged in a pitched battle against Pakistani army troops near the Keane Bridge leading into Sylhet town. Both sides had suffered heavy casualties. Pinned down by superior firepower, the young officer was trying to rally his troops when his jeep was fired upon and fell into the Surma.

"As a young captain with no battle experience, I tried to maintain the morale of my men by visiting the front-line troops. We fought fruitlessly against a formidable adversary only to be violently repulsed," recalled Capt. Aziz (later Major General Azizur Rahman Bir Uttam). "Amidst the confusing and deafening sounds, a voice suddenly spoke behind me: "Young man, what's happening?"

It was the C-in-C himself. "I could never imagine that a person of the stature of Colonel Osmany (I had never seen him before) would have the guts and curiosity to be on the battlefield. He must have travelled a long way on foot to reach me. It was very dangerous."

After a brief introduction, Osmani quickly sized up the situation. "Finding me at a puzzling loss, the C-in-C rescued me," said Major Gen. Azizur Rahman. "He advised me to reorganise, break contact with the enemy, and withdraw to a better defensive position (he suggested the next position) after burying the dead fighters and collecting the wounded. He further cautioned me to not allow the Pakistan army to pursue my troops."

This incident, described by one of his comrades in arms, illustrates Osmany's courage and selfless devotion to the cause. "Papa Tiger", as he was affectionately known, came out of retirement to lead the Liberation Forces. The very name of Colonel (later General) Osmany electrified all Bangali officers, and struck fear into the hearts of the enemy.

Muhammad Ataul Ghani Osmany became a soldier almost by accident. Born in Sunamgonj on 1st September 1918, he was headed for the civil service when the Second World War broke out. A graduate of Aligarh Muslim University, Osmany had already qualified for the Indian Civil Service. But fate had other things in store. In 1939 Hitler was taking Europe by storm, and the Japanese army was advancing through Burma. Osmany answered the call to arms. He joined the British Indian Army and saw action on the Burma front, receiving promotion to the rank of Major.