THE ENDURING LEGACY OF THE 2ND BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR COURSE



The members of the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course with the President, Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, at Bangabhaban following their commissioning on 5 August 1972.

EDITOR'S NOTE

It was my good fortune to be part of this supremely patriotic group, who had already demonstrated extraordinary skill and courage in fighting the brutal Pakistani army. When I joined the training of the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course in Murtee, I discovered this treasure trove of friends who, should tragedy suddenly strike, would be my comrades-in-arms in my final moments. This profound realisation made every one of them extremely dear to me, a feeling that still lasts after 55 years. I cherished every kindness, sensitivity and personal gesture they showed as a blessing. As we trained, struggled, endured, overcame fear and grew in confidence, we became closer, more appreciative of one another, more mutually respectful and prouder—not as individuals, but as a collective ready to lay down our lives for the freedom and dignity of our land and our people.

Today's supplement is The Daily Star's tribute to these brave souls, many of whom are no longer with us.

MAHFUZ ANAM
Editor & Publisher
The Daily Star

MEMBERS OF THE 2ND BANGLADESH LIBERATION WAR COURSE

The War of Liberation comes but once in the history of a nation. Our beloved motherland, Bangladesh, also bathed in the blood of millions of martyrs in its struggle for freedom from the Pakistani oppressors.

On 25 March 1971, when the marauding Pakistan Army suddenly swooped upon the innocent and unarmed people of the country under the cover of darkness, especially at key locations in Dhaka city—Dhaka University, the Rajarbagh Police Lines, and the EPR Headquarters at Peelkhana—killing thousands of people, it effectively ignited the fire of the War of Liberation across the country.

Disoriented and dismayed for a day or two by the extent of the cruelty and mayhem, the Bangali members of the armed forces, the police, the Ansars, and the common people of the country, inspired by the radio announcement of Major Ziaur Rahman (later Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman), regained their bearings and began to confront the enemy with whatever they could lay their hands on.

The War of Liberation had begun in full swing. It was the time for a litmus test; it was time to discover where one's heart lay; it was a time to display one's patriotism by fighting for the country's liberation or by looking the other way. It was an article of faith, of loyalty, and a supreme display of patriotism. Our War of Liberation, while producing some cowards, collaborators, and mere spectators, also produced a group of brilliant sons and daughters of the soil who not only fought the enemy but also laid down their lives for the cause of the nation.

As the War of Liberation gathered momentum, the paucity of officers in the Mukti Bahini was felt acutely, and the Provisional Government decided to expand the officers' corps by recruiting competent and capable candidates from among the freedom fighters who had already gained some battlefield experience by that time. There were two batches of officer cadets: the 1st Bangladesh Liberation War Course (BLWC) and the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course (formerly known as the 1st SS and the 2nd SS).

At the beginning of June 1971, a selection process was held to identify officer cadets from across the various battlefronts and sectors. Sixty-one candidates were chosen to join the temporary military academy established at Murtee in Jalpaiguri, India. Training for the 1st War Course began in the final week of June 1971.

The search for new cadets continued in the field, and a further 70 cadets had been selected by August 1971. By then, all of them were actively engaged in combat on different battlefronts, having received local training at various sector and sub-sector headquarters and other training camps. However, when the decision was taken to send them to Murtee, the First War Course was already midway through its training. It was, therefore, decided that they would undergo training as the 2nd War Course after the passing-out of the 1st War Course. Until then, the selected cadets remained deployed in their respective operational areas.

The 1st BLWC received their commissions on 09 October 1971 and, after reporting to their respective sector headquarters, joined the battlefronts during the third and fourth weeks of October. Cadets selected for the Second War Course were withdrawn from the battlefields and sent to the Murtee Academy during the first week of November 1971.

Murtee is a plain in the Dooars forest at the foothills of the Himalayas, with tea gardens on three sides and the River Jaldhaka on the other. It is a 2 km-long and 1 km-wide strip of rocky plain. It is situated in the northern part of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal, India, about 15 km from the Darjeeling and Bhutan borders. Murtee served as an airstrip for the Allied Forces in the Second World War and as a military training camp for the Indian Army in the 1962–63 Sino-Indian War. During the Liberation War of Bangladesh, a training camp named Mujib Camp, with two wings—the Mujib Wing for training freedom fighters and the Bhasani Wing for training officer cadets—was established at Murtee.

In the final seven to eight weeks of the Liberation War, as the Mukti Bahini gradually shifted from guerrilla warfare to conventional military operations, the officers of the First Bangladesh Liberation War Course assumed crucial responsibilities as company commanders and subsector commanders, helping to steer the war towards its inevitable conclusion.

When the war broke out on 3 December 1971, these officers fought with exceptional courage on the eastern front alongside, or under the command of, other Bengali freedom fighter officers who had revolted from the Pakistan Army. Fighting in coordination with the Allied Forces, they achieved remarkable success. The fact that the Pakistani forces were defeated and compelled to surrender after only thirteen days of fighting against the Allied Forces stands as testimony to how effectively the freedom fighters had worn them down through relentless guerrilla attacks over the preceding eight months.

When fighting alongside the Joint Forces, two officers from the 1st BLWC embraced martyrdom: Second Lieutenant Ashfaqus Samad, Bir Uttam, and Second Lieutenant Khandakar Azizul Islam, Bir Bikram. Twenty officers of the 1st BLWC and seven officers of the 2nd BLWC received gallantry awards (BP-21, BB-5 and BU-1).

Although the officers of the 2nd BLWC remained actively engaged on the battlefront until the first week of November 1971, they were unable to participate in the final phase of the war because they were undergoing training at the Academy. This is a matter that continues to pain most of them to this day.

Upon completing their training, the 70 officer cadets of the 2nd BLWC returned to the country on 5 February 1972. After a few days of leave, 59 of them reported back and were attached to infantry battalions for On-the-Job Training (OJT). The remaining 11 returned to their respective colleges, universities, or previous professions.

As the need arose to maintain political stability and law and order, the Bangladesh Army was deployed in various parts of the country. Various ultra-left revolutionary organisations became involved in violent activities, including political assassinations, the seizure of police outposts and police stations, and the looting of armouries. To combat these activities, 10 East Bengal Regiment from Saidpur Cantonment was deployed in the Rajshahi and Natore region. They fought with exceptional courage until the insurgents surrendered and peace was restored in the Rajshahi region. Five officer cadets of the 2nd BLWC—namely Aminul Islam, Ferozur Rahman, Syed Abul Bashar, Motahar Hossain, and Ashraf Ud Doula—participated in the operation as members of the battalion. During a direct engagement, Officer Cadet Ashraf Ud Doula (who later served as an Ambassador, Secretary to the Government, and Major) lost one of his legs, while two soldiers embraced martyrdom.

About one and a half months after the surrender of the Pakistani forces in Dhaka, Second Lieutenant Selim of the 1st BLWC, along with several soldiers of the 2nd East Bengal Regiment, embraced martyrdom on 30 January 1972 during the operation to liberate Mirpur. Around the same time, filmmaker Zahir Raihan disappeared there while searching for his missing brother, journalist Shahidullah Kaiser. Under the leadership of freedom fighter officers of the 2nd East Bengal Regiment, Mirpur was eventually cleared of hostile forces.

The officer cadets of the 2nd BLWC were brought to the Battle School, which had been temporarily established in Dhaka Cantonment, during the first week of June 1972.

The Commander of 46 Infantry Brigade, Lt Col M Ziauddin Ahmed, Bir Uttam, served as the ex officio Commandant of the Battle School. The instructors were Maj Moinul Hussain Chowdhury, Bir Bikram, Commanding Officer of 2 East Bengal Regiment; Maj Syed Faruqur Rahman of 1st Bengal Lancers; Maj Nazrul Haque, Bir Protik; and Capt Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Bir Bikram. The Adjutant was Capt SHMB Noor Chowdhury.

SEE PAGE 7

Message from the HON'BLE ACTING PRESIDENT



A war of liberation comes but once in the life of a nation. We are indeed blessed to have been part of that defining chapter in the history of our beloved Bangladesh.

On the auspicious occasion of the 54th Anniversary of the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course, it gives me immense pleasure to extend my warm felicitations and heartfelt congratulations to all members of the Course and their spouses.

When a nation is born through the crucible of a war of liberation, it not only secures its independence but also provides the ultimate litmus test of patriotism. The men and women who rise to that historic challenge earn a place of honour in the nation's collective memory.

As our War of Liberation gathered momentum amidst uncertainty and immense sacrifice, it became imperative to strengthen the officer corps for the effective conduct of military operations. Responding to that national call, 131 battle-hardened freedom fighters, inspired solely by their unwavering patriotism, volunteered to undergo military training as officer cadets.

They were organised into two batches—the 1st Bangladesh Liberation War Course and the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course. Upon completing an intensive fourteen-week training programme at Murtee in India, the officers of the 1st Course proceeded directly to the battlefront to join the war. The members of the 2nd Course were still undergoing training when Bangladesh achieved its cherished independence.

Upon their return to Dhaka in early February, 1972, they underwent a further eight weeks of advanced military training before being commissioned.

It was my distinct privilege to serve as one of the instructors entrusted with their training. I vividly recall the exceptional spirit, discipline and patriotic fervour that characterised every member of the Course. They represented a remarkable group of young men, chosen from among hundreds of thousands of freedom fighters, to become the first generation of officers of an army born alongside a newly independent nation. Many generations of officers would follow, but none could ever replicate the unique historical significance of this pioneering group.

The members of the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course were commissioned on 5 August 1972—a landmark occasion in the history of our Armed Forces and our Republic. By a remarkable coincidence, the date of 5 August has, in later years, acquired another profound significance in the nation's historical journey, further enhancing its place in our national consciousness.

Those youthful patriots of fifty-four years ago are today enriched by age and wisdom, yet their devotion to Bangladesh remains undiminished. Throughout their distinguished careers and beyond, they have continued to serve the nation with honour, integrity and dedication. Many shed their blood during the Liberation War, while some made the supreme sacrifice in defence of the motherland. Their contributions have become an enduring part of our national heritage, and the nation owes them a debt of profound gratitude.

As we celebrate this memorable anniversary, let us reaffirm our commitment to the ideals for which they fought—freedom, justice, democracy and the dignity of our people. May their legacy continue to inspire future generations to serve Bangladesh with the same courage, patriotism and selfless devotion.

I wish all members of the 2nd Bangladesh Liberation War Course and their families good health, happiness, peace and prosperity.

HAFIZ UDDIN AHMAD
Bir Bikram