

THE FLEDGLING YEARS

The Staff College Wellington as established by Col Verma was essentially an Army institute whose job was to produce junior staff officers for the Army. As at Quetta, a couple of officers each from the Navy and the Air Force were to attend it and study how the Army operated in war and peace.

Maj Gen WDA Lentaigne CB, CBE, DSO, took over as the Commandant of the Staff College on 10th Mar 1948. In his seven years as head of the College, he contributed immensely towards the setting up of a modern establishment.

The early years of free India were trying times for the country and especially for the Army, as there was a shortage of arms and ammunition, trained soldiers and staff, at a time when there were raiders in Kashmir, refugees to be rehabilitated and a general disorderliness in the newly independent nation. Thus, the first and second interim courses emphasised more on quantity to fill the many vacancies for officers rather than on quality. The syllabus was based on British establishment and tactical doctrines as evolved during World War II. The exercises were modified to suit battle conditions in Kashmir.

1948 was also the year in which the Staff College journal made its appearance. Named 'The Nesting', Maj PLN Choudhary was its first editor. From the second course onwards, The Nesting fledged into 'The Owl'.

The Second World War had brought out very forcefully the increased interdependence of the Services on one another, and on the civilian war effort. This gave an impetus to the thought that the three Services of the

Armed Forces should train and function together, learning the nitty-gritty of organisation and staff management at the Staff College. This, it was felt, would lead to an overall increase in the efficiency of the Armed Forces in the long run. That being so, Maj Gen Lentaigne won over the then Commander-in-Chief and Chief of Army Staff, Gen FRR Bucher, and the Governor General, Earl Mountbatten of Burma, to the idea of converting the College into an Inter-Services Institution. On the advice of Earl Mountbatten, the then Defence Minister, Sardar Baldev Singh gave his consent and from 23rd May 1949, the day the 3rd Staff Course was to commence, the College came to be regarded as an Inter-Services Staff College.

To commemorate this, a mast was constructed on the lawns in front of the syndicate rooms. The College flag was flown at the peak and the flags of the three Services on the yards and the gaff, these taking their turn at the gaff on special occasions such as the visit of a Commander-in-Chief. Today the Indian Tricolour is flown at the peak and the three Service Flags on the yards and the gaff.

When the Staff College was established in 1948, Wellington was to be its temporary home. Among the many tasks in the itinerary of Maj Gen Lentaigne, was the search for a permanent site for the establishment of the College. However, after carrying out extensive surveys in Bangalore, Belgaum and Devlali, he recommended that Wellington be the permanent abode of the Staff College, which was accepted.

The Hammer and trowel used to lay the foundation of Ashoka Block.



*Maj Gen WDA Lentaigne, CB, CBE, DSO,
Commander 3 Indian Division
(Special Force) 30 Mar 44 - Feb 45*

The flag mast on Ashoka Lawns flying the Indian tricolour and flags of the three Services



Maj Gen WDA Lentaigne, CB, DBE, DSO laying the Foundation Stone.

The third course, the first ten months' deivation course, commenced in a considerably better political scenario and the partitioned Army too was fairly rebuilt and organised. It had one full syndicate of Indian Air Force (IAF) officers. With the formation of the Naval Wing before the start of the 4th Staff Course, the College became a truly Joint Services Institution, the only one of its kind in the world. It was also from the 4th Staff Course onwards that students from foreign countries began attending the course. The College was rechristened more appropriately as the Defence Services Staff College. The organisation of the Staff College also underwent a change with the addition of the Air and Naval Wings.

Commenting on the Directing Staff (DS), Maj Gen Lentaigne said, "It is not generally realised that the Defence Services Staff College not only trains its students to be junior staff officers but also trains its instructors to be high grade senior staff officers and formation commanders."

The first interim course had 11 DS. During the 4th Course it went up to 15, and today in 2005 it has 105 members on the faculty of the College.

On 11th May 1955, Maj Gen Lentaigne relinquished office. He left an indelible mark not only on the Staff College but on life in Wellington and the Nilgiris in general. He was instrumental in reviving the Wellington Gymkhana Club and the Ooty Hunt Club. It was mainly due to his indefatigable efforts and enthusiasm that the College was brought to a high standard. Through his efforts, students from other Commonwealth countries were invited to attend the Staff College. His most outstanding contribution was the conversion of the Staff College into a Defence Services Institution.