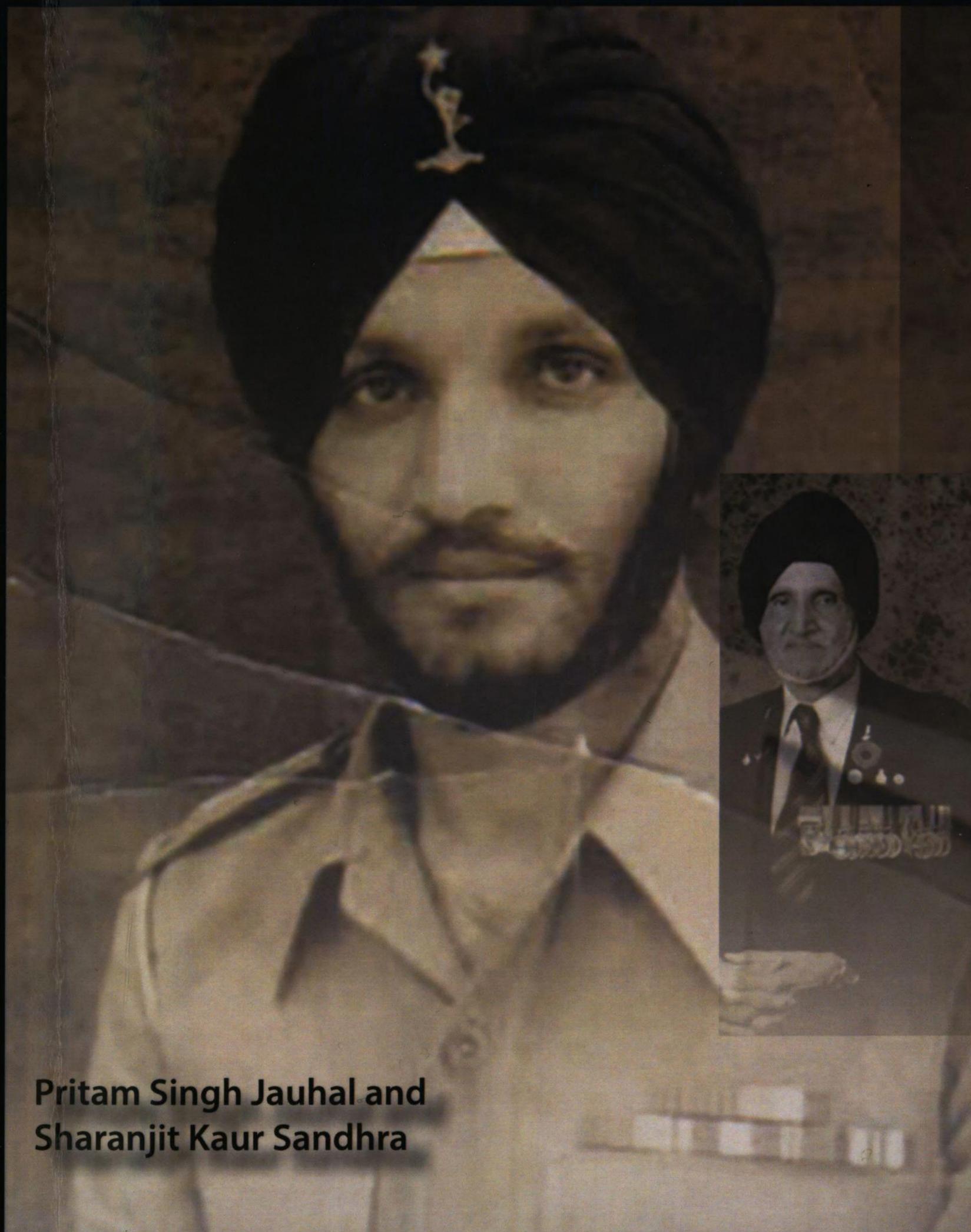


# A SOLDIER REMEMBERS

Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal

World War II Veteran

**A Memoir**



Pritam Singh Jauhal and  
Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra

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LIEUTENANT COLONEL PRITAM SINGH JAUHAL AND  
SHARANJIT KAUR SANDHRA

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Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal  
World War II Veteran  
A Memoir

Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal with Sharanjit Kaur  
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# Prologue

November 11, 1993 - Remembrance Day

Remembrance Day - the day, when I along with people from all walks of life in Canada mourn the loss and pay tribute to those brave soldiers who risked and lost their lives and limbs in order to preserve the peace and sanctity of millions around the world. I am one of those soldiers.

I retired as a Lieutenant Colonel after thirty eight years of meritorious service in the British and Indian Army and was awarded thirteen medals and stars for my brave efforts. And so it was with great honour and pride that I read the Remembrance Day public invitation in the local newspaper by the Newton Legion Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Surrey, British Columbia. The invitation was extended to all veterans to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies on Nov 11, 1993 to remember, honour and respect those brave men and women who had contributed their efforts in battle.

On reading the public invitation I decided to take part in the Remembrance Day Ceremonies as a decorated and proud veteran. When I reached the assembly area in Newton on Nov 11, I met four other World War II turbaned Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO's) and Other Ranks (OR's). Proudly wearing my medals and stars I marched along with fifteen hundred other veterans to the cenotaph where prayers were offered for the war dead, wreaths were laid, last post and reveille were sounded and two minutes of silence was observed. The parade then marched to the Legion lounge, but as soon as I attempted to march inside the lounge, two attendants posted at its doors stopped me and said, "Sir you cannot go in because you have a turban on your head." I was told that I could enter the hall as long as I removed my turban. For me this was just not possible.

As the parade continued to march inside the Legion lounge, my fellow Sikh veterans and I stood outside feeling utterly humiliated. Even though prior to the ceremonies I had visited the Legion and

obtained clearance to wear my turban, now my pleas explaining that I was an invited guest were completely ignored. The Legion President at the time, Mr. Frank Underwood was called who told me point-blank, "As per the Legion Bylaws you cannot go inside the Legion with a turban on your head." Despite my best efforts to explain the special importance of being an invited guest and the symbolism and significance of the turban for a Sikh, the President did not budge from his position. Some elderly Legion members who were listening to my arguments with keen interest asked the President to take the invited guests inside the Lounge with respect, but their pleading was also to no avail. As soon as word of what was transpiring outside the door spread inside the lounge, many members of the Provincial Legislature, Cabinet Ministers and Surrey City Councillors who were in attendance to make speeches inside the Lounge walked out in protest.

As a veteran and a retired Lieutenant Colonel I could not tolerate such a public insult. There were so many valid reasons which should have permitted my entrance into the Legion. But foremost, I had come on invitation to attend the ceremonies and I should have been treated as a guest with respect and decency and allowed to complete the ceremonies inside the lounge. For a Sikh the turban is not merely a head-dress to be removed at will, it is a religious symbol, a sign of my identity and something I could never remove in public on demand. Sikhs invited to Buckingham Palace over the years have never been asked to remove their turbans. They have joined the King and/or Queen for banquets and dinners with their turbans intact proudly on their heads. Even upon death a Sikh man is cremated with his turban on his head. And yet here I was, a decorated war veteran invited to attend Remembrance Day ceremonies being shunned away as if my presence brought disgrace instead of dignity to the commemoration. I was dismayed beyond belief.

All of these and many other explanations fell on the deaf ears of the Newton Legion President. Ignoring us he went inside the lounge leaving four Sikh veterans and myself standing outside the Legion doors. Was it for this moment that I had served in the British and Indian armies loyally and outstandingly for thirty eight years? I had never for a moment imagined that I could be insulted, embarrassed and humiliated in public in this manner and that my religious beliefs could be trivialized by being asked to remove my

turban and that too at the hands of fellow veterans. I never realized that after my thirty eight years of loyal service in the army, having suffered physically and emotionally in Africa, Vietnam, India and Pakistan, that the fight for my rights as a Sikh was to be the greatest battle of my life.

In this book, you the reader will see that my fight to wear a turban in the Legion was my most public fight, but I have been a fighter my entire life. Upon immigrating to Canada and as a Canadian citizen I continued to fight for those in Canada who were unable to do so for themselves. I am a firm believer that my service to humanity has been my greatest calling and it is something I will live by until the end of my days.

Before I explain my battle with the Legion I would like to share with you my beginnings. You cannot begin to understand how a man could take on the Royal Canadian Legion unless you share in the journey of my life. This is my story.

Pritam Singh Jauhal (Retired Lieutenant Colonel)

## 17 Faith Denied & Correspondence with the Queen

While Pritam was fighting for the widows of Indian war veterans and while he was managing and participating in the many activities associated with the Indian Ex-Servicemen Society of BC, he did not realize that he would soon be facing the greatest battle of his life.

The battle was fought on Canadian soil against an iconic Canadian organization, but it showed remarkable strength of courage and character on Pritam's part. This remarkable story unfolded on November 11, 1993 when Lt. Col Pritam Singh, along with fellow WWII Sikh veterans: Flying Officer Harbhajan Singh Minhas (Ret'd), Subedar Puran Singh Saran (Ret'd), Sepoy Waryam Singh Bains (Ret'd), and Subedar Major Honorary Captain Mehar Singh Baring (Ret'd) were denied entrance into the Newton Legion Branch by its President Mr. Frank Underwood during the annual war veterans Remembrance Day ceremonies.

A few weeks before the November 11 Remembrance Day ceremonies in 1993 Pritam had read a public invitation by the Newton Legion Branch in the local community newspapers for veterans to gather to pay respect to fallen soldiers. Five Indian veterans decided to attend the Remembrance Day ceremonies and on November 8th, exactly three days prior to the ceremony, Pritam

visited the Newton Legion Branch and received clearance from Mr. Arni Bayless, the Parade Commander to wear his formal army jacket displaying all his medals and his turban.

On November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1993 the proud Indian veterans wore their formal army jackets and joined the ceremonies at the Cenotaph in Newton, Surrey. After the formal commemorative event, they joined the parade of veterans as they marched to the Legion hall for speeches and refreshments. But as the Indian veterans approached the door, they were refused entry by the Legion President, Mr. Frank Underwood, while others continued to stream by into the hall.

Pritam and the veterans were shocked and humiliated when they found that they were not going to be allowed to enter the Legion hall. They stood outside pleading their case to the President but it was to no avail. What was the cause of this humiliation? It was their turbans - they were told the turban had to be removed in order for them to go inside the Legion hall. No headdress was allowed in the Legion Hall as it was considered disrespectful. As proud and practicing Sikhs they naturally refused to remove their turbans considering their lifelong commitment to the honour of their sacred symbol. Under these circumstances Pritam thought how could he even begin to convey his dismay, humiliation and frustration to those who were standing in front of him - his fellow veterans? The four other veterans were also completely baffled, as they wondered how when every veteran was given an open invitation to attend the ceremonies that these few men could still be denied entry. They questioned how was it that Pritam had received prior approval to join the ceremonies knowing full well he was a turbaned Sikh, and yet he and the other veterans were still denied entrance as invited guests of the Legion? The contradictions had become endless.

Six senior female members of the Newton Legion who heard Pritam's arguments outside the door with Mr. Underwood were considerably upset. They told Pritam and the others with folded hands, "Gentleman, we are extremely sorry for the manner in which you have been insulted as a guest by our President. We apologize to you on behalf of our Legion." But their apology held no weight to remove the ban on turbans within the hall at that moment. Even more shocking was that there were women coming

into the Legion hall with berets on who were being allowed in. When Pritam asked why the law was not restricting them, he was told that women have been wearing such a head-dress for seventy years and so it was acceptable. For the Indian veterans the hypocrisy of the rules was reaching incredulous limits.

As a result of what was happening at the door Ms. Penny Priddy, MLA for the Surrey-Newton constituency and a Minister in the British Columbia Government, walked out of the lounge in protest against the way the veterans were being insulted in public. She had been scheduled to deliver a speech which she never gave. Councillor Bruce Ralston and a few other dignitaries also walked out of the ceremony. This unfolding real life drama inevitably brought the national and international media on the scene.

Baffled and upset, yet determined to find resolution, Pritam drove back to his house where he found news crews with two TV trucks waiting for him. They asked him to accompany them to the very doors of the Newton Legion where he was denied entrance. They wanted to interview Pritam at the spot where he had been refused entry to the Newton Legion. Pritam agreed and accompanied them. When he arrived at the Newton Legion there were over fifty media crews waiting for him. He was bombarded with questions by a throng of media. Seeing that so many of them wanted to talk to him, he told them that he would not return home until all the interviews were done and his voice was fully heard. He stayed there for nearly an hour and a half giving interviews, knowing that through the media the case of these veterans could be made known to the entire world. It would turn out that the various forms of media would end up serving as Pritam's greatest allies. Many members of the Newton Legion there were sympathetic toward Pritam and they promised to go alongside Pritam in the battle of rights and respect that Pritam promised he would wage.

The next day on Friday, November 12, 1993 - Pritam's story was featured in the main headlines of both The Vancouver Province and The Vancouver Sun. The Vancouver Province's headline exclaimed "No Sikhs allowed," and the Vancouver Sun's headline exclaimed "Legion slams door in Sikhs' face."

Pritam was so distraught and upset by the humiliation he had faced, that he wrote the following letter to the Newton Legion,

Surrey branch a few days after November 11th. This is an extract of that open letter:

On April 15, 1944 Abdul Hafiz was ordered to attack a strong position. He led the assault across a bare slope and up a steep cliff, killing several of the enemy himself. He pressed on regardless of machine-gun fire. He received two wounds, the second of which was fatal, but first he captured a critical position and routed an enemy vastly superior in numbers.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

On Sep 23, 1918, while charging a strong position on the River Jordon, Badlu Singh realized machine-guns and 200 Infantry men were inflicting heavy casualties on his cavalry Squadron. With the entire disregard of danger, he charged. He was mortally wounded on the summit while capturing one of the machine guns, but all the guns and infantry had surrendered to him before he died.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

On Nov 22, 1944, in East Mayru Arakan, Burma, Bhandari Ram's platoon was pinned down by machine-gun fire. Wounded and in full view of the enemy, he attacked a Japanese machine-gun. Wounded again, he crawled to within five metres. He then threw a grenade, killing the gunner and two others. This inspired his platoon to rush and capture the enemy position. Only then did he allow his wounds to be dressed.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

In the early hours of Apr 20, 1943, at Djebel Garli, Tunisia, the advance of a battalion was held up by machine-gun and mortar fire. Chhelu Ram dashed forward with a tommy gun and killed the occupants of the post. He then went to the aid of his wounded Company Commander and in turn he was wounded. Regardless of his wounds, he took command, and led his men in hand-to-hand fighting. He was again wounded

but continued rallying his men until he died.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

On March 2, 1945, on the road between Kamyé and Myingyan, Burma, where the Japanese were strongly positioned, Gian Singh alone kept firing his tommy-gun and rushed to the enemy fox holes. In spite of being wounded in the arm he went on hurling grenades. He attacked and killed the crew of a cleverly concealed anti-tank gun and then led his men down a lane, clearing all the enemy positions. He went on leading his Section until the action had been satisfactorily completed.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

On March 10, 1915, at Neuve Chapelle, France, during an attack on the German position, Gobar Singh Negi was one of a bayonet party who entered the enemy's main trench. He was the first man to go around each traverse, driving back the enemy until they surrendered. He was killed during this engagement.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

On April 10, 1921, near Haidari Kach, North West Frontier, India, Ishar Singh was No 1 of a Lewis gun Section. Early in the fighting, he was severely wounded. All the officers of his company became casualties and his Lewis gun was captured. He recovered the gun and went into action again although his wound was bleeding profusely. When ordered to have it dressed, he went to the aid of the medical officer, carrying water to the wounded. While the medical officer dressed wounds, Ishar Singh used his own body to shield the medical officer from enemy fire.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

In the early hours of Dec 16, 1944, in the Kaladan Valley, Burma, Umrao Singh was in charge of a gun in an advanced

Section of his Battery. He repeatedly beat off enemy attacks. In the final assault, he struck down three of the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting. After the fighting when found exhausted he was found wounded beside the gun, as number of enemy men lay dead while his gun was still in action.

**Good enough for the Victoria Cross. Not good enough to earn a seat among the heroes of the Newton Legion on Remembrance Day in 1993.**

Pritam truly felt that at this moment in time his battle to legally protect the Sikh turban had begun. What commenced for the next year was a barrage of newspaper, television and radio interviews, filing a case with the BC Human Rights Council against the Newton Legion Branch #175, letters to the Queen of England, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of BC, local MLA's and politicians, and the World Sikh Organization.

Pritam was asked to speak on various national TV Channels and radio talk shows to give detailed accounts of the incident. He also received numerous telephone calls from many countries for interview requests. A television team came from Australia to interview him. Journalists from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) interviewed him on the phone many times. Journalists and reporters called Pritam from all across North America. As a result, Pritam was kept occupied around the clock. During this ordeal Pritam had the full support of his family including Harjit and their three children; although the children feared for Pritam's very life at times. In the end they all decided that this was a fight that Pritam had to pursue and they encouraged him to never give up.

At times during the ordeal because of the very real physical threats he faced, there was a point in time that Pritam thought that he would not be able to fight the Legion policies. It was here that he was reminded of the story of Sant Baba Nidhan Singh. Nidhan Singh was the only turbaned Sikh doing *seva* at Nanded (earlier in Hyderabad State, India and now in Andhra Pradesh) and was often ridiculed and tormented by people around him. Feeling much hurt, he decided to return to his home in Punjab. While waiting at the railway station he experienced the *darshan* of the tenth Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh Ji who asked of him, "Bas, ho gayee *seva*? (Is that all? Have you done your service)?" Overcome by this vision of the tenth Sikh Guru and his challenge filled question, Nidhan

Singh returned to Nanded and built the *Gurdwara Sachkhand Sahib*, where millions of devotees come to worship and take part in its *guru ka langar*.

Like Nidhan Singh, Pritam was among the few turbaned Sikhs who have faced ridicule and verbal torment and done something about it in a very public manner. One day as Pritam prayed to Guru Gobind Singh Ji, he also heard a voice telling him to not worry and advising him not to keep his turban in the front during his battle with the Legion, but to advocate behind the narrative that he came to the Legion as an invited guest and was still denied entrance. By remembering these words of advice and the strength from the voice he heard very much like what that the tenth Sikh Guru Gobind Singh Ji imbued into Baba Nidhan Singh, Pritam also forged on with his battle. And forged on he did, not in malice or in anger, but with formidable strength and courage. This was because when Pritam first saw himself on television being interviewed immediately after being denied entrance into the Legion he saw himself full of anger. Pritam realized that if he was to fight an honest fight and with his *ek pagh* as his strength, he should remain calm and straightforward and simply let the Canadian viewers/listeners be the judges.

Miss Reeta Sharma, a reporter from for the Tribune, Chandigarh India, travelled to Canada to interview Pritam. She had seen his name and photographs in a number of Indian newsprint and electronic media and decided to come to Canada to interview him. Her interview lasted over two and a half hours and her beautifully worded story was published in the Chandigarh Tribune on July 29, 1994. Here is a brief excerpt from her article:

Once offended and humiliated, he fought the battle of his *pagh* symbolic of his honour and religion, like a warrior. There is not a weapon in his arsenal which he did not put to use. "I had to restore the honour of my turban" he says, looking back. "During all interviews with national media I overemphasized that I went to the Newton Legion on an invitation. In case I was at fault the listening public is my court. Any penalty awarded to me by it I shall accept unhesitatingly. But in case the fault lies with Newton Legion officials, the listening public should deal with them as considered appropriate. This policy helped me enormously to win the hearts of Canadian people."

While the national media (television, newspapers and radio) gave the issue a constructive, analytical and appropriate airing, Pritam was to fight the battle of his honour and turban on many other fronts. Pritam started by writing letters giving details of the incident and explaining the symbolic significance of the turban to all related authorities and figure heads. He wrote to every Member of Parliament of Canada, all organizations dealing with religious discrimination, Canadian justice agencies, the Governor-General of Canada, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of BC, and even the Queen giving his point of view. Pritam also wrote to the Dominion Command of the Royal Canadian Legion at Ottawa to keep them informed of the developments.

On December 9th, 1993, Pritam wrote a letter to the Queen of England at Buckingham Palace to share his story and his distress. He thought surely she would understand this plight of a Sikh soldier.

To:  
Her Majesty the Queen,  
Buckingham Palace,  
London,  
England

Madam,

I have the honour to state that my father fought under the British Empire, during the First World War and I in the second. I served in the 8th British Army under world famous Field Marshall Montgomery. I took an active part in the very famous battle of El Alamein. I saw thousands of my comrades laying down their extremely valuable lives. I was lucky to survive.

I retired from the Indian Army as a Lieutenant Colonel after over 38 years of meritorious service in the British as well as Indian Army. I was awarded 13 medals and stars. I immigrated to Canada in 1980 and am a Canadian Citizen.

I read an invitation from the Newton branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in a community newspaper on November 03, 1993, to immigrant veterans, inviting them to attend Remembrance Day services on November 11, 1993. I decided to attend.

On November 11, 1993, wearing my 13 medals and stars I marched along with 1500 veterans to the cenotaph where some speeches were made, prayers were offered, last post and reveille was sounded and one minute silence was observed. The parade including four other Sikh veterans and myself marched to the Newton Legion branch building. I was stopped at the door of the Legion Hall and not allowed to enter, unless I removed my turban. I was told that a 1946 by-law bans head dress inside the Hall, I tried to reason with the President explaining in detail, some of which were as under:-

(a) I came on invitation to attend the services. I should therefore, be treated as a guest with respect and decency and allowed to complete the ceremonies inside the hall.

(b) A turban for a Sikh is not merely a head dress, but a religious symbol and a Sikh never removes it in public.

(c) Many Sikhs invited to Buckingham Palace over the years were not asked to remove their turbans. They joined the King/Queen for banquets and dinners with turbans on their heads.

(d) A Sikh pays his respects by saluting a dead body with the turban on his head.

(e) A Sikh dies and is cremated with a turban on his head.

I regret to state that all my explanations fell on the deaf ears of the Newton Legion branch President. He went inside the hall leaving four other Sikh veterans and myself standing outside the hall door.

I never for a moment imagined that when I retire and at 73 years of age, I shall be insulted, embarrassed and humiliated in public and my religious feelings will be hurt by asking me to remove my turban and that too at the hands of fellow veterans. I felt completely distressed and have been placed on medications by my physician.

I most respectfully request for forgiveness in case this letter causes any inconvenience whatsoever.

Thanking you and I have the honour to remain.

Your Majesty's faithful and obedient subject,  
Lt. Col Pritam Singh Jauhal (Ret'd)

Pritam did not know if he would receive a response however, on January 13th, 1994, he received the following response from Buckingham Palace:

Dear Colonel Jauhal,

I am commanded by the Queen to thank you for your letter of the 9th December about the wearing of turbans in Canadian Legion buildings on Remembrance Day. I apologize for the delay in replying.

Her Majesty has noted the content of your letter and understands the concern which prompted you to write. I am directed to forward your letter to the headquarters of the Royal Canadian Legion so that they may be aware of your approach to the Queen.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Gimson

The question now was whether the Legion would heed the concerns of Her Majesty, The Queen - sovereign of Canada. Unfortunately, as you will see the Legion's response to the Queen became convoluted because the Branch shared a very different opinion from the Legion Headquarters.

## 22 Trajectory of Pritam's Life – Writer's View

Each time I visited Lt. Col Pritam Singh Jauhal in his home to interview him, I was always struck by his immense presence, his innate kindness and his enduring intellect. It was my duty to convey my respect to an elder by calling him Uncle ji at every visit and with every phone call, in emails, etc. As I wrote his biography I found myself wanting to write Uncle ji in reference to him, but that would divert the reader's attention to a relationship rather than the man. Keeping this in mind, I used Pritam, while acknowledging my respect to his status.

Pritam has certainly lived a remarkable and full life, punctuated time and time again by momentous events that shaped the man that he is. He has lived a life full of honour, dedicated to service to his country, his family, and to his fellow human beings. Above all, he has no regrets. He has been awarded 13 medals for his service in the army (both British and Indian), he has met the Queen of England, been awarded the British Columbia Achievement Award and most recently the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. He has also been asked to speak at Remembrance Day Services innumerable times as a decorated war veteran. Even today, Pritam continues to fight a number of struggles for Indian War Veterans; including assisting Indian Military pensioners to receive their

due benefits. This is because Pritam Singh is not one to sit down idly when he sees that someone needs his help, he comes forward because he is a true fighter and a true soldier at heart.

Throughout his life Pritam has continued to imbibe a positive spirit, immense kindness towards people and a high degree of intellect. He says that he has no regrets and only hopes that that his life can serve as an example to others. He wants to impart the importance to serve one's communities, one's faith, and to fight for one's rights.

Pritam's life story can be placed within the historical trajectory of the history of India and the history of Empire. And like all other Sikh migrants, part of his story finds its place in another historical movement of Sikhs who have created a vibrant Indian Diaspora in Canada.

The history of India is a rich one; it is a history of invasions from its surrounding regions, different rulers with different beliefs over the millennia. A country which constitutionally recognizes 23 official languages and is home to Hinduism, the largest religion in India (81.5%), followed by Islam (13.4%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.9%), Buddhism (0.8%), Jainism (0.4%), Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and the Bahá'í Faith. India has the world's largest Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Bahá'í populations, and has the third-largest Muslim population and the largest Muslim population for a non-Muslim majority country.

For almost three centuries India remained under the rule of the Moghul Emperors. It was during Moghul rule in the 15th century that the religion of Sikhism came to be with the birth of its first Sikh Guru, Guru Nanak Dev. The next 239 years saw a succession of Sikh Gurus up until the final living Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh Ji declared upon his death that there would be no living Sikh Guru and from that point in time all Sikhs would follow the path as written in the Sikh scriptures, the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji*. The relationship between the Moghul rulers and the first five Sikh Gurus was that of relative peace and harmony. Moghul rulers such as Akbar for example accorded religious freedoms and even engaged in conversations with the Gurus and other Sikhs. By the fifth Sikh Guru, Guru Arjan Dev ji's time however, religious tolerance was overtaken by intolerance on part of the Moghuls.

When Guru Arjan Dev ji was tortured and martyred in 1606 by the Mughals, his successor and son, Guru Hargobind Ji took up the Guruship and militarized *Sikhi* through the symbolic gesture of *miri-piri*, referring to the maintainance of a balance between spirituality and temporal authority. From 1556 - 1707, many Sikhs were persecuted and often tortured by treacherous rulers such as Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. During this tumultuous time, Gurus such as Guru Hargobind Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji not only forged and fought for their rights to practice *Sikhi* in peace, but they also defended the rights of other faiths to practice their faith as well.

To fully understand the significance of the *pagh* in Sikhs history one must look back three hundred plus year ago. The tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the *Khalsa Panth*, initiating a 'baptism' of Sikhs by including five elements or *kakar's*: *kara*, *kanga*, *kirpan*, *kachera*, and *kesh* into their identity. Each article of faith carries immense weight, significance and symbolism; however, the keeping of one's *kesh* is meant to signify the human being as he or she was brought into this world, without any desecration to the body in any form, including unshorn hair. The long hair is then tied into a knot on the head and covered with the *pagh*. A Sikh's hair can never be unkempt, untidy, uncombed and unshorn, producing a discipline and rigour to this element that is to be upheld at all times. When asleep, a baptized Sikh must always cover his or her hair with a smaller looser *pagh*. Whenever a Sikh ties the *pagh* he or she is reminded of the historical religious persecution, violence and torture that some of the Sikh Gurus had to endure under Moghul rule and the discipline of straightforward thinking and steadfastness of character. They undertook a fight for individual rights so that all people could practice their chosen faith. This is why the *pagh* is so important to a Sikh and this is why Pritam took up the battle to wear his *pagh* when his faith was being denied.

During the Moghul Empire, the British arrived to trade under the British East India Company in the mid-18th century. Steadily, the British administrators in India moved beyond trade and were able to take control of India and all of its assets, adding it to the vast British Empire.

Following the first Indian War of independence in 1857 when Indians unsuccessfully made their first real collective attempt to expel the British out of India, it was in 1858 that India was offi-

cially placed under the Crown's control. A few years later in 1877, Benjamin Disraeli the Conservative Prime Minister proclaimed Queen Victoria as the 'Empress of India.' This title was a gesture to link the monarchy with the Empire and bind India more closely to Britain. Pritam alludes to village life during British rule in the early 20th century where villagers lacked basic resources and infrastructures including: roads, buses, canals, tube wells, toilets, sewage, electricity, running water, brick houses, etc. Pritam believed that this lack of resources was deliberate so that Indian economic dependence on British rule would ensure their position as rulers. Victorian beliefs and sentiments reigned supreme during British rule and most Indians except the very few elite were treated no better than human slaves and held in disdain by their British counterparts.

When the two World Wars erupted in 1914 and then in 1939 respectively, any and all Indian soldiers were required to risk their lives and face battle in the field as part of the British Empire. Even then, all Indian soldiers' roles were kept to the lower ranks until the British had no option but to allow Indians into the higher ranks. Pritam's father Ram Singh was one of those Indian soldiers thrown into the battlefield at a lower rank and he received very little in return from the British for his bravery. As Pritam mentioned, Ram Singh's retirement allowance only gave him enough to provide for some simple home renovations. Some thirty one years later, Pritam would be following in his father's footsteps, but education allowed him to achieve a much higher success in Army rankings.

In WWII the provinces of British India sent over 2.5 million of their Indian soldiers abroad to fight against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan) from 1939-1945 as part of the British Allied forces. Though key figures for the Indian Independence movement such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi opposed Nazism and Fascism, they refused to support the British cause because of the irony that the British were at war to save democracy when Britain itself denied Indians their basic rights of freedom and sovereignty. It was this slow realization and India's continuous nationalist freedom movement that contributed to the withdrawal of the British and finally giving Independence to India in 1947.

The 4th, 5th and 10th divisions of the Indian Army were all deployed in North Africa as part of the 8 British Army. Pritam

played a key role in providing communication signals for the army. The majority of these Indian (mostly Sikh) soldiers had never seen any land beyond their regions, let alone crossing the oceans. Despite this, they fought bravely on the battlefield thousands of miles away from their loved ones for the freedom of others, even as they were shackled under foreign rule at home. The divisions deployed in North Africa faced the treacherous German Afrika Corps Army which was under the command of Erwin Rommel. Pritam describes going into battle with General Rommel's German Army, which advanced with such a heavy position at one point in Libya that the allied forces were forced to withdraw, losing thousands of soldiers in the effort. Involvement in the war on foreign soil helped Pritam understand the value of sacrifice and he maintained a deep respect for his fallen comrades in arms. These ideals he kept close to his heart long after the war.

Pritam was awarded medals and distinction for exemplary service for the British Army, honoured with a well-earned title of Lieutenant Colonel. With the end of WWII and the dismantling and defeat of the Axis powers, India was already in the throes of an independence movement that came to fruition in the year 1947. What followed was the chaos and horrors of partition which saw the mass movement of 25 million Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. People moved across hand drawn boundaries between villages, from the Dominion of Pakistan to India and vice-versa, facing death and loss along the way. Pritam was truly blessed that his family did not see the effects of this first hand and they were spared untold suffering. In fact, the only real change that Pritam saw following Independence and partition was a sudden changing in his army rank when he was promoted to a Lieutenant.

In 1980 when Pritam and Harjit decided to move to Canada to join their children, they left the ancestral thread that bound them to India. They joined many other Sikhs who had built their lives abroad within the Diaspora, creating new strings of emotion and commitment in a new land.

Most historians would agree that the first true evidence of the Sikhs who arrived in British Columbia came on June 3, 1902. These fifteen or twenty three Sikh soldiers who came to Canada were a part of the procession honouring the coronation of King Edward VII. After they arrived in Victoria on the Empress of Japan, they

walked down the streets of Vancouver to a shower of applause by the local community. After this introduction to Canada, the earliest group of Sikh pioneers arrived on British Columbia shores in 1904 and by 1908 they totaled 5,179. At first the small number of Sikhs remained largely unnoticed in BC; however, as more South Asians began arriving on the shores of BC (e.g., on September 1, 1906 two hundred immigrants arrived by ship), so did racist sentiments. The growing numbers were noticed by the Provincial and Federal governments and racist legislation and policies commenced in order to hinder South Asian immigration. This included the continuous passage law requiring unbroken passage from the point of origin (impossible from India). Wives and children of the South Asian men living in BC also were not allowed to unite with them, leaving them with a temporariness of purpose and settlement. These laws also meant that the Sikh men who currently lived in BC faced blatant discrimination in many facets of their lives. Groups such as the Asiatic Exclusion League engaged in the Anti-Asian riots of 1907 and the community of Sikhs felt the sting of overt racism from European settlers of the time. Yet these men persevered and forged on to build successful lives in B.C. They came together and built *Gurdwaras* which became more than a religious sanctum; they provided a rallying site where the community could support each other politically, financially and emotionally. For the next eight decades, most South Asians who immigrated (or were allowed to migrate) faced immense discrimination which was sometimes violent. These difficult and humble beginnings carried the community into eight decades of Canadian life when Pritam entered the scene as a war veteran and father.

I was surprised when Pritam told me about his experience of arriving at the Vancouver airport in 1980 with Harjit. I was surprised because he told me how Balwinder's eyes welled up in pride when she saw the very visible, high and proud *pagh* of Pritam Singh's. Balwinder's emotion came with having seen so few *paghs* in Canada. I had thought in my naivety that by the 1980's (Pritam was denied entrance into the Legion in 1993) religious tolerance, acceptance and understanding had started to solidify in Canadian society. After reading and researching Pritam's immense collection of documents, I could say my answer would be that it was true for the most part. Yet, it is evident that fighting against the resistance towards the turban was very much a daily personal and community struggle for many and for some it continues to be so.

While Pritam was embroiled in his struggle to wear his turban in the Newton Legion branch, he had support from the media, community members and politicians. But as I read and reviewed Pritam's documents I realized that there was also an undertone of ignorance and some letters were clearly racist and violent in nature. I came to realize that many did not understand the meaning of the turban and its religious, cultural and social importance and as a result those people were making stereotypical and prejudicial assumptions. It is evident to Sikhs that the process of tying the *pagh* and placing it on one's head is so intrinsic to *Sikhi* that the two could not be separated. In the collection of documents Pritam had, he also kept articles and stories which touched on another story making headlines around the same time. This story was of a young man named Baltej Singh Dhillon who wanted to be an RCMP officer but refused to remove his turban and compromise his Sikh faith to adhere to strict Police uniform rules. In April, 1989 the RCMP commissioner recommended the prohibition against turbans be lifted. Then almost a year later, Solicitor General Pierre Cadieux gave his ruling to allow turbans to be a part of the RCMP uniform. In response to Pritam's Legion conflict it would seem that many Canadians were still reeling from the RCMP dress code change and they failed to understand that Sikhs had the same rights as any other Canadian in terms of religious and identity rights.

Sikhs like Pritam have fought the good fight to defend their right to wear the turban and accorded it a rightful place in Canadian society. Pritam's life has been marked by good fortune, many achievements and much acclaim but above all he has kept *seva* at the forefront of his values. His story testifies to this ideal.

Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra

At 93 years of age retired Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh Jauhal has the same intellect, wit and tenacity that he has had his entire life. Born in the village of Johal, District Jullundur, India around the year 1920, Pritam Singh caught glimpses of military life as a young boy and slowly grew up with the notion that serving one's country was a great privilege and not a burden. It is this philosophy that Pritam Singh has held his entire life, from his thirty eight years of service for the British and Indian armies to his more recent life in Canada.

In the 1970's Canadian society was struggling with issues of race and racism based on a general ignorance among its citizenry. When Pritam Singh emigrated to BC, Canada in 1980 he felt shock and disbelief that a man of his caliber and military ranking would have to face a barrage of blatant racism. This discrimination reached its climax during the Remembrance Day ceremonies of 1993 when Lieutenant Colonel Pritam Singh was denied entrance into the Surrey Newton Legion Branch because he was wearing a turban. True to his convictions and his Sikh faith, Pritam Singh waged a long and difficult struggle for Sikh veterans to be allowed to wear this key article of their faith in the Legion.

This is a story of Pritam Singh's struggle with the Legion in 1993, but it is also much more than that. This book chronicles the struggles and accomplishments of an immigrant Sikh-Canadian, and the lifelong service he has given to his community. Pritam Singh is a true role model and his story needs to be shared.

*A Soldier Remembers* brings to the fore the life of a man whose life journey fulfilled both his dreams and obligations. India and Canada both benefited from a son of their land – one by birth and one by choice – through service and resistance against injustice. A war of weapons and a war of thought were both fought equally with valour and bravery. This book is a testament to such a man.

**Pritam Singh Jauhal** is a decorated Indian Army veteran who lives in Surrey, British Columbia with his children and grandchildren.

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