

# BOOK REVIEW

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**A General's Odyssey: GIVING UP IS NOT AN OPTION**

*Authored by Lieutenant General V.K. Ahluwalia*



**Lieutenant General V.K. Ahluwalia, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, SM (Retd), A General's Odyssey: GIVING UP IS NOT AN OPTION. New Delhi: Pentagon Press LLP, 2025. ISBN: 978-81-984458-9-6**

In *A General's Odyssey*, Lieutenant General (Dr) V.K. Ahluwalia, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, SM (Retd) offers readers an evocative, multifaceted narrative that transcends the typical bounds of military memoir. This is not merely the story of a soldier's journey through service, operations, and leadership; it is a reflective voyage into the essence of human resilience, emotional intelligence, and the enduring power of purpose. The author has thoughtfully structured this book into five distinct segments, encompassing a total of 25 insightful chapters. With remarkable clarity and deep introspection, he delves into the lived experiences of a soldier, the psychological and emotional toll of conflict, the spirit of regimental brotherhood, and the transformative impact of visionary leadership. This literary journey, layered with anecdotes, life lessons, and nuanced reflections, serves as a timeless tribute to the Indian Armed Forces and the men and women who embody its spirit.

From the outset, the book establishes its tone with "Trauma that Taught Several Lessons", a compelling opening chapter that does not shy away from vulnerability. It sets the stage from medically unfit for army to an honest exploration of the pain, loss, and reflection that accompany life in uniform to getting selected in the final list of Commissioned Officers and at last General Officer Commanding in Chief. Rather than romanticizing war clouds of 1971, the author distills the anguish into powerful lessons that continue to shape his worldview. These early reflections become the linchpin for the rest of the book where each chapter resonates with authenticity and emotional depth.

The narrative seamlessly transitions into a broader contemplation of what it means to transform not only as a military leader but as a human being. In "The Linchpin of Transformation", Dr Ahluwalia examines how adversities like the village school up to eighth grade push you to think what can be done after that are catalysts for growth, both personally and institutionally. His insight into the evolution of strategic thought within the Indian Army is both informed and visionary, highlighting the importance of adaptive thinking in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment.

The third chapter is "Naam, Namak, Nishaan: The Enduring Regimental Spirit", where the author elaborates on becoming a second lieutenant is like stepping on to a roller coaster for the first time. The Camaraderie days bring to life the intangible yet powerful bond that holds a regiment together. Here, the author invokes the ethos of loyalty, honor, and sacrifice that are intrinsic to the Indian military tradition. This chapter especially, reflects the essence of regimental spirit of military that extends far beyond the battlefield. In a world increasingly driven by self-interest,



this tribute to collective identity is both refreshing and necessary.

*“Envision Beyond Conventional Boundaries”* serves as a philosophical pivot point, encouraging readers to think beyond tactical operations and consider the broader contours of strategic vision and holistic leadership by giving lecture to an audience of 700 military officers and their families as a Director of The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS). He calls for a mindset that balances tradition with innovation, rootedness with agility a message that is as relevant to interacting with young scholars at CLAWS or corporate boardrooms as it is to military command centers. His thoughts here are grounded in lived experience, yet they speak to universal truths about leadership and vision from wide range of civilian scholars to various branch of the military.

The emotional core of the book is found in Part 2, which centers on two deeply formative experiences Uri and Kargil. In *“Warrior Ethos: Facing Deadly Challenges Head On”*, the author conveys the unforgiving realities of conflict either it be Kargil, 9/11 or the Uri attack with precision and empathy. These are not mere battle, they are vivid recollections marked by loss, courage, and resilience. *“Operation Green Kargil”* is the chapter where he extensively elaborates on ground experiences of Line of Control (LoC) and strategic positioning of India and Pakistan. The chapter *“Boots on the Ground: A Snowy Quandry”* bring the snowy terrain, the avalanche tension, and the battle ground tactical challenges to life from snow laden mountains of Kargil and Dras of Leh. while *“Echoes of Kargil: Intriguing Questions in Hindsight”* compels the reader to ask difficult questions about decision-making, strategy, and the cost of war. These chapters form the emotional and ethical anchor of the book bringing humanity to the heroism.

Part 3, *“Emotional Intelligence: Navigating Human Relationships”*, offers a profound look into the emotional complexities that leaders must navigate. *“Dilemma in Decision Making”* captures the weight of command the irreversible impact of choices made in high-stakes environments where the story of Major Vikas Sharma's not taking privilege unavailable to his troops provides us the clear lens of leadership. The chapter *“A Father's Legacy: The Chronicle of Dr Scania Saldeen”* adds a memorable story from learning the state of the art bofors gun system to giving his daughter a name “Scania” means heavy duty vehicle. The chapter *“Is Everything Hunky-Dory? Better Watch Out”* provides a gentle reminder that challenges often lurk behind apparent calm which describes the military ladder at large. *“Human Relations Cut Across All Boundaries”* reinforces the idea that leadership is ultimately about connection, compassion, and the capacity to listen your people and understand them as a part of your life.

Part 4 of the book is a heartfelt homage to some of India's most legendary military leaders. In *“The Heart of a Legend: Legacy of Genral S F Rodrigues”* and

and “Interactions with the Illustrious General Rostum K. Nanavatty”, Author brings to light the values, leadership styles, and intellectual legacy of figures who shaped the modern Indian Army. These chapters are not mere recollections; they are critical reflections on mentorship, legacy, and the importance of learning from predecessors. His engagement with leadership theory, particularly in “Embracing Ambiguity as an Opportunity” and “The Litmus Test Lies in Operations”, is insightful when he explains extended theory of plato that war is fundamental part of human nature to true test is done in operations. By sharing personal stories and operational experiences, he makes a compelling case for adaptive leadership in uncertain times a theme highly relevant to both military and civilian readers. In “A Fresh Start: From Soldier to Independent Director”, where the author reflects the new frontier of challenges in corporate. This chapter captures the journey of reinvention and the challenges of transitioning from a structured military environment to the ambiguity of civilian life. It is a powerful commentary on adaptability, lifelong learning, and the pursuit of purpose beyond profession.

The final section of the book, Part 5, is a celebration of unique experiences, unexpected challenges, and the unbreakable spirit of service. “Alma Mater: Priceless Moments” and “Teachers Remind Us of Invaluable Connections” underscore the importance of foundational values and the quiet impact of early age mentors. In chapter “the curious case of Maoist challenge” he briefs about the new challenges in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. “Flying in the Mountains” and “A Lesson from the Skies” are packed with suspense and learnings from School of Artillery to join flying school, while “Monkeygate Scandal” and “A Horsey Challenge” add a touch of cricket match at sydney to tales of cavalry.

The final chapter of book “*Embracing the Journey: Lessons in Resilience and Growth*” a fitting finale that encapsulates the book’s overarching theme. He reminds readers the terrorist violence over the past 35 years and advises that life is not defined by titles or designations but by the courage to confront adversity. *A General’s Odyssey* is more than just a personal memoir; it is a guidebook on leadership, a meditation on human values, and a tribute to the soldier’s spirit. With its compelling storytelling, emotionally resonant themes, and timeless lessons, the book bridges the gap between military and civilian worlds.

*A General’s Odyssey: Giving up is not an option* has been published by Pentagon Press. It is considered a must read for all.

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