

BOOK REVIEW

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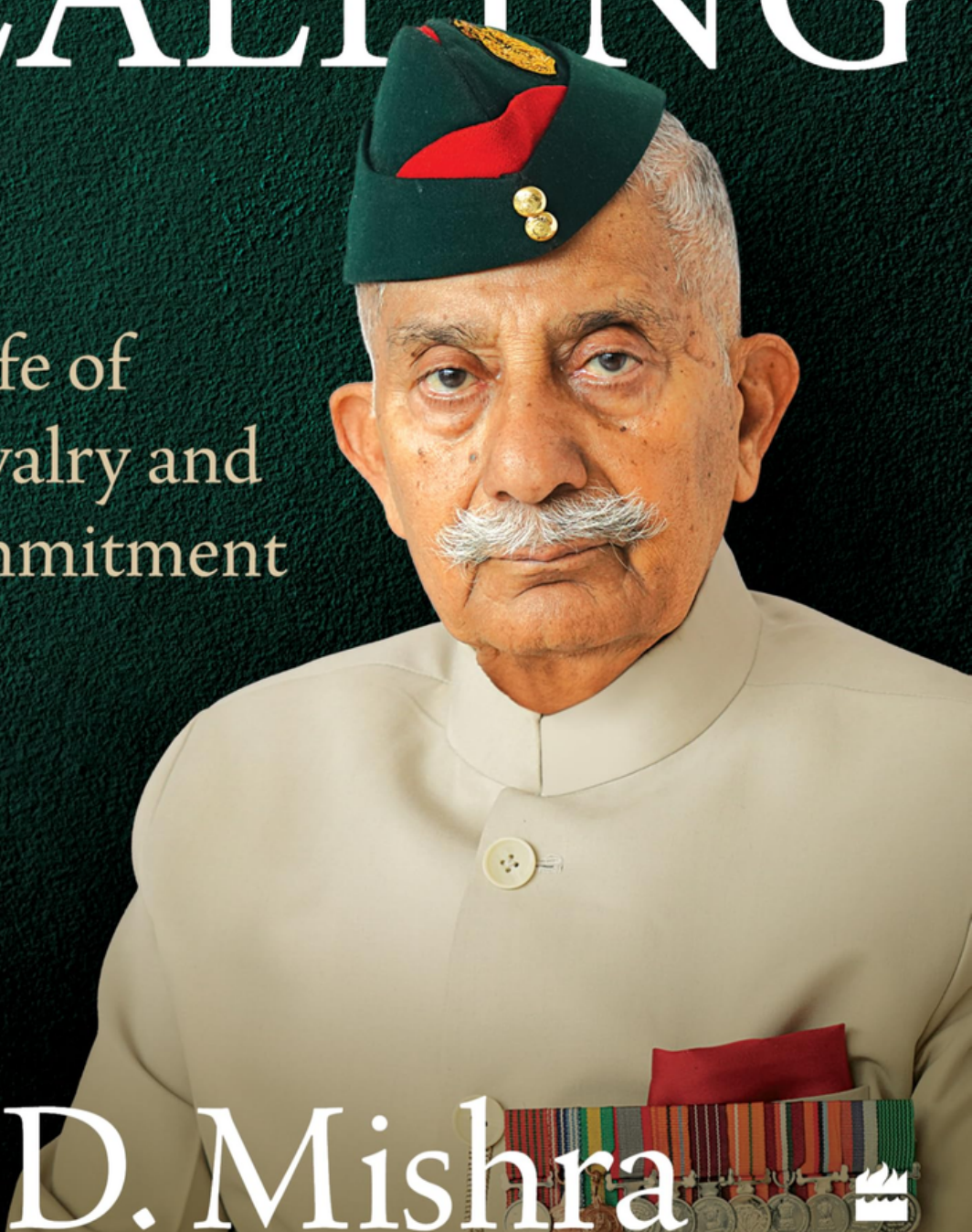
Nations Calling: A Life of Chivalry and Commitment

By Brigadier (Dr) BD Mishra (Retd)

NATION'S CALLING

A Life of
Chivalry and
Commitment

B.D. Mishra



Brigadier (Dr) BD Mishra (Retd), *Nations Calling: A Life of Chivalry and Commitment*, HarperCollins Publishers India Pvt Ltd, 2025. ISBN: 978-93-6989-929-6

Brigadier B.D. Mishra's '*Nations Calling: A Life of Chivalry and Commitment*' is an extraordinary memoir that captures the life of a soldier, leader, and patriot who devoted himself unsparingly to the service of India. The book is a personal reflection, a historical narrative, and an ethical testament to the meaning of commitment in uniform. Through twenty-four thoughtfully structured chapters, Brig Mishra traces his journey from humble beginnings to the highest responsibilities of command, sharing not only his experiences of war and counterinsurgency but also his encounters with culture, faith, and governance. At its core, this book is not simply about a man's military career; it is about the spirit of duty and the values of honour and courage that define the soldier's ethos. It offers an insider's view of India's formative conflicts after independence, but it also speaks in a language that resonates with civilians: the language of sacrifice, of perseverance, and of the quest for a meaningful life.

Formative Years: Roots of Character

The memoir begins in *Alma Mater Days* and *Village Milieu*, where Brig Mishra situates his early life in Benaras with the textures of rural India. These chapters are important not just for their nostalgic value, but for what they reveal about the beliefs and practices of his early days in the making of a soldier. Growing up in a village and studying in a disciplined environment imbued him with values of resilience, simplicity, and self-reliance. The tone here is deeply human: he writes not as a distant officer, but as a young boy absorbing lessons from family, teachers, and community life in his village. He presents the cultural upbringing of singing sohar at the birth of a child to the yagyopaveet and abandoning the piglet sacrifice.

His *Memories of Colonial Days* and experiences of the *Partition of India* highlight how historical upheavals can shape personal destinies. For a young man watching the trauma of displacement, division, and communal violence, the call to serve the nation was not abstract; it was a lived necessity.

Into the Olive Green: The Making of a Soldier

The transition "From Civvies to Olive Green" marks a turning point in the memoir. Brig Mishra captures the challenges of adapting to military life, of leaving behind civilian comforts, and of embracing discipline, hierarchy, and collective responsibility. His reflections are candid and relatable: the pride of donning the uniform, the anxieties of training, and the camaraderie forged among peers.

He describes his 18th battalion of the Madras Regiment as his “New Home” in the Army where he begins to see the military not just as an institution but as a family, one where bonds of trust and loyalty are tested in the harshest of circumstances.

Witness to History: Wars and Insurgencies

A substantial part of *Nations Calling* deals with India’s wars and counterinsurgency operations, narrated not from the perspective of a detached historian but of an officer who lived them. The chapter on *China Attacks India* is a sobering reminder of 1962, a war which was most unexpected and changed India’s perception of ‘Hindi Cheeni bhai bhai’. Brig Mishra’s account does not dwell on blame but on the lived reality of soldiers facing overwhelming odds in unforgiving terrain. His candor in describing hardships, unpreparedness, and the courage of ordinary men underlines the raw truth of war.

The following chapters on the 1965 Pakistan War and the 1971 India-Pakistan War are especially vivid. Unlike sanitised historical accounts, Brig mishra narrates the multiple Pakistan led Operations: like Operation Desert Hawk, Operation Gibraltar, Operation grand Slam, India led Operation Riddle and the responsibility of leading men into battle. The 1971 war, which reshaped South Asia, is described not only in terms of strategy and success but also in terms of human cost. Here the memoir achieves balance and celebrates victory while acknowledging sacrifices.

Equally significant are his detailed accounts of counterinsurgency operations in the Northeast and his engagements with the LTTE. These chapters highlight a different dimension of soldiering where the enemy is elusive, where terrain and local politics complicate operations, and where ethical dilemmas abound. His reflections on these experiences are valuable not only for military readers but also for scholars of insurgency, as they reveal the complexity of applying force while seeking to win hearts and minds.

Beyond the Battlefield: Leadership in Action

One of the striking features of book is how it expands the idea of soldiering beyond combat. Chapters such as Battalion in Dehradun Peace Station, Combat Actions and Bihar Elections, and Operation Ashwamedh illustrate how the Army often plays roles that go beyond conventional warfare, maintaining order, safeguarding democracy, and defending national institutions.

Brig Mishra’s narration of Operation Ashwamedh (the 1993 operation to rescue hostages from a hijacked Indian Airlines aircraft in Amritsar) is especially compelling. The professionalism, restraint, and precision required as a commander in such high-stakes situations stand as a testament to the training and ethos of the armed forces.

His volunteering to join the Kargil War despite seniority and age further cements his image as a soldier who saw service not as a posting, but as a lifelong duty. This decision resonates with the book's central theme: that commitment to the nation is not defined by convenience but by conviction.

The Human and Spiritual Dimension

What makes this memoir more than a military history are the chapters that highlight the human and spiritual sides of the author. *Anecdotes of Foreign Travels and Pilgrimages* provide glimpses into how exposure to other cultures and faiths enriched his worldview. These sections soften the martial narrative, reminding readers that behind the uniform is a human being shaped by curiosity, humility, and a search for meaning.

His assignments in *Arunachal Pradesh*, *Mizoram*, and *Meghalaya* reveal the role of the soldier-administrator managing civil-military relations, engaging with local communities, and representing the Union of India in sensitive regions. Highlights the fact that the leadership is not about firepower but it is about patience, understanding, and the ability to build trust.

Values That Endure

Running through the book is a consistent thread: the values of chivalry and commitment. For Brig Mishra, chivalry is not an archaic term but a lived ethic of respect for adversaries, care for subordinates, and honesty in leadership. Commitment, meanwhile, is presented as the willingness to place the nation's interest above all else, time and again.

The prose is straightforward, occasionally understated, but always authentic. Brig Mishra does not seek to embellish or dramatise his experiences. Instead, he relies on clarity and sincerity, which give the narrative its moral force. The lack of embellishment itself becomes a strength: it conveys the soldier's way of seeing the world direct, disciplined, and grounded.

Significance and Contribution

Nations Calling: A Life of Chivalry and Commitment serves several audiences at once. For military professionals and students of strategy, it offers first-hand insights into campaigns, operations, and leadership challenges that have shaped modern India. For historians, it is a valuable primary source that supplements official records with lived experiences. For general readers, it is an inspiring life story that demonstrates how ordinary men can rise to extraordinary responsibilities through discipline and dedication.

The book also resonates in contemporary times. At a moment when national security, civil-military relations, and the meaning of patriotism are vigorously debated, Brig Mishra's memoir provides a reminder of what genuine service looks like. It is not loud, it is not boastful but it is quiet, steadfast, and deeply human. In the end, Brigadier Mishra's memoir is not only about his own life; it is about the larger story of India as a nation finding its strength through decades of challenges. His journey from a village boy to a frontline commander, from battlefield operations to gubernatorial responsibilities, exemplifies the arc of a life lived in full devotion to duty.

Nations Calling: A Life of Chivalry and Commitment is at once an inspiring memoir, a valuable historical record, and a meditation on values. It shows us that while weapons and strategies may change, the essence of soldiering courage, integrity, and service remains timeless. For anyone who seeks to understand the Indian Army, the resilience of its officers, and the meaning of patriotism, this book is essential reading.

It deserves a place not only on the shelves of scholars and practitioners but also in the hearts of all who believe in the noble calling of serving the nation. It is a must read for all.

Reviewed by
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