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BOOK EXCERPT

How Lt General JFR Jacob secured Pakistan's surrender in 1971

The general, who died on January 13 at the age of 93, discloses the dangerous gamble he took, and won.

JFR Jacob

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On the morning of 16 December, Manekshaw phoned me and said, “Jake, go and get a surrender.” I asked him if I should negotiate the surrender on the basis of the draft sent to him some days earlier. He replied, “You know what to do; just go.”

I then mentioned that Niazi had invited me for lunch, and informed Aurora. I met Mrs Bhanti Aurora outside the office, and she told me that she was going to Dacca as her place was beside her husband. I returned to Aurora and asked him if he was taking his wife with him. He replied in the affirmative. I said it was risky taking her there, to which he replied that it would be my responsibility to ensure her safety!

I proceeded to Dacca accompanied by a staff officer. I took my draft of the Instrument of Surrender, which was yet to be confirmed by Army HQ. I changed helicopters at Jessore to save refuelling time. An officer ran up to me handing over a signal message from Army HQ. I expected that the message

would confirm the draft I was carrying with me. It read: "Government of India has approved of General Jacob having lunch with Gen. Niazi." I proceeded on to Dacca.

On landing at Dacca, I was met by the representatives of the UN, Marc Henry, Kelly, and others. They told me that they were accompanying me to take over the government and to arrange the withdrawal of the Pakistan military, paramilitary, and Pakistani civilians. I thanked them but declined their offer. Fighting was going on in Dacca between the Mukti Bahini and the Pakistan Army.

The Pakistanis had sent me a staff car. The chief of staff of Pakistan's Eastern Command accompanied me in the car to the headquarters of Eastern Command. We had barely proceeded a few hundred yards when a group of freedom fighters blocking the road fired at the car. I jumped out exclaiming "Indian army".

Seeing my olive green Indian Army uniform they stopped firing but wanted to kill the Pakistani chief of staff. I reasoned with them, trying to persuade them to allow us to proceed. They reluctantly agreed.

Meanwhile the Press caught up with us. The *Time* magazine correspondent reported that I had threatened to "shoot you fellows". I was unarmed! After a few minutes we were allowed to proceed.

I entered Niazi's office. Present there were the seniormost Pakistani army, navy, and air force officers, as also some other senior military officers. I was shocked to see Maj. Gen. Nagra seated on the sofa with his arm around Niazi engaged in cracking bawdy jokes in Punjabi. Siddiq Salik in his book *Witness to Surrender* (1977) wrote that the jokes were unprintable!

We had moved Nagra just a few days earlier to replace Maj Gen Gurbax Singh, who was in command of the force that was moving to capture Dacca, but was wounded. Nagra had known Niazi from before when he was posted as military advisor to our High Commission in Islamabad.

The ceasefire had taken effect at 1700 hours on 15 December. On the morning of 16 December, Nagra, who was some 30 miles outside Dacca with elements of 95 Mountain Brigade and 2 Para, well after the ceasefire went into force, sent a message to Niazi to send his representative. Niazi was at a loss to understand this message as he was expecting me. Nagra, flying a white flag, was escorted to Niazi's headquarters. I saw the three jeeps with white flags parked outside.

I called Nagra outside, gave him a sharp dressing down for disgraceful conduct unbecoming of a general officer. I told him to send some troops into Dacca, to the airfield and Intercontinental Hotel to protect the officials there. I also instructed him to arrange a table and two chairs at the Race Course for signature of the Instrument of Surrender, as also to provide a detachment for a joint guard of honour. I told him to leave behind a jeep for me.

Nagra's later conduct was questionable. He hijacked Maj Gen Rao Farman Ali's new Mercedes and drove off with it to his former HQ in Assam. He was ordered to hand it over to command HQ, where

it was taken on charge and given a registration number by Army HQ. There were several other allegations against the general. Aurora declined to recommend him for any decoration and wanted to institute disciplinary proceedings against him. He however reconsidered the matter and decided not to.

I re-entered the building. The draft Instrument of Surrender was read out. Niazi, with tears rolling down his cheeks, said: “Who said I am surrendering? You have only come to discuss a ceasefire and withdrawal as proposed by me.” The service chiefs present also voiced their objections. Rao Farman Ali objected to surrendering to a “Joint Command”.

Time was running out so I called Niazi aside. I told him that if he did not surrender I could not take responsibility for the safety of their families and ethnic minorities but if he did I would ensure their protection. I asked him to reconsider, again reminding him that if he did not surrender I would not be responsible for the safety of their families. I then added that I would give him 30 minutes to reconsider and if he did not I would order the resumption of hostilities and the bombing of Dacca. I then walked out to be met by the press.

I was extremely worried. Niazi had 26,400 troops in Dacca, we had about 3,000 some 30 miles out. I was in a quandary as what to do in the event of his refusing. Aurora and his entourage were expected to land in an hour or two and the ceasefire was to expire shortly. I had nothing in hand.

The Pakistan Commission of Enquiry report later stated “there was Gen Jacob pacing outside, calmly puffing his pipe”. Far from it, I was extremely worried and tense. I spoke to the Pakistani sentry asking him about his family. He burst into tears saying that I as an Indian officer was talking to him whilst his own officers did not.

After 30 minutes I walked into the office to be met by a deathly silence, my draft surrender document lying on the table. I asked Niazi if he accepted this document, to which he did not reply. I repeated the enquiry thrice. He still did not respond.

I then picked up the document, holding it high, and said, “I take it as accepted.” Tears rolled down Niazi’s cheeks, there were glares from those present.

I called Niazi aside and then told him that I had arranged for the signing to take place at the Race Course in public. He objected strongly. I then told him that he would have to surrender his sword. He said that he did not have a sword but would surrender his revolver.

I then told him he would have to provide a guard of honour. My thoughts went back to 1945 just after the Japanese surrender. When I landed in Sumatra, the Japanese provided me with a guard of honour. Niazi said there was no one to command it. I pointed to his ADC and said that he should command it. I permitted them to retain their weapons for their protection until such time as we could disarm them.

I then discussed with his chief of staff other modalities regarding the surrender of other garrisons and troops. I tried to get through on the wireless to Aurora who could not be contacted. Apparently he had gone to Agartala to pick up Gen. Sagat Singh. We then moved to the Mess for lunch.

Gavin Young of *The Observer* was standing outside and requested if he could have lunch. We moved to the dining room. I was taken aback to see the tables properly set and loaded with silver trophies. I did not feel like eating and moved to one side. Gavin Young did a two-page piece for his paper *The Observer*, "The Surrender Lunch".

At around 1500 hours, I asked Niazi to accompany me to the airport. As Nagra had not left a jeep for me, I sat with Niazi in his staff car. The Mukti Bahini fighters jumped on the car and it was with some difficulty that we reached the airport. Fortunately, en route we stopped a jeep with two of our paratroopers who were sightseeing. I asked them to follow us.

Nagra had not sent any troops to the airfield. I sent my staff officer to go and see if he could get some troops, some of whom should be entering the city. A little while later a truck loaded with armed Mukti Bahini arrived at the airfield. A man wearing our olive green uniform, wearing the badges of rank of a major general approached us, followed by two armed men.

I placed him as "Tiger" Siddiqui and sensed trouble. Siddiqui, who had some 20,000 fighters, did not fire a shot to halt the Pakistanis retreating through Tangail and did not move with us to Dacca. I felt that he had come to kill Niazi. I had to ensure that Niazi lived to sign the Instrument of Surrender. I told the two paratroopers to cover Niazi and point their rifles at Siddiqui.

I politely asked Siddiqui to leave the airfield. He did not respond. I repeated this request. He still did not respond. I then shouted to him to get his truckload of fighters off the airfield, and heaved a sigh of relief when they left. A few days later Siddiqui called the international media with their camera crews to witness the public bayoneting of people he called traitors. These pictures were later widely circulated.

Around 1630 hours Aurora and his entourage arrived in a fleet of five M14 and four Allouette helicopters. Aurora was accompanied by his wife and the Cs-in-C of Navy and IAF Commands. Lt Gen. Sagat Singh and some of his divisional commanders also alighted, as did Wing Commander Khondker. Osmani, unfortunately was not there; the helicopter in which he had been travelling having been shot at and damaged.

I had planned to travel in the last car with Aurora and Niazi, but Aurora asked me to make way for his wife, who then took her place by her husband's side. The ADC, who was carrying the papers to be signed, and I had to hitch our way on a truck to the Race Course.

Though there was very little time for any preparations, the ceremony went off reasonably well. After inspecting the guard of honour, Aurora and Niazi sat at the table and signed the Instrument of Surrender. I glanced at the documents and was aghast to see the heading which read "Instrument of Surrender – to be signed at 1631 IST [Indian Standard Time]". I looked at my watch, which showed

that the time was 1655 hours. The documents they brought to be signed had to be re-signed by both in Calcutta some two weeks later!

Niazi removed his epaulette, took out his revolver and handed it to Aurora; tears rolled down his cheeks. It was getting dark. The crowd at the Race Course began shouting and there were threats to lynch Niazi; anti-Pakistani slogans and abuses resounded. They then moved towards Niazi. The senior officers present formed a cordon around him and whisked him off in one of our jeeps.

I briefed Lt Gen. Sagat Singh regarding the disarming of the Pakistanis and other modalities. We then returned to the airfield. Rear Admiral Shari, whom I had given permission to meet our naval commander, met Vice Admiral Krishnan. Krishnan asked Shari to hand over his pistol to him, which he did. We then took off for Agartala and thence to Calcutta.

I wondered why 1631 hours (4.31 p.m.) was the time specified for signature of the Instrument of Surrender. Parliament was in session so perhaps Manekshaw had told Indira Gandhi that it would be signed at that time. Members were anxious to know what was happening. According to Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the chief minister of West Bengal, who was present in Parliament that day, members were anxious to know about the progress of negotiations.

The minister of defence repeatedly stated that Gen. Jacob was having lunch. It was most ironic that amidst all these tumultuous events, Jacob would be remembered by posterity for enjoying a very long and leisurely lunch!

Sometime later, when I examined the revolver that Niazi had surrendered, I realised that it could not have been Niazi's. The barrel was choked with muck and had not been cleaned for some considerable time, the lanyard was frayed and dirty. This could not have been the personal weapon of a commanding general. Niazi had probably taken it from one of the military policemen and surrendered it as his personal weapon. I could not help feeling that in a small way Niazi had got some of his own back.

Excerpted with permission from An Odyssey in War and Peace: An Autobiography, Lt Gen JFR Jacob, Roli Books.