

Major Thakur Hukum Singh Bahadur (1886-1948)

Rajput Noble Who Commanded Jaipur's Transport Corps



Figure 1. Hukum Singh when he was a risaldar of the Jaipur Imperial Service Transport Corps, 1914 (Courtesy of Jitendra Pratap Singh Bhati).

Early Life and Education

Hukum Singh was born on 17 January 1886 into a traditional Rajput family. As the second son, he knew that he would never enjoy the privileges and luxurious

lifestyle of a landlord and so he resolved to join the army.

Military Career

He began his military career in 1905 when he enlisted with the 122nd Rajputana Infantry as a commissioned officer. At the beginning of the 20th century, the total number of soldiers maintained by India was about 18,000 men.



Figure 2. Hukum Singh (lying down at front), probably when stationed in Mhow Cantonment in Southern India, c. 1905-07 (Courtesy of Jitendra Pratap Singh Bhati).

When War Broke Out

When Britain declared war on Germany, the Indian government pledged its support. Hukum Singh became commandant of the transport corps and

left for India's main theatre of war in the Middle East in October 1914. Hukum Singh's main duties as Commandant of the Corps were to manage the animals and to oversee the smooth transportation of ration to military bases.

Role of Horses and Mules in WWI

Horses and mules were heavily used during the conflict, primarily as a way of transporting materials to the front. Military vehicles, as with any mechanised vehicles of the time, were relatively new inventions and prone to problems. Horses, along with mules, were reliable forms of transport and compared to a lorry, needed little upkeep.

On the Western Front alone, it is estimated that over 8 million horses and mules died on all sides fighting in the war. Two and a half million were treated in veterinary hospitals with about two million being sufficiently cured that they could return to duty.

War Services



Figure 3. Hukum Singh with an unnamed British officer in Mesopotamia during the Great War, c. 1916-18 (Courtesy of Jitendra Pratap Singh Bhati).

As a result of his hard work and efficient leadership, Hukum Singh was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and was mentioned twice in dispatches for distinguished services in the field.



Figure 4. Certificate awarded to Major Hukum Singh in respect of his being mentioned in a despatch dated 15 April 1918. The signatory is Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War (Courtesy of Jitendra Pratap Singh Bhati).

Returning Home After The War

On 9 May 1919, after four and a half years of continuous service, the JISTC returned home from the war. A grand ceremony was organised at the Darbar hall of Jaipur State. To mark his departure from the Corps back to his former regiment in Udaipur, the Maharaja of Jaipur presented Hukum Singh with a robe of honour.

Family Life

Hukum Singh married Phool Kanwar, and had two sons, Mohan Singh and Ganpat Singh (b. 1921), and a daughter, Ucchab Kanwar. Unfortunately she died at the age of 15, leaving Hukum Singh in a state of grief.

Horse-lover

Hukum Singh had a special love for his animals. He was especially attentive of his personal horse, Badal, whose daily diet consisted of 10kg of milk and 3kg of *jalebi* (Indian sweets). Badal was regarded as the best horses in Jaipur and nearby estates.

Problems

However when he returned Hukum Singh found that his hard earned war gratuity was halted due to certain allegations being levelled against him. He would spend the next two decades attempting to clear his name and have his war gratuity reinstated.

Move to Alwar

He then became assistant secretary to the Maharaj of Alwar¹ in 1921, with an incredibly wide range of responsibilities – ranging from the kitchen stores, to music, to the ladies quarters and jewellery to the motor garage!

Final Days

Hukum Singh was not one to retire quietly. He was finally granted land for his deeds in the war and spent his last days listening to the 'Ramayan' being recited. He died at his farm on 7 July 1948, aged 62.

¹ A state in Rajasthan.