

GREAT TEA WHILE INDIA DROPS NAPALM

By Joe McGowan

While based in New Delhi in 1967, I began seeing obituaries of Indian soldiers. There were no reports of serious fighting in Kashmir, so I began inquiring.

The Indian Foreign Ministry denied anything was going on. Various western embassies told me there were rumors of an uprising by Mizo tribesmen in far eastern Assam state. Mizos lived in a narrow strip of land flanked by Bangladesh and Burma, now known as Myanmar.

The Indian government denied my request to fly to Assam, which was off limits to foreigners because of its proximity to the Chinese border.

But I boldly went to the Indian Airlines office and requested a ticket to Calcutta and on to Gauhati. Asked if I had permission, I lied. I got the ticket.

Arriving in Gauhati, I boarded a bus headed south to Shillong. The road was one lane, so police permitted traffic one way for an hour, then reversed directions. At one point, the bus driver stopped and everyone got off to relieve themselves. Men went to one side of the road and women to the other!

In Shillong, I met a British tea planter. He was driving home that afternoon to near Silchar, which was the heart of the Mizo uprising and the Indian military operation headquarters.

We arrived in late afternoon at his plantation and his Assamese wife, a

lovely woman with Asian features, quickly poured tea, which was the best I have ever had.

Then, I was shown to a guest bungalow and servants brought buckets of hot water for my bath. I was luxuriating in the tub when there was a loud knock at the door. I hollered "in 10 minutes". The reply was "police".

I went to the door and a police major said I was in the state illegally and must go with them to Silchar where I would take the next flight to New Delhi and would answer to the Foreign Ministry.

So, instead of spending the night on a tea plantation, I was put up in a government "guest bungalow". That night, a monsoon blew in and the airport was closed for three days.

In the interim, I found Indian Air Force pilots in a former tea planters club. Over drinks, they bragged about napalming "those poor buggers". The Mizos' heaviest armament was spears and a few rifles. The Mizos rose up, claiming the Indian government was taxing them, but not providing anything in return such as schools, better roads or electricity.

Finally the clouds lifted and I went to the airline office and asked for a seat on the next flight to New Delhi. I was told all flights were full for days and they would book me when they could.

I strolled over to the police department and informed the major I appreciated his hospitality. I had been followed everywhere I walked in the town. I said I would return to New

Delhi as soon as possible, but it might be a number of days.

Then I went to my room and packed my bag. An hour later, I had a seat on the flight leaving that afternoon!! Some poor soul had been bumped because they really wanted to get rid of me!

From Delhi, I filed a story about the uprising and the use of napalm on helpless tribesmen. I felt it significant because Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sharply criticized Washington almost daily for using napalm in Vietnam.

Unfortunately, my story got very little play in the United States. It did get me a warning from the Indian Foreign Ministry that if I violated travel rules again, I would be expelled.

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