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# Sam Manekshaw

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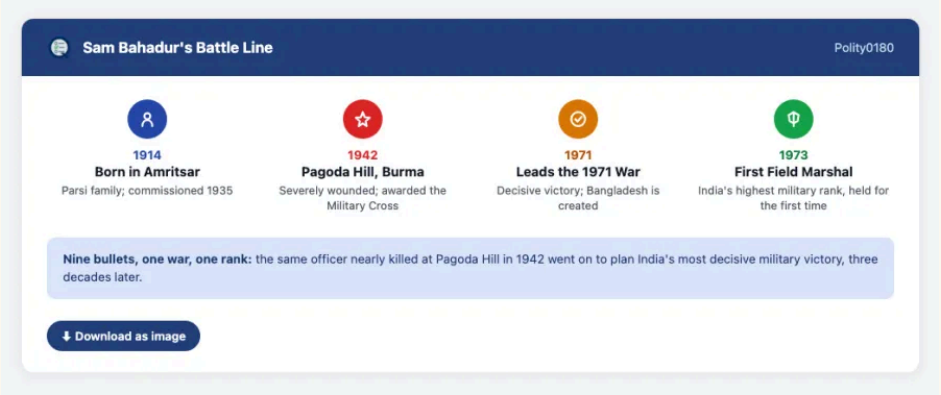
# Sam Manekshaw

Sam Manekshaw is said to have survived being shot nine times. He then led India to its most decisive military victory. He became independent India's first Field Marshal. Soldiers and civilians still call him "Sam Bahadur", Sam the Brave.




Sam Bahadur's battle line

> **Born** 3 April 1914, Amritsar.
> **1942** Wounded at Pagoda Hill; Military Cross.
> **1971** Leads India to victory.
> **1973** First Field Marshal.

**Field Marshal:** Five-star rank above General.

**COAS:** Chief of the Army Staff.

**IMA:** Indian Military Academy.

**Vijay Diwas:** 16 December.

# 1 Chapter 1: The Life of Sam Bahadur

*Must Know*

## Timeline

- 3 April 1914: born Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw in Amritsar, to a Parsi family.
- 1 February 1935: commissioned into the Indian Army from the first batch of cadets at the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun.
- February 1942: severely wounded leading a counter-attack at the Battle of Pagoda Hill, Burma.
- He was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry.
- 8 June 1969: becomes Chief of the Army Staff.
- 1971: leads the Army to decisive victory over Pakistan, and Bangladesh is created.
- 1 January 1973: promoted Field Marshal, the first Indian Army officer to hold the rank.
- 27 June 2008: dies in Wellington, Tamil Nadu, aged 94.

## Honours and career

- He is popularly known as “Sam Bahadur”, Sam the Brave.
- His honours include the Padma Bhushan (1968) and the Padma Vibhushan (1972). See Padma Awards.
- His career spanned over four decades and five wars.
- These included the Burma campaign and the 1947-48, 1965 and 1971 India-Pakistan wars.
- The 1971 victory is commemorated every 16 December as Vijay Diwas.

**Remember:** Born 1914 · commissioned 1935 · Military Cross 1942 · Chief 1969 · Field Marshal 1973 · died 2008.

> **Quick check 1.** Manekshaw was promoted Field Marshal on 1 January 1973. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## 2 Chapter 2: The Brave and the Wise

*Good to Know*

### "A dead man cannot be awarded"

- At Pagoda Hill, General Cowan pinned his own Military Cross ribbon on the badly wounded Manekshaw.
- He reportedly said, "a dead man cannot be awarded the Military Cross."
- Popular accounts say Manekshaw survived multiple bullet wounds, often put at nine.

### The decision to wait

- In 1971, Indira Gandhi first asked him to move against Pakistan.
- He advised delaying the operation until after the monsoon.
- He gave her three concrete reasons.
- Monsoon floods would wash out roads and bridges, making it hard to move tanks and troops.
- His soldiers were not yet fully ready.
- And China, which had fought India in 1962, was a real northern threat.
- Waiting until December let his army move on dry roads, fully ready, with less risk of a two-front war.

- The result was Pakistan’s surrender in just 13 days.

### Army structure

- He rose through the command structure described in Structure of the Indian Army.

> **Quick check 2.** Manekshaw advised waiting until after the monsoon before the 1971 operation. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## 3 Chapter 3: Rank and Legacy

*Great to Know*

### The first of two Field Marshals

- Manekshaw was the first of independent India’s officers to hold the rank, promoted in 1973.

- K.M. Cariappa, India's first Commander-in-Chief, received it second, in 1986.
- See K.M. Cariappa.

### Where Field Marshal sits

- Field Marshal is a five-star rank, one level above General, the Chief of the Army Staff's own rank.
- A Field Marshal never formally retires.
- They keep drawing a serving General's full pay for life.
- See Ranks of Indian Army.

### The diplomatic side of 1971

- For the international dimensions of the war, see India-Pakistan Relations.

> **Think it through: Think it through: was waiting a sign of weakness?**
>
> Moving at once might have looked bold. But monsoon mud, an unready army and a watchful China could have turned it into a disaster. Waiting was the harder, wiser choice, and the quick victory proved it.

## 4 Chapter 4: Current Affairs

*Current Affairs*

### The 54th Vijay Diwas

- On 16 December 2025, India marked the 54th Vijay Diwas, commemorating the 1971 victory Manekshaw led.

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh led a wreath-laying ceremony at the National War Memorial, New Delhi. (Source: Adda247 Current Affairs.)

## A biopic in theatres

- On 1 December 2023, *Sam Bahadur* released in theatres.
- It stars Vicky Kaushal as Manekshaw and is directed by Meghna Gulzar.
- It became a box-office success. (Source: Wikipedia.)

> **Quick check 3.** India marked the 54th Vijay Diwas on 16 December 2025. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

## Quick Q&A

- **Born?** 3 April 1914.
- **Field Marshal on?** 1 January 1973.
- **Military Cross at?** Pagoda Hill, 1942.
- **1971 war lasted?** 13 days to surrender.
- **Second Field Marshal?** K.M. Cariappa, 1986.

## Practice MCQs

**1. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw was born on 3 April 1914. In which city was he born?**

**A.** Lahore

**B.** Amritsar

**C.** Karachi

**D.** Shimla

See answer ↓

**2. During World War II, Manekshaw was severely wounded leading a counter-attack at the Battle of Pagoda Hill in Burma.**

**Which gallantry award did he receive on the spot?**

**A.** Ashoka Chakra

**B.** Param Vir Chakra

**C.** Victoria Cross

**D.** Military Cross

See answer ↓

**3. In 1971, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi first asked Manekshaw to move against Pakistan, what did he advise instead?**

**A.** Immediate invasion, before the monsoon

**B.** A purely naval blockade with no ground invasion

**C.** Waiting for United Nations approval first

**D.** Delaying the operation until after the monsoon

See answer ↓

**4. Sam Manekshaw became independent India's first Field Marshal on 1 January 1973. In which earlier year had he already received the Padma Bhushan?**

**A.** 1965

**B.** 1968

**C.** 1971

**D.** 1972

See answer ↓

**5. A 2023 biopic titled "Sam Bahadur," starring Vicky Kaushal as Manekshaw, was directed by whom?**

**A.** Vishal Bhardwaj

**B.** Sanjay Leela Bhansali

**C.** Rajkumar Hirani

**D.** Meghna Gulzar

See answer ↓

**6. Who was independent India's first Field Marshal?**

**A.** Sam Manekshaw

**B.** K.M. Cariappa

**C.** K.S. Thimayya

**D.** O.P. Malhotra

See answer ↓

**7. Sam Manekshaw was awarded the rank of Field Marshal for his leadership in which conflict?**

**A.** The 1965 war with Pakistan

**B.** The 1971 war with Pakistan

**C.** The 1999 Kargil War

**D.** The 1962 Sino-Indian War

See answer ↓

# Answer Key

1. **B.** Sam Manekshaw was born in Amritsar, Punjab, on 3 April 1914, into a Parsi family. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** General Cowan pinned his own Military Cross ribbon on the badly wounded Manekshaw, reportedly saying "a dead man cannot be awarded the Military Cross." ↑ Q2
3. **D.** Manekshaw, as Chief of the Army Staff, advised delaying the campaign until after the monsoon season, a decision that proved decisive in the war's outcome. ↑ Q3
4. **B.** Manekshaw received the Padma Bhushan in 1968, before the Padma Vibhushan in 1972 and his Field Marshal promotion on 1 January 1973. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** Sam Bahadur (2023), starring Vicky Kaushal in the title role, was directed by Meghna Gulzar and was a box-office success. ↑ Q5
6. **A.** Manekshaw was made Field Marshal in January 1973, ahead of Cariappa, who received the rank later, in 1986. ↑ Q6
7. **B.** Sam Manekshaw earned his Field Marshal rank for leading India's decisive victory in the 1971 war with Pakistan. ↑ Q7

## Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3

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