

## *2 Men at a Table*

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DACCA, Pakistan, Dec. 16—  
On a broad grassy field in central Dacca known as the Race Course, the Pakistani forces formally surrendered today, 13 days after the Indian Army began its drive into East Pakistan.

It was at the Race Course on March 7 that Sheik Mujibur Rahman, in a speech to thousands of Bengalis, called for the end of martial law and the transfer of power to his autonomy-minded Awami League, which had won a majority in national elections.

Today there were no speeches—just two men sitting at a single table on the grass—Lieut. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora, chief of India's Eastern Command, and Lieut. Gen. A. A. K. Niazi, commander of the 70,000 Pakistani troops in East Pakistan—who signed the formal papers of Pakistani surrender in the East.

The final hours of the Indian drive, which ended with the ceremony at the Race Course, were punctuated by artillery and machine-gun fire as the troops pushed across the Lakhya River, just outside Dacca proper.

Seven Western journalists, in-

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# March to Dacca: Last Clash and Victory

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cluding this correspondent, were the only newsmen and only foreigners to ride into Dacca with the Indian troops.

The population turned out in quiet droves to sit and watch the Indians rain artillery shells on the Pakistanis. Such was the case this morning in a field of rice paddies at Barpa, about nine miles from Dacca, where a battery of six 75-mm. mountain guns was firing on Pakistani positions across the river.

A few hundred villagers sat 100 yards back as the guns roared for an hour.

"Good shooting!" an officer from the command post yelled across after getting a report from the forward observer. "We got some vehicles."

The gun crews applauded. So did the villagers.

## A Cease-Fire, but

It was 10 A.M. A cease-fire was in effect, but the Indian officers said it applied only to firing on Dacca City and they were firing short of it. Besides, no one in this brigade advancing on Dacca from the northeast knew anything about the Pakistan surrender, which was being arranged at that very time.

The Pakistanis opposite them were also in the dark, for soon afterward a tank, artillery and infantry battle was raging a few miles farther down the road to the regional capital.

Two light Indian tanks captured from the Pakistanis in an earlier fight moved into position, one in a mango grove and the other 200 yards to the left by an embankment.

As the tanks were getting set Indian artillery shells whistled overhead on their way to an enemy position in Demra, a couple of miles to the northwest. Columns of smoke rose from burning buildings there.

Then the tanks opened up, pummeling the eardrums of those nearby and much more devastatingly pummeling the factory complex in the distance across the Lakhya River, where some Pakistani troops were impeding the Indian advance. Smoke columns began to mushroom from the factory buildings too.

## The Infantry Advances

After 20 minutes of pounding the area with shells the tanks also opened up with machine guns, peppering the area in front of the buildings, where the Pakistanis were dug into bunkers.

A column of Indian infantry then began making its way forward along the bottom of the embankment and then turned right and began crossing a marsh toward the river.

At about 12:30 P.M., under

the bright sun, the officers with the Indian units decided to take the press party forward to watch the infantry in action.

Now there was no answering fire from the Pakistanis. We climbed up the embankment to the road, and, silhouetted against the azure sky, we walked confidently forward. For about one minute.

A Pakistani machine gun began spitting and bullets whizzed by. We flew unsmarterly down the opposite embankment, sending up gravel and dust in the wake of our slide. An Indian major, to assure us, said the bullets had passed 10 to 15 yards away.

Carefully tucked below the ridge of the road, we walked forward as the Pakistanis kept firing. They hit a baby goat gamboling in a culvert and the animal crumpled. In 10 minutes we reached an Indian platoon lying at the top of the embankment, their rifles and machine guns pointing at the Pakistanis, who then began firing at them instead of us.

The Indians opened fire. As the staccato continued, the major with us got a message over the field radio that the Pakistanis had surrendered. The Pakistanis opposite had obviously not been told. Some Pakistani units had lost communications with their headquarters.

## Waved a Big Handkerchief

That was 12:40. For an hour more the Pakistanis kept the Indians pinned down. Then at 1:45 a Pakistani soldier—apparently an officer—came into the open on the opposite bank waving what looked like a big handkerchief.

The Indian major, M. S. Dhillon, climbed over the embankment and moved toward the river, stopping behind a wall. He then began shouting at the Pakistanis to surrender immediately.

"Are you moving or not?" the major yelled. "I want you to move in just one minute! Before I lose my patience, I want you to get a move on. Get your men round you and move to that little boat and start crossing. Put your weapons down. Put your damn bastard Sten gun down. Don't compel me to plaster you with artillery. I'm telling you again. Start moving, start moving!"

The newsmen had followed the major to the wall but were crouched behind it and could not see what was happening. The major obliged with a narrative: "There's an officer standing there. He's got four chaps. He's waving his white hankie. They have surrendered now. There seem to be about 15 chaps."

The rest of the Pakistanis, however many there were, had apparently fled.

This scene—ending what may have been the last battle of the war in the East—took about 20 minutes to unfold, during which a wounded Indian soldier was groaning where he lay in a shallow lily pond. As the major was preparing to gather in the surrendering platoon a cloud of dust on the road signaled that the brigade was suddenly moving up — toward Dacca.

## Happiness on Every Face

Though small-arms fire could be heard far off, serious resistance had ended. Indian infantry columns — happiness writ on the face of every soldier — were advancing on the regional capital. Bengalis joined the column, pulling artillery pieces. This correspondent hitched a ride on one of the tanks that had been blasting the Pakistanis only a few minutes before.

The road was filled with jubilant Bengalis and troops heading for Dacca on tank, truck, scooter, bicycle, rickshaw and foot. Everyone was hitching rides to get to the liberated capital—it was more of a circus parade than a military convoy.

All along the army's route fathers held their infants up

in the air and waved the infants' hands at the Indian soldiers.

At the Lakhya River, the tank, an amphibious vehicle, had to jettison some passengers to be able to motor across. I caught a country boat and, when we got across, joined 17 other people—officers, soldiers and newsmen—who clambered onto a jeep driven by the brigade commander, Brig. R. N. Misra.

## Eome Scars of War

As the mustached commander drove slowly toward Dacca, trying to see the road through the mass of passengers on the hood, we passed through a countryside only slightly scarred by the war. It has been the same all over. A burned-out vehicle here and there on the road, hit by artillery or mortar fire. A blown-up Pakistani bunker. And in those towns where the Pakistanis made a stand, a lot of blackened and razed buildings and huts.

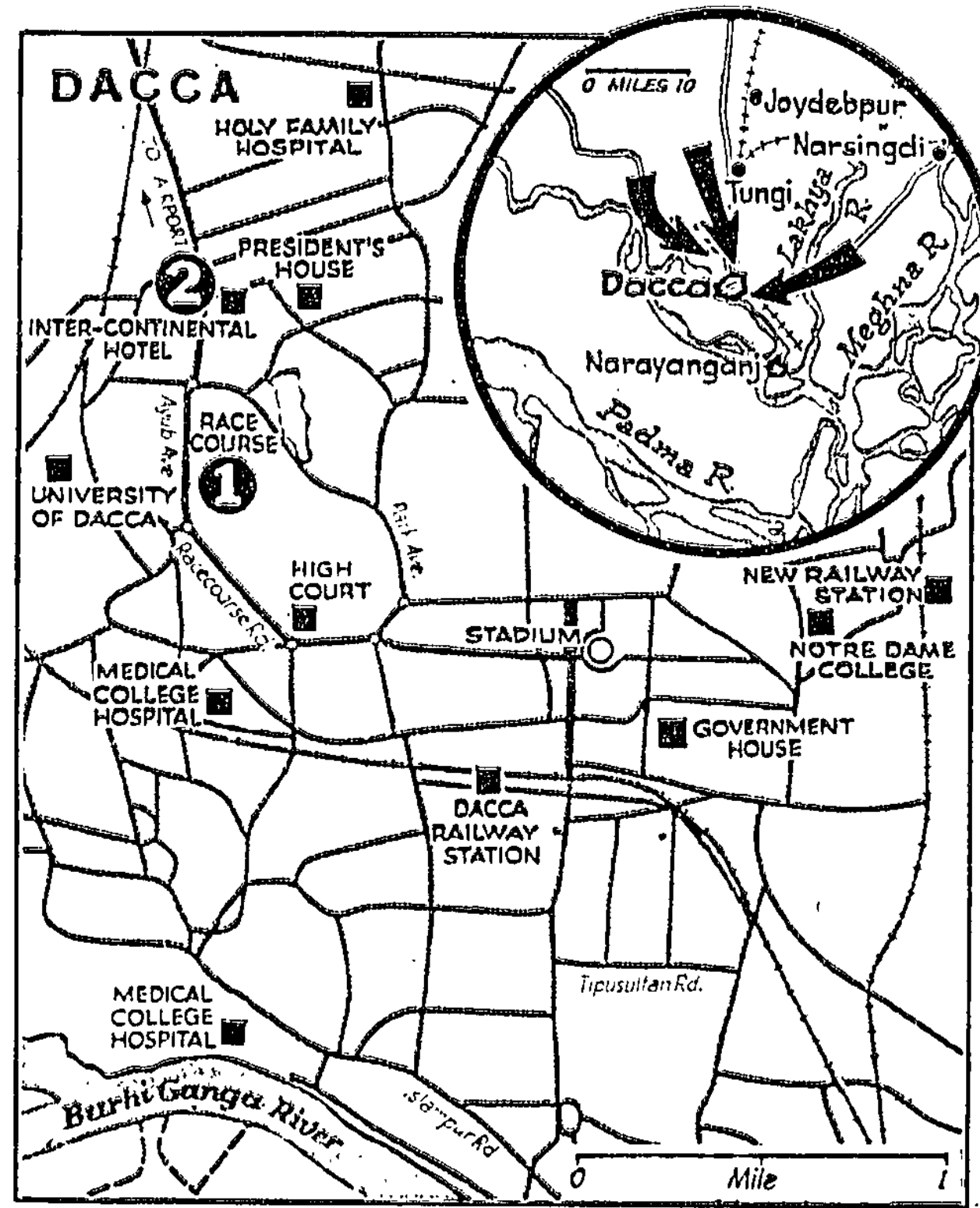
By and large, except for the road and rail bridges the Pakistanis blew up as they retreated, the territory has not been severely damaged. In some areas, in fact, as kingfishers dive for minnows in the streams along the paddy fields and cows graze near lush coconut and banana groves, it is difficult to tell—except for the silence of the dead and of those who have not yet trekked back—that a war has touched this country.

Yet there was one clear sign of the war—the Pakistani troops at the roadside who had surrendered. There had not been enough time to take away their weapons or move them to surrender areas, and they came near the road carrying their arms—a slightly chilling sight for those of the passers-by who had seen them use them on unarmed civilians last March 25, when the army began to try to crush the popularly elected Bengali autonomy movement.

The Pakistanis looked slightly dazed and seemed demoralized. They badly needed a word of reassurance, which they are not likely to get from a people that had suffered so under their rule by bullet. When a passer-by raised a hand in greeting, they waved feebly back and smiled just as feebly.

Brigadier Misra stopped his jeep outside a Pakistani barracks to tell the officer in charge to keep his men inside until Indian troops arrived to take them to surrender areas. "Don't go on the road," he warned. "The Mukti Bahini might be there."

Many members of the Mukti



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Dacca's Race Course (1), where the surrender ceremony was held. The Inter-Continental Hotel (2), where firing interrupted the celebration.

Bahini, or Liberation Forces—the Bengali insurgents who had been fighting alone for independence until the Indians decided the burden of millions of Bengali refugees had become intolerable and took a direct combat role—are eager for revenge. Their potential targets are not only the Pakistani troops but the razakars, or home guards, trained by the troops and the civilian collaborators, most of them non-Bengalis, who did a lot of the dirty work for the army.

"If we don't protect the Pakistanis and their collaborators," said an officer in the brigadier's jeep, "the Mukti Bahini will butcher them nicely and properly."

## Uneasy Confrontation

As the jeep proceeded directly into Dacca, a throng of several hundred Bengalis suddenly materialized and—in the throes of happiness—started walking fast toward the approaching Indian troops, shouting welcome slogans.

But a Pakistani jeep with a .50-caliber machine gun was also moving toward the crowd. The uneasy Pakistani crew, thinking the crowd was coming at them, fired a few bursts. Two people fell, and the crowd carried off these wounded as it melted away.

Brigadier Misra and other Indian officers, in a rage, stripped the four Pakistanis of their weapons and shouted vilifica-

tion at them until they looked so frightened they probably thought they were going to be shot. They were taken off to be placed under guard to face courts-martial.

Near the scene was a bus overflowing with Pakistani troops and their families, some sitting on the roof. The women and children huddled next to their men like terrified refugees.

Because the Pakistanis surrendered before the Indians had to storm Dacca, the capital did not suffer any major damage except for the scars from heavy bombing of the airfield and the military cantonment.

The road to the airport is still full of craters. The airfield runways have been repaired, but off to one side are the charred heaps that used to be fighter planes. The windows of the terminal building have been blasted out by the raids.

Many houses and shops are still shuttered, awaiting the return of their occupants. Still, the crowds gathered quickly, as if from nowhere. They swarmed over our vehicle — shouting greetings, calling us "brother" and trying to touch and hold another human being.

Near sundown, 10 Indian helicopters in formation descended on the airport. They carried General Aurora, other Indian officers and newsmen from Calcutta—all flying in for the surrender ceremony. General Niazi, his face a mask of determined dignity, was waiting

on the tarmac, wearing a black beret and carrying a collapsible hunting seat, though he never opened it to sit down.

Beside him stood General Aurora's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. J. F. R. Jacob, who just a few minutes before had been embarrassed by the frenzied embraces of Bengalis who had come to the airport.

## Microphones and Cameras

The two walked out to greet General Aurora's helicopter and after being surrounded by microphones and cameras, they drove off to the race course field for the signing of the surrender documents.

After signing, the two generals rose and shook hands. General Niazi rode off in a jeep and General Aurora in a staff car.

Sporadic small-arms fire was still crackling in the city when the Indian military party drove back to the airport, as darkness fell, to fly back to Calcutta. There had been sporadic street fighting throughout the day in Dacca, including a gun battle between Mukti Bahini guerrillas and Pakistani soldiers outside the Inter-Continental Hotel, which had been declared a neutral zone for the war.

At the airport tonight, long lines of West Pakistani troops seemed eager and relieved as they marched off to surrender areas where they will be protected by Indian soldiers from Bengali crowds.