

Amrik Singh fulfills family role

Sixty-year-old Amrik Singh, a retired Indian naval officer arrived in Duncan at the end of May, just in time to perform the last rites at the funeral of the father he scarcely knew.

Amrik Singh is the oldest son of the late Bal Singh Mayer. He was the only child born to Bal Singh's first wife who died when Amrik was just a child.

He was born in village Ungha near the Jullunder cantonment in 1927. Amrik was barely two years old when his father left for North America to seek a better life for his family. Shortly afterward, his mother died leaving the small boy to be raised by his windowed grandfather Jai Singh, who cared for him entirely alone.

In the early 30's, Bal Singh returned to India and planning to stay, purchased a large farm. The original owner had two farms and having no heirs, was happy to sell one to Bal Singh. He purchased a Ford tractor and set up farming American style in district Saharan Pur U.P. He put up a large barn and began farming on a large scale. These were the years of the depression and the recession affected the Punjab too. In those days with one rupee, which is about 10 cents today, one could purchase 80 kg of wheat or 1 kg of pure ghee (clarified butter). Providing of course you had one rupee to spend. Discouraged, Bal Singh left for Canada in hopes of a better life.

Amrik vaguely remembers the farm and his father's discussion to leave. By this time Bal Singh



Indo Canadian

By Joan Mayo

had remarried and his father persuaded him to leave Amrik with him as Bal and his new wife would likely have more sons and the grandfather was all alone.

Before leaving for Canada Bal Singh made arrangements for his young son to attend King George's Royal Indian Military School in the Jullunder Cantonment. There were only three schools of this calibre in India and Amrik was eligible because his father had served in the Royal Indian Army during WWI.

Several years later at the tender age of 12 years, Amrik joined the school on Aug. 13, 1939. He lived in army barracks, wore army uniform and endured strict military discipline. His commandant was a British army major. It was compulsory, upon completion of their studies, for the students to join the forces. Following graduation in 1945 Amrik joined the Indian navy.

All through his school years

Amrik longed to be reunited with his father. He often cried when the letters from his father arrived but Bal Singh was having problems with the immigration department in Canada and was in constant fear of being deported. By the time his immigration problems were settled, Amrik was well on his way to becoming a naval officer.

on Nov. 6, 1951 Amrik Singh earned his commission as a sub-lieutenant and travelled to the U.K. He was put in command of the cruiser I.N.S. Delki formerly H.M.S. Achilles noted for the sinking of a German battle ship.

Amrik served on many ships and endured many rough experiences. In 1963 he was assigned to a staff college in Wellington, South India in the defense department. He feels very fortunate to have commanded so many ships at sea and many establishments ashore. His last appointment was commander of the naval training establishment at Visakhapatnam Andhra Pradesh and as naval officer in charge of Visakh.

In Dec. 1978 he was transferred to the Indian Coast Guard with the rank of Deputy Insp. General at Bombay. His area of operation was the entire west coast of India. He had an effective coast guard force under his command consisting of brand new and modern ships, aircraft and helicopters. His involvement included anti smuggling activities, rescue operations, protection of natural resources, security of oil platforms and apprehending illegal fish

trawlers. Many of these trawlers contained very sophisticated sounding equipment and communication equipment.

He retired from the navy with the rank of Commodore.

All these years Amrik's father and brothers had continued with their attempt to have Amrik and his wife emigrate to Canada. He had twice visited Canada. Following his retirement from the navy, he settled his affairs in India and was preparing to emigrate when he received the phone call from his Canadian brothers that their father had died at age 97, still hoping to have all his sons together in his beloved Canada.

Amrik arrived in time to perform the duties of eldest son at his father's funeral and will now settle down to retirement in Canada with his wife and his five Canadian brothers and two sisters.