



SANDS OF TIME

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TATA CENTRAL ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

WORLD WAR II – ONE OF THE DARKEST PERIODS IN HISTORY



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The Germans invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and so began what many consider the greatest conflict in human history. The attack set off a chain of events that eventually embroiled all of the world's major powers in World War II.

It was the bloodiest and most tragic event in world history. Across oceans and continents it raged. Up to 7 crore people lost their lives during the six year conflict.

It witnessed unimaginable barbarism, including above all the mass murder of European Jews by the Nazis. The War ended with the dropping of the atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Marking the Anniversary of the World War II, Tata Central Archives pays tribute to all those who lost their lives through Man's inhumanity to Man, which knows no bounds of

race, creed, or time.

This special issue highlights the involvement of a select few Tata Companies and individuals during World War II.

Following the signing of a pact between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, German troops tore through the old tollgates on the border with Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, to launch what would be the first assault of World War II.

By the time the World War II broke out in 1939, the Tata Iron and Steel Company was the largest integrated steel plant in the British Empire, with a capacity of around one million tonnes a year. The outbreak of the War found Britain dependent on India for supplies of certain types of steel products, particularly those required for ordnance purposes. With the increased pressure on Britain for War

supplies, the growing dearth of shipping, the intensification of submarine warfare and the closing of the Mediterranean route to the East, the discovery of indigenous sources of supply became essential, if India was to play her proper role in the provision of munitions to the British armies in the East.

The Government of India turned for such supplies to the Tata Iron and Steel Company, which was the only commercial unit in the country that had the necessary experienced personnel, equipment and research organisation, to carry out the essential development work.

The foresight displayed by the Steel Company in constructing its new Control and Research Laboratories a few years before the outbreak of the War, placed it in a position in which it could render

"...THE PICTURES, ARE A PRETTY GRIM REMINDER THAT HUMAN BEINGS WERE AS CRUEL 500 YEARS AGO AS THEY ARE TODAY...."

J. R. D. TATA TO BEHRAM SAKLATVALA

SANDS OF TIME

WORLD WAR II – ONE OF THE DARKEST PERIODS IN HISTORY... contd. from pg.1

At the two-million-tonne Tata Steel works today... one out of every five tonnes is special steel

During the Second World War, special steel plates from Jamshedpur were used for making 'Tatanagars' armoured cars, described to be 'the safest place on the fighting line' in Burma and Africa. Simultaneously, Tata Steel supplied a large range of special steels for ordinance materials, cartridges, cottage dies and vital tools.

The large scale production of special steels in India, however, was pioneered in the thirties when Tata Steel developed and produced 'Tataram', a special steel that made possible the construction of Calcutta's mighty Howrah Bridge without imported materials.

Since Independence, Tata metallurgists have developed production processes for many more special steels. These include electrical steel sheets, boiler plates, high tensile steel, forging quality steel, strips for special purposes, etc. Together, these account for one out of every five tonnes of steel now produced in the two-million-tonne plant at Jamshedpur. And efforts are constantly being made to increase and diversify the output of these vital steels.

By increasing the production of special steels, for which we are still dependent on imports, Tata Steel is helping our country to move towards the national goal of a self-reliant economy.

TATA STEEL



An advertisement which was designed in February 1966, includes a paragraph on the involvement of the Tata Iron and Steel Company in World War II.

immediate help to Government. During the 1939-40 financial year, a new 100-tonne blast furnace started functioning. In 1942, the company started manufacturing special steel for War purposes. It also set up a Benzol plant, and a wheel tyre and axle plant – the first of its kind in the country. During the War, Tata Steel made armoured cars fitted with bulletproof plates and rivets, and which were popularly called "Tatanagars". An army report said, "Nowhere the plates were pierced and the occupants were all alive."

It was the pioneering spirit of the House of Tata that a company named "National Radio and Engineering Company" (NREC) was floated by the Investment Corporation of India on August 31, 1940. The major objective in setting up NREC was to manufacture and service radio transmitters and receivers. It was then

intended to manufacture radios, but the War broke out and the Directorate of Munitions Production, looking around for all available manufacturing capacity, placed on the Company orders to make parachute snap fasteners, hand grenades, strikers and even buckles, which the Company had to accept.

The Directorate General, Aircraft, however, stepped in soon after, and for the last three years of the War the company was completely occupied with the repairing, servicing and manufacturing of Signals Equipment for the Royal Air Force.

The power of radio was strikingly demonstrated in Winston Churchill's broadcasts and President Roosevelt's "Fire Side Chats" which helped to maintain the morale of the British and American people during the crucial years of World War II. Indians at that time did not know how to use radio receivers, let alone manufacture them. The experience gained during the War was invaluable to the Company in its programme for the manufacture of radio receivers.

The twenties and thirties were not good times for the House of Tata. The collapse of the World War boom in the early twenties and the Great Depression of the thirties had posed serious problems for several of the existing Tata Companies. Efforts made by the group during this period in new directions had also proved unsuccessful. It was only on the eve of World War II that the group could break some new ground. The

formation of Tata Chemicals in 1939, was to prove the most notable among the new ventures floated by the group during this period. In fact after having entered the fields of steel and power the chemical industry was the next basic industry entered by the group after a lapse of 25 years.

The World War II posed a serious impediment to the procurement of plant and machinery required for the construction of the Tata Chemicals' factory. It became very difficult to engage foreign technical consultants to supervise the construction work and thereafter for commencing production operations.

Some of the plants required for soda ash works were exclusively made in Germany but when Germany invaded Czechoslovakia it became necessary to revise the plant procurement programme.

Even before the actual outbreak of War the company had to reconcile of giving up its plans to obtain plant and equipment from Germany. On proper investigation it ordered equipment from the USA, the UK and Sweden. In each case necessary care was exercised to ensure that the plant ordered would represent the latest design in respect of efficiency of output. However, before deliveries were made, Germany first occupied Norway and later France. Hence, the executions of orders placed by the company on the continent were held up.

By 1940-41, most of the plant and machinery ordered from the UK and the USA arrived at the site. By then some of the plant and machinery items

"I RECALL THAT DURING THE WORLD WAR II A NUMBER OF PROBLEMS CONNECTED WITH DEFENCE WERE BROUGHT TO THIS INSTITUTE (INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE) AND UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE LATE SIR J. C. GHOSH, OUR LABORATORIES MADE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION, AND THE INSTITUTE ITSELF GAINED IN STATUS AND IMPORTANCE."

BEYOND THE LAST BLUE MOUNTAIN
BY R. M. LALA

WORLD WAR II – ONE OF THE DARKEST PERIODS IN HISTORY... contd. from pg.2

ordered from the continent had also been delivered. But they did not include one import item – the turbo generator set which was ordered from Sweden. Confidence in ultimate victory was strengthened when the steam power plant ordered by from Sweden before the War was delivered in 1941 at a time when the Germans, having attacked Russia, were at the gates of Moscow. The plant travelled from Archangel in the north to Baku in the south, through the whole of western Russia, actually passing through the rail-yards of besieged Moscow literally within a few miles of the German army.

The turbo-generator set ordered from Sweden and given up as lost, reached Mithapur over the land route via Russia, the Caspian Sea and Iran arrived in India well ahead of the replacement plant ordered from America. The important point of this episode was, of course, the proof it gave that the Russians could hardly be as helpless under the Nazi onslaught as they were reported to be, if they could afford to keep their rail system open to commercial traffic in the very theatre of war.

On the whole the procurement of plant and machinery during the War proved extremely difficult. Many times ships bringing the equipment met a watery grave, and several items of machinery had to be ordered twice and thrice over again before the company got what it wanted.

Due to the War the company could not obtain the services of foreign consultants and experts

to guide and direct its operations at the time of construction and in the early stages of production as was originally planned. The Company was also prevented from getting the help of manufacturers of various items of plant and machinery for supervising the erection work. It was only in 1945-46 that it was able to recruit from the USA technical personnel which it needed.

The Indian Hotels Company also helped in the war efforts in a number of ways. It arranged tea dances for around 400 persons each time, and provided tea snacks, cigarettes, band and cabaret all free of cost. It provided Service Rest Rooms where light refreshments were provided at concessional rates to the men in uniform. It also helped in equipping the two other canteens run by the Hospitality Committee. Apart from subscribing to the Defence Bonds, the Hotel helped the staff in buying them. It also gave away Rs. 3.72 lakhs as contribution in different forms. In all, the hotel company's contribution towards this War was about Rs. 10 lakhs as against Rs. 4 lakhs during the previous war.

The war had its impact on the business of the Hotel company. The military occupation of the hotel was around 45% of the hotel accommodation at the Taj. The naval authorities rented the first floor of the Wellington Mews Garage on a monthly rent of Rs. 750. The ground floor was later rented to accommodate the lady ambulance drivers. Thanks to the military authorities the Wellington Mews which was earlier running in losses was

able to meet its expenses. The ground floor of the Greens was rented to the ENSA offices in February 1944.

Tata Aircraft, whose main Wartime activities were the assembly, repair and maintenance of military aircraft, were appointed the sole selling agents of the Government of India for the disposal of surplus American goods lying at former American air bases in Bengal, Assam, the United Provinces and Sind. These bases, which served as feeding centres to the American Air Force in India and China during the War, were left behind with nearly 1,75,000 items and stores of all kinds in literally a hundred Warehouses. The stores were valued at several crores of rupees and, at the request of the Government of India, Tata Aircraft took over these stores from the Americans for safe custody and arranged for their disposal both in India and abroad.

Sir Ghulam Mohammed, the Director-in-Charge of Tata Aircraft, - who later became the first Finance Minister of Pakistan - and his staff, along with a few senior men from other Tata concerns, had to work for long hours, taking the stores over at short notice. For their speed and efficiency, Tata's organization and personnel had gained unstinted praise from the Americans, and there is no doubt that only an organisation with such experience and resources could have accomplished this taking over process within the stipulated period. Tata Sons and certain associated companies lent to Tata Aircraft some of its top ranking



A view of the Tata Chemicals plant at Mithapur.

MANY THEN BELIEVED THAT HITLER WOULD WIN (WORLD WAR II), BUT THE DOGGED ONWARD PROGRESS THAT THE TATA CHEMICALS' SHIPMENT MADE GAVE J.R.D. TATA THE DEEP CONVICTION THAT HITLER, THEN AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS SUCCESS, WOULD ONE DAY BE DEFEATED. THAT CONVICTION SHAPED HIS THINKING AND PLANNING FOR THE REMAINING PERIOD OF THE WAR AND FOR THE POST-WAR PERIOD.

The main entrance of the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. The entrance of the hotel was built not facing the magnificent harbour, as the horse-drawn carriages had to be driven from Wellington Mews.



WORLD WAR II – ONE OF THE DARKEST PERIODS IN HISTORY... contd. from pg.3

"... JEH AND THELLY KEPT FOUR OF THE CHILDREN (POLISH REFUGEES) IN THEIR HOUSE FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, THEY ALSO PAID THEIR PASSAGE TO ENGLAND. THEY KEPT IN TOUCH WITH THE CHILDREN AND VISITED THEM LATER IN LIFE."

KIRA BANASKINSKA
DELEGATE, POLISH RED CROSS
DURING WORLD WAR II

executives for organising this work, and particular mention must be made of the Steel Company from whom had been drawn the Controller of Stores, the Deputy Sales Manager and even the General Manager of Tata Aircraft. Naturally, this task of disposals was very different from Tata Aircraft's Wartime work and it was necessary to pool the accumulated experience of different Tata concerns in order to set up an efficient organisation at Titaghur for the storage and quick disposal of the stores.

The Americans when they left had on their staff nearly

twelve thousand men, compared with the four thousand with whom Tata Aircraft were handling the job.

The Americans had brought with them to India equipment for every contingency and what they left behind consisted of almost everything from aircraft down to pins. The aircraft were of the Dakota, Curtiss-Commando, Expeditor, Nordyne and Trainer types.

The bulk of the American stores were aircraft and engine parts, but there were thousands of other items, many of which could be utilised in

India. The stores were grouped in thirty classes and, apart from aircraft spares, the Tata Aircraft catalogues, which run into several hundred pages, cover classes of electrical goods of all descriptions, machine tools, small tools, motor vehicles of all kinds, photographic, cinematograph and radio equipment and spares, parachutes in silk, cotton and nylon, ropes and cordage, plastic sheets, non-ferrous metals, timber, paper, quartermaster stores, sports and leather goods, chemical and medical supplies, and office equipment.

SOME INTERESTING INFORMATION . . .

During the Second World War, Thelma Tata, (J. R. D. Tata's wife), drove an ambulance and also helped the Defence Services Canteen.

Miss Tehmina Bomlsa Matron-in-Charge of the Bombay House Canteen worked in the Indian Troops' Canteen during the Second World War.

In a sense the Delhi Office of Tata Industries (now Public Affairs Department of Tata Services) owes its existence to the Second World War. It came into being in 1942 mainly to keep in touch with the then British Government on behalf of Tata Companies for work connected with the War.

During the Second World War K. A. D. Naoroji left Jamshedpur for Washington DC to act as Director of Supplies for the Indian Supply Mission for the duration of the War. After the end of the War he rejoined Tatas.

When the Second World War broke out, there was intensive activity in the Field of Air Raid Precautions, and Nevill Vintcent took a keen interest in organizing things. He would take J. M. Shapoorjee to attend various classes in A.R.P.

and First Aid etc. with him, and when he was appointed a Group Warden of a sizeable portion of the Fort area, he entrusted the issuing of circulars etc. entirely to Shapoorjee. This, coupled with the negotiations with the British Government for the manufacture in India of certain types of aircraft/gliders, often meant work till past midnight. In order to ascertain the workshop potentialities available in India, Vintcent visited the entire major Railway and other workshops throughout India. He himself piloted the plane and took Shapoorjee along with him. In the course of this assignment he achieved a couple of firsts: Bombay-Simla was done in one day by motoring from Ambala; and Calcutta-Madras was flown non-stop for the first time by a civilian aircraft.

World War II however, brought about many changes

for Gool Cowasji and her family. They had to leave Burma. Recalling this, she said, "... I did the overland route, trekking it most of the way. We landed in Calcutta via Chittagong and arrived in Bombay sometime around May 1942." That's when she joined Tata Aircraft Ltd.

K. M. Chinappa joined the Army Engineer Corps during the Second World War and saw active service on the Assam-Burma Frontier.

During the Second World War, Jyotish Chandra Bose was attached to the Intelligence Branch of the Supply Department. He was a recipient of a Gold Chain and a Watch from the Government for his excellent work during the War. At the end of the War he joined Tata Aircraft.

IN LIGHTER VEIN

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
COTTON TEXTILES
DIRECTORATE, BOMBAY.Times of India 21.5.42
TENDER NOTICE

THE Assistant Director General,
Cotton Textiles, Sudama House,
Ballard Estate, Bombay, invites quotations for the stores detailed below:—

Tender No. SYCX-1724/P-18/General for

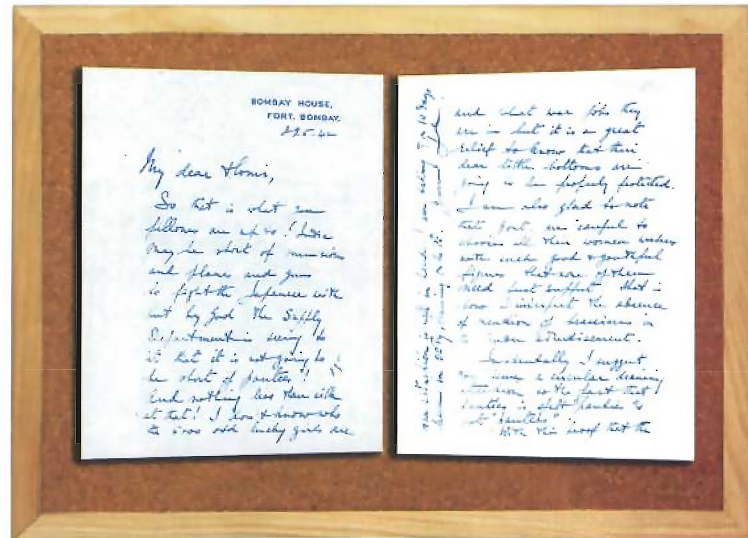
	Prs.
1. Pantees Silk, Pink, peach, Beige, grey or black.	5,500
2. Pyjamas, Art, Silk.	2,400
3. Slips, Silk White.	5,100
4. Stockings Silk Beige.	4,700
5. Stockings Silk, Khaki.	6,200
6. Vests Silk, White.	750

Quotations against the above will be received upto 4 P.M. on 26-5-'42.

16538

Sir Homi Mody joined Tatas as a Director in 1934. He remained as a Senior Director until 1959, barring two interruptions - in 1941 when he was appointed to the Viceroy's Executive Council with the key portfolio of Supply and in 1949 when he went to Lucknow as Governor of U.P.

During his tenure as a Member of the Supply Department a tender notice (right) was inserted by the Government of India, Cotton Textiles Directorate, in the Times of India, Bombay on May 21, 1942, inviting quotations for the Stores.



Commenting on the Advertisement which appeared in the newspaper, J. R. D. Tata wrote a letter to Sir Homi Mody the transcript of which is given below.

**BOMBAY HOUSE
FORT, BOMBAY.**

29.5.42

My dear Homi,

So that is what you fellows are up to! India may be short of munitions and planes and guns to fight the Japanese with but by God the Supply Department is seeing to it that it is not going to be short of pantees! And nothing less than silk at that! I don't know who the 5,000 odd lucky girls are and what War jobs they are in, but it is a great relief to know that their dear little bottoms are going to be properly protected. I am also glad to note that Govt are careful to choose all their women workers with such good and youthful figures that none of them need bust support. That is how I interpret the absence of mention of brassiers in the Tender Advertisement.

Incidentally, I suggest you issue a circular drawing attention to the fact that panties is spelt "panties" and not "pantees".

With this proof that the War situation is well in hand I am taking 8 or 10 days leave in Ooty, leaving on the 1st.

Yours Jeh

NEVILL VINTCENT - A CASUALTY OF WORLD WAR II



Nevill Vintcent

WAYS TO GIVE

The Tata Central Archives is built on contributions from the Group companies. We are the proud guardians of thousands of documents, carefully preserved paintings and several such collections.

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Nevill Vintcent, the son of Charles Vintcent, a South African cricketer, was born in 1902.

Vintcent entered Osborne in 1916, proceeded to Dartmouth, and served in HMS Temeraire for a few months during the Great War. In 1922, he was commissioned in the RAF, and served in Kurdistan, Transjordan, Egypt, and Iraq, where he won the Distinguished Flying Cross in an unusual manner. Once, he, with another officer, forced landed in a hostile country. To enable his co-pilot to fire the guns of the aeroplane and beat off the attacks of Arab horsemen, he carried the tail of the aeroplane on his shoulder and swung the aircraft into position for firing until help arrived.

For a time he served as a pilot at the RAF experimental establishment at Martlesham Heath. Convinced of the great future of civil aviation, he left the RAF in 1926 and engaged in air survey work in India, Burma, the Federated Malay States and Borneo. He also flew the first air mail from Borneo to the Straits Settlements.

In 1928, he, with a partner, undertook one of the early long-distance pioneer flights, when they flew two de Havilland DH9 aeroplanes from England to India.

Nevill Vintcent and J.R.D. Tata together pioneered the Tata Airlines in 1932.

Together they built the air transport companies before the 1939-45 War, which rendered invaluable assistance

to the RAF in operating scheduled air transport services and as the carriage of troops to Iraq, the evacuation of women and children from Habbaniyah, and later from Burma.

During the War, commercial air transport more or less closed down in India like elsewhere. Tatas offered to build "The Mosquito" bomber which the British had developed and which was the first one to bomb Berlin. The Government of Great Britain approved the project. They built a factory in Poona, Tatas began to assemble material but the government suddenly decided that they didn't want 'The Mosquito' - they wanted Gliders.

Vintcent flew to England at the request of Lord Beaverbrook, then Minister of Aircraft Production and obtained a contract for the construction of troop-carrying Horsa Gliders, and set about organising the company and the building of the factory at Poona.

So they undertook the preliminary steps for that until the government started wondering where they were going to use the gliders. These big troop-carrying gliders had to be towed by large aeroplanes. Well, it dawned, on the British authorities that there would be no aeroplanes to tow the gliders, and the scheme was cancelled.

For his work in the organisation of air transport in India he was made an O.B.E. in 1938.

The approach of War in Europe impressed upon Vintcent and J.R.D. the

strategic need for an aircraft industry in India. In 1940, simultaneously with the Government of India's decision to establish the Hindustan aircraft factory at Bangalore, with American assistance, Vintcent visited the United States and England and obtained the promise of a contract for the construction of training aircraft in India as an initial programme for the Tata Aircraft factory. Shipping and other difficulties, however, delayed the building, equipping, and manning of an aircraft factory in India.

In 1942, Vintcent set out on a flight to India to put into effect a plan for which he had fought long and tenaciously. Of all the numerous personnel who were sent to India by air and sea to establish this enterprise, he alone was lost on the way out.

The RAF Hudson in which he had been given a place in the crew to expedite his return disappeared without trace after taking off from a Cornish aerodrome. While officially there was no further information, it is known that other RAF aircraft were attacked by enemy aircraft in the mouth of the English Channel that day, and among his friends it was presumed that Vintcent was shot down.

The outbreak of the War revealed how invaluable an established aircraft industry in India would have been. It was too late for India to make any contribution. The Tata aircraft factories as well as the Hindustan aircraft factory were switched over to the repair and overhaul of aircraft for the air forces.

The troop-carrying Horsa Glider which was to be manufactured in Pune.

