

Always standing tall, Field Marshal Manekshaw

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Pune On Infantry Day on Tuesday Pune got a monument in honour of Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, near the Southern Command headquarters, which was inaugurated in the morning by Lt Gen Pradeep Khanna, Army Commander and General-Officer-Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command.

“I was commissioned in the Army when he was the general,” said Khanna reminiscing about Manekshaw who was popular as ‘Sam Bahadur.’ “He was a man of honour; the best of the kind,” Khanna said.

Field Marshal Manekshaw died in June 27 last year.

Infantry Day is observed to mark the day Indian soldiers landed in Srinagar on October 27, 1947 to defend the city against Pakistan. The Southern Command thus chose Tuesday to unveil the statue of Manekshaw.

Khanna, who had met Manekshaw in 2007 when the latter was in hospital, said the Field Marshal had a fantastic sense of humour. “He could keep us in fits of laughter. With him you were kept laughing all the time, even if he didn’t know a person too well,” he said. “His smile was enduring. This is the first official monument of a soldier anywhere in the country,” he said.

The nine-foot bronze statue, weighing 700 kgs, was made in eight months. “The statue has light eyes, just like Manekshaw had, the effect will be visible at night,” Khanna said.

The statue was made by sculptor Abhijit Dhondphale who had earlier made a plaque of the late Gen Vaidya for the Southern Command.

“For two months during the preparation of the clay model, we read books on Manekshaw and spoke to soldiers who had worked with him to learn as much as possible about him,” said Dhondphale. “We wanted to capture the personality of the man. We have tried to bring life to the statue, as much as possible,” said Cyrus Dalal, who conceptualised the Rs 20-lakh project along with Dhondphale.

Several members of the Zoroastrian community were also present. “We feel proud, always used to respect him a lot. We owe it to him,” said head Priest Jehangir Daruwala, who was part of a small group of Zoroastrians at the ceremonial unveiling of the statue.

Earlier, Chief of Staff of the Southern Command Lt Gen R K Swamy laid a wreath at the National War Memorial to mark Infantry Day.

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Tandarosti,

Cyrus Bulsara