

The Daily Star

Committed to PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW

Vol. 5 Num 200

Wed. December 15, 2004

Letters to Editor

An unsung hero of the Liberation War

Z A M Khairuzzaman, Dhaka

December is the month of victory. In the ongoing month we recall with gratitude the sacrifices of our brave freedom fighters and people in general for giving their lives for the independence of Bangladesh.

But there are stories of unsung heroes also. Here is a story of a Christian missionary who emerged as a saviour for many of our war -injured freedom fighters. He is Dr. R J Garst (full name Dr. Ronald Joseph Garst). He was born in Tennessee in the United States. After his graduation, he completed the board examination as an orthopaedic surgeon. During our Liberation War in 1971, he was serving the distressed humanity at Ludhiana Christian Medical College in India. He joined there as an associate professor of orthopaedics in 1953 and ultimately became its superintendent. He was deeply moved to see the sufferings of the freedom fighters. He voluntarily visited the war camps and engaged himself in treatment of war-injured freedom fighters, many of them disabled. His noble gesture drew the attention of the then special envoy of Bangladesh government in exile, Justice Abu Syeed Chowdhury.

In the meantime, Bangladesh became an independent state and Justice Chowdhury invited Dr. Garst to visit Bangladesh.

Dr. Garst's affection for war -wounded freedom fighters brought him to Bangladesh on February 28, 1972. Patronised by the government, he set up makeshift rehabilitation camps for disabled freedom fighters at Mohammadpur College Gate near Shaheed Suhrawardy Hospital at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. He stayed in Bangladesh till 1981 and rendered his selfless services to disabled freedom fighters and developed orthopaedic treatment facilities. The facilities were not available here at that period.

Dr. Garst founded the Rehabilitation Institute and Hospital for the Disabled (RIHD) commonly known as Pangu Hospital. Believe it or not, he worked there on monthly remuneration of *one taka* only as project director of the newly-established institute. At his initiative, MS and Diploma courses in orthopaedics were introduced in Dhaka University. On the eve of the Victory Day, the entire nation remembers the great man's sacrifices with gratitude.



Dr. Garst (garlanded) at a reception by the Shaheed Family and War Injured Freedom Fighters' Unit Command of Bangladesh Muktijoddha Sangsad in 1987