

Major Man Bahadur Rai, A.C., M.C., I.D.S.M.

10th January 1914 – 14th February 2011

Major Man Bahadur Rai, who joined the Society in 1984 as Honorary Member No.5, passed away on 14th February 2011 at Jorhat. He was ninety-



seven years old. He enrolled in the British Indian Army on 17th July 1930, and was posted to the 1st Bn 10th Gurkha Rifles. He was commissioned Jemadar on 1st December 1941. During his illustrious military career he was awarded the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, and later the Military Cross, for actions during WW2. At independence, 10th Gurkha Rifles was allotted to England, and Jemadar Man Bahadur Rai, like many others, opted for service with the Indian Army. Consequently, in August 1948, he was commissioned Lieutenant in 4th Bn 11th Gorkha Rifles, then a newly raised regiment containing cadres from Gurkha regiments allotted to England who opted for service in the Indian Army. From 1957 to

1962, Major M.B. Rai was with the 8th Bn Assam Rifles. In 1961 he was awarded the Ashok Chakra for Counter Insurgency Operations.

In 1964, as the pioneer of the Nagaland Police, he was instrumental in raising the 1st Bn Nagaland Armed Police. He also served as Commandant of the Village Guards of the Naga Hills, Tuensang Area, in 1965.

After retirement, Major M.B. Rai became a Deacon of the Nepali Baptist Church, living in Nagaland. His duties took him to villages around Imphal where, as a young Gurkha officer, he had once waged war in his own implacable way.

Recalling his invaluable service to the Nation, heartfelt condolences were conveyed by the Chief of Army Staff, Eastern Army Commander, Director-

General Assam Rifles, and the 'Kiranti' Fraternity (Assam Rifles Fraternity) to the family of the oldest officer of the 11th Gorkha Rifles.

Major M.B. Rai was given a befitting farewell by his fellow soldiers, family friends and relatives. On 15th February 2011, at 11.00 hrs, the funeral service was held at the Gorkha Baptist Church, Jorhat. The Guard of Honour was provided by a detachment of the Assam Rifles. Amongst those present were Lieutenant-General Rameshwar Roy, A.V.S.M., Y.S.M., Director-General Assam Rifles, and other senior military officers. The procession to the Christian Cemetery in Jorhat was led by 21st Bn The Parachute Regiment (SF). Major Rai was finally laid to rest at the Christian Cemetery with full military honours by 2nd Bn 11th Gorkha Rifles.

Indian Distinguished Service Medal

London Gazette, 17th February 1944; for Burma

IO-17249 Paid Acting Subedar Manbahadur Rai, 1st Bn 10th Gurkha Rifles; 63rd Indian Infy Bde, 17th Indian Division, 4th Corps; location Chin Hills.

'On the 14th Nov. 1943, this G.O. was 2nd-in-command of a Company, which was ordered to counterattack at night a strong Japanese forces, estimated as the major part of a battalion, and supported by mortars and infantry guns. During the course of the fighting, which lasted the whole of the next day, and during which, quite early in the proceedings, his Company Commander was wounded five times, this officer displayed the greatest coolness, courage, and military skill.

'Initially in charge of mortars and Rear ['D'] Company HQ, he kept his Battalion HQ fully and continuously in the picture, gauging accurately when extra ammunition was required and organising the evacuation of the wounded. When his Company Commander was wounded, he ordered him back to Rear HQ and took over command. For some hours, he kept large numbers of the enemy at bay by his dispositions, ensuring he could not be surrounded, counterattacking twice, methodically collecting a large quantity of material for identification purposes, and finally, when ordered to withdraw, pulling out unhurriedly and with great military precision. All his dead, wounded, and material were got away, including much enemy material, and the enemy received such a hard blow that he never followed up and indeed has never reoccupied the position.

'Throughout, this officer's leadership and military skill was of the highest order.'

Military Cross

London Gazette, 28th June 1945; for Burma

(periodical award; period omitted from citation)

IO-17249 Jemadar (W.S. Subedar) Manbahadur Rai, 1st Bn 10th Gurkha Rifles; 63rd Indian Infantry Bde, 17th Indian Division, 4th Corps.

‘Subedar Manbahadur Rai has, throughout the Imphal Operations, shown the most outstanding example of fearless courage, high morale, cheerfulness, and in addition quite exceptional tactical ability and leadership for a VCO. Under fire, this Subedar is the most conspicuous example of coolness in the Battalion. The men, on account



of his courage and leadership, will follow him anywhere, and he has throughout the recent operations contributed in no small measure to the high morale displayed by the men under difficult, dangerous, and extremely unpleasant conditions. By his example, he has proved an inspiration to officers and men alike.

‘During the period under review in the Bishenpur area, in an attack on a strongly held Japanese bunker position, Subedar Manbahadur Rai took command of his Company after the Company Commander had been killed. The Company was pinned to the ground in an open paddy field by heavy and accurate automatic fire from bunkers on the far side of a nullah one hundred yards distant. From Company HQ, Subedar Manbahadur Rai doubled at full speed to the forward elements of his Company, and, having pinpointed the main points

of enemy resistance, again raced forward across completely open ground to behind a large tree, some ten yards from the nullah and the enemy bunkers. From this point, he reconnoitred a crossing place on the nullah and pin pointed the exact positions of the enemy bunkers in the immediate area. In this position, all possible enemy fire was directed at him from short range, but, completing his recce, Subedar Manbahadur Rai threw five grenades at the nearest bunkers, and then raced back to his Company HQ across seventy yards of open paddy field. He had gained sufficient information to enable him to form a further plan of attack, an attack which took the Company to the edge of the nullah and eliminated the first line of bunkers.

‘Later, when the Japanese attempted to attack his position, Subedar Manbahadur Rai, who was speaking on the wireless at the time, without waiting to pick up his rifle joined his newly appointed Company Commander and two platoons in a counter attack, cheering and encouraging his men as they fought back the enemy.

‘This example is one of many displayed over a long period and is typical of the dash and courage combined with high qualities of leadership and initiative shown by this Gurkha officer on all occasions when his Company has been in action.’

Ashoka Chakra (1st Class)

Not. 9-Pres./1962; counter-insurgency operations, Nagaland 1961.

IC-5261 Captain Man Bahadur Rai.

‘Captain Man Bahadur Rai, son of Shri Ram Singh Rai, was born on 10 January 1914, in Darjeeling, West Bengal. He was enrolled in 10 Gurkha Rifles on 17 July 1930. He was granted a commission in 11 Gorkha Rifles on 27 August 1948. He had been decorated with the Military Cross and Indian Distinguished Service Medal. He subsequently rose to the rank of Major.

‘In 1961, 11 Gorkha took part in a series of actions against a body of hostile Nagas, entrenched in a densely wooded hilly region, interspersed with numerous ravines. Towards the end of April 1961, he led a platoon at the dead of night through two hostile positions into the main stronghold. A fierce attack was launched and, after bitter fighting, he was able to dislodge the hostiles from that position.

‘On 3 May 1961, Captain Rai led a platoon attack on a strongly fortified hostile position, situated on the steep slopes of a ravine. This position, which was dominating the surrounding area, could be approached only frontally. However, realising that heavy casualties would follow if he made a frontal attack, Captain Rai crawled, with half a platoon, through the surrounding thick undergrowth. He then scaled up the steep side of the position through a hail of close-range fire. On sighting the hostile position, he advanced towards it, threw two grenades, and killed a few hostiles. He then charged into them, firing as he went, and killed two more. His fearless assault spurred his men in the encounter, and so demoralised the hostiles that they fled into thick jungle. The hostiles lost ten men in the encounter and left behind two rifles, one 12-bore gun, and one Tommy gun. The attack dealt a crushing blow to the hostiles. Subsequently, Captain Rai performed many such acts as an officer of 8th Battalion Assam Rifles and of the Village Guards Organization of Nagaland.

‘Captain Man Bahadur Rai’s bold leadership, indomitable willpower and disregard for personal safety was a source of inspiration to his comrades.’

This obituary, to an extremely gallant and thrice-decorated Indian officer, has been compiled by I.M.H.S. member Sushil Talwar in New Delhi. The photo of Manbahadur Rai, taken during his period of service with 10th Gurkha Rifles, has been kindly provided by Gavin Edgerley-Harris of the Gurkha Museum in Winchester. Manbahadur Rai was known personally to the Society’s first President, the late Major A.J. ‘Tony’ Sudlow TD, who served alongside him in ‘D’ Coy of 10GR in Burma during WW2, and who wrote about him in the Society’s Newsletter No.2 in April 1984.

Brigade Machine Gun Squadrons

Western Front: 1916

In October 1915, the Machine Gun Corps (MGC) was founded, with Cavalry, Infantry and Motor branches, and a training establishment was set up at Corps headquarters in Belton Park, Lincolnshire.

The so-called Brigade Machine Gun Squadron [Bde MG Sqn] became an important element of the MGC establishment during the fighting in France and Flanders. Each of the five cavalry divisions (three British and two Indian) contributed three squadrons, or a total of fifteen squadrons. For a relatively brief period of ten months in 1916, the Indian Army contributed a significant proportion, about 25%, of the personnel in these squadrons.

The establishment of each cavalry regiments of the Indian Army, upon embarkation for France in 1914 as part of Indian Expeditionary Force A, included a machine gun section equipped with two Maxim guns. These two-gun MG Sections were beefed up in September 1915 with the addition of two of the lighter Vickers guns.

The two Indian Cavalry divisions within Indian Expeditionary Force 'A' each contained three brigades of three cavalry regiments – one British and two Indian Army. The Bde MG Sqns were formed in February 1916 by merging the MG Sections of each of their three regiments.¹ The six Indian Cavalry brigades formed a matching number of six Bde MG Sqns, namely: Sialkot, Mhow, and Lucknow in the 1st Indian Division; and Secunderabad, Amballa and Meerut² in the 2nd Indian Division.

Each of the Bde MG Sqns was commanded by a Major or Captain, selected from one of its three contributing regiments, and there were six two-gun sections (all Vickers) comprising a subaltern, thirty-three other ranks, and forty-six horses. Total squadron strength was eight officers, 303 other ranks, 299 horses, eighteen limbers and a water cart. The 19th Lancers appears to

¹ The regiments, deprived of the machine guns, were subsequently issued, circa April 1916, with four Hotchkiss Light Automatic Guns per squadron.

² The Meerut Brigade, which had formed an MG Sqn in February 1916, was ordered to Mesopotamia in June 1916 (it is not known whether the Indian element was mustered out when the brigade embarked from Marseilles, or after it reached Mesopotamia). It was replaced in the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division by the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.

have met its full obligation to the Sialkot Brigade Squadron, recorded as: 'regimental machine gun section of four guns, with its two British and one Indian officer and about sixty other ranks, with riding and pack horses.'³

The extent to which the personal arms of the Indian cavalry were changed is not clear, but the troopers of most squadrons in the three British divisions ceased to carry swords – although some retained them for officers and sergeants. Nos. 1 and 2 of the gun teams were issued with revolvers, with some squadrons obtaining them for the rest of the gun team. Most squadrons used the McConnel pack saddle, although it proved to be unsatisfactory and was eventually phased out in 1917.

A cross-section from a photograph of one of the Brigade MG Sqns is reproduced on the opposite page.⁴ It was taken in France or Flanders between the months of February and November 1916. It is exceptionally interesting and unusual to see British and Indian personnel serving alongside each other within the same fighting unit. A Sikh jemadar is seated between a lieutenant and the squadron sergeant-major, and behind the latter stands a dafadar.

During their service with the Bde MG Sqns, all ranks continued to wear their regimental insignia. The cap badge worn by the British personnel in the photograph is clearly a 7th Dragoon Guards pattern, making it possible to identify the unit as the Secunderabad Brigade MG Squadron – which is probably archetypical of these squadrons. Throughout 1916, its constituents were H.M.'s 7th (The Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards, the 20th Deccan Horse, and the 34th Prince Albert Victor's Own Poona Horse.

The Indian officers and other ranks are not wearing pagri badges, this being by and large the general rule on field service during WWI. Although shoulder titles were usually worn, the detail is invariably difficult to decipher in photographs. However, some regimental identification can be deduced from the typical style of tying pagris. Thus the 34th P.A.V.O Poona Horse is represented by its Rathors from Jodhpur and Kaim Khanis from Rajputana, who formed three out of the four squadrons of the regiment at that time.

³ Hudson, p.151

⁴ Thank are due to the Machine Gun Corps Old Comrades Association for permission to reproduce this fine photograph. When discovered, it had been torn into four pieces ready to be discarded, and has since been expertly restored. A panorama of the complete photo appears at the end of this article. The Society's website, when it becomes fully operational, will reveal the fine detail typical of this type of photo



The field services of the detachments that fought with the Bde MG Sqns are hardly mentioned in the unit histories of the cavalry regiments that supplied them, but they are described, in varying detail, in the brigade war diaries held by the National Archives at Kew. There is little doubt that the squadrons experienced a great deal of hard service in the trenches, and they were also involved in some of the major battles.

The only active service [of the Indian Cavalry during the winter of 1916]... fell to the share of the machine-gun squadrons.⁵ The Sialkot Squadron, which included sections from the 6th (King Edward's Own) Cavalry and the 19th Lancers (Fane's Horse), took part in the heavy fighting on the Ancre in support of the 3rd and 31st Divisions. The 6th Cavalry... had three of its four guns destroyed by enemy fire after firing over 200,000 rounds and suffered heavy casualties. Jemadar Jai Sing won the Military Cross at Grandcourt and the troop earned, in addition, two IDSMS and six IMSMs. The Lucknow Squadron, like the others in the [1st] Division, went into the trenches opposite Serre and Beaumont Hamel. The three squadrons were in the trenches for twenty-seven days at a stretch without relief on this occasion, and performed an important role in the Beaumont Hamel battle on 11th November. The gunners of the 29th Lancers and 36th Jacob's Horse smashed a German counter-attack delivered under very heavy bombardment. The Lucknow Machine-Gun squadron collected two Military Crosses, one Distinguished Conduct Medal, five Military Medals and two Indian Orders of Merit.⁶

Between July and September 1916, the Secunderabad Bde MG Sqn, commanded by Captain E.C. Watson, 7th Dragoon Guards, fought in three important actions: Bazentin Ridge, Delville Wood and Flers-Courcelette.

In November 1916, ten months after they had been first absorbed, the Indian Army elements were withdrawn from all Bde MG Sqns and returned to their respective regiments. They were replaced by British gunners drafted from the MGC Training Centre.⁷ At the same time, the 1st and 2nd Indian Cavalry Divisions were renumbered 4th and 5th respectively, and the brigades, together with their MG Sqns, were allotted sequential numbers. The now all-British

⁵ The actions described here continued until 18th November 1916, in the twilight of the Indian Cavalry's involvement. It explains why the Indian element was mustered out of the Sialkot squadron somewhat later than the others.

⁶ Gurcharn Singh Sandhu, p.308

⁷ The MGC Training Centre had moved very recently, in October 1916, from Belton to Maresfield Park in Uckfield,

Secunderabad Squadron gunners were thenceforward known as the 13th (Secunderabad) Brigade Machine Gun Squadron.

The war diary of the 5th Cavalry Division War notes that on 14th November 1916: 'British personnel for Secunderabad M.G. Sqn arrive from base to replace Indian personnel.' The general changeover seems to have started about the 21st or 22nd November, but in some squadrons, such as Sialkot, the Indian ranks were not mustered out until early 1917. Although, on the face of it, the squadrons had become purely British units, Indian personnel continued to serve in the MGC as drivers and in non-combatant supporting roles.

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Published sources:

General Gurcharn Singh Sandhu, PVSM, *The Indian Cavalry: History of the Indian Armoured Corps till 1940* (Vision Books, Delhi 1981), volume 1, p.308; General Sir Havelock Hudson, *History of the 19th KGO Lancers 1858-1921* (Gale & Polden, Aldershot 1937).



SECUNDERABAD BRIGADE MACHINE GUN SQUADRON

Boer Prisoners of War at Abbottabad

Omer Tarin

As the gauntlet was thrown down by the Editor in the previous edition of *Durbar*, I have given due thought to the Boer prisoners held at Abbottabad more than one hundred years ago.

Some say the number of Boer POWs was about 300, some say more. It has not been possible to confirm the exact number, but I discussed this and other matters relevant to the subject some years ago, in a paper on the caretakers/chowkidars of the Old Christian Cemetery (OCC), Abbottabad, read at the South Asian Studies Seminar at the Punjab University in Lahore.

In 2001, I interviewed the elderly Mr Ali Akbar, caretaker of the OCC at that time. He was a member of a single family which has traditionally looked after the OCC for over one hundred years. He passed away in 2005. His father, Fakir Muhammad, had been the caretaker back in 1901-02; and Mr Akbar told me that, as a child, he remembered his father saying that about thirty-five Boers, whom he referred to as ‘Germans from the African war,’ were buried at the OCC. If so, their graves are not identifiable anymore, and there is no record of their burials in the St Luke’s church registers. I have often wondered if there was some record of them at the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA), in the Kakul locality, which is an extension of the main Abbottabad Cantonment, but there certainly aren’t any now.

It is interesting that the site of the prison camp for the Boers, at the base of the Kakul Hill, was in fact levelled by the 5th Gurkhas. There’s a Kakul village up there too, behind the spur to the left. Since Abbottabad was the regimental centre and depot for the 5th Gurkhas, they had a strong presence here and always maintained a respectably sized company or force at base; so it made sense to have them ‘in charge’ as it were. Other elements of the ‘Punjab Frontier Force’ also had a presence here, but were not, as far as is known, given any responsibility for tending to the Boers.

The concentration camp site itself was not abandoned after prisoners departed. For many years it provided a base for the Army Mountaineering and P.T. School; and ‘pukka’ barracks and basic offices and classrooms were set up there.

My late grandfather, *Khan Sahib* Abdel Salim Khan, Tarin, of the Indian Political Service and later Pakistan’s High Commissioner to Sri Lanka and then Japan, had a property nearby in Kakul, where he had a small hut for guests which rejoiced in the name of ‘The Folly.’ Mr Hamid Khan later lived at ‘The Folly’, my grandfather’s cottage, and some of his family still live there now.

They could recollect very well that, until the 1940s, trainees from military units all over India used to come there, and there was a polo ground in front of the School where they also used to play with the officers at times, or just go and watch polo matches.

One interesting bit of information has been gleaned from a Hazara district gazetteer for 1910-11 (p.145), describing road-building from Havelian (where the Hazara plain ends and mountains begin) to Abbottabad. Havelian was also the site of an army depot and entrainment spot. This road section was a *kutch* track, fit only for horses, mules and suchlike, but not for heavy military convoys of a mechanised type. In 1899, a scheme was approved to metal the road up to Abbottabad town. This was eventually put into operation by the Public Works Department and the Army Engineers, in collaboration. Initially, only local labour was used (maybe prison labour from the big Haripur Jail), and in 1901-02 'conscripted Boer labour' was employed. So it seems that the poor chaps had to bear more than just captivity.

After Independence and Partition, the premises of the Army Mountaineering and P.T. School at Kakul was selected for the PMA, and my other (maternal) grandfather, then Major (later Brigadier) Azmat Hyat Khan, served here as one of the Pakistan Army's first battalion officers/instructors. He was aware that the site had been originally the Boer concentration camp; although, sadly, I never got the chance to ask him more about the Boer prisoners and their time here, or if there were any records somewhere in the PMA's files.

The 5th Gurkha history, quoted in Durbar, mentions a small cemetery 'in a nullah' near Kakul, but I never came across it in the days when the PMA compound was more accessible. The opportunity for exploration is long past, as the compound has become a huge complex surrounded by high security wire.

Until now, I have not seen any other graves or memorials to the unfortunate Boer prisoners anywhere throughout the length and breadth of the Hazara. There is even a measure of doubt concerning the existence of the supposed cemetery at Kakul, if one gives credence to the testimony of Ali Akbar, late chowkidar, whose father mentioned the thirty-five POWs buried in the OCC at nearby Abbottabad. However, I have not yet thrown in the towel, and I still hold a measure of hope, no matter how remote, that further enquiries will produce more evidence of the presence of these redoubtable African fighters, and the sad end, so far from home, of some of their comrades.

Jottings from the journal of Colonel C.F. Wild CB¹

Charles Frederick Wild was born in Bex, Switzerland, on the 15th May 1786. He became a Cadet on the H.E.I.C.'s military establishment in 1805, and in due course he was sent to India for further training and education, prior to commissioning as an ensign in the Bengal Army. He landed in Calcutta on 7th April 1807, and two days later was appointed Ensign. Before another week passed, he was on his way to Baraset Cadet College, where he remained for the next six months, whereafter he was posted to the 8th Bengal Native Infantry.²

The following notes, taken from his journal for the year 1807,³ provide some anecdotal evidence of life for a new cadet arriving at Baraset.⁴

16th April: At 6 o'clock in the evening, I left Calcutta, and rode in a palankeen to the College of Baraset, sixteen miles, all at the expense of Government, with a double set of bearers which went at 5 mph. A little after 9 o'clock I arrived at Baraset. I had a cold dinner at 10 o'clock, and some of the gentlemen had the goodness to get me a bed – ours being not yet arrived.

17th April: Next morning I got a room in a bungalow (thatched house) where, as in every other, there were three cadets already. I afterwards went to Major Raban,⁵ the CO, for whom I had a letter of recommendation, and only found Lieut. Martin,⁶ his Adjutant, for whom I had also a letter. In the evening, after parade, I was introduced to the Major by Mr Martin; he received me in a polite and friendly manner, and desired me to attend drilling and parade next morning.

18th April: I did not attend drilling, nor parade, neither of the other cadets (my shipmates) being willing to go, and I would have been the only one without a regimental jacket. I was sent for, for parade, being still asleep. I dressed directly, but came too late, though I made every possible haste. I understood the same had

¹ Col. C.F. Wild, 30th Bengal NI, was the father of Maj.-Gen. E.J. Wild, whose memoir has been published in *Durbar* in six parts (ending in Vol. 27, No.4, Winter 2010).

² Major V.C.P. Hodson, *List of the Officers of the Bengal Army 1758-1834*, Phillimore, London 1927-1947. Footnoted details of other officers are also drawn from this source.

³ The extracts from C.F. Wild's journal, quoted in this article, were noted down and kindly forwarded to the editor by IMHS member Tony Kerrison. They were found during a recent search of his family archives in Switzerland.

⁴ These notes supplement information on Baraset [Barasett] which has been published in three previous editions of *Durbar* (Vol.25, No.3, Autumn 2008, p.146; Vol.26, No.2, Summer 2009, p.93; Vol.27, No.1, Spring 2010, p.14).

⁵ Major William Raban, Bengal European Regiment; commandant at Baraset from its reopening in 1806 until July 1807. Retired as Lt.-Colonel, in India, on 20th July 1814.

⁶ Lieutenant Russel Martin, 7th Bengal N.I.; professor and asst. adjutant at Baraset from 1806 to 1811; later asst. professor of Hindustani at the College of Fort William; retired as Lieut.-Colonel, 2nd Bengal European Regiment on 2nd June 1830.

happened with the three other cadets. The consequences were, I am happy to say, nothing. I went to parade in the evening

19th April (Sunday): The Surgeon read prayers in the mess-room, which is a large hall where 200 cadets can meet together. The Major and his Adjutant always come to breakfast, and dine there – the only two meals which you get there.

20th April: I attended drill in the morning for the first time. We were eight or nine beginners, and did nothing but march, without muskets, from one traced line on the ground to another, at two-and-a-half distance each, for the space of about 100 paces.⁷

A Battle versus the Gurkhas

By the time Charles Wild first saw action, in the second phase of the campaign in Nepal between January and March 1816, he was serving as a lieutenant with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Bengal Native Infantry. His regiment was posted to the 4th Brigade of the Centre Column (Sir David Ochterlony), which advanced through the main entrance to Nepal, the Chiriaghati Pass. The Gurkha defences were turned by a flanking movement of the 3rd Brigade which allowed the Pass to be occupied with a minimum of resistance, but on 28th February the post of Sekhar Khatri, covering the left of Ochterlony's encampment, was vigorously attacked by the Gurkhas. It was defended by forty men of H.M.'s 87th Foot, and three companies of the 2-25th Bengal N.I. They managed to hold off the Gurkhas until reinforcements arrived. Besides the 2-25th, the 2-12th Bengal N.I. was prominently involved, and Wild's battalion, the 2-8th Bengal N.I., particularly distinguished itself by a gallant bayonet charge towards the end of the action. The Gurkhas were finally driven off with a considerable loss. Lieutenant Wild recorded his observations on his regiment's progress in Nepal in his journal, commencing 16th February 1816:

No man had, since the preceding day, any victuals dressed, and the cattle did not only get no grain, but scarce any grass to eat. Since daybreak till 10 o'clock we had only proceeded about four miles, some persons pretending that they had heard the signal guns for our advance very distinctly.

Colonel Burnett, Acting Brigadier,⁸ ordered our brigade to advance, preceded by the light companies of our battalion [2nd of the 8th], the 2nd of the 4th, and the 2nd of the 15th. Just at that moment, a note from the General [Ochterlony] to Colonel Burnet informed him that, having met with obstacles beyond his expectation, he had not yet reached the point at which he intended to arrive, and that, therefore, Colonel Burnet must advance, and carry the stockade before him the best way he could.

⁷ 'Square-bashing' was presumably carried out with 2.5 paces between each cadet.

⁸ Lieut.-Col. John Burnett, 8th Ben. NI, cmdg 4th Brigade; C.B., 21st December 1816.

The light companies, in the meantime, had gone along the hills on the sides of the nullah (the bed of which was our road). They came, quite unexpectedly, on the second stockade thrown across the entrance of the pass, and, perceiving no-one behind it, they rushed into it. When a few Gurkhas were seen coming down to defend it from a short distance in their rear, Captain Tickell of the Engineers,⁹ who had gone ahead with the light companies, ordered the Sepoys about him to fire on them.

Many more of the enemy in the rear were seen running in different directions towards the heights, up which our men followed and pounded them. But entering a narrow defile, where no more than one man abreast could have passed, and which was commanded by almost perpendicular hills on both sides, they pushed on until they came to a hill which was crowned with a stockade which defended the top of the Chiriaghati Pass, and completely enfiladed that part of it.

O'Shea,¹⁰ who commanded the light company of our battalion, and who came to this spot first, told me that the enemy, owing to the cover of the foliage under which they [had] moved thus far, did not seem to have observed their approach, but that the very instant our Sepoys fired on the enemy at this stockade, the fire was returned by detached parties, not perceived before, from every height round about them, and which they could neither avoid, nor silence.

When the engagement became brisk, a reinforcement was sent for, and two companies under me were detached from the head of the column, and wonderfully few casualties occurred, considering the heavy fire kept up, a circumstance that greatly astonished me, this being the first engagement in which I found myself.

[With] night coming on as the column and guns came up, we took up a position for the night, remaining under arms. Towards morning, an advanced sentry challenging, and receiving no answer, fired. Nothing else happened, seemingly, but when the day broke the stockade was found to have been evacuated, and, as was subsequently ascertained from a wounded prisoner, it appeared that, when the sentry fired, the enemy thought that we had found out and taken a road by which the stockade could be turned, and they hastily retreated.

Our time was taken up until the 23rd, when we marched on towards [Heltoondah], in making a road for the artillery, and getting it over the pass – a most harassing work for our men, who lent themselves to it with great goodwill and cheerfulness. A strong stockade and ditch were thrown up round one of the

⁹ Captain Richard Tickell, Corps of Bengal Engineers; Field Engineer, Centre Column.

¹⁰ Lieutenant Andrew O'Shea, 2nd Bn 8th Ben.NI; died at Mirzapur, U.P., on 18th November 1817, shortly after he was advanced to Captain.

pukka houses that served as a depot for the Nepalese traders. The other was pulled down.

On the 27th, we resumed our march through the forest on the road leading to the Makwanpoor Valley, and although the distance did not exceed five-and-a-half miles, the making of the road in our front, and the slow progress of the artillery, delayed the arrival of the 3rd Brigade, which was in advance... [several indecipherable words]¹¹... since daybreak, when it left the old ground, and it was not until 10 a.m. of the following day that the 4th Brigade, which had marched at the same time, came up.

As the former brigade entered the valley, they observed a body of Gurkhas on the heights which commanded it, who, being dressed in red, made us believe at first sight that our own light companies, who acted as flanking [parties], had reached that position. But the deception was only momentary. Their post was a strong one, and it was conjectured that, during the night, they would disturb us in our camp, which was situated at the foot of that hill. Our troops were badly scattered, and it was fortunate for us that the enemy did not attempt it, for we must have encountered them to great disadvantage.

On the morning of the 28th, to our great surprise, the post they had occupied appeared abandoned, and a detachment of the strength of two companies was sent up from camp to occupy it. Poor Terrell¹² commanded them. They accomplished this without opposition; however, some sick Gurkhas who had been left behind at this advanced post told our party that theirs had only gone to dinner (!!) and would return presently. I was one among the many of our officers who ascended this hill to get a view of the fort of Makwanpoor, which may be about two miles in a direct line eastward from our hill, and considerably higher. On my way there, I met Captain Tickell and Lieutenant Pickersgill¹³ who, with a party consisting of nearly one-half of the detachment sent up, were proceeding onwards to reconnoitre a stockade which had been erected about 800 yards in advance of the fort. It was then about 11a.m.

At about 12.30, a sharp skirmishing was heard in the direction they had taken, but to judge from the firing, which was fast nearing us, there could be no doubt but that they were retreating. Captain Pickersgill himself had a narrow escape of being taken prisoner, but, favoured by the thickness of the jungle, had made his way to camp. There he found the 2nd Battalion of the 12th regiment

¹¹ The most probable interpretation is that the 3rd Bde, having difficulty in advancing, took from dawn until 4 p.m. before coming up, thereby delaying the 4th Bde.

¹² Lieut. James Bates Terrell, 1st Bn 20th Bengal NI, att'd 2nd Bn 25th Bengal NI in the 3rd Brigade, Central Column; killed in action at Makwanpoor on 28th February 1816.

¹³ Lieutenant Joshua Pickersgill, 24th Bengal NI, att'd Champaran Light Infantry. He was employed in survey work in the Q.M.G.'s Dept with the Centre Column, and discovered the track over the hills by which Sir David Ochterlony's force was able to turn the Chiriaghati position. He died of fever at Saugor, C.P., on 8th September 1818.

preparing to move up the hill for the support of our party there, and he returned up with them.

The firing, in the meantime, grew brisker and brisker. A large force was seen coming down from the fort to support their men. We had no longer any doubt that the reconnoitring party had fallen in with the enemy, and being repulsed, were retreating upon us, but our supposition fell short of the full extent of the dangers to which it was exposed, as became more evident in the valley. H.M.'s 87th regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the 25th Regiment N.I. were successively detached to reinforce our position.

In the meantime the enemy brought down a mountain field-piece, which was shortly afterwards followed by two others, to bear upon us, and we also sent, on our side, three 6-pounders on elephants up the hill, but the ascent being steep and rugged it took them a long while before their fire could open. The onset of the Gurkhas, led on by their chief, sword in hand, was daring and bold to [the point of] admiration.

Our men had no chance of escaping but by opposing their own valour. The contest for half-an-hour was desperate. Poor Terrell had his right hand cut off, and was shot dead through the body. Kerr of the 12th Bengal N.I.,¹⁴ and Impey of the 25th,¹⁵ still remained to encourage their men. The former succeeded to the command and escaped unhurt, though a shot through his cap grazed his head, and another, passing between his arm and body, cut the cloth in both places. He defended his post gallantly, and, although his men were falling, those who stood continued to fight across the ...[illegible]... behind which they had been driven by superior numbers, maintaining their ground until reinforcements arrived, yet in constant expectation of being overwhelmed.

Brigadier Miller, of the 3rd Brigade, assumed command on the hill after arriving with his troops, and continued exposed the whole afternoon to a most destructive fire, yet dreading to advance. At about 4 p.m., our battalion was ordered up, and we reached the summit at about 5 p.m. No sooner had our [men] of the light company got up than, from an almost spontaneous impulse, the three companies under ...[illegible]... rushed the enemy and drove them from the guns, which they attempted to save in their retreat, and accidentally blew up their magazine, by which eight of our men were dreadfully burned, some to death, others mangled. From this moment, however, the enemy gave way altogether and threw their guns down the hill, whence we recovered one the following morning.

(Extract from Journal ends here.)

¹⁴ Lieutenant William Kerr, 2nd Bn 12th Bengal NI; with 3rd Bde, Central Column.

¹⁵ Lieutenant Henry Raleigh Impey, 2nd Bn 25th Bengal NI; with 3rd Bde, Central Column. Mentioned in despatches, *London Gazette*, 12th August 1816.

Colonel Wild went on to see considerable field service, in the 3rd Mahratta War, including the battle of Nagpore on 16th December 1817, and in the latter stages of the 1st Afghanistan War. In January 1842, he commanded a brigade-strength column of all arms, including his own regiment, the 30th Bengal N.I., in an attempt to relieve the beleaguered garrison in Jellalabad. He came up against unexpectedly still resistance from Afridi tribesmen, who rose in unison against this invasion of their territory. Wild encountered them at the mouth of the Khyber Pass, and a severe engagement ensued.

Owing to the worthlessness of the Sikh guns, which broke down at the first discharge, and to the inadequacy of the force, the attempt to get through to Ali Masjid proved a complete failure. The troops were beaten back and obliged to retire to Jamrud with considerable loss, Brigadier Wild himself and three other officers being amongst the wounded.¹⁶

Wild's reverse had a fatal effect on any immediate plans for relieving Jellalabad. But there is enough evidence to prove that Wild did well under adverse circumstances, and he was not held personally accountable for this setback. Indeed, it is difficult to understand why a patently inadequate column was sent on a mission of such importance through the treacherous Khyber Pass.

It was not until the following April that a considerably larger force, under Major-General Pollock,¹⁷ was able to accomplish the task. Wild was given command of the 3rd Brigade during Pollock's advance through the Khyber Pass to Jellalabad and Kabul. During the difficult final retirement from Afghanistan, on the night of 3rd November 1842, the rearguard of his Brigade was rushed by a body of Afridis near Garhi Lala Beg and overwhelmed. It suffered fifty-one casualties and two mountain guns were lost, although they were recovered the next day. For his services in Afghanistan, Colonel Wild was appointed Companion of the Order of the Bath on 27th December 1842.

He proceeded on sick leave on 18th April 1843 and never returned to active service. He passed away at his home in Bern, Switzerland, on 1st April 1846.

¹⁶ Lieutenant F.G. Cardew, *Sketch of the Services of the Bengal Native Army to the Year 1895* (Calcutta 1903), p.185; also *London Gazette*, 7th June 1842 ('severely wounded'). His personal papers record that he was shot in the jaw, the musket-ball knocking out some of his teeth and ending up in his neck, from where it was extracted by a surgeon.

¹⁷ Major-General George Pollock C.B., Corps of Bengal Artillery

Camels of the Central India Horse, circa 1919

Sean Weir

The previous issue of *Durbar* described the traditional beast-of-burden role of the camel within a *silladar* transport corps in East Africa immediately before the start of the First World War.¹ In the immediately post-war photograph (below), the animals appear to have been prepared for parade, or possibly for ceremonial duty, wearing decorative tiers of bells around their necks and forelegs.²



They are ridden by a mixed group of Indian officers and N.C.O.'s of whom four, possibly five, are Sikhs and one, or possibly two, Punjabi Muslims. WW1 service stripes, the inverted chevrons on the lower right sleeve, are in evidence, as also is the 1914-15 Star. It is not unheard of to see the Star being worn alone, as it is here, with only the ribbons of the other members of the trio, British War and Victory Medal, alongside it, prior to the actual distribution of the latter two medals; and from this combination of Star and ribbons one might reasonably deduce that the date of the photograph is circa 1919.

During the Great War period, camels were employed in various roles by the Indian Army: camel batteries of the R.G.A., *shutur sowars* (camel drivers or riders) in cavalry regiments, and the numerous camel companies of the Supply and Transport Corps establishment. The latter in turn were generally of three

¹ *Durbar*, Vol.28, No.1, Spring 2011: 'They Also Serve - Camel Transport in E. Africa.'

² For more of the detail, see the cropped section of the photo on page 74.

types: Silladar, Grantee, and Government.³ A fourth type consisted of various corps within the State Forces including: Jaipur, Bharatpur, Kalat and Las Bela, Bhawalpur, Khairpur, among others.

Identification of the regiment in the photograph is open to conjecture. The shoulder chains (worn by all the riders in the photo) suggest a cavalry regiment, and a number of them, for operating in harsh and arid territory such the western frontiers of India, maintained camels on their strengths. Although the superimposed shoulder titles are almost illegible, it is tempting to interpret the clearest of them as the letters 'C.I.H.' representing the Central India Horse.



The Central India Horse started as a single regiment, Mayne's Horse, in 1858. It soon expanded to three regiments but, by mid-1861, had contracted to two. Originally nicknamed 'be number risala' or the regiment with no number, this omission was addressed in 1903 when the two components of the regiment became the 38th and 39th Central India Horse; to which was added the title 'Prince of Wales' Own' in 1906.

Early shoulder titles consisted solely of the three initials C.I.H., but these were subsequently embellished after 1906 by the Prince of Wales' plumes and motto *ICH DIEN*, reflecting the enhanced title. Incorporation of the plumes was somewhat haphazard. The old titles had the plumes added locally. Often these would break, especially on shoulder chains, as the plumes projected considerably. As a result, the plumes and the titles became separated. In many cases the scrolls bearing the motto were also done away with, being a weak part of the badge. Their absence in the photograph is therefore entirely plausible.⁴

In the 1921-22 reorganization, the two regiments received a special authorization of sixteen camels and *shutar sowars* each, compared to the eight allocated to other cavalry regiments.⁵ The combined regiments also underwent their final name change: 21st King George's Own Central India Horse.

³ *Durbar*, Vol.21, No.2, Summer 2004: 'The Grantee Camel Corps in World War I.' For a description of the earlier exploitation of camel transport, see *Durbar*, Vol.23, No.1, Spring 2006, 'Silladar & Grantee Camel Corps in the Indian Army.'

⁴ *Izzat, Historical Records and Iconography of Indian Cavalry regiments 1750-2007*, Captain Ashok Nath (New Delhi 2009). The title is illustrated on p.270 (ref: C1.43.15).

⁵ *The Indian Cavalry: History of the Indian Armoured Corps – Vol I*, Maj Gen Gurcham Singh Sandhu, PVSM (Vision Books, Delhi, 1981), p.403.



I am indebted to Rana Chhina, Tony McClenaghan, Sushil Talwar, Ashok Nath and the Editor for their help in compiling this brief and open-ended description of the camels and their riders. Further thoughts from the *Durbar* readership would be much welcomed.

Anatolian Incident: the 24th Punjabis at Ismid, 15th June 1920

Harry Fecitt, MBE, TD

Introduction

During the Great War the 24th Punjabis was first deployed to Egypt and fought in defence of the Suez Canal. In April 1915 the battalion landed at Basra in Mesopotamia and campaigned up the River Tigris to Ctesiphon before withdrawing and becoming besieged in Kut with the 6th Poona Division. General Charles Townsend surrendered Kut on 29th April 1916 and the entire battalion went into captivity in Turkey, where 159 of the Indian ranks died.

In September 1916, the 24th Punjabis was re-formed at the war-time depot at Hyderabad in Sind, India. In April 1917, the new battalion arrived in Mesopotamia. After operations against Arab raiders, the unit joined the 50th Brigade of the 15th Division and, on 26th March 1918, fought the Turks on the Euphrates River at Khan Baghdadi. Here the battalion lost Captain A.P. Algar, killed in action, and had thirty-nine men wounded.

The 24th Punjabis was then selected to serve in another theatre, and was shipped to Salonika, Greece, landing there on 24th October 1918. The battalion did not see action in Greece, as the Bulgarian enemy accepted an Armistice along with the other Central Powers. In January 1919, the 24th Punjabis joined the Allied Army of The Black Sea.

The Black Sea

The Army of The Black Sea was tasked with ensuring that Turkey complied with the terms of the armistice it had signed with the Allies, known as the Treaty of Sèvres. Terms of particular importance were the Turkish evacuation of territories outside Anatolia, such as the Caucasus region, as well as the demobilization and disarming of the Turkish Forces.

The 24th Punjabis was immediately deployed around Batum, an important port on the east coast of the Black Sea and a main access point to the Caucasus. Detachments occupied posts in villages, and on the main routes to Kars and Tiflis in Georgia. The most distant post was eighty miles from Batum. Due to an outbreak of mumps and the prevalence of malaria, many sepoy were ill, as a result of which the fit men in the battalion were almost constantly on duty.

In September 1919, the 24th Punjabis was re-deployed to Bostanjik in Anatolia, on the coast of the Sea of Marmora south of Constantinople (Istanbul). There, on 19th December 1919, Brevet-Colonel H.A.V. Cummings, D.S.O., returned to command the battalion after leave granted following his

release from captivity. He had been in command when the original 24th Punjabis surrendered at Kut.

Anatolia

In Anatolia a Turkish National Movement was developing under the leadership of the charismatic Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the Turkish front-line commander at Gallipoli. The Nationalists were extremely resentful of the Armistice of Mudros, signed on 30th October 1918, that had brought an end to hostilities between Turkey and the Allies. It not only heralded the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, but granted the Allies the right to occupy forts controlling the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, and any other Turkish territory in the event of an outbreak of disorder that threatened the integrity of the armistice. Nationalist supporters armed themselves and prepared to fight a war of independence. Attacks on Allied units began.

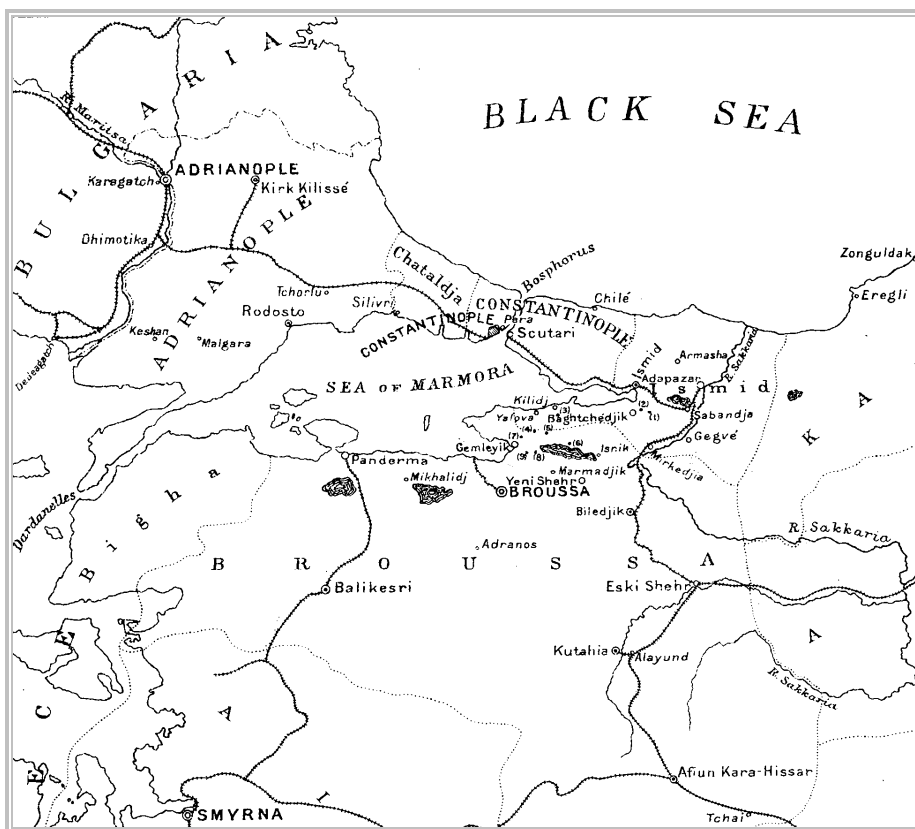
The Punjabis arrived at Bostanjik to find that the most distant post occupied by British troops was at Ismid, sixty miles away. Nationalist pressure had led to the withdrawal of two more-distant British posts. The battalion moved to Derinje on 19th May 1920 to relieve the 25th Punjabis. Derinje housed administrative details for the 242nd Brigade that was based eight miles to the east at Ismid. Brigadier-General Montague-Bates, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., commanded the brigade.

The 24th Punjabis was now employed on posts securing the rail link to Bostanjik. However, on 11th June, 'C' Company under Captain G.P. Troughton-Dean was deployed two miles north of Ismid to relieve a company of the 10th Jats holding a detached post known as Point 325.

The fight at Ismid

On Point 325, 'C' Company was accompanied by Lieut. C.D. Mattox, of the Royal Field Artillery, who was an Intelligence Officer, a Greek interpreter and a Sub-Assistant Surgeon of the Indian Medical Service. The company contained a number of new soldiers recently arrived in drafts from India. Initially, Subedar Suba Ram was the only Indian officer present, but on 13th June Subadar Kehr Singh joined the company with a convoy from Derinje.

At this time the Turkish Nationalist Army was advancing towards Ismid to confront its rival, the Constantinople or Anti-Nationalist Army. This latter force skirmished with the Nationalists near Point 325, and then lost heart and withdrew to Ismid from where the British speedily evacuated it to Constantinople, although the Punjabis observed that many anti-Nationalists deserted and stayed behind to join the Nationalists.



THE BOSPHORUS

On 14th June at 13.00 hrs, the Nationalist force advanced on Point 325 in regular extended lines, and a mounted officer, while proclaiming friendship towards the British, requested that his men be allowed to pass through the Point 325 defences. He was advised that the British General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) would not permit this, but that the Nationalist troops could pass at a distance of 600 yards from the perimeter. This information was received with surprise and annoyance by the Turkish officer, but he consented to the arrangement.

For a couple of hours, the Turks moved in small parties on either side of Point 325 towards Ismid. However, by 16.00 hrs, the British telephone line had been cut and a strong Turkish picquet established 200 yards from the

British perimeter, in a dominating position above the road to Ismid. The Turkish troops became openly hostile and abusive towards the sepoy. Lieutenant Mattox went out to ascertain the Turkish intentions, but he was threatened and temporarily detained. Again, a Turkish officer approached the post and demanded a British evacuation to avoid bloodshed, stating that his men were fanatical and could not be controlled. He advised that a message be sent to the British G.O.C. stating that the post would be attacked during the night if it was not evacuated. When this advice was rejected, the officer departed, stating that no-one would now be allowed to leave the post.

The British orders for Point 325 were that fire was not to be opened unless the Turks actually fired into or advanced upon the post. Neither of those events happened during the night, and the sepoy improved their trenches whilst Lance-Naik Devi Singh established satisfactory lamp communications with Ismid. At 04.00 hrs, heavy gunfire was heard from Ismid where the Nationalists were unsuccessfully fighting with the British garrison, and Nationalist casualty evacuation parties passed by the perimeter.

At dawn on 15th June, two Turkish heavy guns were observed on a hill about half-a-mile from the post and the G.O.C. was informed. A British aeroplane dropped a message into the post at 13.45 hrs, ordering that Point 325 was to be evacuated at 17.00 hrs that day, and that 'C' Company was to retire on Ismid.

Tents were struck and dumped in a hollow along with kits, stores, rations and bombs, and kerosene oil was poured on. At 16.45 hrs, the perimeter was evacuated and the dump fired to prevent looting. 'C' Company moved off in three parties. The advance guard was a Sikh platoon, commanded by Havildar Harnam Singh. Company Headquarters followed. Then came the main body of two Dogra platoons and the transport, commanded by Subedar Suba Ram. The remaining Sikh platoon, under Subedar Kehr Singh, initially stayed on Point 325, with its Lewis Guns ready to provide covering fire.

As the advance guard arrived below the Turkish picquet, the Turks ordered the Sikhs back to the post. Havildar Harman Singh responded by doubling his men forward down the road to Ismid. A Turkish whistle was now blown as a signal, and the Nationalists opened fire at close range, supported by several machine guns deployed in various locations along the road. The transport mules stampeded back to the post. The enemy then swarmed down onto the road and engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with the main body. Subadar Kehr Singh's Lewis gunners could not give effective support because of the confusion between friend and foe. Lieutenant Mattox and Company Havildar-Major Kesar Singh were both shot down at point-blank range, as was the Greek interpreter, the Sub-Assistant Surgeon and several sepoy. Further casualties

were only avoided by Subedar Suba Ram deploying his men into a deep watercourse.

Captain Troughton-Dean ordered the withdrawal to continue. Further up the road, the advance guard had become scattered. Of eight men who had taken up position on the road with a Lewis gun, four had been hit and the gun had jammed after firing two short bursts. Annihilation of the British detachment was avoided by the poor shooting of the Turks, and also by the surrounding broken ground which allowed 'C' Company to disperse into cover and to move to Ismid in small parties. Meanwhile, a British unit that had been ordered forward to support the company's withdrawal arrived late, and did not participate in the battle.

The Turks did not spare any of the wounded that they overran. The British casualty total represented 25% of the strength of the detachment at Point 325. The Turkish casualty figures were not known. When 'C' company concentrated again at Ismid, the casualty figures were found to be:

Killed in action: Lieutenant Mattox R.A., the Greek interpreter, the Sub-Assistant Surgeon, and eighteen sepoy.

Wounded in action: sixteen sepoy.

Re-deployment to the coast and then to India

On 29th June 1920, the British evacuated Derinje and the 24th Punjabis moved to Beikos, on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. Here, on 5th July, a battalion working party was sniped at, due to Italian armed police who defended the town allowing Nationalist troops to enter. Jemadar Zafar Husain,¹ a direct commissioned officer only recently arrived from India, and one sepoy were killed, whilst five other sepoy were wounded. Two days later another sepoy was wounded.

Turk Nationalists were murdering local Christian villagers at Arnaut Keui and the battalion operated with the Greek Archipelago Regiment in an attempt to surprise and capture Nationalists. Then the Punjabis moved to Shileh on the Black Sea coast. From there patrols reconnoitered villages in the interior. At the end of September, orders were received for the 24th Punjabis to return to India and the battalion disembarked at Karachi on 21st October 1920. After being transported to the old Depot at Montgomery, all Indian ranks were granted two months' leave.

¹ The jemadar is named 'Zafar Husain' in the Indian Army List and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission register, and 'Muzaffar Hussain' in the unit history.

Gallantry awards for the Ismid action and Meritorious Service awards for service with the Army of the Black Sea:

Military Cross

Captain Geoffrey Percival Troughton-Dean, 24th Punjabis, Indian Army

‘For gallantry and skilful leadership near Ismid, on 15th June, 1920. It was entirely due to his boldness and coolness under heavy fire at short range that his company succeeded in reaching Ismid.’

Indian Order of Merit – 2nd Class

1289 Naik Bhag Singh

‘For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on 15th June 1920. Although severely wounded, he continued to lead his section and direct his Lewis guns under heavy machine-gun fire. He set a splendid example to his men.’

699 Lance-Naik Kehr Singh

‘For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on 15th June 1920. Although severely wounded, he continued to fire his Lewis gun under heavy machine-gun fire from three directions. He was afterwards carried back, but retained his Lewis gun which he brought into action in another position.’

Indian Distinguished Service Medal

Subadar Suba Ram

Indian Meritorious Service Medal

792 Company Quartermaster-Havildar Udham

1034 Havildar Bostan Khan (Batan Khan in unit history)

345 Havildar Janta Singh

Commemorations

Lieut. Charles Douglas Mattox, R.F.A., is interred in Haidar Pasha Cemetery, Turkey. Jemadar Zafar Husain, Havildar-Major Kesar Singh and nineteen sepoy, all of the 24th Punjabis, are commemorated on the Tehran Memorial, Iran. The identity of the Sub-Assistant Surgeon has yet to be established.

Sources

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The Malabar Campaign of 1921-1922 also known as the Moplah Rebellion

Part I

Chris Kempton

Background

Early in 1919 India was to undergo political upheaval which, in one form or another, would last for the next twenty-eight years. The Rowlatt Acts, which came into effect in early 1919, introduced severe anti-terrorist laws and, as well as outraging Indian feelings, brought to the forefront of national politics a previously relatively minor player, Mohandas Gandhi.

Gandhi had practised civil disobedience in South Africa and he now introduced his campaign of *satyagraha*, popularly, though not entirely accurately, called passive resistance. Both Hindus and Muslims agreed to take part in the first action or *hartal*, which was to be held in Delhi on 30th March. Unfortunately the 'passive' part of the campaign was not understood, or ignored, and the highly volatile crowds, not complying with Gandhi's rather naive idealism, started serious rioting, attacking both European property and civilians, before being fired on by both police and army. The same events took place during the subsequent *hartals*, held over the next two weeks, with violent outbreaks in the Punjab, Ahmedabad and again in Delhi. The situation became even worse after Gandhi was arrested on 10th April.

The Punjab was particularly badly affected, with severe rioting taking place in Amritsar, Multan, Jullundur, Lahore and Kasur between 10th and 12th April. The Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, considered these outbreaks to be the precursor to a full insurrection which would involve the Indian Army and, with the spectre of 1857 always in the background, felt that the severest measures had to be taken to contain the situation and prevent its spread throughout India. In this assessment he was wholeheartedly supported by the vast majority of Europeans, not least of whom was Brigadier-General Dyer, then commanding the 45th Infantry Brigade at Jullundur. On 11th April O'Dwyer ordered Dyer to move his brigade to Amritsar, where the riots of the previous day had developed into full scale attacks on Europeans, and the situation was getting out of hand.

On 13th April, after ordering a curfew and banning processions or meetings, Dyer carried out the notorious massacre at the Jallianwalla Bagh, his force of fifty Gurkha and Baluch troops firing 1,650 rounds in ten minutes of directed fire, causing 379 fatalities and 1,500 wounded amongst a crowd of some fifteen to twenty thousand who were effectively trapped in an enclosed

area of open ground. The result of this action, coupled with the declaration of martial law, the use of aircraft to bomb and strafe rioters at Gujranwala, and the use of humiliating punishments at Amritsar inflicted arbitrarily on the innocent and guilty alike, created a high level of sustained ill-feeling throughout India.

On 4th May, the 3rd Afghanistan War started. Although short-lived, a truce being declared at the beginning of June, it encouraged tribal uprisings, particularly in Waziristan, which continued intermittently for the next five years. This created considerable discontent amongst British troops whose return to England and demobilisation was delayed. There were incidents involving British units at Peshawar, Sialkot and Poona. Despite accelerated demobilisation, unrest continued into 1920 culminating in July with a mutiny in H.M.'s Connaught Rangers instigated by Irish Nationalist supporters.

Though Gandhi, horrified at the results of his campaign, had called off the strikes, on 18th April they were reinstated in the form of a non-cooperative movement, and continued throughout 1920 and 1921 with the added refinement of the recruitment of peasants into specific organisations, the setting up of which heavily involved Jawaharal Nehru, another figure who was to become a major player in the Independence Movement.

In February 1921, the visit of the Duke of Connaught to Calcutta had been largely boycotted by Indians, and there were riots in Bombay at the end of November 1921 during the *hartal* to mark the arrival of the Prince of Wales.

Adding impetus to Government paranoia, there were serious concerns over the ever present and part-imaginary, but certainly part-real, fears of Russian subversion. Russian agents had been active on the Persian frontier from 1918, and in 1920 a flood of Communist and Moslem-inspired anti-British propaganda was filtering into India from Tashkent.

Given all these factors, it is not entirely surprising that the uprising in Malabar was given little publicity, and the ensuing campaign was played down, exemplified by the Government initially refusing to consider the award of a campaign medal.

Malabar and the Moplahs

What was known as Malabar in 1921 now consists of the districts of Malappuram and Pallakkad in North Kerala, on the coastal strip west of the Ghats. Calicut has since been renamed Kozhikode, but the other place names mentioned in the campaign remain largely unchanged.

The area was then, and still is, prosperous, with Calicut being an important centre for timber and boat building. The climate can be oppressive with a heavy monsoon starting in June and another in November but temperatures are

moderated by the proximity to the sea. There are several lakes and the highly fertile lowlands support coconut groves, rice fields and spice plantations. Moving inland, the country becomes progressively more hilly. In 1921 there were large areas of dense jungle, many of virtually impenetrable bamboo. Roads were good but rail access was very limited, and the general geography was not conducive to military operations.

A particular feature of the area, which had a significant effect on the campaign, was the fact that houses, rather than being together in streets, were built as individual units each with its own separate, substantial, compound. Thus a village would cover a wide area and contain many isolated buildings. This trend was particularly applicable to the coastal strip, while villages became more compact towards the hills on account of the constraints of the jungle. This dispersion and separation of neighbours made intelligence-gathering difficult, and made it much easier for the rebels to coerce and murder Hindus or those Moplahs who did not join the uprising.

It should be mentioned that virtually all Hindus and a substantial number of Moplahs declined to join the uprising which took place largely in the southern Ernad sub-district.

The Moplahs, or Mappillas,¹ were descended from Arab traders who arrived on the Malabar coast from the ninth century, and from subsequent conversions of the local population. The Arabs were initially welcomed by the Hindu Rajahs as useful traders, but their influence deteriorated after the arrival of the Portuguese followed by the French, Dutch and English, and the Moplahs were unable to compete on level terms with the Europeans.

The Moplah move towards Moslem fanaticism started from the middle of the 16th century and then escalated, resulting in some murders of Hindus in 1756 and 1764. It was, however, the invasion of Malabar by Hyder Ali in 1766 and again in 1773, followed by Tipu in 1783, that set up the Moplahs in Ernad as a law unto themselves. In 1790, Tipu was defeated by the English at Tirurangadi and Feroke, and the English took control of the whole of Malabar. In the north the population, including the Moplahs, settled under English rule, and with the exception of one incident in 1852 remained peaceful. In the south, however, the predominantly Moplah population became a separate entity and fanaticism flourished. Numerous attacks on Hindus took place from 1836 to 1852, and in an incident in 1849 a small group attacked a company of Madras Native Infantry and routed the troops, killing the English officer and four of his

¹ Mappilla is used throughout Hitchcock and also in Capt. MacEnroy's report (below). Official references use Moplah.

men. In 1855 the District Magistrate was murdered and there was more trouble in 1884, 1894 and 1896, all involving the need to send troops from Bangalore.

In 1915, wild rumours of German landings in Bombay roused the Moplahs to further violence and an attempt was made to assassinate the Collector, followed by the murder of Hindus in 1919.

Some attempt had been made to assimilate the Moplahs into the Indian Army by the reorganisation of the 17th and 25th Madras Native Infantry as 1st and 2nd Moplah Rifles in 1902. Renumbered 77th and 78th in the following year, the experiment was not a success and both regiments were disbanded in 1909. It is unlikely, in any case, that the Ernad Moplahs would have enlisted.

The political agitation led by Gandhi and Shaukat Ali had a major effect on the situation in Malabar, and a visit by the two men in August 1920 inflamed the situation, particularly as Shaukat Ali was advising Moslems that they should become openly aggressive. Nehru's involvement in the creation of a local peasant organisation was a strong motivation for trouble, and itinerant preachers were active in the area. The ensuing general unrest and political instability caused the initial eruption of violence on 31st July at Pukkottur.

Campaign chronology

- 31 Jul Riot at Pukkottur.
- 3 Aug Unrest at Tanalur. Attacks by Moplahs on Tiyars.
- 11 Aug Increase in force approved.
- 20 Aug Tirurangadi Raid (see Captain McEnroy's report below).
- 21 Aug Withdrawal to Calicut. On this date G.O.C Madras District made the following appreciation of the situation to the Government:
 - '[1] That the strength of the detachment now at the disposal of the Collector is sufficient to support the police in the arrests and search for arms already authorised, and any other raids that may be planned within easy reach of the railway.
 - '[2] That anything in the way of operations on a larger scale and out of touch with the railway would be very difficult in the present state of the country and weather, and would necessitate the sending down of more troops and transport. Such action must take the form of deliberate operations and should, if possible, be postponed till after the monsoon.
 - '[3] That any troops employed should be British. Southern Indian troops, even if available, would be of little use for this kind of work. Any further British troops would have to be sent from Bangalore. The first trainload might be expected to reach Calicut twenty-seven hours after receipt of orders to move.
 - '[4] That if the worst happens (i.e. if the measures now being carried out fail, or if the police or troops suffer a serious reverse, or if the Mapillas become aggressive in large bodies and indulge in wholesale murder and robbery) then

- one or two moveable columns must be sent from Bangalore at once under a senior officer and take such drastic action as circumstances and the conditions of country and weather permit.'
- 25 Aug H.M.S Comus arrived off Calicut. It remained for five days and a landing party marched through the town on the 26th. The advance to Pukkottur commenced.
- 26 Aug After overnighting at Kondotti, the force advanced at 06.00 hrs [for the hard action en route, see Captain McEnroy's report below]. The force reached Malappuram at 17.00 hrs. Casualties were three killed, including the Asst Supt of Police Malappuram, and twelve wounded, including four police officers. Martial Law was declared throughout the area effective from 19th August.
- 27 Aug The force remained at Malappuram.
- 28 Aug Lt-Colonel Radcliffe arrived at Malappuram from Bangalore with 1 Sqn Queen's Bays, followed by a column of 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment. A second column was despatched to Tirur. At this stage the situation was one of general dacoity with looting of police stations and the main thrust of the rebellion being clearly against the Government. The HQ was at Tirur, and the remainder of the force was located at: Shoranur - one sqn Queen's Bays; Malappuram - 2nd Dorsets (less one-and-a half coys); Tirur - one-and-a-half coys 2nd Dorsets and 64th Pioneers with one pltn Sappers and Miners; Calicut - one coy Leinsters, and two pltns 83rd Wallajahabad Light Infantry; two pltns Leinsters at Gudalur [to the north in Nilgiri-Wynaad].
- 29 Aug A column commanded by Lt-Colonel Ratcliffe left Malappuram for Tirurangadi, with a second column leaving for Tirur.
- 30 Aug The Tirurangadi column arrived to find the town almost deserted with a force of rebels inside the mosque which was surrounded by the Dorsets. At 09.00 hrs the rebels opened fire and a group of twenty tried to break out all of whom were killed, but not before they had inflicted casualties of one killed and six wounded, two of whom subsequently died. The remaining thirty-six rebels surrendered shortly after, under a white flag, and a further six were found dead in the mosque. This action would normally have been sufficient to restore order, however in this case it had the opposite effect and the violence escalated, including the murder of two police officers.
- 2 Sep A Dorset column commanded by Major (Brevet Lt-Colonel) G.M. Herbert, D.S.O, started a tour of the Ernad sub-district, which repaired bridges and opened roads and returned to base on the 6th, having met little opposition
- 9 Sep Another Dorset column set out to suppress trouble at Manjeri, then split into two, one group moving to Wandur, and the other to Pandikkad. This tour lasted twenty days, returning to Malappuram on the 29th, but achieved small success - killing some rebels on the 18th but losing one BOR killed during an ambushed river crossing on the 23rd. During the Sep-Oct period the Dorsets carried out a number of patrols throughout all the sub-areas, with varying levels of success.
- 13 Sep 1st Bn The Suffolk Regiment arrived at Tirur
- 16 Sep One coy 83rd Wallajahabad Light Infantry and part of the 64th Pioneers moved to Malappuram. Major Herbert started out with a column for Nilambur and, after some diversions to deal with trouble en route, arrived just short of the

town on the 24th, when the column was ambushed by a strong force of rebels who, on this occasion, put up a heavy and sustained resistance, causing casualties of one killed and seven wounded, before being dispersed with severe losses. It was during this action that four O.B.E's [later EGM's/George Crosses] were awarded (see list of awards below).

- 1 Oct A convoy en route from Nilambur to Malappuram was ambushed with one officer and one OR killed, and Major Herbert and one OR wounded.
- 7 Oct A Dorset patrol was attacked at Vadapuram.
- 13 Oct Another patrol killed fourteen rebels on the Melattur road. The rebels carried out an abortive raid on the Manjeri hospital. Further reinforcements arrived as follows: 3rd Bn 70th (Kachin) Rifles; one Wireless section.; one Armoured Car coy; section 'F' Coy 2nd Sappers & Miners; half 20th Draught Mule Corps; one section Ford Van Coy.
- 14 Oct The Force HQ moved to Malappuram.
- 16 Oct 2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles arrived at Tirur.
- 17 Oct All units were on patrols. 3rd Bn 70th (Kachin) Rifles made arrests and shot a number of rebels in Wandur and Nilambur. On 27th October this Battalion
- 11 Nov killed twenty-six rebels who, after attacking a platoon of the 3rd-70th Rifles, had occupied a mosque at Obayil and refused to surrender. On 20th October the 2nd-8th Gurkha Rifles were involved in a sharp action against a group of rebels who were prepared to stand and opened fire from a hill position. After the Gurkhas had surrounded the hill a fierce hand-to-hand fight took place, resulting in three wounded Gurkhas but around fifty rebels killed. The majority of the operations carried out during this period were by the Malabar Special Police, and rebel action in virtually all cases consisted of guerrilla-type sniping and ambushes. The 1st Bn 39th Royal Garhwal Rifles and 2nd Bn 9th Gurkha Rifles arrived in early November and, with these reinforcements and before the Dorsets left for Egypt, it was decided to carry out a full scale drive throughout the area
- 11 Nov The drive started on the 11th, using small parties, and on the 12th November,
- to 2nd Bn 8th Gurkhas were involved in action against a party of rebels holding
- 26 Nov out in a mosque and refusing to surrender, similar to the action on 27th October. The Gurkhas had one killed and fourteen wounded but killed fifty-nine rebels. A company of this battalion was attacked at Pandikkad on 14th November and was involved in fierce hand-to-hand fighting, with one British officer killed and thirty-seven Gurkhas wounded. The second phase started on the 14th, and apart from two small incidents no opposition was encountered. A third phase was equally unsuccessful and the drive was abandoned on 26th November, after the 3rd-70th Rifles had accounted for seventeen rebels on the 24th and it was realised that the bulk of them had retreated into the dense jungle of the foothills.
- 27th After the 'drive,' sectors were allocated as follows:
- onward Mararghat and Angadipuram – 2/9th Gurkhas from 83rd Wallajahabad Light Infantry from the beginning of December to 15th January 1922;
Melattur & Pandikkad - 2/8th Gurkhas to 8th January 1922 then two platoons

2/9th Gurkhas to 6th February (the latter took over at Pandikkat from 16th January);

Nilambur - 3/70 (Kachin) Rifles to end January 1922;

Malappuram & Manjeri - 2nd Bn Suffolk Regiment to 4th January 1922;

Calicut - 1/39th Royal Garhwal Rifles to 20th May 1922.

.Martial Law was ended on 25th February 1922, and Major D.R. Mainwaring, D.S.O., commanding 1/39th Royal Garhwal Rifles, was appointed O.-C. Troops, Malabar. By August 1922, full normal conditions had been restored.

Report by Captain P McEnroy. D.S.O., M.C., 1st Bn The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians), commanding at Calicut.²

The elaborate reports on the outbreak of the Mapilla Rebellion in the London papers gave one cause to wonder how the press was so conversant with the place. But it must have been an Anglo-Indian wag who gave a photograph of a Hindu to a well known illustrated paper which duly appeared in the columns as a typical Mapilla!

The outbreak was no surprise. It was only the magnitude of it that surprised the Civil and Military authorities. The non-cooperation propaganda found a very fertile soil in the ignorant minds of the Mapillas who inhabit the interior of South Malabar.

In the hot weather of 1920 the garrison of Calicut had been taken over by Captain McEnroy (myself) with two platoons of 'C' Company, 1st Leinster Regiment. The garrison was now strengthened by the remaining two platoons of 'C' and two platoons of 'B' Company, and we were thus ready to meet any emergency.

About the middle of July 1921, the Civil authorities informed me that the Mapillas were arming with firearms and swords. At this time, a lot of the Civil authorities were anything but happy. They were flouted at every turn and it became conclusive that the Mapillas believed the British Raj about to close.

Matters became so bad that the District Magistrate (Mr E.F Thomas I.C.S.), decided to arrest some of the ringleaders and I was ordered to assist him. Tirurangadi was one of the storm centres and, being only about five miles from the railway line, lent itself to a surprise raid.

Orders were issued, and 150 police and 100 men of 'C' Company 1st Leinster Regiment managed to surprise the inhabitants of Tirurangadi at dawn on August 20th. As the troops were not to take part in any of the arrests unless organised opposition was encountered, we proceeded to the Sub-Magistrates Court and awaited results.

At about 10 a.m. the District Superintendent of Police (Mr Hitchcock) and police returned, having met with only slight opposition to the arrests. But unfortunately the ringleader, Ali Musaliar, had managed to evade capture.³

Our baggage had not yet arrived from the station as we had to rely on local transport to supply our requirements as, in the interests of secrecy, it had not been ordered to await us on arrival.

² Appendix II to Hitchcock. Reproduced here verbatim.

³ Musaliar was eventually captured, tried and hanged (as related in Pt II of this article).

However, our baggage began to arrive about 11 a.m., and an effort was being made to get breakfast when news was received that some thousands of Mapillas from other villages, armed in divers ways, were approaching the town. This was confirmed by a staff officer (Captain B.P Evans, M.C., R.F.A.), who was down from Madras District Headquarters to get in touch with affairs locally, and was on his way to return there when he met the mob. He wisely decided to return and inform us.

The police immediately set out to prevent them coming into the town. It was considered advisable for the troops to follow them so as to be handy if required. I left one platoon under 2nd Lieutenant W.R.M Johnstone, Indian Army, attached 1st Leinster Regiment, to guard the courthouse in our absence. In addition there were some police under an Assistant Superintendent of Police (Mr Rowley).

The police moved rapidly to meet the mob, and had actually come into collision and opened fire before we arrived on the scene. On our arrival, the mob appeared to be still defiant but were eventually driven back by the police, the troops not taking any part other than protective measures of formations in rear of the police.

When it appeared that the mob were dispersing in the direction from which it had come, we returned to the courthouse where we found the platoon left to guard it busily defending it from an attack by the inhabitants of Tirurangadi. Our arrival immediately caused the attackers to disperse.

It appears that the police had a post on the roadway watching Tirurangadi in our absence, and shortly before our return a message was received from them stating that they wanted reinforcements as the mob was seen to be collecting some distance off.

Mr Rowley went out to investigate matters himself and was followed later by 2nd Lieutenant Johnstone with a few men. These men state that, on arrival at the police post, they were immediately attacked by the mob, who had managed to outflank the post, and that they only extricated themselves by fighting their way out with the bayonet. In a *mêlée* like this, it was a case of every man for himself. On learning that Lieutenant Johnstone and Mr Rowley were missing, a search party was sent out. It was raining furiously – a real Malabar monsoon- when we discovered their dead bodies lying side by side on the roadway. It is doubtful if anyone who witnessed the ghastly sight will ever forget it. The pallor of the faces of these two young officers contrasted strangely with the bloodstained roadway. It instantly made every man realise the fate that awaited him, should he be so unfortunate as these two young officers, both splendid types of British youth. We brought their bodies back to the courthouse where we remained for the night.

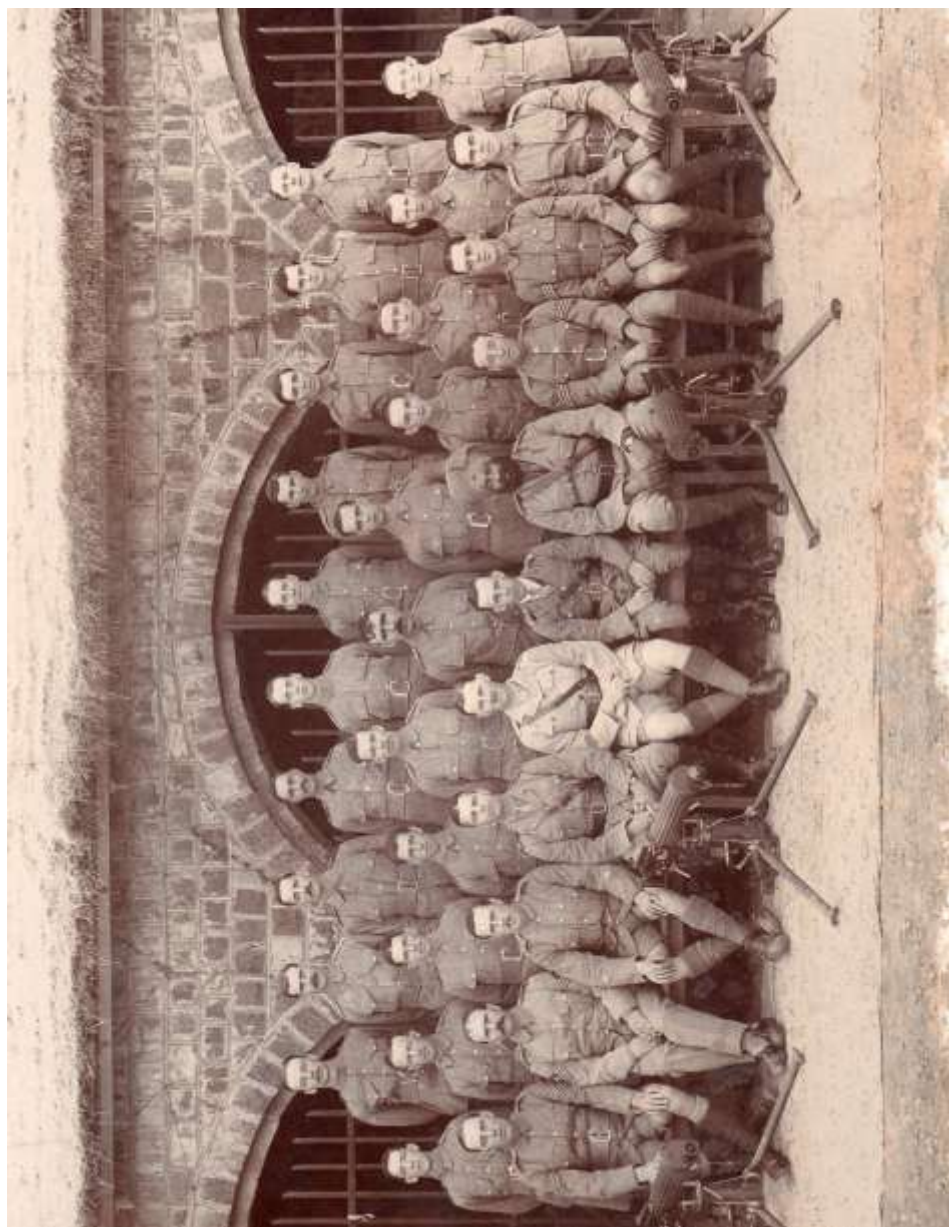
A rather alarming but also amusing incident occurred during the early hours of the following morning. Everyone slept at their posts, which were on the verandah [sic] of the court, the troops occupying the north and the police the south verandahs [sic] of the square which forms the interior of the court. Just before dawn the Non-Commissioned Officer, in his usual trench style, called out ‘stand to.’ The effect was an immediate stampede on the part of the attached civilians, who rushed to get out from the inner square, while those outside wondered what was happening. Some of us were knocked over and trampled on. What a fortunate thing that the wearing of hobnailed boots is not a custom in Malabar!

During the night alarming reports kept coming in of the spread of the rebellion. Railways were torn up and the column was now cut off from all communication with the outside world. I decided to go back as quickly as possible to Calicut. We buried Lieutenant Johnstone and Mr Rowley in the courthouse compound - where they rest as they fell, side by side - and shortly afterwards set out on our return journey.

Nothing of note happened until we reached the railway station which we found burnt and the railway torn up. I decided to move back by the railway line, as the ferries on the route by road were in Mapilla hands and would be destroyed or on the wrong side of the river. The column had just started down the railway line when it was immediately attacked from all sides. This was beaten off and the column moved slowly along with its baggage, the prisoners and attached civilians carrying what could be carried of our baggage, but it was not for several hours that the rebels ceased their attacks. During the latter part of the journey, I received information that a mob ahead of us was destroying one of the bridges which we would have to cross. I immediately despatched Lieutenant McGonigal and one platoon to move as fast as they could and deal with them. This they did at the double and succeeded in dealing with the mob before they had done much damage. The term 'bridge' conveys an entirely erroneous impression of what these structures are like. There is nothing between a foot slip and a dip in the dirty waters 30 feet below except the sleepers and rails. I confess to a nasty inner feeling while crossing them until it was shamed out of me by the sight of C.Q.M.S Kells carrying a man across on his back. Another equally meritorious performance was that of Private Worgan and Private Maloney who carried a machine gun all the journey (12 miles) without help. We eventually reached Calicut, in my opinion just in time to prevent the place joining in the general disorder. It is evident that the shrewd Mapilla businessmen of Calicut exerted all their influence to prevent the unruly element joining the trouble. Loyalty may not have been their only motive in so doing. In our absence, owing to the alarming reports that reached Calicut of the column, all the Europeans of the district were collected and brought into barracks where Lieutenant Howes M.M. had the unenviable task of trying to make everyone comfortable. It is doubtful if the Europeans can look back upon their quarters as the acme of comfort, but we had a scheme prepared and it worked very well. Unfortunately the mess caterer got lost at Tirurangadi looking for me, and this part of the arrangements suffered as a result.

Two others got lost – Privates Mulvaney and Horgan. They had been left to guard some baggage remaining at the station and were sent on to Tirur where they and ten police were captured by the rebels, who for some unknown reason spared their lives. They were put in prison but eventually escaped and were picked up by the covering party sent out to repair the line. The only complaint of the treatment they received was the remark of Private Mulvaney: 'Sure, Sir, the curry was so hot that we had to put sugar on it to make it cool' – a remark anyone who has sampled a native curry can well believe.

The concluding 'Part II' will include the balance of Capt. McEnrou's report, as well as details of command and staff, the order of battle, awards and medals granted for the campaign, and sources and acknowledgments.



Unidentified Machine Gun Group in India, circa 1919

A definite identification and date of assembly of the officers and other ranks depicted in the photo (opposite) has so far not been possible, but the possibilities can be narrowed down from a study of their uniforms and badges.

There is a noticeable absence of medal ribbons. Only the W.O.2., seated third from left, and the sergeant, seated second from right, are wearing them – and in both cases it is the watered ribbon of the 1914 Star, authorised in November 1917. All recipients of this star, without exception, were ultimately entitled to the British War Medal and Allied Victory Medal – authorised during 1919. So the absence of the ribbons of this latter pair of medals suggests that the photograph was taken, give or take a few months, in 1918 or 1919.

That the watered ribbons might represent the 1914-15 Star has been discounted. As it was a relatively widely issued award (unlike the 1914 Star), several of the longer-serving men might be expected to be seen wearing it. Furthermore, the 1914-15 Star was authorised at about the same time as the War and Victory medals, and the ribbons of this ‘trio’ of awards would have been worn *ensemble*. They are noticeably absent from this photo.

Another yardstick for dating the picture is the presence of WW1 service stripes. These are the small inverted chevrons on the lower right sleeve - dark red for 1914 (often indicative of pre-war regulars) and, worn above this, a blue chevron for each subsequent year. The sergeant with the 1914 Star ribbon can be seen with one chevron for 1914 and one each for 1915, 1916 and 1917. The lance-corporal seated next to him has five chevrons, presumably including 1918 as well. The absence of a medal ribbon on his tunic may indicate that he was not in France or Flanders during the qualifying period for the 1914 Star. The wearing of service chevrons was discontinued shortly after the war ended.

The identification of the unit is not an easy matter. There are too many men for a Section and too few for a Company or Squadron. Furthermore, the thirty-one officers and other ranks are not in the right proportions to be representative of a Company or Squadron of any sort, with three British officers (a captain or lieutenant and two 2nd-lieutenants), an Indian officer, a W.O.2, three sergeants, a corporal, a lance-corporal, and twenty-one privates. It is top-heavy in sergeants and above, and there are too few corporals and lance-corporals.

It seems that the three men in the centre of the middle row are giants, or otherwise that the men on either side of them are from Bantam battalions! Apart from the remarkable stature of the three privates, the variety in the colour of tunic cloth suggests that more than one regiment or corps is represented in the photograph. In particular, each of the three British officers wears a different shade of khaki, and only one wears collar badges.

The collar badges worn by the jemadar are intriguing, partly because collar badges were rarely worn by Indian officers, and partly because they represent the Machine Gun Corps (MGC). The MGC did not have any Indian officers on its establishment, and the Machine Gun Corps History Project confirms that the jemadar could not possibly have been on the Corps establishment.

The only other regimental/corps badges that are distinguishable to any reasonable degree are those worn by the British officers. Unfortunately the P.O.W. feathers are unhelpful, insofar as they were used by a number of infantry regiments. Some of the privates have brass shoulder titles, but the letters and/or numbers are, alas, illegible even under a strong glass.



The MGC badge consisted of crossed machine guns with a crown in the upper angle. The first badge of Indian manufacture, *vide* Indian Army Order No 117 of 1919, accorded with this pattern and was produced in gilding metal. According to the availability of the badge in India, and the date of disbandment of the MGC, the photo could have been taken at any time between 1919 and 1922. The earlier part of this period is the most likely, taking account

of the dearth of medal ribbons in the photo, as elucidated above.

A possibly significant clue to the identity of the assembled group is the qualification badge of a Machine Gun Instructor (the letters 'MG' within a wreath), worn above his rank chevrons by the sergeant seated third from right, particularly as he is the only non-commissioned officer wearing this badge. It may point to the group being a local (maybe a brigade or garrison) cadre for training extra MG 'gun numbers' and reserves, quite possibly at the time when preparations were being made for the punitive operations in Waziristan that commenced in October 1919.

The presence of the Indian officer, the only man wearing an MGC badge, remains an enigma. Could he have been a member of the permanent MGC instructional staff posted from the Training Centre at Mhow to assist with decentralized training? And even if he were so, is he then entitled to wear the MGC badge? The Editor would appreciate hearing from members of the Society who might be able to throw some light on the role and identity of this jemadar.

Acknowledgements

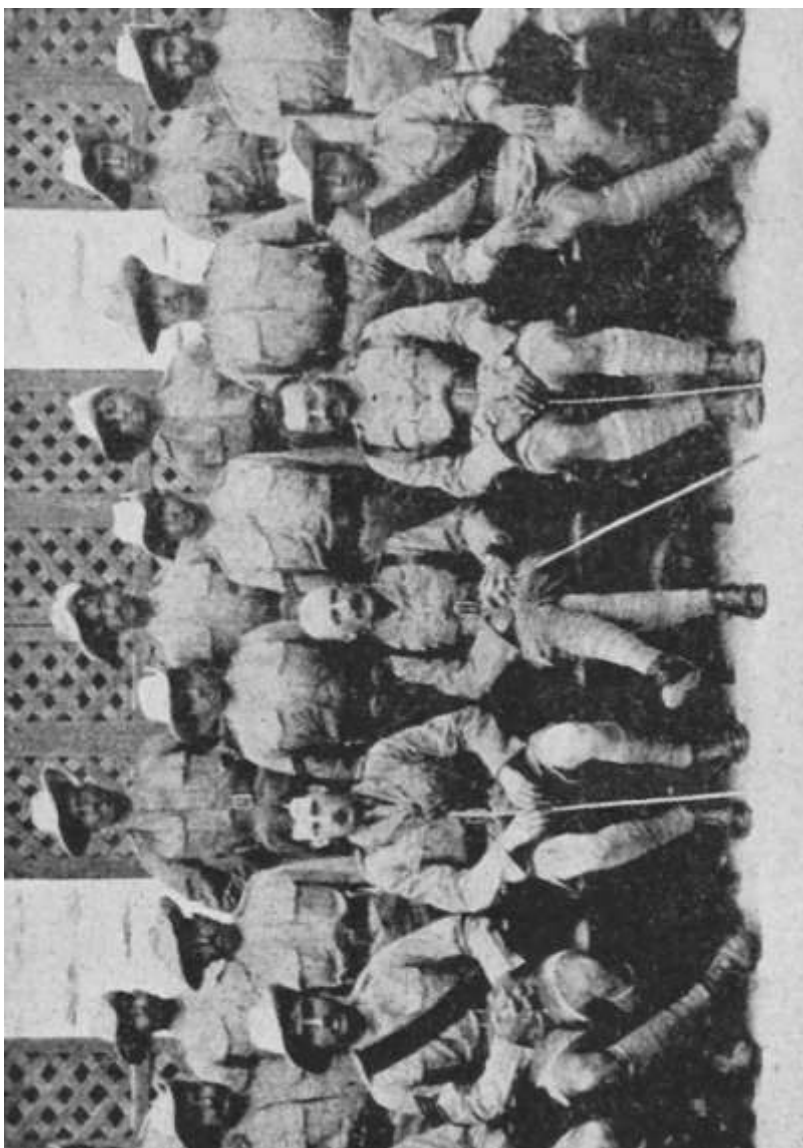
The Editor thanks David Harding, Rana Chhina, Sean Weir, Sushil Talwar and Tom Donovan for putting their heads together and enabling him to compile the above commentary. He also thanks Alan Simcock and colleagues of the MGC History Project for their valuable advice.

49th Bengalis - the Only Bengali Regiment of the Colonial Army

Lieutenant-Colonel Muhammad Lutful Haq (Retd), Bangladesh Army

Bengalis were treated as a non-martial race during the British Raj, and were not taken into the army until the early twentieth century. At the outbreak of the Great War, there was almost no presence of Bengalis in the Indian Army. WW1 broke out in Europe on 28th July 1914, and England joined the war on the 4th August 1914. England had need of more combatant and noncombatant soldiers, in addition of her standing army, and she started recruiting soldiers from her colonies, including India. This brought an opportunity for Bengalis to be enrolled in the army. They were first given a chance to serve as noncombatant soldiers on the battlefield as part of the medical services. The medical contingent of Bengalis was named the Bengal Ambulance Corps (BAC). It served in Mesopotamia from June 1915 to September 1916, and earned itself a good name on the field of battle. Good deeds of BAC personnel and long persuasion by Bengali community leaders influenced Government to decide upon raising a Bengali class regiment. On the 7th August 1916, Government announced the raising of an infantry regiment of Bengalis. First step in this process was the formation of the so-called Bengali Double Company (BDC), popularly known as the *Bangali Polton* (Bengali Regiment). The 'double company' was an infantry unit that was in essence the fusion of two normal companies under one double-company commander. It was found only in the Indian Army during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There were four double companies in a full-strength infantry regiment. The establishment of the BDC was: two British officers, six Indian officers, 218 combatant ranks, and a small complement of non-combatants or followers.

A civilian committee named the Bengali Regiment Committee (BRC) was formed at 46, Bedon Street, Kolkata (Calcutta) to raise funds, and to motivate and create awareness amongst the Bengali youth to join the army. *Maharajadhiraj* Bijoy Chad Mahtab of Bhardhaman, Surendra Nath Benarjee, Nawab Nowab Ali, Sreemoti Sorola Devi, Dr. S.P. Sharvadhikari, A.K. Fazlul Haq, Dr. S.K. Mullick and many other landlords and elites joined the BRC. This committee also assisted government by recruiting soldiers from Kolkata and different remote areas, sending them to the appropriate army authority for final selection. *Maharajadhiraj* Bijoy Chad Mahtab and Dr. S.K. Mullick were made President and Secretary of the committee. The BRC had several branches at district/mofussil areas, with local Rajas, Nawabs, landlords and elites participating. The BRC also arranged financial and other incentives for the Bengali soldiers and their families to attract them to soldiering.



49TH BENGALIS — OFFICERS AND NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AT NOWSHERA.

The seated Indian officer is probably Jemedar (later Subedar-Major) S.N. Basu, IDSM.

Lieutenant-Colonel Tanner¹ and Captain Tate² of 127th Baluch Regiment were appointed recruiting officers for the BDC, while Mr. R. Clarke, Commissioner of Police, was deputed by the Government of Bengal to assist the recruiting team. Recruitment started on the 30th August 1916 at Kolkata, and continued till November 1916. On 12th September, the first batch of ten recruits started from Kolkata for Nowshera cantonment for training. The task of training the recruits was allotted to the 46th Punjabis. Lieutenant S.G. Taylor, I.A.R.O.,³ was posted to the BDC as officer commanding, and Jemadar S.N. Basu [Bose],⁴ I.D.S.M., as the senior Indian officer.⁵ Recruitment was completed on 26th November 1916 when the required strength of the Company was achieved. Most of the soldiers of the BDC came from noble and well-to-do families. After completion of the first phase of training, the BDC left for Karachi at the end of December. Next step was to be a second phase of training, prior to eventual deployment in the field.

During its stay in Karachi, training of the BDC became the responsibility, successively, of 16th Rajputs, the 106th Hazara Pioneers, and the 116th Marahattas. In March 1917, Government decided to upgrade the BDC to a regular infantry regiment. It was officially formed at Karachi, on the 1st July 1917,⁶ as the '49th Bengalis.' Lieutenant-Colonel A.L. Barrett⁷ was posted as Acting Commanding Officer.⁸

¹ Lieut.-Colonel Charles Oriel Oliphant Tanner had been commanding the 127th Queen Mary's Own Baluch Light Infantry since 25th August 1913.

² Captain John Creery Tate, an Assistant Political Agent with the Bombay Political Dept. since February 1909, had been temporarily returned to military employment and attached to the 127th Baluch Light Infantry from December 1914.

³ Stanley Grisewood Taylor, India Army Reserve of Officers, was commissioned 2nd Lieut. on 15 Sep 1916, and advanced to Lieut. on 15 Sep 1917. He went on to serve as a Company Officer in the 49th, but was no longer listed with the regiment in Jan. 1920.

⁴ The Bengali name 'Bose' was sometimes expressed as 'Basu' in English, and is thus synonymous.

⁵ Naik Sailendra Nath Basu had received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal, a gallantry award, while serving as a chauffeur with the Mechanical Transport Corps at H.Q., Indian Expeditionary Force 'E' (Egypt). The award was notified in G.G.O. 348 of 31st March 1916. The date of his first commission is unknown, but he was advanced to subedar on 1st February 1917 and appointed subedar-major on 25th July 1918.

⁶ This date is given in various editions of the Indian Army List. However, on 2 July 1917, Dr Mullick reported, in a meeting presided over by the Governor of Bengal, Lord Ronaldshay, that the 'first Bengalee Battalion' [sic] was completed on Tuesday 26th June. This news was published in *The Englishman* on 4th July 1917.

⁷ Lieut.-Colonel Arthur Lennard [sic] Barrett, 126th Baluchistan Infantry. He had served in China during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, att'd to the Hong Kong Regiment, but

In 1917, the British advance in Mesopotamia resulted in extended and vulnerable lines of communication, and more troops were urgently required to protect them. With this in mind, Army HQ in Simla decided to send the 49th Bengalís to Mesopotamia for active service – even though recruitment was still in progress and training for war was not completed, with soldiers not yet prepared for battle conditions. The regiment reached Baghdad at the end of September. Sir Stanley Maude, Force Commander, first posted it to the Baghdad garrison, where he would be better able to take a personal interest in its training and progress. He sanctioned a special scale of rations to assist the men's physical development, and appointed selected British instructors for drill and physical training. At the end of December 1917, the Bengalís were afflicted by a variety of debilitating diseases and, as a result, most of its soldiers became physically unfit for active service. The regiment was first sent back to Aziziyeh, and then, due to a continuous deterioration in the health situation, it was sent further back to Kut-el-Amara. By September 1918, a series of medical inspections was carried out, but the situation did not improve. When General Sir William Marshall, force commander after the death of General Maude, inspected the 49th Bengalís, he included the following remarks regarding the medical situation of the regiment in his book.

Shortly after taking over command, I went to inspect this unit, and, met by Lieutenant-Colonel Barrett (known as The Boomer on account of the quality of his voice), was taken round the battalion, which was not drawn up in the ordinary way, but dotted about in squads, some large, some small. On arrival at the first squad, Barrett announced: 'The Measles Squad;' at the second, 'The Whooping Cough Squad,' at the third, 'The Scarlet Fever Squad,' and so on through most known diseases. The *crème de la crème* of the battalion, those not convalescing from any particular disease, numbered some sixty-five, but the only *man* I saw was the senior Indian officer, a brother of a prominent Bengali politician' (*Memories of Four Fronts*, p.270).

In June 1918, an everlasting shameful and self-destroying incident took place at Kut-el-Amara, which probably sealed any hope of going to the front permanently. On the night of the 8th, when the camp was fast asleep, two sepoy, with the connivance of the guard commander, took two revolvers and a number of rounds of ammunition from the quarter guard. Entering the Indian

most of his career was spent with the 126th Baluchis. He was not posted permanently to the 49th Bengalís, and by 29 Oct 1918, the day the 49th was ordered to Tanuma, he was given another temporarily attachment as Acting Cmdt of the war-raised 2-33rd Punjabís.

⁸ The Jan. 1918 IAL records that Colonel W.E. Boudier was Commandant, but there is no evidence that he actually served with the 49th. He is not listed in the Jan 1919 IAL.

officer's tents, they shot at Subedar-Major S.N. Basu and another Bengali officer as they lay asleep, killing the latter and seriously wounding the former.⁹

On 29th October 1918, the regiment was ordered to move further backward to Tanuma, an extension of Basra city. Two days later, the Armistice of Mudros was signed, bringing an end to hostilities between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies. However, armed struggle in the Middle East was by no means at an end. Although they had fought alongside the British against Turkey during the Great War, in early 1919 the Kurds revolted against the British authority in Kurdistan and killed a number of British officers and soldiers. The British response was to apply force in order to destroy the uprising, for which purpose the Kurdistan Expeditionary Force (KEF) was formed, consisting of several independent columns. The 49th Bengal, strength 235 all ranks, formed the core of the Sandiford Column,¹⁰ with elements of various other supporting units. On 16th June 1919, this column set out from Basra for Kirkuk, headquarters of the KEF. It reached Kut-el-Amara by steamer, moved to Hinaydi by train, continued on to Baghdad by steamer and then to Baizy by goods train. From Baizy, the Sandiford Column marched the sixty miles to Kirkuk on foot, through difficult and rough terrain. After taking a two-day break at KEF headquarters, they again marched up to Yalankush. The Kurdish fighters chose not to contest the column, but rather left Kurdistan and crossed into Iran. Leaders of the Kurdistan revolutionary forces were arrested and, with the uprising coming to an end, the Sandiford Column came back to Tanuma by 1st September 1919.

As the post-war disruptions gradually fizzled out, soldiers recruited by the many regiments of the Indian Army for war service were discharged and sent home. Most war-raised units, including the 49th Bengal, were disbanded. The demobilization process of the 49th Bengal was completed by the 31st August 1920, when the regiment ceased to exist.

Thirty to thirty-five British officers, commissioned by the King, and almost forty Indian officers, commissioned by the Viceroy and all Bengalis, served in the 49th Bengal during its total tour of duty. Approximately 6,000 Bengali soldiers were recruited for the regiment within a period of two years, of which only 2,000 experienced field service at Mesopotamia and Kurdistan; the remainder stood by for possible deployment and were held at Karachi, Kolkata and Dhaka depots. Subedar-Major Sailendra Nath Basu was appointed to the

⁹ It appears that the Subedar-Major never fully recovered from his wounding. On the 2nd October 1918, his place was taken by Subedar-Major Kumar Adhikram Mazumdar.

¹⁰ Major (Actg Lt-Colonel) Victor Valentine Vincent Sandiford, 62nd Punjabis, became Acting Commandant of the 49th Bengal when Lt-Colonel Barrett returned to his regiment. Sandiford had been attached to the 49th since its formation in July 1917.

Order of British India (2nd Class) with the honorary title *Bahadur* for his services in Mesopotamia, and No. 2268 Sepoy A.N. Mukerji was awarded the Indian Meritorious Service Medal for his services in India. Broadly speaking, field service in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan between 1917 and 1919 qualified for the British War Medal and Allied Victory Medal, and the General Service Medal with 'Kurdistan' clasp. Sixty-one soldiers of the 49th Bengal died for various reasons (other than in combat) during their stay in the regiment.

The 49th Bengal was the first and only Bengali regiment in British India, but it is little surprising that in neither Bangladesh nor in India have the appropriate authorities given any importance to the record of its history. Not many people know that it even existed. The raising of this regiment was not a purely military matter; rather it had many political and social implications. Whether the regiment proved to be a success or otherwise is a debatable question, but it cannot be denied that the soldiers of this regiment were the pioneers in soldiering from the Bengali race, and have removed the unjust ignominy, imposed on Bengalis for centuries, of being a 'non-martial race'.

References: *Memories of Four Fronts*, General Sir William Marshall (Ernest Benn, London 1920); *The Englishman* (daily newspaper published in Kolkata); *The Hindoo Patriot* (weekly periodical published in Kolkata); *Bharatborso*. *Probashi*, and *Manoshi O Mormobani* (monthly periodicals published in Kolkata); 'Report on recruiting in Bengal, and Bengal's contribution in manpower to the conduct of the war,' Political Department, Government of Bengal, May 1919; *The Indian Distinguished Service Medal*, Rana Chhina (Invicta, New Delhi 2001); *Honours & Awards, Indian Army August 1914-August 1921*, (J.B. Hayward, London, no date); *The Indian Army List* (editions of July 1917, and January 1918, 1919, 1920).

BOOK REVIEW

Chris Kempton, *Duty & Fidelity, The Indian Army, August 1914-1921*, The Military Press, Milton Keynes 2009; 345 pages with 32 maps, in four separate volumes. Available from The Military Press (recently changed hands), 29 Roslyn Way, Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 6JX, UK <militarypress.co.uk> telephone 01582.529271; complete sets £136.96 hardback or £82.96 softback. The various volumes are also sold separately (ISBN numbers/prices available from the publisher).

In view of the excellence and utility of an earlier and parallel compilation by Chris Kempton on the India Army in WW2 (*Loyalty & Honour, The Indian Army, September 1939 – August 1947*, Milton Keynes 2003), this reviewer had

no hesitation in acquiring his new study of the formations and units of the Indian Army during WWI as soon as it became available. Maintaining the high standard previously established, this new work gathers together a vast amount of information. It is comprehensive, detailed, and arranged in a straightforward manner that allows the reader to follow the progress of the formations and units of the Indian Army in all theatres of war between 1914 and 1921, including France and Flanders, the Middle East, Turkey and Central Asia, East Africa and the North-West Frontier. It encompasses all categories of the Indian Army, including IST, Nepalese Contingent, and a miscellany of locally raised units, and also the British cavalry and infantry that served with Indian formations.

The simplest way of describing the entire work is to say that it is split into three inter-related volumes of text, and a fourth volume of maps. To make it work, one needs the three text volumes close at hand. The maps, albeit not essential, are clearly drawn and the reviewer has found them most helpful.

The first volume deals with the divisions, with narratives (some are lengthy) describing their field services. Supporting data include lists of commanders (Division, R.A., R.E.), all divisional troops, and all brigades that served in the division (dates in/out). The second volume describes the brigades, with brief narratives and comprehensive details including dates of formation, commanding officers, the battalions/regiments they contained (dates in/out), and the divisions to which the brigades themselves were posted (dates in/out). The third volume lists the battalions/regiments – indicating the brigades in which they served. All movements are noted and dated, as are the postings of odd squadrons or companies – which will solve many enigmas!

Interspersed between the main data are chronologies of events in each theatre, and a number of appendices detailing the changes in title of formations and regiments throughout the period. To further help the reader, abbreviations are well explained, and there is an extensive bibliography.

It has clearly taken the compiler a huge amount of effort to get it all sorted out, as the amount of data is staggering. Most regiments and brigades made several movements during their WW1 service, and by following these movements across the three volumes of this work, the researcher can readily determine exactly where they served – and when.

The only criticism, which should not be seen as a deterrent, is that an essentially inseparable work has been produced in three slender and tightly bound volumes, with inadequate descriptions on the covers. The best option might be to purchase the soft-back set and having it bound into one volume. It would be worth the trouble. In any case, this monumental work by an I.M.H.S. member is an asset that every Indian Army researcher and collector, with an interest in WWI, should consider acquiring. Strongly recommended. (CJP)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Badges queries: Sir John Chapple (Durbar, Spring 2011, pp.44-45)

Chris Kempton has responded...

‘Fig. 1 might be the Bombay Battalion, but not their normal badge (long shot).
 ‘Fig. 5 (bottom right) is the Coat of Arms of Bombay (a certainty). It was used by the Bombay Light Horse/Light Patrol as part of their badge but not in this format; so this example is possibly for civil rather than military use.
 ‘Fig. 6 (top left) could well be the Cawnpore Rifles I.D.F., when they were numbered ‘16’ between 1917 and 1920 (educated guess).
 Fig. 6 (top centre) could well be the Calcutta Light Horse which was numbered ‘3’ between 1917 and 1920. It has the look of a C.L.H. badge but it would depend on the inscription, if any, within the garter (educated guess).’

Colin Bell has responded...

‘I believe the centre one, bottom row in fig.6, could be the South African Cape Police, worn on the Slouch Hat, around the 1900’s. The monogram was die-struck or stamped out of sheet metal.’

Regarding the Formation Sign illustrated here, Colin has asked whether any reader knows who wore it. The background is black. If it were a white Fleur-de-Lys on a scarlet square, he believes it would be 2nd or 252nd Indian Infantry Brigade, from the WW2 era; but surely not on a black square?

**WAC(I) or FANY at Edinburgh Castle (Durbar, Spring 2011, p.49)**

Chris Kempton has written...

‘Further to my enquiry regarding a W.A.C.(I)/F.A.N.Y. group in Edinburgh, it has been possible, with the help of correspondence from Trevor Kingsley-Curry and further research at the British Library, to resolve a couple of the queries.

- ‘1. The naval personnel are all W.R.I.N.S. In 1942/3 a number of women, wives of serving R.I.N officers, acted as volunteers in a semi-unofficial capacity

and, effective from 1st June 1943, they were required to formally join the W.A.C.(I). In February 1944 this nucleus, as an incentive to further recruitment, became the Naval Wing W.A.C.(I)., although at this stage still wearing khaki, but with the W.A.C.(I). shoulder flash in light blue on white. By 31st May, strength had risen to seventy-two officers and 362 other ranks. I.A.O. 401/45 dated 2nd March 1945 ordered: "The Naval Wing W.A.C.(I). to become Women's Royal Indian Naval Service; the Women's Royal Indian Naval Service badge to be worn below the W.A.C.(I). badge." A distinctive naval uniform was authorised with the W.R.I.N.S. lozenge-shaped badge, and administration and command became separate, which led to some problems with co-operation. By May 1945, the W.R.I.N.S. strength stood at 269 officers and 710 other ranks.

'2. The shoulder flashes on the I.A.F. Branch personnel are almost certainly "INDIA" light blue on dark blue. Unlike the W.R.I.N.S., the I.A.F. branch was never separated and remained an integrated part of the W.A.C.(I). It is interesting to note that the badges of rank, both Officers and Warrant Officers, were Army types, and not R.A.F types (see the figure 5th from left in the photograph). This is confirmed by a photograph of W.A.C.(I). R.A.F. Platoon 307MJ, Lahore, kindly supplied by Trevor Kingsley-Curry. This clearly shows the platoon commander with Army "pips" and two members with Army type W.O II rank badges.

'Nothing has come to light regarding the unidentified cap badge, nor has there been anything further on the detail of the visit itself.'

CORRESPONDENCE

Omer Tarin has written...

'The little tribal enclave of Kala Dhaka (Black Mountain), abutting the Hazara region, has formally been notified as a "Settled District" of the North West Frontier Province (now Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa) in Pakistan, on 28th January 2011. It is the 25th District of this province and has been renamed "Tor Ghar." It is a rough, mountainous, cis-Indus Pukhtun/Pathan district approx 2,000 sq. km. in area with a population of nearly 400,000, mostly a conglomerate of local tribes. It was originally recognised as a "provincial tribal zone" in 1849-1850 by the then Punjab Government, and attached to the Hazara, which is a Hindko/non-Pukhtun ethnic majority region, Pukhtuns/Pathans proper being only about 12% to 13% of the total population. It was a long standing demand, in fact a dire need, that this enclave be assimilated into the settled areas in order to benefit from general socio-economic development. As far as Indian Army military historians are concerned, the Black Mountain long remained a hotbed of crime and sedition, and a whole series of momentous campaigns

from the 1850s to the 1920s attest to this. Over the years, a number of articles have been published in *Durbar* concerning some of these events.'

Harry Fecitt has written ...

'The British in India Museum, located at Hallam Road, Nelson, Lancashire, is a splendid private museum, housed in a mill. It merits a visit by anyone interested in the British period in India. On display are pictures, posters and prints, military accoutrements and weapons, regimental photographs, neck-ties, cutlery and crockery, ivory and silver and furniture.' Tel. 01282613129; open Mon. to Fri. 10.00 to 16.00 hrs; more details on <www.visitlancashire.com>

Giles Clarke has written, following a visit to Plassey...

'The battlefield lies four-and-a-half hours drive north of Kolkata, about two kilometres from Palashi village on the NH34 main Kolkata- Darjeeling highway. The river has slightly changed its course since the battle. The mango grove which sheltered Clive's troops during the three ineffectual hours of the French bombardment, with its earth ramparts, still remains and ancient inhabitants of course identify with certainty the spot where Mir Madan Khan was killed in his unsuccessful cavalry charge, provided Rs 10 changes hands.

'Mir Jaffer's troops who stood by and refused to move obviously occupied paddy fields, whilst the monument sits on the higher ground where two water tanks and the French guns were located. On the 250th anniversary of the battle, the Bengal government erected a small gold statue of Siraj-ad -Daulan, who lost and was later killed by Mir Jaffer's order. He is seen as a modern Indian hero who was one of the few to stand against us. The hunting lodge from whose roof Clive surveyed the field at dawn has gone. The Victoria Monument in Kolkata has an excellent model of the battle and one must commend the Indians for keeping it as a major display.

'Although it was not 60,000 against 3,000 because of Mir Jaffer's treachery, nevertheless Clive's forces were outnumbered at least eight-to-one, so it was a great day in British annals, and settled the destiny of Bengal for almost 300 years.'

Indian Military Hospital, Brighton

Members of the I.M.H.S. will be aware that, during WW1, the Royal Pavilion was converted into a hospital for wounded soldiers, and that from December 1914 to January 1916 it was used for Indian Army troops. It may not be so well known that the Pavilion houses a permanent exhibition commemorating the work of the hospital and the enthusiastic support given to it by the local population. It features some outstanding contemporary photographic images from the Museum archives.