Frontispiece. Lalbahadur Gurung tests his kukri for sharpness.
THE GURKHAS

Harold James, M.C., & Denis Sheil-Small, M.C
To
The Gurkha Soldier
Courageous, Steadfast and Loyal—far beyond the call of duty.

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First published in the U.S.A.
in 1966 by
The Stackpole Company
Cameron & Kelker Streets
Harrisburg, Pa. 17105
Library of Congress Catalog No. 66-15829

Made and printed in Great Britain by
Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd.,
Aylesbury, Bucks
Foreword


The authors of this story of 150 years of the Gurkha Regiments have undertaken a great task and one of no little difficulty. Readers will agree that they have made a very good hand at it. In one single volume—and not a very big one—they have managed to tell their tale with a careful and selective eye on the most interesting episodes of the period of the British-Indian connection and of the years that have passed since 1947 which will appeal to an audience far outside the members of the Gurkha Brigade. This has necessitated a very extensive study of printed records of all the Gurkha battalions that have fought in the Indian and British armies since 1815.

Obviously, owing to pressure of space they have had to omit many periods which those who are intimately concerned with the fighting Gurkha will regret not to see in these pages. For instance, they have had to make do with only a brief mention of the story of the Gurkha War which Britain and Nepal fought so gallantly between 1814 and 1816, when they learnt to respect each other’s military prowess as stubborn enemies: and they have been compelled to ignore the part played by the first three Gurkha battalions for the days when they served under the East India Company’s flag, notably when they were still irregular battalions on the North West Frontier of India and operating in the Mahratta and Sikh wars. So the story really starts at Chapter I, where the Sirmoor Battalion marches at short notice from its cantonments in Dehra Doon to join the main army outside Delhi, there engaged in the fiercest fighting of the Mutiny. It was fortunate that Major Charles Reid kept a diary throughout that siege but it is also very unfortunate that only these two authors seem to have had the enterprise to take most of that period from Reid’s diary. All too many historians who have written about the
Indian Mutiny have taken no notice of this invaluable record written by the man who commanded the Main Picket right through the siege of Delhi. Without consulting this record, much of their history of those days is barely history at all.

Since those days we have had the excellent regimental histories and the official accounts of innumerable campaigns from which these chronicles have to a great extent been compiled. But without doubt it has been in the two Great Wars of this century, in which about forty battalions of Gurkhas were each time engaged, that the story they have to tell has become more crowded with incident and is indeed far more familiar to readers of today.

No man who has ever served with Gurkhas in war will consider anything recounted in this book to be superfluous or over-enthusiastic: in fact, he will want to hear more. Great though the literature on these Nepalese mountaineers may be—and their fighting record expands daily, even in these times of “peace”—there is much yet left to be written.

This volume will widen the public interest.

Falmouth

FRANCIS TUKER
Acknowledgments

In writing this book we have received most generous help and encouragement from a great number of people. First of all we should like to thank the various Gurkha Regimental Associations for so kindly giving us permission to use material and quote passages from their Histories. For helping us to obtain this permission, regimental journals and many anecdotes, we are indebted to:

- Colonel R. B. E. Upton—7th G. R.;
- Lieut.-Col. A. A. Mains—9th G.R.; and
- Brigadier G. B. Proctor—10th G.R.

We should like to express our gratitude to Major-General Walter Walker, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., Director of Operations, Borneo, for providing material on activities in that sphere; to Major E. N. Fordyce (Brigade Major, The Brigade of Gurkhas, Malaysia, and Editor of *The Kukri*) for considerable assistance, permission to use material from *The Kukri*, and photographs; to The Government of India for giving us details of individual Gurkha actions in Katanga and the India-China War; to Lieut.-Col. P. O. Myers, M.C., for information on operations in Malaya.

For valuable material on the Gurkha Army Service Corps we should like to thank Colonel T. E. Stoneham, M.B.E., who gave us permission to draw on an article in the 1964 *R.A.S.C. Review*; Lieut.-Col. I. R. Elliot, R.A.S.C., for his kind assistance; and Major Ian Bennet, R.A.S.C., for permission to use his excellent photographs. We are grateful to Lieut.-Col. J. H. Carver, R.E. (Retd.), for the
great deal of trouble he went to in giving us background information on the Gurkha Engineers.

We also owe a debt of gratitude (for placing their libraries at our disposal, and for most friendly and helpful assistance) to Mr. Donald H. Simpson, F.L.A., Librarian, Royal Commonwealth Society, and his staff; and Mr. D. W. King, O.B.E., F.L.A., Librarian, War Office, and his staff.

We should also like to thank Mr. J. F. Golding, Photographic Librarian, Imperial War Museum, for generously giving us permission to use many photographs, and to his staff for their most efficient assistance during our many visits to the Museum. We are also grateful to Mr. J. H. St. J. McIlwaine of the India Office Library for permission to use photographs of Gurkhas in World War I, and to Miss K. Blair and Miss V. R. Penny for searching these out.

For permission to use their photographs we are most grateful to Mr. John Morris, the 2nd and 5th Gurkha Rifles, and the 9th Gorkha Rifles.

Many of our friends gave us a good deal of help and encouragement. We should like to thank Major C. G. Ludlow for background information on Gurkha boxing activities and for providing photographs; Mr. Craven Griffiths for information on World War I; Mrs. Anne Fenwick, Miss Christine Clayden and Miss Margaret Sheil-Small for giving up so much of their spare time to type several chapters and numerous letters; Mr. James Wilson for helping us to obtain news of Gurkhas in post-war India; Lieut.-Col. Shamsher Singh, 2/8th G.R., for much help and encouragement; Mr. Bob Wyatt for an introduction to our publishers; Lieut-Col. J. H. Montagu, O.B.E., for a good deal of assistance when he was the Brigade of Gurkhas Liaison Officer; Mr. Harold Shields, of Panora Ltd., for going to a lot of trouble in searching out the original photograph of the Queen’s Gurkha Orderly Officers; Mr. Peter Huntley for designing the jacket; and Mr. Derek Wootton for drawing the maps.

We are most grateful to Lieut.-General Sir Francis Tuker, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., for writing a Foreword.

We should like to thank most warmly Mr. Leslie Egginton for so generously volunteering to check the final proofs.

Finally, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Michael Hastings for giving up so much of his valuable time in order to read the manuscript and give us the benefit of his skilful advice on many points.
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Introduction

At the second battle of Ypres, 1915, a wounded British officer of a Gurkha regiment managed to crawl into a ditch. On the lip of this lay a Gurkha rifleman, Moti Lal Thapa, his arm practically severed by a shell splinter.

As a second wave of British troops approached, the officer was able to get Moti Lal into the ditch so that his arm could be bound up. The attack passed by them. The April sun was quite warm, shining directly on the officer’s face. He fell asleep.

Moti Lal propped himself against the side of the ditch and held his field service hat so that it kept the sun from his officer’s eyes. Unaware of this, the officer slept for a few hours. When he awakened, Moti Lal was still holding up the hat, in great pain but saying over and over again: “I must not cry out. I am a Gurkha.”

Presently the stretcher bearers arrived, but poor Moti Lal died on the way to the aid post.

His selfless devotion and great courage in the face of frightful pain were characteristic of the Gurkha soldier—a devotion which those who have served with him have returned whole-heartedly, a courage so infectious it has brought out the best in those who have fought alongside him.

The Gurkha soldier comes from Nepal, an independent Kingdom stretching for just over 500 miles along the northern border of India and back about 100 miles to the Himalayas. In all, practically 54,000 square miles of mainly mountainous country. The capital, Kathmandu, is in the Nepal Valley, 4,500 feet above sea level and surrounded by mountains.

There are no roads outside the capital. A switch-back of rough paths wind up the steep hillsides and drop almost sheer into the valleys. The Gurkhas carry prodigious loads along these paths, and
it is not surprising that they are so agile and that their leg muscles are well developed.

The land is one of rugged beauty, of tropical and temperate forests, pine trees, alpine meadows, terraced fields and small hamlets. In the monsoon, heavy rain turns the rivers and streams into raging torrents which can only be crossed by rickety bridges. The snowy Himalayas are always in sight, their white majesty towering above the dark green of the trees and the gay colours of the rhododendrons.

There are many tribes in Nepal. From the western and central areas come the Magars and Gurungs who make up the greater bulk of recruits for the British and Indian Gurkha regiments. From the Nepal Valley come the Khas or Chettri who are recruited almost exclusively by the 9th Gurkha Rifles. In the east are the Rais and Limbus, most of whom join the 7th and 10th Gurkha Rifles.

Within the major groups are numerous clans, such as the Lamas, Puns and Khandkas. The Gurkha always adds his “clan” to his given name, so that we get Dilbahadur Gurung, Balbir Rai, Agandhar Khandka and so on.

Outside Kathmandu the people live restricted lives within small village communities. The nature of their existence toughens them physically and spiritually. It is hard work tilling terraced fields on rugged hill slopes; but they are easy-going and their great sense of humour keeps them cheerful. They have simple pleasures. They enjoy hunting and fishing, for the mountains are full of game and the quiet pools teem with fish. There is but one way out of this little enclosed world and that is through the recruiting centre.

For one hundred and fifty years Gurkha recruits have made the long journey down the mountains to join the British Army. And all this time there has been a strong allegiance between Nepal and Britain. By a strange quirk of fate this outstanding friendship and staunch loyalty came about because once the British went to war against the Gurkhas.

It happened at the beginning of the nineteenth century when Nepal’s turbulent hill-country frontier stretched for two hundred miles further than it does today. There were several incidents which, on May 29th 1814, culminated in an attack by Gurkha troops of the Nepalese Army on three British police posts in the Butwal district. Eighteen policemen were killed, four wounded, and the chief police officer was taken prisoner and executed in a barbarous manner.
Lord Moira, the Governor-General, decided that full-scale military action was the only way to bring peace and order along the frontier. He despatched a force of over thirty thousand men, who were to make a four column attack along the extensive frontier. Before the campaign ended he had to throw in another twenty thousand troops. This was partly because the twelve thousand Gurkhas proved tough and courageous adversaries who were highly experienced in mountain warfare, and partly because only one of the four generals commanding the columns, Major-General Ochterlony, had the imagination and daring the task demanded.

The major battles were on the western flank, where the Gurkha Army was commanded by Kaji Amar Sing Thapa, Governor of the region. He was ably supported by his son, Ranjur Sing, and his nephew, Balbahadur Sing.

The tenacity of the Gurkhas, and their bravery, were proved at Kalunga. This was an isolated jungle-covered hill, five hundred feet high, surmounted by a fort of stone and rough-hewn logs. Here, a few miles to the north-east of Dehra Dun, Balbahadur with six hundred men kept four thousand British and Native troops at bay for thirty-three days.

During the first assault on the fort a detachment of a hundred dismounted dragoons of the Royal Irish Regiment advanced too far ahead of the other troops. Balbahadur ordered a sortie and for the first time the British saw Gurkhas in action with the kukri. The knife, the national weapon, has a short, curved, broad blade. From the top of the handle to the tip of this it is some eighteen inches long. On that October morning the kukris were used with deadly effect. Within a few minutes the dragoons were routed, losing four dead and fifty-eight wounded.

In spite of heavy bombardment from cannons and several assaults, the Gurkhas held out until the end of November, by when fewer than a hundred were capable of further fighting. Under cover of night, Balbahadur led the survivors away, creeping silently and unseen past the fires of the investing force. Among the escapers was a Gurkha boy named Singbir Thapa, who over forty years later was to become Subedar-Major of the Sirmoor Rifles and be awarded the Order of British India for gallant and loyal service during the Mutiny.

On the morning of November 30th the British at last entered Kalunga fort. The stench of death pervaded the place, and the bodies
of the dead lay everywhere. No one, an eye-witness said, cared to look upon it a second time. The Gurkha losses exceeded five hundred, while the total British casualties were seventy-five killed and nearly seven hundred wounded.

In spite of the fierceness of the fighting, the Gurkhas showed a natural courtesy and obviously recognised a kindred spirit among the British officers. On one occasion a Gurkha, whose lower jaw had been shattered by a round shot, advanced to the British lines waving his arms. He had come for medical aid, which his enemies readily gave. But when he recovered from his wound he asked if he could return to the Gurkha Army so that he could take part in more battles against the British!

At Almora, when the town was captured by the British in the spring of 1815, Gurkha officers came boldly to the camp of the victors, seeking medical attention. They offered to take their British counterparts on a tour of the town to examine the defences and the fort walls. Their frankness, confidence and friendliness, so remarkable in the circumstances, made a great impression.

At the western end of the frontier the war continued through the winter, with all the hardships of mountainous country. Ochterlony had six thousand troops against half that number commanded by General Amar Sing Thapa. But the British general was well aware that numerical superiority would not be enough; it would need all his military skill to outwit Amar Sing. He forced the Gurkhas back to their second line of defence on the Malaun ridge and in April 1815 seized the heights of Deothal and Ryla. This put the British astride the centre of the Gurkha defence line.

The outcome of the war lay in the balance. Amar Sing ordered his ablest sirdar, Bhagte Thapa, to make a counter-attack on Deothal. And so, on the morning of April 16th, Bhagte led two thousand hillmen out of Malaun, fully aware of the supreme importance of his mission. Throughout a morning of repeated attacks the Gurkhas showed the highest courage and determination. It was a preview of the dogged persistence which was to make them so feared and respected for the next one hundred and fifty years. Time and again Bhagte led his men up the steep hillside in attempts to drive the British from the peak. So fierce were these charges that many died on the bayonets of the defenders.

Amar Sing, with his younger son, stood in the open near his colours and within musket range all through these attacks, en-
couraging his troops to yet greater efforts. Through the afternoon the fighting continued; but towards evening Bhagte was killed leading a final desperate rush. The Gurkhas withdrew, leaving five hundred dead. Although they had failed, they were far from disgraced, for the unflinching bravery of the defenders had been outstanding.

This disaster, soon to be followed by the fall of Almora, convinced Amar Sing that it would be hopeless to continue the war and he asked for terms. By the Convention of May 15th 1815 the Gurkhas agreed to withdraw east of the Kali River, ceding Kumaon, Garhwal and Sirmoor. Ochterlony, in recognition of the valour of his opponents, permitted Amar Sing and his son Ranjur Sing to return to Nepal with all the honours of war.

The most important clause of the Convention allowed the British to recruit troops from the Gurkha Army, other than the Royal Bodyguard. Ochterlony was most impressed by what he had seen of the warrior hillmen and was anxious to include them in the East India Company’s forces. By Order of the Governor-General, and confirmed by the Director of the Company, the Gurkha Corps was officially raised on April 24th 1815.

Four Gurkha battalions were formed: the 1st and 2nd Nasiri, the Sirmoor and the Kumaon. Within a few years the 2nd Nasiri Battalion was disbanded; but the others have continued to this day, achieving magnificent reputations as the 1st King George V’s Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment); the 2nd King Edward VII’s Own Goorkha Rifles (The Sirmoor Rifles); and the 3rd Queen Alexandra’s Own Gurkha Rifles.

In this manner the Gurkhas started their long and trusted association with the British. As the years passed further regiments were raised until, by the turn of the century, there were ten Gurkha regiments serving the British Crown.

The Convention of 1815, however, did not mark the end of hostilities. Fighting broke out again early the next year. Ochterlony once again showed his tactical skill and turned the Gurkha’s first line of defence. He then advanced towards Makwanpore Fort on the road to Kathmandu. A British detachment seized a village near this fort, and the Gurkha general, Ranjur Sing, at once ordered it to be retaken. The attempt was driven off, and more Gurkhas were sent against the detachment. Then British reinforcements arrived, and one of the bloodiest battles of the war developed.
INTRODUCTION

With reckless courage the Gurkhas charged time after time against steady volleys of musketry and the deadly fire of grape-shot and cannon ball. Gaps were blown in the waves of attackers but the survivors still came on, darting under British bayonets to slash with their terrible kukris. But the village was held against them, and at last the attack broke down. The Gurkhas left over five hundred dead, a brave, sad carpet of corpses on the slopes.

The road to Kathmandu was now open; Bhim Sing, the Nepalese Prime Minister, knew that all was lost. He sued for peace, and at last the war was over. But far more important than the lasting peace was the beginning of friendship and mutual admiration between Britain and Nepal.

The Gurkhas have many marching songs, and one of them is synonymous with their attitude to war. It runs:

Timita charaune raili ma,
Hamita Japane dhawa ma,
Bachyo bhane, yo bato aula
Maryo bhane, baluwa sirane.

You, climb aboard the train—
We’re off to fight the Jap.
If we live, our journey back
Will be along this road.
If we die, no further travel
Than six feet under the ground.

Their hundred and fifty year history is an epic of such a journey. They have followed the road to war over the borders of Nepal to the recruiting centres, on to their various regiments and into battle. They have marked the way with hundreds of milestones, monuments to gallant action and loyal service. Many have returned safely to their mountain villages; but thousands have never come back. Their graves, known and unknown, lie in jungle and swamp, desert and rock-strewn mountain, river bank and sea shore, village and town and city, wheat field and paddy bund.

This is the story of that one hundred and fifty year journey. From the Indian Mutiny, along the Indian frontier, west to North Africa and Europe, east across Asia, through two world wars and many lesser campaigns. To tell every story would be impossible, but we
INTRODUCTION

hope that within the limits of this selection there is a clear picture of the Gurkha soldiers and of the British officers who not only led them but became one with them.

NOTE

For the reader who is unfamiliar with military formations and the system of ranks in the Indian Army up to the end of World War II, the following paragraphs are included as a general guide. The changes in some Gurkha regiments after India’s independence are explained in a later chapter.

Ten regiments formed the old “Gurkha Brigade”, each with traditions and customs of its own. A regiment was divided into two battalions, except during the emergency of the World Wars when two or three additional battalions were raised. When referring to a particular battalion it is customary to give its number first, followed by that of its parent regiment. Thus: the 1st Battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles. Abbreviated, as used throughout this book, this becomes 1/8th Gurkhas.

There were many changes in the strength and structure of a battalion during the long period covered by this story. Generally speaking, a battalion was about 1,000 plus. It was split into four rifle companies, each of three or four platoons. In turn, the platoons were divided into three or four sections. In addition there were specialist groups such as the pioneer platoon, commando platoon, mortar and machine-gun groups, and signals.

A battalion had eleven or twelve British officers, King or Queen commissioned. Assisting them, and the backbone of the battalion, were Gurkha officers who held the Viceroy’s Commission. The senior of these was the Subedar-Major, a man of great power in the battalion. Under him were the Subedars and Jemadars. As a rule the former were second-in-command of companies, while the latter commanded platoons.

The non-commissioned ranks consisted of Havildars (Sergeants), Naiks (Corporals) and Lance-Naiks (Lance-Corporals). There were also senior non-commissioned officers such as the Company Havildar-Major. The other ranks were known as Riflemen.

Turning to the larger military formations, the following is a rough guide. An army consisted of two or more corps, which were in turn divided into two, three or more divisions. Within a division
were a number of brigades. No set rule applies but usually there were three brigades to a division. The brigade itself consisted of three battalions.

The Indian divisions nearly always included a number of British battalions, and a great tradition of comradeship and friendly rivalry was built up through the years between them. It probably reached its highest level between the British and the Gurkhas.
1 The Siege of Delhi

On a Sunday evening in May 1857, while British families were attending evening service at Meerut, the sepoy garrison mutinied. After shooting their officers they ran amok, murdering and looting in the light of blazing buildings. They swept upon Delhi and within a few days the city was in the hands of ten thousand mutineers. Others flocked to join them and soon their number was almost doubled.

It was the start of the Indian Mutiny. For some years agitators, taking advantage of the strong religious beliefs of the Indian sepoy, had spread discontent through the ranks. As far back as 1849 the 66th Native Infantry had mutinied and been struck off the rolls of the East India Company. The Naseri Battalion of Gurkhas had been brought into the Bengal Army in their place. This had been done by Sir Charles Napier on the advice of General Sir John Hearsey, who had fought against the Gurkhas in 1815. By a general order the Naseri Battalion was denominated as the 66th or Gurkha Regiment.

The Mutiny gave them the chance of showing their loyalty.

One of the causes of the mutiny was a rapidly spreading rumour that the cartridges for the new Enfield rifle were greased with the fat of cows and pigs, offending the faiths of both Hindus and Moslems. The army’s well-meaning relaxation of normal drill, permitting the men to use their hands instead of their teeth for tearing off the end of the cartridge, coupled with the concession that they could supply their own grease, had the wrong effect. It was interpreted as confirmation of the rumours.

As Hindus, the Gurkhas were at liberty to take the ungreased cartridges. But the men of the 66th, with a mixture of Gurkha humour and resentment toward agitators, insisted on having their cartridges greased as before. It was a practical demonstration of their faith in the British commanders.
After the chaos and confusion of the first days of the mutiny the British began to organise their available forces for an attack on Delhi. General Sir George Anson, the Commander-in-Chief, assembled three brigades. He had in all three thousand Europeans, a thousand native troops, and fifty-five guns against twenty thousand mutineers in the city.

He started from Ambala with two of the three brigades, planning a rendezvous with the third, which was coming from Meerut under command of Brigadier-General Sir Archdale Wilson. They were to meet at Baghpat for a combined assault on Delhi.

He was not to achieve his plan because when he came to Karnal, within a hundred miles of his objective, he was stricken by cholera and died. Major-General Sir Harry Barnard assumed command.

The march on Delhi continued. It was the hottest time of the year and such an ordeal that there were many cases of heat exhaustion. They switched to resting in tents by day and moving at night. One campaigner wrote: “The scene at night was one of intense beauty. The stars were bright in a deep, dark sky, fireflies flashed from bush to bush and the air was cool and refreshing to cheeks scorched by the hot wind during the day. The heavy roll of the guns, the jingling of bits and the clanking of the steel cavalry scabbards sounded in front; behind came the infantry marching with dull, deep tread through the stifling dust; further back padded the baggage camels towering above the creaking bullock carts. A vast concourse of sutlers, servants and camp followers brought up the rear, and gigantic elephants stalked over bush and stone by the side of the road.”

Meanwhile, the dreadful news of the sepoy mutiny reached Major Charles Reid, commandant of the Sirmoor Battalion of Gurkhas at Dehra Dun. He acted swiftly. Within four hours, taking neither tents nor baggage he marched his four hundred and ninety men out of the cantonment, making for Meerut via Roorkee. Each Gurkha had sixty rounds in pouches, and spare ammunition was carried on two elephants.

He covered twenty-eight miles on the first march and over a third of this was down the stony beds of dry hill streams. By next morning they reached the village of Kheri at the end of the pass where, over forty years earlier, Gillespie had led his column at the start of the Gurkha War. Here, the major received an urgent message from Colonel Baird-Smith, Superintendent-General of Irrigation in the
North-Western Provinces, imploring him to make for Roorkee with all haste in order to prevent a rising by the sappers stationed there.

With scarcely any rest after their hard night march the Gurkhas pushed on in response to this appeal; but when they were within three miles of the town another message came to Reid from Baird-Smith. This advised him to by-pass Roorkee, as it was feared the entry of "the loyal, fierce and independent Gurkhas" might be seen as a hostile move, inciting the sappers to violence.

Reid grasped the situation immediately and to ease tension he pretended he had lost his way and asked for a guide to lead him to the Ganges Canal where boats were waiting to take his men on the next stage of the journey. When he reached this he gave orders for the battalion to rest and cook a meal. Several disloyal sappers came from the town and moved among the Gurkhas, trying to spread the rumour that ground-up bullocks' bones were mixed with the flour. The Gurkhas jeered at them and enjoyed a hearty meal of chappatis and dhal.

The time came to embark in the forty-five boats. The fleet moved along the waterway, with a few skirmishers proceeding along the banks for protection. The canal, one of the engineering wonders of those days, had been completed two years earlier to irrigate many hundred square miles of land. Most of the locks had now been sabotaged, so that it was necessary to manhandle the boats several times. There were armed natives at the bridges, but they moved away and there was no trouble until the village of Bhola was reached. Here a party of mutineers attacked the convoy but were quickly driven off. In retaliation the Gurkhas occupied the village. In some of the houses they found arms and other government property. They took some prisoners, who were tried by drum-head court-martial. Thirteen were found guilty and shot that evening. Then the village was set on fire.

The Gurkhas pushed on and reached Bulandshar to find it had been gutted by mutineers who had fled to Delhi with their loot. A few days later news reached Reid that General Wilson, moving from Meerut to link with the two brigades from Ambala, was near Ghazi-ud-din Nagar and in danger of attack from the Delhi mutineers. His brigade would be hopelessly outnumbered. Leaving their boats the Gurkhas set off in a race against time. They were soon in difficulties. The sabotaging of the irrigation system had flooded the countryside. The Gurkhas, whose average height was little above five feet three had alternately to wade and swim with their rifles held above their heads. During the day the sun-glare off the water was blinding.
night there was always the danger of a man drowning without his companions’ being aware of his plight. Yet, such was their determination that in one night they covered twenty-seven miles.

Three days later the Gurkha vanguard saw the scarlet facings of men of the 60th Rifles (King’s Royal Rifle Corps) who formed part of the Meerut Brigade. At first the British were alarmed, thinking the enemy was approaching; but as soon as they realised their mistake they turned out to welcome the Gurkhas with lusty cheers. This meeting was the start of a famous entente between the two. In 1858 the designation of the Gurkha battalion was altered to the Sirmoor Rifle Regiment, and the distinction of wearing scarlet facings was conferred on it.

Although the soldiers recognised the Gurkhas as loyal allies, some of the senior British officers were taking no chances. The Sirmoor Battalion was allotted camping space next to the artillery, who had orders to turn their guns on them at the slightest sign of mutiny.

Next day the entire force moved forward and shortly after dawn encountered rebels in a strong position seven miles from Delhi. Two hours of fierce fighting followed during which thirteen guns were captured, and at the end the mutineers were driven right back to the city walls. By this time the heat of the day was so intense that the soldiers’ hands blistered on their rifle barrels.

As the rebels fell back, the British were able to enter the Delhi Cantonment, where many Europeans had been massacred. It was a grim sight. Blood-stains covered the walls and doors of buildings blackened by fire. Broken furniture littered the ground. The shreds of women’s dresses, children’s tiny boots and broken dolls were pathetic evidence of a ghastly story. These things sent the British troops berserk and in a furious bayonet charge they tore into the retreating mutineers, completely routing them. They killed over a thousand for a loss of only fifty-three. By noon the whole of what was known as the Ridge was taken.

Reid was instructed to hold Hindu Rao’s House, which was at the southern end of the Ridge and within twelve hundred yards of the Moree Bastion in the city walls. No sooner were his men in position than the alarm was sounded. A large body of mutineers, spurred on by cries from the city walls, were approaching in fanatical fury.

Reid ordered his Gurkhas to advance. They were supported by two companies of their friends the 60th Rifles. The two groups clashed in a savage hand-to-hand struggle. It was difficult to see what was happening because this was the hottest time of the day

2. Gurkha Officers and N.C.O.s—about the time of the Manipur Rebellion, 1891.
3. The Capture of the Spingawai Kotal, December 2nd, 1878.
and the fighting men raised clouds of choking dust. Battle cries died away as men's throats became too parched.

That men could struggle so fiercely and in such heat for several hours seemed impossible; but they did. The Gurkhas took a tremendous toll with their kukris; but always there seemed to be more and more mutineers coming through the dust. The little men from Nepal had been under arms for sixteen hours and towards the end of this fight some of them were so exhausted they collapsed to the ground and were trampled underfoot, too weary even to protect themselves.

But at long last, at five o'clock, the enemy broke and fled back to the city. Two guns which had been attached to Reid's force took the final toll for at last it was possible for them to distinguish between friend and foe.

Reid wrote in his diary: "My little fellows behaved splendidly and were cheered by every European regiment. I may say every eye was upon (us) . . . The General was anxious to see what the Gurkhas could do, and if we were to be trusted. They had (because it was a native regiment) doubts about us; but I think they are now satisfied."

The walls of Delhi were constructed of large blocks of grey freestone and stood twenty-four feet high. There was a dry ditch in front, twenty feet deep and twenty-five feet wide. The walls were crowned with a loopholed parapet and at intervals there were bastions armed with at least ten guns apiece. In addition to the hundred and fourteen guns in the bastions the mutineers had sixty field pieces.

The city, seven miles in circumference, had ten strong gates, each named after the province towards which it opened. On the eastern side there was the natural defence of the River Jumna, deep and a quarter of a mile wide.

The Ridge, which was now in British hands, was a rocky elevation just over two miles long. It slanted towards the front of the attack. The left extremity, on the Jumna, was three miles from Delhi; the right, only twelve hundred yards from the Kabul Gate. The Ridge was about sixty feet above the general level of the city, but the preparation of defences on it was a nightmare because there was little soil covering the rocky surface.

Hindu Rao's House, held by the Gurkhas, was the key position on the Ridge. The house itself was a large, handsome building, flat-roofed and encircled by a broad verandah. It had been owned by a
Mahratta nobleman, well-known in Delhi society. "A keen sportsman . . . liberal and hospitable." He had died some time before the mutiny, and the latest guests found the place deserted. All the Sir-mooris except one company occupied the house. This company was in the outbuildings together with men of the loyal Punjab Guide Corps, who arrived to reinforce the army on the 9th June.

Reid had outposts at Observatory, Crow's Nest and Subzi Mandi, and the 60th Rifles helped him to man these. They had to keep watch over plenty of cover provided by gardens, groves, house clusters and the walled enclosures of the city environs.

The rebels were fully aware of the importance of the big house on the Ridge. From early June until mid-September Reid's small force held off no less than twenty-six determined attacks. Under the point-blank fire of the heavy guns in the city bastions the house was gradually reduced to a shell. Lacking such heavy artillery the besiegers became the besieged, constantly withstanding ferocious sorties from the city. More mutineers were reaching Delhi and it seemed the practice to test their mettle by sending them out against the Ridge. But the British held on, in spite of disease and heavy casualties.

The main camp behind the Ridge presented a fascinating sight. There were long lines of gleaming white tents and thatched huts for native servants. There were rows of horses and parks of artillery. British troops in grey linen coats and trousers mingled with the dark, bearded Sikhs who wore red and blue turbans. There were Afghan auxiliaries, wild-looking men who delighted in coloured saddle-cloths. And there were little Gurkhas in their black worsted Kilmarnock bonnets and black serge coats. At the back of this tented town were the booths of the native bazaar, and on the plain beyond there were thousands of camels, bullocks and horses.

In contrast with this almost festive scene there was the frantic rush to positions every time the alarm was sounded. And by night there was an inferno of artillery fire, with bursting shells, round shot tearing through embrasures, and large balls of fire flying overhead. There was the rattle of musketry. Not only was the whole area nearly as light as day but the noise was deafening. Sometimes the sound of the guns was drowned by the screaming cries from the city of "Allah! Allah! Allah Akbar!"

On the day the Punjab Guide Corps arrived the few British guns capable of the range opened up at dawn on the Kashmir Gate and
the Moree Bastion. There was immediate retaliation, and the large east verandah of Hindu Rao's House was demolished by fire from the rebel guns. The mutineers followed with an attack which was repulsed.

Next day a fiercer engagement took place. Reid advanced with all his men to smash up a rebel attack. The alarm was sounded, and every available man of the 60th Rifles came at the double from the main camp to take over the Gurkha posts.

During this long engagement there was a lull in the firing and some of the mutineers shouted to the Gurkhas: "Come over and join us! We won't fire on you."

The Gurkhas shouted back: "Right! We are coming." They rushed across to within twenty yards, halted, and fired an accurate volley which dropped between twenty and thirty rebels. Taking advantage of the confusion the Gurkhas followed up with a kukri charge. This was too much for the mutineers, who retreated into the city.

In contrast with this incident, during the next attack launched by the mutineers a detachment of native irregular cavalry, thought to be loyal, went over to them. Reid witnessed this, writing: "They went to the front just as if they were going to charge, but no sooner had they closed than, to my horror, I saw them mix with the enemy and walk off with them."

Some new regiments from Oudh joined the mutineers and took part in the next attack. It was afternoon and the sun glistened on their bayonets and swords as they marched up the Grand Trunk Road headed by the Sirdar Bahadur, who made himself very conspicuous.

Reid had ordered his men to hold their fire until the enemy was within twenty yards. The volley, accompanied by grapeshot from the neighbouring guns, caused frightful carnage. Gurkhas and men of the 60th leaped over the breastworks and charged, scattering the survivors. Reid's orderly, Lal Sing Thapa, had marked down the Sirdar Bahadur. He reached him and there was the flash of a kukri. Then the Gurkha snatched the Ribbon of the Order of British India from the native officer's breast and held it high in triumph as he returned to the entrenchments. Later, Lal Sing gave the ribbon to Reid, who sent it to his wife.

The reinforcements the British were expecting had still not materialised. Meanwhile, the rebels were increasing in strength. They were joined by the Bareilly Brigade, a horse battery, a cavalry regi-
ment and four battalions of infantry. This encouraged them to launch an even bigger attack on the Ridge. Some six thousand men emerged from the city and began to form up outside the walls. Reid advanced from his defensive positions with his six Gurkha companies supported by two field guns. He took up a forward position to meet the attack and, as before, held fire until the last moment. A mutineer was able to rush ahead and plant a green standard in front of the British line. This challenge was too much for the Gurkhas who rose up and charged.

During this action Reid employed a new strategy. Instead of pursuing the retreating enemy he withdrew his men across the line of his own silent guns. Tempted, the rebels returned to the attack and came within range of shot and grape from the artillery, which decimated them.

The fame of the Gurkhas was spreading, and frequently officers came from the main camp to see them. One such was General Lyte of the Royal Horse Artillery and he had a grisly demonstration of their coolness. He was sitting with other officers on the verandah of the house when a round shot from a rebel gun crashed through it and cut a nearby Gurkha sentry in two. The officers sprang to their feet, horrified; but the Gurkha corporal of the guard stepped calmly forward and posted another guard. The body was quietly removed.

Day after day the heavy guns on the Moree Bastion pounded the house until it took on a skeleton appearance. Gurkha losses mounted. A round shot piercing the front wall of the house killed Taka Ram, one of the regiment’s best shots, who had killed twenty-two tigers in the Dun. Ensign Wheatley was also killed, and nine Gurkhas wounded. Later the same day Lieutenant Tulloch fell and eight more Gurkhas were wounded.

The mutineers were growing bolder. They came from behind the walls and started to erect heavy batteries in a suburb over on the British right. Fire from these could be disastrous, and Reid was ordered to take part in an attack. His Sirmooris, less one company left at the defences, moved off the ridge one June afternoon strengthened by four companies of the 60th Rifles. Advancing on the battery position, they battered down three strong gates and forced their way into a large enclosure crowded with rebels. They killed or wounded some three hundred of them, and destroyed the guns and magazines before withdrawing at dusk, having lost only fifteen men.

Their next exploit was not so successful. Rebel reinforcements were constantly reaching the city by way of a bridge of boats across the
Jumna. Fifteen Gurkhas volunteered to destroy the bridge. The plan was to float small rafts against the boats. Each raft contained earthenware jars filled with combustibles in which cocked pistols had been buried. The idea was that each pistol would discharge on impact.

The small party reached the river; but only five men, under heavy fire managed to get their rafts into midstream by diving and swimming until they were guided out of range on the left bank. After nightfall the rafts were released; but, unknown to the British, the rebels removed the four centre boats each evening. Most of the rafts passed harmlessly through the gap and only two boats caught fire. The damage was soon repaired the next morning.

June 23rd was the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Plassey, which had avenged the Black Hole of Calcutta, and early in the morning look-outs on the roof of the much damaged house reported that Subzi Mandi, only four hundred yards away, was full of enemy infantry.

Reid attacked with three Gurkha companies, supported by three of Punjab Guides and two of the 60th Rifles. As they advanced down the slope of the Ridge they were soon under fire from the nearest houses. They forced their way into the buildings and drove the rebels out; but there was only ten minutes' respite before they were outnumbered ten to one in a counter-attack. They were compelled to withdraw. In addition to the battle casualties many Gurkhas and British riflemen collapsed because of the appalling heat.

British supports arrived and once more the buildings changed hands, only to be lost again in the face of a determined attack. The situation was becoming dangerous, and the Gurkhas and their comrades launched six attacks before the houses were finally recaptured.

During this fighting Havildar Badal Sing was ordered to take half a company of Gurkhas to clear mutineers from a building which enfiladed the British advance. There was a large, brick-walled enclosure which had only one entrance, covered by heavy fire from above.

Badal Sing, who had captured an enemy standard in a previous battle, quickly split up his party, leaving half of them firing into the entrance. He took the others round to the rear where, with a few men, he scrambled to the top of the wall, opening fire on the rebels below, and into the backs of those on the front wall. As these began
to fall his waiting men rushed the entrance. Thirty-five rebels were killed and many more crawled away wounded.

For this action Badal Sing was promoted to jemadar and awarded the Indian Order of Merit. Those who climbed the wall with him were also decorated.

The general fighting finished, the mutineers finally withdrew, taking with them the artillery they had used with devastating effect. Their losses were heavy, about eight hundred killed or wounded. The Sirmoor Battalion lost thirty-six.

Stories of the Gurkhas and their bravery began to circulate around the camp fires. One was recorded by a British officer. It concerned a Gurkha and a rifleman who chased a Brahmin soldier into a house. The rifleman tried to force the door, “but the Gurkha went to the window and coiling his compact little person into the smallest compass, waited for his enemy. Soon the point of a musket, then a head and long neck appeared. The Gurkha sprang up and seizing him by the locks, which clustered out of the back of his puggaree, he cut off his head with his kukri, ere the Brahmin could invoke Mahadeo.” The Gurkha returned with this grisly trophy.

At the end of June, after long days of oppressive heat, the rains came. The choking dust was changed almost immediately into thick mud. The first storm lasted two hours, and the Gurkhas had to splash through the swift torrents flowing down the ridge, in answer to a call for help from the Fusiliers, who were now holding the Subzi Mandi post.

There was a more general attack before the month was out, with the rebels coming out against the entire line of the Ridge. Reid was ordered by the general to remain on the defensive. When the rebels withdrew at sunset, only two Gurkhas had been lost. Presumably Reid pleased the general; but his own men complained that had they been allowed to counter-attack they could have captured at least three 9-pounders.

By this time the Gurkhas had become very attached to the English riflemen who were so often in action with them. Although the two corps were unable to speak each other’s language they managed to get along famously. Strangely, by early July their casualty figures were almost identical—twenty-eight killed and a hundred and ten wounded.

Owing to this drain on his strength Reid had sent word to Dehra asking for all available recruits and furlough men; but these were not
to reach him until the First of August. Meanwhile his casualties mounted, though there was a lull for a few days during which Reid set his men to work strengthening Hindu Rao’s House. The constant firing had almost battered it to pieces.

The respite was broken by the early morning beating of drums and the fluttering of standards below the city walls. Reid, using a telescope from a vantage point on the roof, estimated there were eight thousand rebels in this new attack. The battle raged for a long time, but by noon the British passed to the offensive and Reid headed one of the two columns sent to turn the enemy flanks.

With monsoon rain lashing down unceasingly, the rebels slowly retreated down the Grand Trunk Road. The pursuing Gurkhas pressed so hard that they came under fire from the heavy guns in the bastions. In fact they came within two hundred and fifty yards of the defences; but by this time the rebel force had re-entered the city. Reid ordered his bugler to “sound off” and he withdrew his men to the Ridge.

The rebels had suffered heavy losses that day; long after nightfall they were still collecting dead and wounded in bullock carts. Among the seventy-five British casualties were Lieutenant Eckford and twenty-six men of the Sirmoor Battalion. Among the wounded was Subedar-Major Singbir Thapa who forty years earlier had fought under Balbahadur in Kalunga Fort against the British.

The total battalion losses were now a hundred and seventy-three, and Reid was anxiously watching for the draft from Dehra. His men appeared untroubled by this. A British colonel wrote. “... the poor little Gurkhas have somewhat less than half the number of effective men that they had on the day of their arrival here, and yet they are always as jolly and cheerful as ever, and as anxious to go to the front when there is an attack.”

On July 29th all Reid’s wounded were taken into a large convoy starting for Ambala. This reduced the battalion strength to two hundred men; but three days later an artillery and ammunition column, three miles long, arrived at the Ridge. It brought large sums of treasure and its sole escort since starting from Rawalpindi in June was the Kumaon Regiment of Gurkhas. The long march had called for great discipline and endurance. It had started in tormenting heat and finished in torrential rain. The main camp was flooded in parts.

So Reid received his reinforcement, a second Gurkha battalion, on the Ridge. They were in time for immediate action for this day was
the Festival of Id, and the Bahadur Shah, King of Delhi, descendant of Timour the Tartar, planned to celebrate it with an overwhelming assault on the Ridge. The old king, who was 82, had become a puppet under British rule and he longed for revenge and to regain his lost power.

There were four Gurkhas on the roof of Hindu Rao’s House and they gave warning that the whole city seemed to be turning out. Some ten thousand mutineers swarmed out of the Ajmere Gate, bringing artillery with them. Another column was seen moving away to the right, with the obvious intention of attacking the British camp in the rear.

The Jumna was swollen with monsoon rain, and the rebels were only able to get their guns over with great difficulty. Before the operation was completed, the bridge was swept away.

A terrific fire had been kept up from the rebel lines, but there was no assault launched until the following afternoon. Six times they were beaten back by the Gurkhas, the 60th Rifles and the Punjab Guides with a detachment of Coke’s Rifles. By moonlight there was a further attack; but this, too, failed. It was the twenty-fourth assault on the Ridge.

Reid conducted the defence from the right flank battery. During the battle he had a narrow escape. As he handed his telescope to his orderly a round shot decapitated the unfortunate Gurkha and passed through the body of a servant bringing tea for the “Major Sahib”.

On his way back to the house, Reid came across a Gurkha boy squatting behind a rock with a rifle in his hands. He was a “line boy”, which meant that he had been born in the regimental lines, and he had accompanied his father in the draft of recruits from Dehra. Questioned, he told Reid that he had gone to an outpost with his father, to help with the cartridges. His father had been killed, so the boy had teamed up with a rifleman from the 60th, helping him to load quickly. Later, the rifleman was wounded. He gave his rifle to the boy and told him to fetch a litter party to get him to hospital. After this the boy returned to the outpost and carried on firing on his own account until he, in turn, was wounded. He stood up, seeming quite pleased to show his wounds—four holes where a bullet had gone through the fleshy part of both thighs without causing serious injury. Although the boy was only fourteen, Reid enlisted him on the spot and sent him to hospital, where he fully recovered in a fortnight.

A few days after this battle five large bales arrived. These con-
tained flannel shirts, shoes and other articles of clothing, sent by the "kindly ladies of Mussorie" who had heard that "their Gurkhas" were in rags after three months' fighting since marching out of Dehra. The men quickly paraded in their new kit, giving rebel look-outs the impression that more Gurkha reinforcements had arrived.

Early in August the long-awaited British reinforcements arrived, under the command of Brigadier-General John Nicholson. This raised the British strength to eight thousand regulars and three thousand irregular troops. The first meeting between Reid and Nicholson, the "Lion of the Punjab", was decidedly cool, Reid disliking the general's overbearing manner. But this unfavourable impression passed on Nicholson's subsequent visits, and the two men eventually became firm friends.

The general frequently climbed the ladder to the roof and after ten such visits he demanded: "Why don't you instruct your Gurkhas to let me pass? They have seen my face ten times now but still they halt and challenge me." This characteristic trait of the Gurkha soldier was still evident among their great-great-grandsons during the Second World War!

For a while after Nicholson's arrival the rebel attacks diminished; but the blinding monsoon rain coupled with constant guard and outpost duties imposed so great a strain that about a hundred men had to be admitted to hospital. Throughout frightful weather the engineers were busy constructing advanced batteries in readiness for more heavy guns which were expected.

There was no major attack until the end of the month. Still confident of victory the aged King of Delhi had special seats erected outside the walls and close to some sunken batteries. The promised spectacle was the raising of the rebel's green standard over Hindu Rao's House. Spies brought Reid a copy of the king's order to the mutineers. This offered a reward of ten rupees for every Gurkha head. This was the same price as for English heads, a tribute to the dread in which the Gurkhas were held.

On the morning of the attack the king, with a large retinue and a number of his wives, came to the prepared place. The end was not as good as the beginning, for the assault proved too costly and the royal spectators were forced to withdraw hurriedly into the city.

Knowing that the British siege train, with only a slender escort, was but a short march away the rebels tried to intercept it; but they were foiled with heavy losses by Nicholson at the head of a mobile column.
The siege train, a welcome sight to the weary troops holding the Ridge, was escorted in on September 3rd. It was a long procession, each gun being drawn by twenty bullocks. The city walls were out of range from the guns on the Ridge; so working by night and as silently as possible, the engineers set to work on new battery positions. It was a fantastic spectacle, with fifteen hundred camels bearing faggots and sandbags, and hundreds of men working frantically to complete the task by dawn. They were forward of the Ridge and a little to the left. Soon after daylight the first of the batteries opened up with 18-pounder shot with such effect that the Moree Bastion was soon in ruins. There was heavy retaliation from the rebel guns, and because of casualties the last of the batteries, only a hundred and forty yards from the walls, was unable to come into action until September 12th.

While the bombardment was getting under way Nicholson spent a great deal of the time in Reid’s look-out at the house. They narrowly missed death when a shrapnel shell burst overhead. Three balls struck the telescope which Reid was using at that moment. A Gurkha sitting at Reid’s feet lost an eye, and another was hit in the chest.

The combined assault on Delhi started at eleven o’clock on the morning of September 11th. Under a terrific bombardment the enemy batteries were silenced within ten minutes. The rebels ran out field pieces which did great damage by enfilading the British batteries. Rockets from their Martello Towers and volleys of musketry from advance trenches took a fearful toll. Half of Battery No. Two, bombarding the Kashmir Bastion, caught fire. The rebel guns concentrated on the flames.

The trenches between the first and second batteries were occupied by two companies of Gurkhas under Lieutenant Lockhart. He realised the fire could only be put out by working on top of the parapet from outside, in a dangerously exposed position. Without hesitation he climbed out of the trench, immediately followed by seven Gurkhas. They started cutting open the sandbags and pouring out the contents to smother the flames. Two Gurkhas were killed almost immediately as the enemy firing increased. Then Lockhart received a terrible wound in the jaw, smashing it to pieces. He fell in agony but managed to scramble to his feet in an attempt to carry on; but he dropped again from exhaustion and loss of blood. The remaining Gurkhas, in spite of wounds, stayed gallantly at the task and extinguished the fire.

Reid, who witnessed the action, recommended Lockhart for the
V.C. His citation was written in pencil and was not regarded as "official". Reid re-submitted it when things were quieter, but Lord Clyde ruled that young Lockhart had only done his duty, and refused to consider the award.

Lockhart recovered from his wound and eventually became Colonel of the 107th Foot.

On September 13th Nicholson came to Hindu Rao's House for the last time. He discussed with Reid plans for the grand assault due to take place early the next day.

At the storming of Delhi, Nicholson lived up to his title of "Lion of the Punjab" by being the first to mount the breach in the Kashmir Gate, the blowing of which was one of the epics of military history. Waving his sword he led a wave of troops and took possession of the ramparts. Unfortunately he was killed in the attack.

Reid's column, which included his two hundred Gurkhas, had moved through the swirling mists of dawn up the Grand Trunk Road. At a point opposite the Subzi Mandi outpost he awaited the blowing of the Kashmir Gate, which would be the signal to advance. Immediately upon the roar of the explosion his men swept forward to take part in the attack. They were soon suffering heavy casualties because they not only lacked artillery support but had to storm an unbroken wall, eighteen feet high, where the road crossed the canal. The wall was lined with guns and marksmen, and rebel artillery was firing down the road. The numbers of dead and dying began to mount at an alarming rate.

The Gurkhas and the 60th Rifles were in the van. Both suffered severe casualties but in spite of these they gained the canal bridge. Reid, near the head of the column, was considering what orders to give next when he was struck by a musket ball and knocked senseless into a ditch. He was thought to be dead. Captain Lawrence, taking over command in the midst of the confusion, decided to withdraw. When Reid regained consciousness he was being carried on the strong back of one of his Gurkhas towards the Ridge.

The main city fell within two days, though mopping up operations continued until September 20th. So ended the siege during which a small force, by bravery and endurance, had held down a vast number of well-armed and well-trained mutineers, and finally triumphed over them. The Gurkhas had won the hearts and admiration of their British comrades-in-arms and had built a strong foundation
for the future of the Gurkha regiments. They had come to Delhi four hundred and ninety strong and later been reinforced by a detachment of ninety-one. During the long siege they had suffered three hundred and twenty-seven casualties.

There were two unsatisfactory postscripts. In the heat of battle Reid's reports had been written in pencil. Apart from citing Lockhart he had drawn attention to the splendid service not only of his own officers, but of officers of the 60th Rifles. All these were considered unofficial and ignored. When foolscap and a pen were available he sent them in again. Lord Clyde replied: "The time is past for publishing further despatches relative to these services, which, however meritorious, are now of old date."

In some quarters, too, there was adverse criticism of Reid for his offensive tactics. With so small a force why did he not keep on the defensive? The answer, of course, was that although stout-hearted and firm in defence his men were at their best when attacking. Nothing was more likely to depress them than a long stand behind walls. In short, Reid knew his Gurkhas.
2 Frontier Warfare

"The Russians are coming!"

In the latter half of the nineteenth century this was a very real fear among the British in India, particularly those in the region of the North-West Frontier. Even ayahs used the threat to subdue their small European charges.

Over the centuries the invasion route to the plains had been through the passes which were now on the frontier between India and Afghanistan.

In Kabul, the capital of the Afghan ruler Sher Ali, there was a diplomatic struggle between the Russians and the British; each anxious to prevent the other from becoming a political influence in the country. Suddenly in 1878, a Russian Mission was established in the Afghan capital.

The balance had to be restored, and Sir Neville Chamberlain, who had distinguished himself at Delhi during the Mutiny, was instructed to establish a British Mission at Kabul. He left Peshawar for the Afghan border, only to be turned back by a show of force. This was an affront which could not be overlooked in those days. Sher Ali was given the opportunity of making an apology. He refused, and the British prepared for what was to be the Second Afghan War.

Afghanistan was to be invaded by three columns. One of these, the Kurram Field Force, included the 5th Gurkha Regiment. The force commander was Major-General Frederick Roberts, V.C., later to become Lord Roberts of Kandahar.

His objective, the Kurram Valley, was a dependency of Kabul. It was some sixty miles long and situated at the foot of the Safed Koh mountain range. Its scenery was beautiful, with green fields and pleasant orchards over which towered the snow-peaked mountains whose lower slopes were covered in dark pine forests. A number of
small, well-watered glens ran into the hills on either side. The Kurram River flowed through the valley, and the main road ran for the most part along its rocky bed.

Nearly every village in the valley was a virtual fort. The mud walls of the square enclosure had a cheveux-de-frise of thorn bushes running along the tops. There was a tower at two of the diagonal angles flanking the sides.

A campaign in such country was not going to be easy, and General Roberts was far from happy about the force at his disposal. Not only was its total strength inadequate, but four out of his six Indian regiments contained a large proportion of Moslem sepoys who, at best, were not enthusiastic about fighting tribesmen who shared their faith. Also, in one of the British regiments, the 2nd Battalion of the 8th Foot, there were many young soldiers new to the country and susceptible to fever. Moreover, the transport system was inefficient and his lines of communication would be exposed to attack by Afridi tribesmen. However, Roberts was not the man to let these misgivings deter him. He would be alert for trouble, dealing with it as and when it arose.

Before dawn on November 21st 1878 his leading troops crossed into Afghan territory, heading for the Safed Koh. Roberts described the early stages of the march. “The stars were still shining when we started but it was very dark and we were chilled to the bone by a breeze blowing straight off the snows of the Safed Koh; towards sunrise it died away and was followed by oppressive heat and clouds of dust. Our progress was slow, for the banks of the numerous nullahs which intersect the valleys had to be ramped before the guns and baggage could pass over them.”

There were reports that the Amir’s troops were withdrawing, but a patrol of Punjab Infantry established that the Afghans were, in fact, occupying a very strong position astride the pass, with their guns trained. This patrol was attacked and pinned down until the 5th Gurkhas, making skilful use of the broken ground, came to their assistance and covered their withdrawal.

Roberts abandoned his original intention of a frontal attack. The enemy position was formidable. The ridge held by the Afghans rose abruptly two thousand feet above the valley. Using his telescope, Roberts could see crowds of soldiers and a large number of guns.

The only approach was by a narrow, steep path flanked on either side by precipitous spurs jutting out at right angles to the ridge and
from which devastating fire could be brought to bear on the single file of the attackers.

By night no tents had come up, so the British force prepared to bivouac; but they were suddenly under fire from Afghan shells and had to pull back a mile, out of range. Roberts stayed at this point for two days with strong pickets posted on the neighbouring heights. The pause enabled his men and the animals to recover from the exhausting march up the valley. During this Roberts' Chief Engineer surveyed the approaches to the ridge. His report was discouraging. A deep ravine made an attack on the enemy's left appear as hopeless as a frontal assault.

However there was, on the other side, the majestic bulk of the Spingawai Kotal, screened by spurs densely covered with deodar forests. A further reconnaissance established that there seemed to be no Afghan troops there and that a nullah would provide cover for an approach. Roberts decided to move at night; but with suspected Afghan sympathisers in his camp the plan was confided only to his two senior staff officers and his A.D.C.

In order to deceive the enemy, false reconnaissances were made as if in preparation for a frontal attack. Even battery sites were traced out. The ruse was clearly successful because the Afghan guns started to shell the working parties.

Roberts decided to lead the turning movement in person, taking over two thousand men, including the Gurkhas, and leaving a thousand men and five guns with Brigadier-General Cobbe, who was instructed to make a feint attack on the Afghan-held ridge.

Roberts moved off at ten o'clock on Sunday evening. The tents, which had come up during the waiting period, were left standing and all the camp fires still burning. Everything was done so quietly that even the troops left behind in the camp were unaware of the column's departure.

The Punjab Infantry led, following a track which ran due east for about two miles. Here it turned north, entering a wide gorge and following the bed of a mountain stream. The moon came up and the cliffs on the eastern side were bathed in light, making even more dark the shadow of the steep hills on the west under which the troops toiled, over piles of stones and glacier débris. A bitterly cold wind blew down the gorge from the icy peaks above. In spite of their exertions the climbers, in light-weight uniforms, shivered. In the darkness men stumbled over great boulders and splashed into
streams which were freezingly cold. With such hard going frequent halts were necessary so that the column could close up.

Roberts became anxious about the all-important timing of the operation and moved forward to consult with Colonel Gordon of the Punjab Infantry. His suspicions were aroused by the straggling manner in which the leading troops were marching, and no sooner had he spoken to Gordon about this than two shots rang out from a Pathan company which was in the van.

The Sikh companies of the Punjab Infantry closed up at once, and Gordon's Sikh orderly whispered urgently that there was treachery among the Pathans.

It was a tense moment. In the darkness it was impossible for Roberts or Gordon to discover who had fired the shots and exactly what was happening. There was no means of telling whether the firing had attracted the attention of the enemy. To halt the column would not only mean losing valuable time but would inevitably add to the confusion.

Roberts acted quickly. He ordered the Gurkhas and a company of the 72nd Highlanders to take over the lead. The Highlanders were detailed to keep a close watch in readiness should any Pathans defect.

With the first faint light of dawn the Afghans became aware of the approaching British force. There were two shots from sentries. The advance party of Gurkhas formed up and led by Major Fitz-Hugh and Captain Cook rushed a barricade which was just becoming visible about fifty yards to their left. The remainder of the regiment, in extended order, swarmed round the flanks of this obstacle, which was swiftly carried.

The light was rapidly growing stronger, and the Gurkhas, having shot or bayoneted the Afghans in the first entrenchment, could see more formidable defence works two hundred yards higher up the slopes. The supporting Highlanders, guided by the flashes of enemy rifles, came charging up the steep hillside. The Gurkhas, transferring their rifles to their left hands, drew their kukris, outstripped their Highland comrades and tore into the second entrenchment, leaping over the felled trees that lined the tops of the trenches.

The Highlanders, breathless after their run up the hill, came upon Afghan corpses sprawled across the logs and saw the nimble Gurkhas hounding the fleeing enemy towards a third defensive line. They rushed after them and joined in taking this final position, which commanded the head of the pass. The Spingawai Kotal was won.

The sun was still only rising, and in the uncertain light of the thick
forest it was difficult to distinguish friend from foe. Captain Cook suddenly came face to face with a large number of Afghans who were attempting to save one of their guns. Against heavy fire he and his Gurkhas scattered them.

Cook suddenly saw one of the enemy taking aim from behind the cover of a tree at Major Galbraith, the Assistant Adjutant-General. Distracting the man’s attention to himself, Cook slashed with his sword. The Afghan avoided the sweeping blade and sprang upon Cook, seizing his throat in muscular hands. At the same time he caught Cook’s sword-arm between his teeth. The two struggled among the pine needles until a Gurkha came rushing up and shot the Afghan through the head.

Although the main assault was over there were still Afghan soldiers lurking in the surrounding forests. Some four hundred of these made a daring attempt to recover the guns which had been left behind in the first shock of attack. Their dress was so like that of the sepoys in some of the Indian regiments that they were not identified until they were within a hundred yards of the entrenchments. Galbraith, who had just narrowly escaped death, hastily gathered some troops and concentrated rifle fire on the enemy to such effect that they fled, leaving seventy dead behind them.

With full daylight Roberts could see the wisdom of his daring night attack. The approaches to the pass were defended by breastworks of felled trees which would completely screen the defenders so that they could fire deadly volleys without exposing themselves. But for the dawn surprise it was doubtful whether any of the attackers would have reached even the first entrenchment. The Afghans had fled so quickly that where each one had rested a sheepskin coat and up to a hundred rounds of ammunition had been abandoned.

The main enemy position still lay a long way off on the Peiwar Kotal. The assault troops reformed on a grassy plateau where a field hospital was set up. Among the wounded were seventeen Gurkhas. Only two of the little men had been killed in the fierce fighting.

Roberts continued his advance through dense forest until his leading troops were fired on by Afghans strongly entrenched on the far side of a deep depression. The Punjab Infantry were once more in the van, and he sent the Sikh companies forward; but he had to withdraw them when it became clear they were not strong enough for the task. The Gurkhas and Highlanders arrived on the scene and
joined in a fresh attack; but this, too, failed because of the extremely narrow front of approach.

Rapid reconnaissance revealed another route farther to the north, and use of this turned the position immediately. Roberts pressed on without delay, for any attempt at concealment was now pointless. He was able to make use of his mountain guns, and under the bombardment the Afghans hurriedly retreated.

General Cobbe was now able to launch a real attack from the camp and shortly before nightfall Roberts had the satisfaction of seeing, through his telescope, a great body of enemy moving away. It assured him that the main position was now in British hands.

Having marched and fought since ten o'clock the previous night, with very little food and no rest, his troops were ordered to bivouac on the southern slope of the mountain. Here they spent an unpleasant night, lying on the ground without cloaks at an altitude of nine thousand feet, with the thermometer registering twenty degrees of frost.

An hour's march after daybreak brought him to the Peiwar Kotal. Guns, baggage waggons, and camp equipment of all kinds lay around. Thousands of rounds of ammunition and other war material fell into British hands. It was learnt later that the Afghan Army had numbered eight regular regiments. In addition there were hordes of tribesmen who had answered to the cry of a Jahad, or Holy War, against the infidels.

As a result of their bravery in the action five Gurkhas were awarded the I.O.M. Captain Cook won the V.C. and was promoted to major. Unfortunately, the following year he died of wounds received in the action at the Takht-i-Shah Hill, overlooking the City of Kabul.

The feelings of the 5th Gurkhas towards their gallant British officer were expressed several years later by Subedar-Major Parsu Khattri, himself decorated for bravery at Peiwar Kotal and regarded as one of the finest soldiers ever bred in his regiment. “Major Cook was the bravest man I have ever seen—braver even than Roberts Sahib whom all the Regiment considered very brave, above all other men.”

Two British officers, journeying to India in 1891 by way of the Pamirs and Gilgit were forced by Russian soldiers to leave “newly acquired Russian territory”.

The same year a certain Colonel Yanoff crossed the Hindu Kush mountains at the head of a band of Cossacks and carried out a
reconnaissance along the borders of Kashmir before withdrawing as suddenly as he had appeared.

This act violated the boundary line agreed in 1873 between Russia and Britain and led to the mounting of the Hunza-Nagir campaign. These were the main tribes in the Kanjut, a petty state on the northern boundary of Kashmir. The Russians had for several years been fomenting trouble, inciting the tribesmen to carry out border raids into British territory.

The Yanoff incident came after attacks on the Kashmir outposts of Chalt and Chaprot, and the British decided it was time the Hunza and Nagir tribesmen were taught a lesson. The most impressive would be to capture Nilt fort, which symbolised the isolation and independence of Kanjut.

Colonel Durand was given command of a small force and sent on this mission. His only regular troops were two hundred Gurkhas from the 5th, fewer than thirty rifles from the Punjab Infantry and some half-dozen Bengal Sappers. The remainder were irregulars, including some Kashmir Infantry. The total strength was around eleven hundred men; but some two hundred Pathans, working on the road, were enrolled and armed to form an Engineer Corps.

The assembly point was Chalt outpost in Kashmir. This meant a long and arduous journey for the Gurkhas, who had to come from their Regimental Centre at Abbottabad. Under the command of Captain Barrett, and accompanied by a section of the Hazara Mountain Battery, the detachment set off.

By October 14th they reached the foot of the Tragbal Pass. This mountain and the neighbouring one of Burzil, both well over the ten-thousand foot line, had long exposed stretches swept by devastating blizzards which were a constant danger to travellers. It was decided to split the detachment into three parties. The first two crossed both passes with no trouble more serious than a few frostbite casualties; but when the third reached the Kashmir end of the Burzil Pass on October 25th the weather became threatening.

Arrangements were made with the local people to supply ponies which could struggle ahead and tread a path through the deep snow, but the animals failed to materialise. So the troops had to force their own passage. They had to cross a long exposed stretch in the face of a howling blizzard. The mountain road had disappeared under a thick carpet of snow. The baggage mules kept wandering into deep drifts, and precious energy had to be used in hauling them back to safety. The muleteers themselves began to fail, and the escorting
troops had as much difficulty keeping them moving as they had with the animals.

It was noon before the head of the column reached the summit of the pass and during the afternoon conditions became even worse. It began to freeze hard and what track could be discerned was an icy slide; every mule must have fallen at least a score of times. The muleteers had virtually given up and so the Gurkhas were continuously unloading fallen animals, heaving them to their feet, and loading them again. All this had to be done in a bitterly cold wind and before long the Gurkhas were chilled and exhausted.

To rest was impossible because it would mean certain death from exposure, so when night fell the painfully slow advance still had to go on. An hour and a half after midnight the leaders of the column staggered blindly into camp; but it was not until after daybreak that the rearguard's ordeal was over.

The blizzard had taken a heavy toll. Barrett had been with this party and he had suffered so severely that he was on the sick list for five months and lost several toes. Twenty-nine Gurkhas were frostbitten, four so badly that they were incapacitated for further service. The muleteers came off worst with over fifty men frostbitten, and several of these died.

With the crossing of the passes the march became easier and Gilgit was reached in mid-November. Here Barrett had to be left for medical attention, and the command passed to Lieutenant Boisragon. He took the detachment on to Chalt where the field force was assembling for the attack on Nilt fort. This moved off on December 2nd, followed by baggage coolies and mules.

Slowly the column wound its way down to the plain. This flat stretch between hills and river narrowed gradually until some three hundred yards from the fort it was only sixty yards wide. The fort was hidden most of the way by a mountain spur. The plain itself was slashed by two deep nullahs and at both the path had been cut away, forming formidable natural obstacles.

Not long after mid-day the leading Gurkhas reached the mountain spur and could see the fort in front of them. It occupied a fantastic tactical position. It stood amongst terraced fields on the edge of a high cliff overlooking the Hunza River. Behind it the deep Nilt ravine ran down from the Rakaposhi Glacier, over 25,000 feet high, to join the river. Beyond there was a magnificent background of towering mountains, the lower slopes sheer and bare but the crests crowned by pine trees.
The fort was built of stone cemented with mud. The walls were fourteen feet high and eight feet thick, strongly reinforced with stout timber baulks.

As soon as the tribesmen within saw the advancing Gurkhas they opened accurate fire. Pressing forward by section rushes the Gurkhas managed to reach a position from which they could shoot at short range into the loopholes. Meanwhile the few Punjab infantrymen and some of the irregulars climbed to the top of the spur. From this vantage point they commanded the interior of the fort; but could do little because the enemy remained well-hidden behind the walls.

The mountain battery opened fire from a bluff overlooking the river, but the shells made little impact upon the stout defences.

Colonel Durand inspected the objective. There was only one gate to the fort, which had flanking towers at each angle and midway along each face. This gate, at the north-west corner, was screened by a second loopholed wall about eight feet high, and a steep-sided ravine running outside this gave additional protection. The ravine had been filled with branches to form a dense abatis, like a forest lying on its side. The colonel ordered Captain Aylmer and his sappers to blow in the main gate. Lieutenant Boisragon and his Gurkhas were to give what cover they could and then assault the fort following the breach. No sooner had Colonel Durand given these instructions than he was seriously wounded and had to hand over to his second-in-command, Captain Bradshaw.

The Gurkhas advanced according to plan but were pinned down by heavy fire at the abatis. Half a dozen drew their kukris and hacked a way through, followed by Boisragon and Aylmer. Making the most of what cover was available, they managed to work around to a small gate leading through the outer wall but when they had battered this down they found themselves faced by the main entrance, built of heavy timber and barricaded with stones. Every loophole spurted flame and shot. The entrance was recessed and marksmen in the flanking towers were able to bring cross-fire to bear.

While the Gurkhas retaliated and tried to reduce this, Aylmer, accompanied by Sapper Hazura Singh, rushed forward to place the slabs of gun-cotton. These were tamped with stones. As Aylmer lit the fuse he was wounded in the leg at such close range that his clothes and skin were burned by the powder-flash. Incredibly, he managed to hobble back and rejoin Boisragon.

The seconds ticked away with the assault party waiting in suspense. Nothing happened and it became evident that the fuse was
faulty. In spite of his wound and facing almost certain death, Aylmer crawled back. Again he was wounded, one hand being crushed to pulp by a rock hurled down from the wall above. Miraculously, he managed to get back, and his gallantry was rewarded by a deafening report. Stones and fragments of wood flew in all directions. The Gurkhas rushed through the cloud of dust and smoke.

Up to this moment only the two officers and the handful of men had reached the gate. But the other British officer of the 5th Gurkhas, Lieutenant Badcock, rushed forward with some more men.

There was fierce hand-to-hand fighting in a narrow alleyway leading from the gate to the interior of the fort. Two Gurkhas fell dead in the first few minutes and several others were wounded. Aylmer, in spite of his agonising wounds, shot several of the enemy before, faint with pain, he had to be carried back to the shelter of the ditch outside.

It was clear that these few brave men would never be able to take the fort unaided. Boisragon left Badcock to hold the gateway as well as he could and went looking for reinforcements. It was a hazardous venture. He had to run the gauntlet of fire from the towers. Moreover, as the gunners were ignorant that the gate had been breached, there were shells falling from the British battery, and he had to close in upon covering fire from his own troops. Even beyond the abatis he was still in danger, for in moving from group to group, gathering men, he was exposed to fire from the loopholes of the fort, which was only a matter of yards away.

Inside the fort Badcock was hard-pressed. Snatching up a rifle he shot some of the enemy in the narrow alley. Then, rallying his men, he led a charge, driving back the defenders into the maze of the interior. With one arm hanging useless at his side from a severe wound he was on the point of collapsing when Boisragon, in the nick of time, returned with reinforcements.

The Gurkhas surged into the network of passages within the fort, closely followed by the Kashmir irregulars. The fighting was confused and desperate but at last the enemy started to withdraw, leaving only a few of their number to struggle and die within the walls.

The escaping tribesmen crossed the Nilt ravine and manned defences on the far side. Durand’s original plan had been to push ahead part of his force and gain a footing over the ravine. But the enemy had cut away all paths leading down the precipitous left bank and in view of this Bradshaw postponed the advance. He left a
strong detachment to hold the captured fort and encamped the rest of his men in the terraced fields about half a mile away. Guns were brought up to pound a great sangar of rocks and stones which guarded the crossing.

For their part in the spectacular capture of the Nilt fort, nine Gurkhas were awarded the I.O.M. Both Boisragon and Aylmer of the sappers received the V.C. and Badcock was given the D.S.O.

The wounded Colonel Durand wrote a despatch describing the subsequent events.

"The force was halted for the night at Nilt. In front of it was the great ravine rising from the river bed to the glaciers some thousands of feet above. The far bank was lined with sangars which commanded every possible track up to it. Its height varies from 600 feet where it joins the river bank to 1,200 feet and it is absolutely precipitous. To the left of the force ran the Hunza river, on the opposite bank of which was the strongly fortified place of Maiun, standing on the high cliff of the river and full of men. Half a mile up the river on the left bank was a strongly fortified ziarat from which to the junction of the great ravine ran one continuous line of sangars.

"During the night all the sangars were strongly reinforced, and those exposed to shell fire were provided with such heavy roofs as to defy the 7-pounders."

The cliff path up which the enemy had fled the previous day had been deliberately broken away. In addition to abatis defences of felled trees with the branches towards potential attackers, there was a large sangar manned by about a hundred tribesmen.

Night after night fruitless attempts were made to discover some route for attacking Maiun. While these probings were taking place the field force remained encamped for over a fortnight. At last a bold plan was evolved. In place of an attack on Maiun, one of Durand’s officers named Manners-Smith was to take fifty Gurkhas and a hundred irregulars and under cover of darkness reach a point in the Nilt ravine immediately below four enemy sangars, which they were to attack at daybreak. Their advance would be covered by picked shots positioned on the spur above Nilt fort.

Soon after Manners-Smith and his men set out for their hiding-place in the ravine there were shouts and the beating of tom-toms from the direction of Maiun. Those left in the main camp thought that, in spite of the darkness, the manoeuvre had been discovered. However, no firing broke out and apparently the noise was only the tribesmen carousing.
Well before daylight the selected marksmen from the Gurkhas, the Punjab and Kashmir regiments moved up to their positions on the spur. They were divided into four groups, each to concentrate on one sangar. The two 7-pounder guns were hauled up to assist in the covering fire.

December dawn comes late to the valleys and it was not until eight in the morning that there was sufficient light for covering fire to open up.

From their concealment in the ravine the attackers started their fantastic climb. The sangars were twelve hundred feet above the bed of the ravine and the cliff was so steep that the climbers were hidden from the defenders on either side. Neither were they, at first, visible from their own camp so for a time there was great anxiety.

Surmounting one obstacle after another Manners-Smith and the fifty Gurkhas, who were leading the assault, came to within four hundred feet of their objective. Here, heart-breakingly, they were stopped by a sheer cliff, impossible for even highly-skilled cragsmen.

Undaunted by this bitter disappointment, Manners-Smith took his men down again and tried another approach. They were not observed until they were within sixty yards of the lowest sangar. Even so, it was not the defenders who spotted them but the tribesmen at Maiun. These gave the alarm by beating tom-toms and shouting a warning from breastwork to breastwork across the ravine.

The response was immediate. An avalanche of rocks thundered down on the climbers. The sight and sound were terrifying but luckily only a few Gurkhas were hurt. With great coolness and judgment Manners-Smith continued up until it was possible to rush the enemy. Among the first to enter the sangars was his Gurkha orderly Harkbir Thapa, whose conspicuous gallantry earned him the I.O.M. Manners-Smith was later awarded the V.C.

There was fierce fighting in the sangars. Many of the defenders were killed, and those who fled suffered heavily from the covering fire of the marksmen on the spur. As more and more Gurkhas and irregulars achieved the arduous climb the tribesmen were cleared from the remaining sangars.

The gaining of this strongly defended point turned the enemy's left flank and threatened his retreat. Almost immediately long lines of fugitives could be seen streaming up the valley from Maiun and other strongholds. The big sangar opposite Nilt fort surrendered without resistance and nearly a hundred dejected tribesmen filed out to give themselves up.

To the Gurkhas fell the honour of leading the pursuit up to Pisan, seven miles away, where the resistance of the tribes completely crumbled. Considering the almost impregnable positions the enemy had held in the Nilt it is not surprising that Lord Roberts should later refer to the action as "the brilliant little Hunza-Nagir Campaign".
3 Rebellion at Manipur

The Rajah of Manipur fled from his royal palace one September day in 1890 and sought British help. Manipur was an independent state, between Assam and Upper Burma. Its capital was Imphal, to become so well known in the Burma campaigns of World War Two.

Sur Chandra, the Rajah, had been little more than a puppet ruler in the face of the growing power of the Senapati, his chief minister. When he came to the British he was in fear of his life and wanted to abdicate in favour of his brother. But his brother, the Jubraj, would be in equal danger.

The British Government decided to send a small force to arrest the Senapati and secure the new Rajah’s position. Perhaps they were not unmindful of the fact that the Senapati was hostile to British influence.

The arrest was to be carried out by Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner for Assam. The troops were four hundred of the 42nd Gurkha Light Infantry and 44th Gurkha Rifle Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Skene, D.S.O.

It was evident that Skene expected little or no trouble. He included several young recruits in his force; each man was armed with only forty rounds, and there were no reserves of ammunition. The Gurkha battalions were equipped with 7-pounder mountain guns; but these, too, were left behind.

When the column reached Mao Thana on the frontier, Manipuri troops stationed there were eager to know if the British had brought their “big guns”; but nobody seemed to attach any significance to this. Quinton and Skene continued the march towards the British Residency at Imphal, where there was already a detachment of sixty Gurkhas of the 43rd on Resident’s duty. The only other British
troops in the Imphal area were thirty-three Gurkhas of the same regiment at Langthobal, four miles from the Residency.

On the morning of March 22nd 1891 Frank Grimwood, the British Political Agent, rode out to meet Quinton and his troops. Grimwood's wife wrote: "The morning broke clear and beautiful over the valley. The place never looked more lovely. Clusters of yellow roses blossomed on the walls of the house, and the scent of the heliotrope greeted me as I went on to the verandah to watch my husband start out to meet Mr. Quinton.

"The Residency was a long low house with a thatched roof. The walls were painted white, and the woodwork picked out in black. A verandah surrounded it, comfortably matted and strewn with rugs and skins. In front of the house there was a circular lawn covered with flower-beds blazing with colour, and at the end of the lawn was the flagstaff of my dreams and the ensign of Old England waving proudly in the breeze."

With not the slightest suspicion that within forty-eight hours the house would be in ruins and the only scent that of burning wood and cordite, she busied herself preparing for her guests. In the grounds tents were being pitched in readiness for the four hundred troops.

Quinton reached the Residency in time for breakfast and without delay he sent a message to the Senapati and Sur Chandra's brother asking them to attend a Durbar at noon. The Palace was only some two hundred yards away. It had three outer walls, not very high, and in parts fallen into ruin. On the north was the Manipur River. A broad ditch surrounded the ramparts but parts of it were dry. The main gate was to the west, looking out on the Cachar road, and there were two more timber gates to the north and south.

The inner walls were much stouter and they protected the palace and several native houses. The Jubraj's house was to the north between the outer and inner walls.

There were six thousand well-armed Manipuri troops. They had Enfields, Martinis and Sniders, as well as plentiful ammunition. In addition they had some artillery, though nothing heavier than 7-pounders.

Obviously it would be safer to arrest the Senapati away from his home ground, and this was Quinton's intention. The doors of the durbar room were all locked with the exception of one entrance, and guards were stationed in the adjoining rooms and around the house.

Shortly before noon the Senapati and the Jubraj arrived at the gates of the residency. According to Mrs. Grimwood: "The Senapati
was not a very striking-looking personage. I should think he was about five feet eight . . . with a lighter skin than most natives, and a rather pleasing type of countenance. He had nice eyes and a pleasant smile, but his expression was rather spoilt by his front teeth, which were very much broken. We liked what we saw of him. . . ."

The Senapati was a fine polo player and he enjoyed the reputation of being the physically strongest man in the country. He exercised by lifting heavy weights. By nature he was a proud man and conscious of the power he wielded.

Many British in India had adopted an irritating and discourteous habit of keeping Indians waiting outside the gate. That Quinton, after his careful preparations for a smooth and trouble-free arrest, should do this very thing is hard to understand. It was a serious blunder which led to disaster. The angered Senapati refused to be kept waiting, and stormed back to the palace. Quinton tried to arrange another durbar for the following morning, but nobody came. He made a last attempt and, when this failed, he sent Grimwood to the palace in the afternoon accompanied by Lieutenant Simpson, who commanded the Residency Gurkhas. They had no escort with them.

The Senapati received them, and Grimwood told him of the British intentions, which were that he should be banished until such time as the Jubraj died. Then, if he survived the Jubraj, he could return as Rajah. It was suggested that he should give himself up quietly. Not unnaturally he refused.

Grimwood and Simpson returned to the Residency, where a council was held. The chance of arresting the Senapati without difficulty had been thrown away. The only course left was to attack the palace and take him by force. Plans were drawn up.

According to Mrs. Grimwood: "The clouds had been gathering up all the afternoon, and about seven o’clock a terrific thunderstorm occurred and darkness set in, which was only lit up now and then by brilliant flashes of lightning. I busied myself about the house, where I found a state of confusion reigning. A number of the servants had taken French leave and departed, scenting danger."

The British officials seemed less aware of it. Quinton and three of the officers played whist. Afterwards Lieutenant Brackenbury of the 44th Gurkha Rifles brought out a banjo and sang comic songs. They retired early, because they wished to be called at three the next morning. Grimwood and his wife stayed up a bit longer. The rain had
cleared, and they walked in the garden in the moonlight. It was to be for the last time.

Early the following morning Skene was ready for the assault. He had not come prepared for serious fighting yet it seems apparent he still believed his small force, with its limited supply of ammunition, could take the place without difficulty. In view of later information, and bearing in mind the fighting calibre of his Gurkhas, a determined, well-directed attack might have succeeded. Instead, he frittered away his opportunity by making only minor assaults.

Shortly before daybreak he sent in a hundred Gurkhas with another fifty in support to seize the Jubraj’s house, where the Senapati was believed to be staying. They were also to hold the main west gate. Within a few hours the main party of Gurkhas, under Captain Butcher, had taken the house. Unfortunately, the information was faulty—the Senapati was not there. A second group of Gurkhas succeeded in taking the main gate, which commanded the ramparts facing the Residency.

Lieutenant Brackenbury, with thirty Gurkhas, lost his way and finally approached the Jubraj’s house on the wrong side of the wall. They were exposed to heavy fire. Three Gurkhas were killed, while the lieutenant and several others were wounded. Brackenbury’s wounds were serious, and he lay in an open position on the river bank for over four hours. Several attempts were made to rescue him, and in one of these a Gurkha officer was killed. Finally, just before four o’clock, a Gurkha bugler with great courage braved a vicious hail of bullets and carried him to safety. The lieutenant was taken back to the Residency.

During the fighting one of the Gurkhas, Gorey Thapa, was struck on the head by a bullet, apparently without any effect. He must have been particularly hard-headed because in September of the previous year, at the relief of Changsil, a bullet had glanced off his head and unfortunately killed his commanding officer, Lieutenant Swinton.

Throughout the morning, those at the Residency had no news of what was happening. They could hear firing, and all of it seemed to come from the direction of the Jubraj’s house. Mrs. Grimwood wrote: “From time to time stray bullets came over our heads where we sat down at the telegraph office. I thought it was very exciting then, and the little Ghoorkas, who had remained to keep guard over the place, were constantly running out on to the road in front of our entrance-gate to see whether they could discover what was happening. They did not like being inactive at all.”
The attackers had gained the first objectives as planned, but ammunition was running dangerously low. Grimwood, who had followed the troops, returned to collect the small reserve which was kept at the Residency. Even with this the chances of holding on at the Jubraj's house were becoming slender. The Manipuris were counter-attacking and starting a bombardment with their 7-pounders. Skene must have been regretting leaving his own artillery pieces behind.

Around noon, Mrs. Grimwood was asked to make some sandwiches to be sent to Captain Butcher. "I had been busily engaged for about ten minutes when I heard a sound which filled me with alarm, and a bullet crashed through the window above my head. . . . I dropped my knife, left the sandwiches as they were, and rushed into the dining-room. All the officers meanwhile had gone out and had found that the Manipuris had crept round to the back of the Residency and commenced an attack upon us, using as cover the Naga village which lay between our grounds and the river. This was a clever move on their part, and it was some time before the troops could drive them back. . . . Eventually our party set fire to the Naga village and drove the Manipuris out.

"Bullets had made their way through the window-panes and doors of the dining-room and had smashed some of the breakfast things and the glass on the sideboard. It was difficult to find out the most secure place in the house, as the firing was hot in the front of the Residency by this time and the walls, being only lath and plaster, were little or no protection."

By the afternoon the situation was confused. By what must have been a mistake the troops holding the main gate were ordered to withdraw. This left Butcher's group with no support, and he was forced to abandon the Jubraj's house. Soon the whole force was pulling back to concentrate at the Residency.

According to Mrs. Grimwood: "It must have been about half-past four that the big guns began to be played against us . . . the sound of the first shell which whizzed over the Residency made me speechless with terror. . . . Luckily most of them went over the house into the garden at the back, where they could not do such serious damage; but the noise the guns made, added to the other firing, which had never ceased, was deafening."

The hospital, filling up with wounded, was built of plaster, so a temporary ward was made in the cellar of the Residency, and the wounded were moved into this.
Around seven that evening the senior officers held a conference. At first they agreed to evacuate the Residency and withdraw to Cachar. Then, dogged by the same indecisiveness which had contributed so much to their present circumstances, they changed their minds in favour of requesting a truce. Quinton sent a letter to the Senapati asking: “On what condition will you cease firing on us, and give us time to repair the telegraph and communicate with the Viceroy?”

Skene ordered his bugler to sound the “cease fire”. The Gurkhas obeyed at once; but the Manipuris continued firing for some time longer.

At last a messenger could be sent and, after a short delay, returned with an invitation for the senior British officers to meet the Senapati at the palace. It is hard to understand why Quinton and Skene decided to trust him. Perhaps they were demoralised by the failure of a poorly-planned attack and ready to accept any chance of extricating themselves from an obviously hopeless position. Or perhaps they clung to the belief that because of their official positions and the power of the British Raj behind them, the Senapati would not dare to harm them.

But, after having made this decision, it is even harder to understand why five of them should have placed themselves in the Senapati’s power. They set out, unarmed and unescorted. There were Quinton and his assistant secretary, Cossins. Then Skene and Grimwood and, finally, Simpson of the Residency Gurkhas who accompanied them at his own request, for no better reason, seemingly, than his friendship with Grimwood.

By the time they reached the main gate a large crowd of Manipuri soldiers and civilians had gathered, and the five were surrounded by an excited, jeering mob. Suddenly, one of the Manipuris, Kajao Singh, rushed forward and speared Grimwood. This was the signal for the soldiers to seize the other four Englishmen. They were dragged and buffeted into the citadel.

A few hours later they were brought out and beheaded by the public executioner.

Unaware of their fate, Major Boileau and Captain Butcher waited for news at the Residency. They were now the senior officers in command.

Mrs. Grimwood tended the wounded in the cellar. “Some of the men were terribly wounded, but poor Mr. Brackenbury was by far
the worst . . . his face was grey and drawn, and damp dews collected on his forehead from the great pain he was suffering. . . . That scene will never be forgotten—the little cellar with a low roof, and the faces of the wounded lying together on the floor. We did not dare have a bright light for fear of attracting attention to that particular spot, and the doctor did his work with one dim lantern. Such work it was, too! Every now and then he asked me to go outside for a few moments while the dead were removed to give a little more space for the living."

At midnight there was still no news of Quinton and the others. By this time the Manipuri guns had opened up again, and this could only mean that the surrender talks had failed. Boileau and Butcher decided to evacuate the Residency under cover of darkness and to withdraw to Silchar. They knew that Captain Cowley would be on his way from this place with two companies of the 43rd to carry out a routine relief of Simpson and the Resident’s escort. He would know nothing of events at Imphal, but they hoped to meet him on the road and come under his protection.

The withdrawal was the same sorry story of poor leadership. By two in the morning Boileau and Butcher pulled out with about a hundred and sixty Gurkhas. Mrs. Grimwood was with them, and they also had seventeen wounded. They made the best speed they could along the road to Silchar. But some two hundred and seventy Gurkhas were left at the Residency, seemingly unaware of the evacuation order!

Without leaders these gallant men fought on. The shells exploding on the house soon had the thatched roof in flames and these spread rapidly, giving a fearful lighting to the compound. Several thousand Manipuris came out of the gloom.

Unflinching, the Gurkhas mowed many of them down with a withering fire. But this died away as their inadequate supply of ammunition gave out. The once-peaceful flower-beds, the deodars and mango trees, became the setting for wild hand-to-hand fighting. The firelight picked out the naked steel of bayonet and kukri.

Of the sixty-six men who had made up the Resident’s escort, hardly a man survived. Of the others, who had been marched in so proudly by Skene, a mere fifty were still alive by morning, prisoners in the hands of the victorious Manipuris.

This same morning found Boileau and Butcher climbing towards the summits of the first range of hills which lay between them and Silchar. There was no Manipuri pursuit, but the column was being
closely followed by hostile Naga tribesmen. They managed to keep these at bay and maintain the hard march. The following morning, as the column approached the six-thousand-foot Leimatak Hill they came upon Manipuri troops preparing to ambush Cowley's Gurkhas. Firing broke out. This gave warning to the approaching troops, who advanced into action. Caught between the two parties the Manipuris fled into the valley.

The British officers met, and Cowley was told of the disaster at Imphal. His immediate thought must have been to press on and see if he could save the situation; but the others persuaded him to get them back safely to British territory. A few days later they reached Cachar.

Major Boileau and Captain Butcher were court-martialled and cashiered for gross neglect of duty in the face of the enemy.

The two heroes of the Manipur rebellion began to play their part while Boileau and Butcher were in flight. At Langthobal, Jemadar Birbal Nagarkoti was on special duty with thirty-three men belonging to the Resident's escort. Although he was only four miles from Imphal no orders were sent to him and he was not advised of the withdrawal.

Birbal was a Gurkha of great courage and determination. When news began to come through of the disaster at the Residency he gave careful consideration to the situation. With so small a force it was clearly impossible to march on the Residency. But he was not going to take flight, and he was certainly not going to be overawed by a few thousand Manipuris. He knew that Lieutenant Grant was stationed at Tamu with a detachment of Madras Infantry. He decided to make the sixty-mile march and join him.

Already Manipuri troops were encircling Langthobal. After some hard fighting Birbal and his thirty-three men cleaved their way through them. Then they set off at a hot pace for Tamu, covering the distance in forty-eight hours, with only four hours halt.

Grant was a determined and daring young officer. He at once "wired all over Burmah" and by eleven o'clock that evening the orders he required were through.

Jemadar Birbal immediately offered the services of his party. No doubt Grant was only too happy to accept. His own force was small enough and quite a high proportion were recruits who had so far fired only a few rounds of ball ammunition.

They left Tamu at five o'clock the following morning. The force
consisted of Birbal and his Gurkhas, armed with Martinis and sixty rounds per man, and an Indian subedar with fifty sepoys of the Madras Infantry, thirty of whom were recruits. Grant also took three elephants to carry supplies.

Because of the elephants, progress was slow even though they kept on the march until five in the afternoon. The great beasts could only climb the hills outside Tamu at the rate of one mile an hour.

Grant had halted at the Lokchao River. He crossed this shortly after midnight and resumed the march. By the afternoon of the next day he had reached Kongaung and there had been the first exchange of shots with bands of Manipuris. At moonrise, an hour before midnight, the advance continued. They soon came upon obstacles across the road. Telegraph wires had been cut, pulled down from the poles, and twisted about the road. Trees had been felled to make a series of barricades, from behind which the Manipuris opened fire on the advancing column. Grant sent small parties to turn each position, and the enemy was driven off without any losses to themselves.

Grant’s small force came out of the hills at daybreak and attacked the two hundred-strong garrison at Palel, driving the Manipuris out of the town and pursuing them for three miles before drawing back to spend the remainder of that day resting. At moonrise they moved out of Palel, going along foothills and swamp fields. By seven in the morning he was nearing Thobal, fifteen miles from Imphal. “Meeting”, he wrote, “slight resistance till within 300 yards of river, three to six feet deep, and fifty yards broad; there seeing a burning bridge, I galloped up on poor Clinker . . . and was greeted by a hot fire from the mud-walled compounds on left of bridge and trenches on the right in the open all across the river. I saw the wooden bridge was burnt through, and made record time back to my men, emptying my revolver into the enemy behind the walls.”

His men were in fighting formation. Ten Madras Infantry and ten Gurkhas in firing line, with six paces interval between each man and the next. A hundred yards in the rear there were twenty of his men in support. In reserve he had another score of his men and twenty Gurkhas.

“We opened volleys by sections (ten men) and then advanced, one section firing a volley whilst the other rushed forward thirty paces, threw themselves down on the ground and fired a volley, on which the other sections did likewise. Thus we reached a hundred yards from the enemy, where we lay for about five minutes firing at the only thing we could see, puffs of smoke from the enemy’s loopholes.”
Dust from enemy bullets covered them, and one man was killed at Grant’s side. He felt a sharp flick under his arm and “began to think we were in for about as much as we could manage; but the men were behaving splendidly, firing carefully and well directed. I signalled the supports to come up wide on each flank; they came with a splendid rush and never stopped on joining the firing line, but went clean on to the bank of the river within sixty yards of the enemy, lying down and firing at their heads, which could now be seen as they raised them to fire. Then the former firing line jumped up and we rushed into the water. I was first in, but not first out, as I got in up to my neck and had to be helped out and got across nearer to the bridge.”

The men fixed bayonets as they waded through the water, and seeing this the Manipuris started to run. Eight were bayoneted as the attackers took the trenches. Six were found shot through the head behind the compound wall. There was a second line of walls, and the enemy tried to make a stand here but a vigorous charge from the right made them break again. They retreated, never stopping until they reached the cover of the hills.

Grant, watching them streaming across the plain, was amazed to see that they spread for about a mile and must have been some eight hundred strong. Most of them were in white jackets with white turbans and dhotis; but there was one group of about two hundred in red jackets and white turbans.

Grant did not order a pursuit because he could see about three hundred Manipuris to his rear beyond the baggage. He moved a Gurkha picket in advance under Birbal while he prepared a defensive position close to the road and so placed as to form a refuge for anyone who had escaped the massacre at the Residency. He still lacked definite news of the fate of all those who had been there.

He selected three compounds in a line, each containing a one-roomed house, thirty by twenty feet, a few sheds and a paddi barn. The baggage was brought across the river. A search of Thobal village produced a ton of rice, five or six earthenware jars of coarse sugar cane, and some dhal and peas. All these were welcome because rations were sufficient for only three days.

When the food was stored in the paddi barn he organised a party to clear a line of fire by cutting down the hedges near the compounds and burning the surrounding houses and grass. The walls around his position were two to four feet high and up to three feet thick.

Having made these preparations Grant decided to sit tight until
reinforcements arrived. He also hoped to be joined by any Gurkha survivors from Imphal.

The night passed quietly, but at six the following morning his patrols reported that the enemy was approaching in force. He went at once to his advanced picket and “took a single shot with a Ghoorka’s Martini into a group of ten or a dozen at seven hundred yards. The group bolted behind the walls . . . and the little Ghoorkas screamed with delight at a white heap left on the road. Then a group assembled on the hill, a thousand yards off, and the Ghoorka Jemadar fired and one went rolling down the hill.”

Birbal was never one to be outdone.

Grant now brought forward more men to the picket, strengthening it to fifty. He ordered them to open fire when the enemy was within six hundred yards. The Manipuris halted and fired wildly for about an hour before retiring. Grant was still at the picket, which was four hundred yards from the compounds.

“Suddenly from the hill a great ‘boom’, a scream through the air, then fifty feet over our heads a large white cloud of smoke, a loud report and fragments of a 9-lb or 10-lb elongated shell from a rifle cannon fell between us and our fort; a second followed from another gun, and burst on our right; then another struck the ground and burst on impact to our front, firing a patch of grass. They went on with shrapnel. I confess I was in a horrid funk, for although I know that artillery has little or no effect on extended troops behind a little cover, I dreaded the moral effect on recruits, who must have had an enormously exaggerated idea of the powers of guns; but they behaved splendidly.”

By calculating the time between the smoke and the report Grant estimated the range of the artillery as under a thousand yards, and the Gurkhas opened fire with their Martinis. The effect was considerable. The guns began to fire wildly as every now and then a gunner was dropped by an accurately aimed bullet. Within thirty minutes both guns ceased fire and were taken five hundred yards further back, but even at that range the Gurkhas were able to make things too hot for the gunners to lay their guns accurately.

Meanwhile the Manipuri infantry kept up their rifle fire from about eight hundred yards distance, but Grant’s men, wasting no bullets, only replied when the enemy tried to advance closer. Shortly before nightfall groups of the enemy were seen working round to Grant’s left so he decided to concentrate his entire force within the
“fort”. He sent the men back, warning them to use the cover of some hedges. He noticed that not one of them went at the double.

The Manipuris kept up long range shooting until two in the morning but the garrison, husbanding precious ammunition, made no reply to this. Grant snatched a couple of hours sleep but by three o’clock he was active again, detailing fatigue parties to strengthen the walls in four places and to make a covered way to the water. They also dug shelters for the thirty odd camp followers.

As the soil of the compound had been ploughed it was a simple matter to fill the large rice-baskets, the ration-sacks, a post-bag and one of Grant’s pillow cases with clods of earth. These were used to build five parapets in front and to the flanks, each giving cover for eight or ten men.

During the day a patrol reported the approach of a man with a white flag. Grant went out to meet him and found he was one of the Gurkha prisoners from the Residency. He bore a letter signed by half-a-dozen Indian clerks and telegraph men who were also prisoners. The letter said that the Manipuris held fifty Gurkhas and fifty-eight civilians. If Grant advanced, all these would be killed. If he retired they would all be released and allowed to make their way to Cachar.

Grant replied that he would be willing to consider the terms and during the next few days several letters passed between him and the Senapati, as well as the Jubraj. In order to give an impression of greater importance Grant signed all his communications as “Colonel A. Howlett, Commanding 2nd Burma Regiment.” And when meeting emissaries he borrowed rank badges from his subedar in order to give the necessary addition to his own.

The ruse did not prevent the Senapati from threatening that his three thousand men would cut Grant’s force to pieces. Grant was not to be intimidated. He answered: “I refuse to move without the Gurkha prisoners, at least; and I don’t care for five thousand Manipuri Babus.”

It was bold to refer to the Senapati's troops as native office clerks. However, it was apparently not without effect. The Jubraj sent a message advising that all the prisoners were on their way to Cachar. He also sent a gift of 500 pounds of atta (wheaten flour) and 50 pounds each of dhal and ghee. Grant returned these without delay and demanded a hostage to remain with him until such time as he had definite proof the prisoners had arrived safely at Cachar.
A messenger came with the reply: "You may have as a hostage one of our subedars."

"A subedar! He's no one," Grant exclaimed. "I want at least a member of the Durbar."

Instead of the hostage, morning brought the Manipuris in great strength. The defenders had now only seventy rounds per Snider and thirty for each Martini, so Grant held his men within the fort. After shelling which lasted over half an hour the enemy attacked. They tried to cross some walls less than two hundred yards away which Grant had been unable to demolish. There was such accurate fire from the defenders that nearly every Manipuri was hit as he showed himself. The direct assault was abandoned; but from this cover there was heavy rifle fire while some of the enemy moved to a wall two hundred yards to the left.

Grant realised this could be reached from the fort by using the screen of a row of hedges. He made a bold counter-attack with ten Gurkhas. They crept unobserved and turning the left flank of the wall fell on the surprised enemy, killing several of them. The rest fled, and Grant's section returned to the fort without any loss.

"Then at eleven in the morning there was firing from behind the hedges to our front with a weapon that rang out louder than rifles. I crept up with a havildar and six Ghoorkas close in the ditch under the hedge . . . up to within ten yards of the nearest of them. They opened a wild fire and bolted as we attacked their left flank; but then we found ourselves in a bit of a hole, for thirty or forty were in a corner behind a wall six feet high, over which they were firing at us. I had my double-barrelled sixteen-bore shot gun, and six buckshot and six ball cartridges, and as they showed their heads over the wall they got buckshot in their faces at twenty yards.

"When my twelve rounds were fired, and the Ghoorkas also doing considerable damage, we rushed the wall, and I dropped one through the head with my revolver, and hit some more as they bolted.

"When we cleared them out we returned to the fort along the ditch, having had the hottest three minutes on record, and only got the Ghoorka havildar shot through the hand and some of our clothes shot through; we had killed at least ten.

"Next day I visited the corner and found blood, thirty Snider and fifteen Martini cartridges, and one four-inch long Express cartridge .500 which accounted for the unaccountable sounds I had heard."

On his return to the fort Grant checked the ammunition which was now down to fifty rounds per Snider, and twenty-five for the
Martinis. He ordered all the men to lie down behind the walls except for one in six to keep a half-hour watch on the enemy's movements. These sentries were ordered not to fire unless the enemy came to half-way across the open adjoining compounds. But the enemy declined to come closer.

At the end of the day Grant counted his losses: "Two men and one follower wounded; one pony killed and two wounded; two elephants wounded, one severely." Grant's breakfast had been spoilt by a shell. "... which did not frighten my boy, who brought me the head of the shapnel which did the mischief—I will send it home to be made into an inkpot, with inscription."

The next day passed quietly. On Saturday a man appeared under a white flag and left a letter on the road. It was from Grant's immediate superior, Presgrave, ordering him to retire at the first opportunity. It seems likely the Manipuris were so sick of the fierce little force they were only too glad to deliver the message.

At 7:30 p.m. Grant started to withdraw. It was raining heavily and so dark they could only see their hands before their faces by the lightning flashes; but these bad conditions gave them a good chance of slipping away undetected. Hampered by the wounded elephants they were not able to do more than a mile an hour. They were soon drenched to the skin. Because of the intense dark, movement was restricted to ten paces forward when the lightning flashed and then halting for the next, up to half an hour at times. They passed through several Manipuri villages full of enemy troops, but not one of these dared to leave the shelter of his house.

At two in the morning there was a welcome meeting with Presgrave at the head of a hundred and eighty men. They had marched thirty-six hours without kit or rations, only halting for eight. They had with them eleven boxes of ammunition.

Having joined up, the two forces continued towards Palel. There they surprised over three hundred of the enemy, who bolted after firing a few shots.

For the remarkable exploits at Thobal of this small and gallant band, Grant received the V.C. and was promoted to Brevet-Major. The indomitable Birbal was granted the Indian Order of British India. Every man of both units was given the Order of Merit, together with a gratuity of six months' pay and allowances.

On receiving news of the disaster at Imphal three British columns
set out for Manipur. They reached Imphal simultaneously on April 27th 1891, only one of them having met opposition on the way.

This column, from Tamu, was commanded by Brigadier-General Graham. It left on April 23rd, and both Grant and Birbal were with it. Near Palel, Grant was with a strong reconnaissance patrol which included a hundred of the 2/4th Gurkhas. Coming through the hills, the patrol ran into a group of Manipuris. These men were based on a mud fort in a strong position about a thousand yards from the hills. As soon as fighting broke out the patrol was committed to attacking the fort, and word was sent back to the general asking for reinforcements.

These were sent without delay: two hundred Gurkhas of the 2/4th and bustling along with them Jemadar Birbal and his small detachment of the 43rd, determined not to be left out of any fighting.

Four mountain guns came up and opened fire from a nearby hill, but had to hold their fire eventually as the Gurkhas and fifty Sikhs stormed the fort. A great number of Manipuris moved out, retreating to the north, but few of them escaped. The guns opened up on them, and then they were charged by mounted infantry.

Some thirty of the enemy remained in the fort, and the Gurkhas fought fiercely with these in the confined space. Captain Drury, the officer in charge of the patrol, had his hand broken by a swinging blow from a rifle butt and was in a desperate position until Havildar Manbir Limbu forced a way through the struggling men to rescue him. Two Gurkhas were killed and nine wounded. None of the Manipuris survived. For saving Drury, Manbir was awarded the I.O.M.

There were seventy-five enemy bodies in the fort and fifty-six near it, and the shrapnel and mounted infantry killed over a hundred, according to Grant, who was among the British wounded, as was his fighting comrade, Birbal.

After this engagement the column continued on its way, linked with the other two, and entered Imphal on the 27th. It was virtually a victory parade; for the Manipur royal family, the Senapati, and all the troops had fled. Later the Senapati was captured and executed for the murder of the five British officers, a fate which was shared by Kajao Singh, who had speared Grimwood.

Yet all this might not have happened if one man had not kept another waiting outside the Residency gates.
8. Gurkha rifleman—all set for Mesopotamia Campaign.

9. About 20 years later—two Gurkha pensioners at Gorakhpur, both of whom won the Victoria Cross in World War I
4 Black Autumn

The British Expeditionary Force in France, outnumbered and ill-equipped, was exhausted. It had fought magnificently but was reduced to hanging on grimly. The vast Territorial Army was still in training. Fresh troops had to be found from somewhere to hold the British line.

The Army Chiefs turned their eyes towards India, where several Indian and British regiments were stationed, regiments with a fine history of soldiering. An Indian corps was quickly formed. It reached France towards the end of October 1914 and was thrown into battle just in time to hold back a German onslaught. By the end of 1915, a little over a year later, when the corps was withdrawn the majority of British officers who had come with it were dead or wounded, and among the battalions few remained of the original gallant band.

The conditions into which they were hurled in Autumn 1914 were enough to daunt anyone; for troops accustomed to the sun they were appalling. The flat fields of Flanders were a sodden waste. There was no escaping the mud. It sucked the puttees off the troops’ legs, and if they tied them tighter to prevent this they suffered from frostbite. The mud worked into the barrels, bolts and chambers of rifles so that they were often useless in time of need; it clogged the sword-springs so that bayonets fell into the ooze and were lost; it covered all the equipment with a coating of slime. Water was only a short distance below the surface, so that trenches were always wet and men’s clothes seldom dry. Yet in spite of all this and a dreadful winter to come, the Indian Corps achieved glory.

The majority of the Indian and Gurkha troops knew next to nothing about the war. One Gurkha battalion on its way to Calcutta by train was said to have started sharpening its kukris when ap-
The causes and reasons for the war mattered little to troops whose loyalty was to their British officers and the Regiment. To support the one and bring honour to the other was all they wanted to do. In our complex, materialistic times such sentiments may seem simple to the point of being ridiculous; but to them it was a very real and honest faith.

The Indian Corps consisted of two divisions. The troops were a mixture of Sikhs, Jats, Garhwals, Pathans, British and Gurkhas. The first, Lahore Division, sailed from Karachi on August 24th, and reached Marseilles on September 26th. They had left one brigade, the Sirhind, to guard the Suez Canal and this did not rejoin them until the end of November. The second division, the Meerut, left India on September 21st and reached France on October 11th.

At Karachi many of the Gurkhas saw salt water for the first time in their lives. They had never seen such ships before. During the voyage some of them were seen hanging over the side and when asked what they were looking for answered: "The ship's legs".

The French in Marseilles turned out to give the Indian troops a splendid welcome, overwhelming them with kindness. In return, the Indians earned the reputation of being the best-behaved and the most considerate of all the various armies. In addition, the little Gurkhas provided the French women with a good laugh: issued for the first time with warm underclothes they donned them proudly over their outer garments and marched through the streets.

At the end of October most of them went to their death. The Indian Corps took over from the 3rd and 5th British Divisions. The line extended from just north of Givenchy, east of Neuve Chapelle, and on to Chapigny before swinging gradually eastwards past Fauquissart to link with the British line facing Rouges Bancs.

On October 29th the 2/8th Gurkhas took over the triangle formed by la Quinque Rue and the road from Festubert. The main crop in this area was sugar beet and by this time of year the land was a morass. Troops could only make slow progress, sinking to the knees in mud. The Gurkhas arrived tired and hungry into trenches which were all ooze and trickling water. They were faced immediately with an alarming problem. The parapets built by the previous occupants, a British battalion, were so high that the little Gurkhas were unable to see over them.
Fire-steps had to be made from sandbags and planks. It was a horrible task, for the trenches were like canals, and a number of Gurkhas were drowned, a tragedy which could easily happen at night.

Trench warfare was completely foreign to the Gurkhas. It gave them no chance of bringing their natural ability into full play, as in mountain and jungle operations. The Gurkha is always strongly individual, and this was a war where the individual did not count for anything. War had become too big for the generals, a blind process demanding a daily quota of human lives. For the first time the Gurkhas had to face the full blast of modern artillery, the murderous barrage. They had to live with the idea that at any moment a mine could be exploded, blowing them to smithereens. And on top of all this there was the physical misery of wet and cold to which their bodies were not accustomed.

Yet in spite of these things they had the courage, tenacity and adaptability to overcome tremendous difficulties and to achieve a quality of fighting which made them feared by the enemy.

The 2/8th had hardly taken over their trenches when, shortly after midnight, the Germans began shelling. This was followed by two or three small attacks, which were beaten off; but the continuous shelling and rifle-fire added considerably to the difficulties of a battalion trying desperately to build fire-steps so that it could defend itself.

On the next day the shelling increased as heavy guns and howitzers came into action. Already, at daybreak, the telephone wires had been cut, making communication a hazardous business.

The trenches were badly constructed, giving little protection against artillery fire. They were between twelve and twenty-five feet broad and there were no traverses to give shelter from blast. As a result many men of one company were blown to pieces as shell after shell, seemingly out of the blue, dropped into the chasm with a great "whoosh".

During the morning several German attacks were driven off, but early in the afternoon there was a new one. The enemy came over in large numbers, well supplied with bombs. There was fierce and confused fighting on the Gurkha right flank. Dead and wounded lay together in the slush, and many of the wounded were suffocated beneath the soggy débris of broken parapets. Around and over the bodies the living struggled. Shouts and screams joined the din of
exploding bombs. For over an hour the Gurkhas, inspired by the bravery of their officers, held on. But ammunition was running dangerously low. At the same time the Devons, on the right of the Gurkhas, were being heavily engaged and were also in a perilous position.

Colonel Morris, commanding officer of the 2/8th, sent an urgent call for help to the brigade commander. Meantime, he was determined that his battalion should not be driven out before reinforcements arrived. The critical point was the right of the line. From a red farmhouse, three hundred yards away, the Germans were able to enfilade these trenches with deadly fire. Reinforcements from the other companies were unable to get through. A trench in between was blocked with debris and the dead. The only way was to make a rush in the open for a few yards; but this was exposed to the hammer of machine-gun fire from the farmhouse.

Major Barlow, wounded three times but still carrying on, saw that it was imperative to put the German post out of action by gunfire. The only one who could be spared was the battalion doctor, Captain MacWatters, so he was sent back with a message. Crossing the open under heavy fire, MacWatters crawled through a hedge and reached headquarters; but he was too late.

The Germans had broken through into the right-hand trenches and were able to work their way round to the rear of Barlow’s position. He and his Gurkhas now had to face attacks from two directions. The major kept on fighting until he fainted from loss of blood. The few remaining Gurkhas were killed, and the trench was in German hands. By now all the officers on the right of the Gurkha position were either dead or wounded. Barlow recovered consciousness some time later and managed to crawl to safety.

The Gurkha companies on the left held on and later were able to retake a section of the support trenches. The Bedfords and West Ridings came up to reinforce both Devons and Gurkhas, and the German advance was checked. Next day a counter-attack retook the rest of the support trenches and two farmhouses lost on the previous day.

For the Gurkhas it was the end of a devastating introduction to a new type of warfare. Within twenty-four hours, six of the ten British officers had been killed and three wounded. It was a crippling loss in this kind of regiment. Of the Gurkhas, thirty-seven were killed and sixty-one wounded. But over a hundred were missing, believed killed.
Many were buried in the mud and débris, while others had simply been blown to pieces.

A few days later, on November 2nd, the Germans attacked the 2/2nd Gurkhas, who were in trenches near Neuve Chapelle. The enemy had captured the village a few days before the Gurkhas moved up. The battalion, taking over at night, were able to occupy nothing better than makeshift trenches which were little better than muddy ditches. The entire position was a poor one because a small copse and orchard were between them and the support trenches. Telephone communications were unreliable as the wire was constantly being cut by artillery fire.

The German attack began with a battering artillery and mortar bombardment, after which fire was concentrated on the trenches held by No. 1 Double Company. The shallow trenches, offering little cover, were suicidal. Most of the Gurkhas were blasted out of existence. The few survivors held on in spite of the merciless hail of metal; but in the end they had to evacuate, crawling to No. 2 Company which was to their left and with a drain some fifty yards to their rear. One man did not leave with them. He was Naik Padamhoj Gurung and he carried on the fight single-handed, keeping up a rapid fire until even he found the situation too hot for comfort and pulled out. Later he was awarded the I.O.M.

The Germans now turned their attention to the second company, and the grim slaughter by shell-fire was repeated. Mangled remains were spattered against the parapets as each shell exploding in the useless trench took its heavy toll. Shattered bodies were buried beneath the débris. Two of the officers were killed.

Following up on the bombardment, enemy infantry charged across the fifty yards gap from their advance trenches. In one corner of the shallow trench Naik Rampershad Thapa and a dozen Gurkhas were ready to repel them. Lieutenant Innes, collecting as many survivors as he could, joined Rampershad. It was a desperately brave fight against great odds. With no regard for their own skins the small Gurkha force tore into the Germans, using kukris, bayonets and rifle butts, driving the enemy off with the ferocity of their attack. Innes was killed, and then two of the Gurkha officers.

Even such lion-hearted resistance could not last, and in the end the Gurkhas had to withdraw, step by step, giving no quarter, asking none. Another Gurkha officer was killed before they reached the
drain at the rear. Rampershad Thapa won the Indian Distinguished Service Medal on this day.

The Germans now held both trenches; but before they could continue their advance, Major Ross and Subedar-Major Man Sing Bohra came up with some twenty men and tried to dislodge them. Once again the full fighting ability of the Gurkha at close quarters was demonstrated; but the odds were impossible and soon both Ross and the subedar-major were killed. About eight Gurkhas were left alive and they fell back on No. 3 Double Company, which was commanded by Lieutenant Reid.

Reid sent a runner to the Connaught Rangers, on his left, asking for reinforcements. Then he encouraged his men to hold on, until word reached him the Rangers were on their way. He ran back across fire-swept ground to guide them to his trench; but no sooner had he returned with them than he was killed.

By now all the British officers in the two trenches were dead and Subedar Fateh Sing Newar took over command. He held the position as long as he could and then withdrew into a communication trench. The Germans had brought up a machine-gun into the orchard, and the raking fire tore into those of the Gurkhas and Connaughts who were left. The trench was soon so filled with the dead that those about to make their retreat were unable to get past to safety. Worse was to come. The Gurkhas in reserve, believing the trench to be occupied by the enemy, launched a counter-attack. Until the mistake was discovered the unfortunate survivors were being shot at from all sides.

A company of the Rangers moved up in support, but they too suffered heavy casualties from machine-gun fire on the way.

Earlier that day as the German attack started, Lieutenant-Colonel Norie, Commanding Officer of the 2/2nd brought up some reserves and silenced a German trench mortar which had been doing considerable damage to the trenches. The reserves continued to direct heavy rifle fire on the enemy until ammunition was exhausted. They withdrew for further supplies and when they advanced again, towards the left this time, it was to find the trenches occupied by the enemy. The Gurkhas engaged these until heavy machine-gun fire and shelling forced them to withdraw to the reserve position.

Another attempt to regain the lost trenches was made later in the day with fresh troops, including the 1/9th Gurkhas. Several gallant rushes were made at the objective but each failed. All these, how-
ever, helped to make the Germans so uneasy about the position they had gained that they withdrew from it.

Counting their casualties afterwards, the 2/2nd had lost every British officer who had been in the front line of the trenches. Thirty-one Gurkhas were killed and over a hundred missing, many of whose bodies were never found.

So, within a few days of their arrival two Gurkha battalions had been flung into action and come up against enough shellfire and infantry attack to demoralise the finest troops of any nation. It says much for them that after such an initiation they still kept their high morale. But the heavy casualties had left large gaps in the ranks and filling them presented a difficult problem. The regiments were below strength when they started, and it was particularly difficult to find Gurkha recruits at short notice. However, the Assam Rifles and the Burma Military Police were largely composed of Gurkhas, and these volunteered for France en masse. They were welcomed gladly and made a great name for themselves while serving with the regular Gurkha regiments.

Gradually the Indian Corps settled down in the trenches. With about fifteen thousand men they were holding a position which had previously been held by twice that number. Apart from a few raids it was therefore impossible to adopt an attacking rôle.

On November 23rd the Germans launched an attack with far superior numbers in the area of Festubert. Part of the line held, but the enemy managed to occupy some trenches. The corps commander ordered the original line to be retaken before dawn at all costs. A preliminary bombardment was put down and then the counter-attacking parties moved in. The Bhopals retook part of their former line. The 2/8th Gurkhas, split into two groups, each three companies strong, made for the remaining part of what had been the Bhopal line. Those on the right knocked the Germans out of the trench which was immediately ahead of them. Those on the left were held up. The ground was snow-covered, making them easy targets and casualties were quite heavy.

Captain Buckland. with the companies on the right, realised that this hold-up meant there were pockets of the enemy in the trenches which stretched to his left. Although it was quite dark he led a detachment of his men in that direction, winkling out the enemy, bombing and bayonet-
Hariparsad Thapa worked his way like a fox after chickens, killing several of the enemy before being severely wounded.

By this time there was a risk that the other three companies might be clearing the traverses from the opposite direction. To avoid the danger of killing their own comrades one of the Gurkhas would whisper in Gurkhali. "Ko ho?" (Who is that?) on approaching each traverse. If the reply was not: "Mo," (me) the men threw their bombs and rushed in with the bayonet. In this manner they cleared a long stretch of the trenches. Later, Buckland received the D.S.O. and Hariparsad the I.O.M.

While the 2/8th were still doing their spell in the trenches a Gurkha bugler was posted to a sap-head within range of German hand-grenades. He was given two dozen.

"Every time the Germans throw a grenade you throw two back," he was told. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, huzoor," he replied with a broad grin.

A short while later the officer went up to see how the bugler was getting on and found him wounded but still full of fight, although he looked worried.

"What's the trouble?" the officer asked.

"Well, huzoor, it's like this. You told me every time the enemy threw a grenade I was to throw back two. That was all right at first and I used up sixteen bombs. Then they suddenly flung two grenades and I promptly let them have four of mine. But a few moments ago they sent over three, one of which hit me. Huzoor, I only have four grenades left so what should I do?"

It was a perfect example of a Gurkha's literal interpretation of orders.

Towards the end of December the Indian Corps was withdrawn from the front line for a much needed rest. After two months of constant combat its casualty figures were: 1,397 killed; 5,860 wounded; and 2,322 missing. This represented over half of the total strength.

During the short rest equipment was replaced, reinforcements arrived and several tactical exercises and training instructions were carried out which proved valuable later.

When the men came out of the line their feet were almost green from constant immersion in mud and water, and they could scarcely
march back to the billets in the rear. During the period in the back areas, route marches were introduced and gradually their feet grew hard again.

The rest period was by no means long enough, but at least it gave the troops a chance to get their second wind.

On January 15th 1915 the first brigades started moving back into the front line, once more into the appalling winter conditions of mud and heavy rain, of snow and bitter winds.
At the beginning of March 1915 only two German divisions faced seven divisions of the British Army on the thirteen-mile front between La Bassée canal and Bois Grenier. The Germans had moved large forces across to the Russian front.

The worst of the winter was over; there were the first signs of spring. But if this was a promise of life, there was also a prospect of death. The Aubers ridge was occupying the thoughts of the British general staff. It was long and low, running from near La Bassée through Aubers to the north of Armentières, but in such flat country it was as good as a mountain range. From it the Germans had an excellent view of the British back areas; while the British had to rely on two crow’s nests and some high strawstacks.

The German line, in front of the ridge, ran slightly west of Neuve Chapelle, which they had captured in 1914, bending the British line. General Haig planned to recapture the village and the Bois du Biez, a large wood of young oaks and thick undergrowth south-east of it. With these gained there was to be a push against the Aubers ridge. Forty-eight battalions were to attack the three German battalions defending the sector. The initial assault was to be made on a two thousand yard front held by a battalion and a half of Germans. The Garhwal Brigade from the Meerut Division and the 23rd and 25th Brigades from the British 8th Division were chosen for this operation.

There was massive preparation. Troops lining up for the assault could find little cover in the flat, water-logged country, so more trenches were dug and two lines of breastworks constructed along the road. About a hundred portable footbridges were laid across drains and water courses. Step ladders were collected to enable the men to climb the parapets quickly.

The preliminary bombardment was considerable for those early
days of the war. Nearly four hundred and eighty guns were assembled
to blast the enemy front line and the barbed wire barrier. The day
before the attack there was a return to winter. It rained and snowed
steadily until nightfall. When the clouds cleared a little, a frost set
in. After dark the assaulting troops began to move into their posi-
tions. Before dawn all were in their places.

The morning of March 10th was cold and misty, making condi-
tions difficult for aerial or artillery observation. But with sunrise the
mists began to clear. The weather reports were favourable.

At 7.30 a.m. the artillery opened fire with a tremendous roar. The
bombardment lasted for just over half an hour, and by the end of it
the whole area was covered with a dense cloud of smoke and dust
which blotted out the watery sun. For the first time in the war a
barrage was put down to prevent the enemy escaping from their
trenches or from bringing up supports. Not that the Germans had
any sizeable reinforcements in the area.

As soon as the bombardment lifted, the infantry battalions began
their assault. The 2/39th Garhwal Rifles, on the left, reached the first
enemy trenches after doubling across two hundred yards of No Man’s
Land. There was little or no resistance because the few surviving
Germans were still stunned by the heavy bombardment.

The left centre attack was made by the 2/3rd Gurkhas, who also
reached the first line without trouble. They then crossed the Neuve
Chapelle road and immediately came under machine-gun and rifle
fire from the ruined houses near the village brewery. On the right,
the Leicesters were also held up by this fire.

There seemed a real danger that the Germans might rally at this
strong point, so the Gurkhas drove straight for the brewery. There
was a sharp struggle among the ruined houses before the enemy were
driven out. Havildar Bahadur Thapa led his men into one house and
stormed a barricade, killing sixteen Germans and capturing two
machine-guns. He was awarded the I.O.M. Rifleman Gane Gurung,
finding that particularly heavy fire was coming from another house,
rushed it single-handed. He came out again driving eight Germans
before him at the point of his bayonet. British soldiers of the 2nd
Rifle Brigade were just following up and, at the sight of the little
Gurkha handling the Germans as casually as if they were cattle, gave
him the spontaneous tribute of three cheers. It was probably the first
time in history that a single soldier of the Indian Army was so
applauded by British troops in the midst of battle. Gane received a
well-earned I.O.M.
The Leicesters reached their main objective but over on their right the 1/39th Garhwalis were in difficulties. Their two leading companies took the wrong route and came up against enemy trenches which had not been shelled. The barbed wire was still intact, and the Garhwalis suffered heavy casualties in forcing a way through. Before the mistake of direction could be rectified the remainder of the battalion followed. They took the German trenches but at the heavy cost of all six officers and over a hundred men killed. To prove more serious later in the day there was now a gap between their left and the Leicesters.

By ten o'clock in the morning the British were holding their first objective, the line of the old Smith-Dorrien trenches about two hundred yards east of Neuve Chapelle. But there were still two pockets of enemy resistance. There was the two hundred and fifty yard gap on the right, and a two hundred yard one on the left, where the 23rd Brigade had been held up. The general advance was halted until both these were closed, which was not until late afternoon. The next stage of the battle plan had been gravely delayed, and the Germans given five valuable hours in which to organise a second defence line.

At last the Dehra Dun Brigade, under Brigadier-General Jacob, was given the word to move forward. They were to pass through the Garhwal Brigade and attack the Bois du Biez to the east of the village and on the other side of the Layes brook. The 1/9th Gurkhas were on the left and the 2/2nd Gurkhas on the right, with the 1/4th Seaforths in close support.

Leaving the trenches at dusk they used the cover of houses and orchards until they came out into open ground about three hundred yards from the centre of the village. They deployed into line of platoons and in near-darkness passed through the Garhwal trenches going towards the brook. A gentle slope led down open fields bounded by ditches and pollards.

No. 1 Company of the 1/9th was the directing company but there were some confusion and delay when the left company of the 2/2nd swerved to the right in the dark and lost contact, which was not restored until the supporting companies of the 1/9th came up.

The two battalions reached the Layes, which was ten feet wide, three to four feet deep, and had banks which rose about three feet above water level. The Gurkhas were carrying eight portable bridges and they quickly put these down and crossed over. A burning cottage on the edge of the wood was a valuable guiding mark. The leading
company of the 2/2nd reached the south-west corner of the Bois du Biez and began to dig in. Soon the rest of the battalion joined them in this task. About the same time, two German reserve battalions had reached the north-east edge of the wood.

There was a group of cottages, called Les Brulots, near to the Gurkhas and these housed a nest of snipers who caused some casualties until a party of Gurkhas stormed the cottages, drove them out, and occupied the position. Patrolling quietly in the wood, the leading company ran into an enemy patrol and took five prisoners. They also found several searchlight cables, which they severed.

Over to the left, across the Brewery road, the 1/9th had come under fire from a machine-gun at the Layes Bridge redoubt. This was on their left flank, and that part of the battalion went to ground, believing that the 8th Division was coming up and would storm the redoubt. The right half of the 1/9th continued on its way and reached the wood. Here, Subedar Mehar Sing Khattri was suddenly challenged in German. He promptly replied: “First-Ninth!” Then he rushed in with his platoon, killing five Germans and capturing seven.

Meanwhile the advance of the 8th Division had been halted by determined German resistance. In consequence the Dehra Dun Brigade was isolated with both flanks in the air. The Germans tried to turn them, but Gurkha machine-guns kept them at bay. The night was lit with the continuous fire and the bright flares. Machine-gun ammunition ran short, and Rifleman Hastobir Rana, although wounded in the arm, came across the fire-swept ground with a further supply.

Under interrogation one of the German scouts said that the woods were held by two regiments. In fact there were only two battalions at that stage, not six. Although Gurkha patrols, crawling through the wood in the darkness, had not come upon any strong enemy positions, the intelligence information was believed back at headquarters. Because of it, and the knowledge that the brigade was holding an isolated front, General Jacob decided to withdraw the two battalions of Gurkhas to a safer position on the western side of the Layes.

The Gurkhas came back across the stream, bringing with them as many of their wounded as could be found in the darkness. Several of them took risks both in searching and in carrying wounded back under fire. However, the withdrawal was managed without casualties and, when it was completed, the brigade held a line along the brook.

No sooner had they moved back than the two German battalions
advanced into the Bois du Biez and spent the best part of the night digging and wiring trenches and in bringing up more machine-guns to various strong points, including the Layes Bridge redoubt.

It was decided to resume the British attack at seven the next morning; but things soon went badly. Because of fierce enemy resistance the 8th Division was unable to get going. And a thick fog covered the front of the Dehra Dun Brigade so that it was impossible to locate German strong points which were to be softened by artillery fire. The men of the brigade were exhausted and hungry, and the 2/8th Gurkhas, detailed as a ration party, came up with food and ammunition. Their task was unenviable; there was no glory of action yet they suffered casualties from machine-gun fire and bursting shells.

For the front line troops it was a day of strain. Orders kept coming through, but each one was countermanded by the next. There was a frustrating sense of indecision. By the end of the day the expected attack had failed to materialise. When darkness fell the order was given to relieve the Dehra Dun Brigade, which was still in position along the Layes.

The Sirhind Brigade was ordered to move forward, with instructions that the 1st Highland Light Infantry and the 1/4th Gurkhas were to take over the front line trenches. The 1/1st Gurkhas and 15th Sikhs were to form up behind them until dawn, when a new attack would be launched.

The Sirhind Brigade left its reserve position around nine o’clock and moved towards Neuve Chapelle, slowed down by the heavy traffic of troops and transport in the darkness. At one stage a German bombardment started but the brigade suffered only slight casualties and were soon out of the danger zone.

There was more confusion to come. Unknown to them, the 2/2nd and 1/9th Gurkhas had been given orders to withdraw soon after dark. The liaison officer sent forward by the Sirhind Brigade protested at the withdrawal taking place before his own troops had time to occupy the trenches, but the commander on the spot refused to consider this and the withdrawal proceeded.

The evacuation of the wounded was particularly difficult. There were forty stretcher cases in the 1/9th and only eight stretchers available. Many of the wounded had to be carried out on the backs of their comrades.

The Sirhind Brigade, approaching the Layes, met the withdrawing Dehra Dun Brigade in a narrow road which had ditches either side and beyond these a wilderness of shell-holes and wire. In the
darkness, with shells bursting all around, there was chaos. Shoving, pushing, cursing, the Sirhind Brigade managed to get through somehow but not into the trenches they should have occupied. The Highlanders finished up in trenches some two hundred yards north-east of the brook with their left resting in Neuve Chapelle. The 1/4th Gurkhas had one company squeezed tight in a front line trench with the Leicesters and the remainder of the battalion had to dig in further back.

It had been intended that the Gurkhas should be on the left and the Highlanders on the right. As a result of the confusion these positions were reversed. The 15th Sikhs dug in behind the Scots Battalion, and the 1/1st Gurkhas behind the 1/4th.

The original battle plan had been for the 1/1st and the Sikhs to lead an attack on the north-west edge of the wood. But by morning this was changed. The Highland Light Infantry and the 1/4th Gurkhas were to go first. The Sikhs and 1/1st were to carry out the second phase, the capture of the south-east edge of the wood. The Jullundur Brigade, moving up into Neuve Chapelle, was to launch an attack on the left; but it had suffered savage casualties during daylight on the 11th when it had been lying in the open exposed to shell and rifle fire. It had lost two hundred and eighty-six men. During the night march continuous shelling had caused another three hundred casualties.

The Germans had been busy rushing up reinforcements. During the night their front line had been strengthened by two Bavarian and four Saxon battalions. Unknown to the British there was a new threat. The 6th Bavarian Reserve Division had reached the battlefield. The German Command was planning a strong counter-attack to drive the British out of Neuve Chapelle.

The British attack was forestalled. Before dawn the German artillery opened fire. Their guns were badly registered and most of the shells travelled high over the British front line trenches to drop in the rear causing more casualties among the luckless Jullundur Brigade.

Half an hour later the German counter-attack began. They flung in sixteen thousand men. Ten battalions in the vanguard, four in support, and six in reserve. Under cover of mist German infantry crossed the Layes by plank bridges and occupied the deserted Dehra Dun trenches. The 2/3rd Gurkhas had listening posts in the area and they crept quietly away to give the warning.

The Sirhind Brigade made ready. Then, out of the swirling mist
came the solid grey line of infantry. An Indian sepoy, questioned later by the corps commander, General Sir James Willcocks, answered: "It was like a hot weather dust storm in India and looked as if it must pass over us; but at the very moment of reaching us it was as if a fierce rain had suddenly extinguished it."

The entire front line of trenches burst into flame as every rifle and every machine-gun opened up at point-blank range on the advancing Germans. The moving wall of flesh halted and broke as the bullets tore and ripped into it. Within seconds the ground was covered with dead and wounded. The survivors tried to take cover behind the rising pile of bodies. Then they broke and fled, and as they streamed back to the cover of the Bois du Biez the British guns opened up and shells burst among them.

In that brief period the Germans suffered over three thousand casualties and for hours afterwards their wounded came weakly crawling into the British trenches for medical aid.

The German counter-attack was another of those senseless mass assaults which both commands seemed hypnotised into making during the First World War. At the cost of thousands of their youth they gained at most a few yards of useless ground, while more often than not they gained nothing at all.

The most positive result of the counter-attack was that the British guns had run out of ammunition, and this had to be made good before they could continue their own planned assault. A new zero hour of eleven o'clock was announced and half an hour before this the British guns opened up again. There was still light mist to impair observation, and the barrage was far from effective.

At eleven o'clock the 1/4th Gurkhas and the Highlanders were ready to move forward. Fresh orders arrived, postponing the attack for two hours. Once more the troops had to stand down and go through the nerve-racking experience of waiting and then working up their courage again.

Immediately in front of the Gurkhas was one of the trenches which had been evacuated by the Dehra Dun Brigade. Some German survivors of the counter-attack had taken refuge there and around midday Subedar Durgia Gurung of A Company noticed that the enemy seemed to show signs of wishing to surrender. He drew the attention of his company commander to this, with the result that the order to attack was given. In the face of heavy fire the Gurkhas stormed across, led by Durgia, who was first to drop among the enemy. The deadly little Gurkhas completely demoralised the Ger-
mans, capturing a hundred and twenty and killing some fifty who tried to get away. Their own losses were slight, but among them was the gallant subedar.

Shortly after these prisoners were taken, the British artillery opened up a heavy shrapnel bombardment. The 8th Division attack was launched; but by the time the two Indian brigades moved forward there had only been a hundred-yard advance in the face of strong enemy opposition.

For the Indian attack the Jullundur Brigade was on the left and the Sirhind on the right. The Sikhs and some English units ran into a withering fire the moment they appeared in the open. In spite of heavy losses they pressed on and reached the front line trench of the Garhwal Brigade, where they took cover while reorganising for the next push forward across the brook and into the woods. On their right the Highland Light Infantry and the Gurkhas advanced with great dash. But when the Highlanders reached the Layes they found that the footbridges placed by the Dehra Dun Brigade had been removed by the retreating Germans. Undaunted, they began to wade across but the German machine-guns at Layes Bridge opened up on them. The water turned red with the blood of the dead and wounded. Still trying to advance, the Scots attempted to climb the slippery east bank but were cut to ribbons, and the few remaining men of the battalion were forced to withdraw.

The bridges in front of the Gurkhas were still intact, but as the order for the advance was “by the left” and the Highlanders with the Jullundur Brigade beyond were failing to move forward, the Gurkhas halted. There was now complete confusion among the higher command, caused mainly by the disruption of communications. General Walker, in command of the two-brigade attack, thought that the 1/4th Gurkhas hold up was due to enemy opposition and ordered the 1/1st to their aid.

Lieutenant-Colonel Anderson, temporarily in command of the Sirhind Brigade and close to the front, was aware of the true reason for the Gurkhas coming to a standstill and sent his brigade commander to instruct the 1/4th to continue the advance. Unfortunately this officer was killed on his way forward. Not knowing this, Anderson held back the 1/1st. When he finally sent them forward they were slowed down by heavy fire and did not reach the Layes until five o’clock, by which time the Germans had rallied.

While they were on the move, General Haig, with an inaccurate picture of his battle front and a false belief the enemy were “much
demoralised”, ordered the advance to be pushed through the barrage of fire “regardless of loss, using reserves if required”.

Around the time that the 1/1st reached the brook, Haig rode forward to Indian Corps headquarters. Here he learnt, presumably for the first time, that the left was held up by fire from the Layes Bridge. He suggested to General Willcocks that the right need not wait but should push on with all speed against the southern part of the Bois du Biez and along the La Bassee road.

With no footbridges to help them, the Gurkhas of the 1/1st made a desperate attempt to cross the Layes, but their ranks were split apart by the heavy metal of German fire. Nepalese blood mingled with the water, as had Highland blood on a previous attempt. The 1/4th Gurkhas, trying to attack at the same time, were similarly pinned down.

The whole attack ground to a halt. Shortly after ten that night Haig ordered the operation to be suspended and all positions gained to be consolidated. The Neuve Chapelle salient had been straightened by a British advance to a depth of a thousand yards along a two mile front. German casualties were estimated at over twelve thousand, while the attackers had lost around eight hundred more. British dead numbered some two thousand five hundred. The material expended in the British attack was fantastic for the period: over a hundred and twelve thousand shells and approximately three million rounds of small ammunition.

For the next few days both sides were busily engaged in strengthening their new lines. Fighting was followed by the digging of trenches and wiring. There was considerable patrol activity, each side anxious to find out what the other was doing. One night it was thought the Germans were trying to advance their line by consolidating a trench which they had dug during their counter-attack and then abandoned. A patrol of the 1/4th Gurkhas was sent to investigate.

Lance-Naik Ranbahadur Gharti and six men moved stealthily forward in the darkness. They heard sounds ahead and crept upon a party of Germans at work in the trench. Drawing their kukris the patrol dropped down on them out of the blackness. Before the slashing blades, the trench party fled but at that moment a German patrol came up and attacked the Gurkhas from the rear. They swung round and drove it off, but Ranbahadur was killed and three of the men wounded. These were brought back by a second Gurkha patrol, sent out at the sound of the fighting. Later, a Gurkha working party
ordered to go out and fill in the trench found eight dead Germans and two wounded.

Stories of the Gurkhas began to circulate after the battle of Neuve Chapelle. One was of a subedar, himself badly wounded, walking and searching in the open, heedless of enemy bullets, and shouting: "Where is my Sahib? Where is my Sahib?" Eventually he discovered his British company commander, who was also very badly wounded, and managed to drag him back to the British trenches.

Another concerned a German officer who took cover in a dug-out during the British artillery barrage at the start of the battle. When this ended he started to come out, only to see the advancing Indians, so he dived into hiding again. He remained for some days, fearing that if he was caught behind the British lines he might be executed as a spy. In the end hunger drove him out. In broad daylight and in full uniform he walked boldly down the main road into Vieille Chapelle, where he was officially taken prisoner.

"Surely you met some of our troops on your way here?" he was asked.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "many of them. But they were Gurkhas and they all saluted me!"
6 Action of Piètre

After four days and nights of bombardment there was a shattering roar at twelve minutes to six on the morning of September 25th 1915. A British mine was exploded beneath the German line north-east of what was called Winchester Road. A mountain of earth mingled with broken bodies was flung up amidst a black cloud of smoke and dust. It left a crater ninety-two feet across and marked the start of the Indian Corps' part in the Battle of Loos.

Known afterwards as the Action of Piètre, their attack was to be against the German line between Sunken Road and Winchester Road on a fifteen hundred yard front. Once the enemy salient was taken they were to gain the high ground between Haut Pommereau and La Cliqueterie farm. The main Loos offensive was to the south of them, and they were to assist this by turning the La Bassée defences from the north.

Two minutes after the mine exploded there was a final bombardment, crashing thousands of shells into the German trenches and the protecting wire. For the first time field guns had been brought right up to the front parapet from which, together with a Hotchkiss gun, they were to knock out German machine-gun posts.

For the first time, too, the British intended to use gas, following the German example at the second battle of Ypres. It proved a much greater danger to the British than the Germans. An enemy bomb burst near several cylinders and blew off their heads, releasing the gas. Several men, including the officer in charge, were put out of action. The damaged cylinders were covered with earth and the gas attack was called off in this sector. In others, by the time the gas was released the slight wind had veered and the gas began to blow back, causing several casualties among our troops. The cylinders were quickly shut off.
When the artillery bombardment lifted, a smoke screen was put down to cover the assault of the Meerut Division. The 2/3rd and 2/8th Gurkhas with the 2nd Leicesters formed the attacking battalions of the Garhwal Brigade. They were on the right.

As the 2/3rd Gurkhas advanced into the smoke screen they found it so dense that visibility was limited to only a few yards. There was an almost uncanny inactivity from the German front line trenches and it seemed there was to be little opposition. But as soon as the leading company emerged from the smoke it was met by a scorching fusillade. In spite of so many of their number being cut down the Gurkhas pressed on, only to come up against an unexpected and disastrous obstacle. The wire had not been completely cut by the bombardment.

Lieutenant Bagot-Chester tried desperately to find a way through, probing right and left with his men falling all around him. Within a few moments the hundred and twenty strong company suffered eighty-six casualties. In places the bodies of the dead and wounded were piled four or five deep against the wire. Lieutenant Wood and four men managed to get through and they made a recklessly brave charge upon the enemy trench, to die there in hand-to-hand fighting.

The Gurkha company following up was No. 3. Bearing slightly to the right it was stopped by a stretch of wire which, because of protection from trees, had not been damaged at all. Colonel Brakspear and Lieutenant Tyson were both killed trying to find a way through, and most of their men were killed against the same grim barrier. No. 2 Company in the third wave met a similar fate.

Back in battalion headquarters, Colonel Ormsby received a false report that British distinguishing flags had been seen flying in the German trenches but that there was a gap between the Gurkhas and the Leicesters. He sent Subedar Bhim Sing with A Company to fill this gap. The Gurkha officer soon came up against the stark truth. The German parapets were ablaze with rifle fire, while machine-guns enfiladed both flanks. Bhim Sing sent back a runner to report on the grim state of affairs, and he was given orders to withdraw the survivors of his company. Small groups worked their way back, and the battalion, the pathetic remnant of it, was relieved by men of the Dehra Dun Brigade.

Bagot-Chester, who had led the first wave of the attack, had been wounded in the right shoulder. He managed to roll into a "pip-squeak" hole. It was quite small and already housed a wounded
Gurkha, Budhiman Gurung. Although the shell-hole provided some protection for their heads and bodies their legs were out in the open, and both were hit several times again. They were squeezed so tightly that Bagot-Chester was unable to get the morphia out of his pocket.

So they remained all day, in pain, and only fifteen yards from the enemy trenches. About three in the afternoon it began to rain. This caused the firing to slacken off but it also filled the hole with icy cold water and mud. With dusk, Budhiman suggested they should try to make a break for it; but Bagot-Chester felt it advisable to wait for complete darkness.

They started to drag themselves away about eight o’clock but soon became separated. Bagot-Chester had a nightmare journey across the slippery ground, past the piles of dead. Because of his wounds he was forced to slither on his back, but by the time he was halfway across he found he was able to stand on one leg and just use the heel of the other. Every few minutes he collapsed and had to rest before struggling to his feet again. Two hours after leaving the shell-hole he was discovered by a British officer and carried into the safety of a trench. Poor Budhiman was never seen again.

During the morning’s fighting a small party of thirty-six Gurkhas managed to crawl through the wire and rush the Germans. All were killed except Kulbir Thapa, who charged through to an empty part of the trenches only to find himself alone. Looking around he discovered a wounded soldier of the Leicesters. Without any thought for his own safety, he remained with him throughout that day and night.

Early the next morning there was a heavy mist, and Kulbir decided it gave a chance of a safe return to the British lines. Lifting the wounded man upon his back he set off through the German trench, within touching distance of the enemy, climbed up and eventually reached the wire, though more than once he was very near to being discovered. He crawled through, taking the wounded man with him as far as a shell-hole, where he left him for the moment.

On his way out he had passed two fellow-Gurkhas who were wounded; so he returned through the wire, bringing them out to safety one at a time. But he did not feel his rescue work was completed until he had made his way to the wounded British soldier, whom he carried the rest of the way, in the clearing mist and under fire. For these acts of supreme bravery Kulbir Thapa was awarded the V.C. He was the first Gurkha to win this decoration.
While the 2/3rd Gurkhas were suffering such heavy losses up against the wire, the 2/8th were advancing on their left, together with the Leicesters. The English regiment, faced with heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, suffered severe casualties. Others were overcome by gas. But a portion of this attack managed to get through the German lines and took up a position near the road from Mauquissart. The right flank, however, had run into uncut wire and suffered the same fate as the 2/3rd Gurkhas.

The 2/8th Gurkhas were on the left of the Leicesters, with No. 3 Double Company in the lead under Captain Buckland. The wire on their stretch had been cut, and part of the company occupied the first enemy trench without difficulty. The other part met fierce opposition. At close quarters on the sandbag parapet and down in the muddy trench there was a grim struggle until the Gurkhas got the upper hand, killing or capturing all the fifty defenders.

The Gurkhas then pushed through the second and support trenches and started to dig in near Moulin de Piètre. No. 2 Company, under Lieutenant Meldrum, was supposed to be following them up, but in the dense smoke swung to the left and became mixed up with the 4th Black Watch. They joined the Highlanders in an attack on an enemy trench. A fierce fight was taking place, but two more platoons of Gurkhas arrived at a critical moment and the trench was overrun.

Meldrum rallied his men and continued to advance, eventually taking up a position in a communication trench with sixty men. He was just in front of the Moulin where the Germans had a strong post from which they directed heavy fire at the Gurkhas.

The third wave of Gurkhas was led by Subedar Ransur Rana, who had taken over when the two British officers had been put out of action. He and his men came under heavy rifle and shell fire as they moved forward. Ransur was slightly wounded in the chest; but he snatched up the rifle from a dead Gurkha and shot the German who was firing at him. The enemy trench was stormed and the few remaining Germans taken prisoner. Ransur led his men to the right, going along the trench until they bumped into some more Germans and captured sixteen of them.

Ransur advanced about three hundred yards from the fourth line and ordered his men to dig in. But his right flank was wide open because, due to the tragic failure of the Leicesters and 2/3rd Gurkhas to get through the wire, the enemy was still in possession of the second and third line of trenches.
The last wave of the 2/8th moved forward under the battalion commander, Colonel Morris. They had only advanced fifty yards when the colonel was seriously wounded. Lance-Corporal Evans of the 2nd Leicesters rescued him under heavy fire. Unfortunately, the colonel was too badly wounded to survive. It was typical of him that as he was dying one of his last requests was for Evans to be rewarded for his heroic action.

In all about three hundred men of the Gurkha battalion reached the foremost positions. On their left all five battalions of the Bareilly Brigade had fought through, in spite of many casualties; but the right flank was still vulnerable.

Buckland was with about a hundred and fifty men and they had two machine-guns. He engaged a strong party of Germans who were in front of him, and dispersed them. Then the enemy launched a strong counter-attack on the Gurkhas and the Black Watch. They had overwhelmingly superior numbers and their artillery maintained a bombardment against the original British front line to prevent reinforcements from coming forward.

The fighting went on for an hour before a small party of Black Watch had to withdraw, losing more men from machine-gun fire on the way back. But the Gurkhas managed to hold on, although their losses were increasing alarmingly. Realising that reinforcements were imperative if the position were to be held, Buckland decided to return and report what was happening. In case he should be killed he took two volunteers with him.

They were taking a tremendous risk because they had to cross an open area swept with enemy fire. Miraculously, it seemed, they crossed the danger zone. Having reached the line and reported, Buckland made his way back. Knowing the supreme importance of communications he took with him an artillery observer and two signallers to lay a telephone line. This attempt failed because the artillery officer was killed and both signallers put out of action.

When the Germans were able to take stock of the situation, they realised that the British attack on the right had failed; so they moved into some houses on that flank and brought up a machine-gun. They were able to open fire on the Gurkhas from behind. Subedar Sarabjit Gurung was quick to recognise this threat and he at once attacked the new German position. His men were heavily outnumbered and, although a few were able to survive German bombs which were showered among them, they were killed in the hand-to-hand struggle
against odds. Sarabjit Gurung was posthumously awarded the I.O.M.

Meanwhile Buckland had returned to his men to find that their position had worsened drastically. Just before his arrival Lieutenant Meldrum had been killed and Jemadar Rimani Thapa had assumed command of the small detachment. He held on grimly; but a British shell fell short and burst among the Gurkhas, reducing their number to thirty. Rimani was forced to retire, but he and his men made several stands so that the Germans had to prise them out of every position. The cost of doing this steadily rose, for the Gurkhas were fighting with typical courage.

Buckland, taking part in this, tried to relieve pressure by leading some men against Germans who were coming in on the exposed flank. Their own supply of bombs had run out, but there were a number of enemy ones around and these were used to good effect.

Word came to Buckland that he was to return to battalion headquarters and take over command, as he was the only British officer left. He put Subedar Ransur in charge, instructing him to hold the position as well as he could, and promising to try and send reinforcements.

Once more Buckland set off across the exposed fire-swept zone. This time he had with him a havildar and two riflemen, Bahadur Pun and Ratbaran Gurung. Bahadur was carrying one of the machine-guns which had been put out of action by a bomb, and Ratbaran had a captured German gun.

Dodging fire, they split up on the way across. Buckland, the havildar, and Bahadur Pun reached their own lines safely, with Bahadur still holding on to the damaged machine-gun. Ratbaran was missing for a while; but he was eventually located in an ambulance, still proudly clutching the German gun, and although he was wounded there was a broad grin on his face.

No sooner had Buckland taken over command than he received the astonishing order that the 2/8th must hold the positions gained and make contact with the Black Watch on their left and the Leicesters on the right. It summed up the confused picture of the situation at brigade headquarters.

Buckland sent back his havildar with a signaller to get in touch with Ransur Rana but by this time the Germans had regained their front line. The 2/8th detachment was cut off and the havildar was unable to get through.

Ransur Rana was still holding out but the Germans knew that his
flanks were exposed and launched strong attacks from both directions. Ammunition had been running out but a party of the 39th Garhwals had managed to bring a small supply to the Gurkhas before the Germans moved in; so Ransur was able to keep up a stout resistance a bit longer. The end, though, was inevitable. Split into small groups the Gurkhas fought desperately but at last they were overpowered. Among the prisoners taken was Ransur Rana.

The German attack switched to the Bareilly Brigade, whose right flank was now exposed. Fighting hard, they were forced to withdraw. By late afternoon the Germans had retaken all their trenches, and the Meerut Division was back on its original front line.

The survivors of the 2/8th Gurkhas were placed in local reserve. They had started the attack five hundred strong. When it was all over they had one British and one Gurkha officer and thirty Gurkha other ranks.

On August 13th 1915 General Sir John Nixon, who was commanding in Mesopotamia, asked if he could be reinforced by an Indian division from France in view of further operations and an intended advance on Baghdad. At home, Austen Chamberlain, who was Secretary of State for India, was most anxious that both Indian divisions should be spared the ordeal of another European winter.

In France, they had given of their best but casualties had been extremely high and reinforcements were difficult to obtain. They had left India with a ten per cent reserve but this had been absorbed to replace the sick and unfit before any of the troops reached the front line in 1914. Early in the following year reinforcements had been obtained from the regiments still in India; but this source was limited.

Over twenty-one thousand casualties had been sustained and there were very few of the original men left. Further battles like Loos, with such heavy losses that a complete battalion could be wiped out in a few hours, would obviously reduce the divisions to mere skeleton organisations.

Accordingly, early in November the Meerut and Lahore Divisions were withdrawn from the front line and moved down to Marseilles. Officially as from December 8th the Indian Corps ceased to exist and on December 26th the last troopship of Indian soldiers sailed from France.
7 River Road to Baghdad

When Turkey came into the war on the side of Germany in November 1914 the immediate threat was to the oil fields of the Persian Gulf and to the Suez Canal. There was also the danger of the enemy gaining an overland route to India.

Only one division of the Indian Army was available for a campaign in Mesopotamia. The others were committed to the Western Front. It was hoped, however, that the Arabs, known to be smouldering under Turkish rule, would rebel and so augment the British forces. This they failed to do in the Mesopotamia theatre of the war.

The main battlefront was in the lowland regions of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. These two rivers joined near Basra, from where, as the Shatt al Arab, they flowed for about sixty miles to the Persian Gulf. The 6th Indian Division landed here on November 6th and quickly occupied Basra. They were five hundred miles from Baghdad but they halted at Qurna, the actual junction of the rivers, in order to consolidate their position.

Early the next year the Turks counter-attacked with a wide encircling movement in the expectation of driving the British into the sea. But by this time a new Indian division, the 12th, had arrived, together with a brigade of cavalry. Among these troops was the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Gurkhas, the first Gurkhas to reach this theatre of operations.

The battalion had been in Egypt and had suffered its first casualty in an action far removed from the war. It was against Arab raiders who had been terrorising the Sinai coast. The battalion crossed the Red Sea in H.M.S. Minerva, whose captain was so impressed by the Gurkhas that he insisted on attending the funeral of the one who was killed. All his officers and a firing party of Royal Marines were present, and ships in the roadstead flew their flags at half-mast. The
battalion record reads: "It is improbable that any Gurkha rifleman has ever been, or will ever be again, attended to his grave with so much honour."

The battalion was soon to make its impact in the Mesopotamia fighting. The new British commander, General Nixon, threw back the Turkish counter-attack and then advanced his force up the two rivers to gain control of the delta. There was fighting for Nasiriya on the Euphrates, but at one stage in the battle the British attack was held up. Suddenly Naik Harkaraj Rai, at the head of his section of Gurkhas, charged the Turkish trenches. Kukris drawn they leapt the parapet into the trench, cleaving fiercely with their deadly knives. They killed thirteen Turks for the loss of one man. The remaining Gurkhas came rushing to join in the fighting, with the result that the Turks were swept out of their trenches into headlong flight. Harkaraj was awarded the I.O.M. Later he was to earn many more decorations and to become an Honorary Captain.

On the Tigris General Townshend had already occupied Amara and pushing on from here he seized Kut. Now Baghdad was only about a hundred miles away; but this tempting prize, once taken, had to be held. It was certain the Turks would respond with a powerful counter-offensive. More troops were needed, and it was this which finally brought about the withdrawal of the Meerut and Lahore Divisions from France.

In addition to fighting the enemy, the British forces had to contend with smallpox, cholera, malaria, dysentry and the flies. The last were in the proportion of a plague. It is on record how the mess orderly of the 2/7th Gurkhas dealt with them. "The Mess consisted of two 160-pound tents pitched end to end, from the long ridge-pole of which the Mess orderly suspended bits of string a few inches long on which the flies settled in their thousands. Filling his mouth with paraffin he would strike a match and blow a flame quickly down the length of the tents. There was a tremendous buzzing and a dusting off of the corpse-laden boxes that served as tables on which he then solemnly set our tin plates and cutlery."

It was terrible country in which to be campaigning. Mile upon mile of desert sand stretched as far as the eye could see, shimmering in intense heat and producing mirages which made observation difficult. Trees were scarce and the only vegetation was an occasional date palm or patch of scrub.

In the hot season the temperature soared to 120° in the shade. In
the flood season, caused by the melting of winter snows in the high-
lands, the rivers broke their banks, vast areas of the flat land were 
completely flooded, and the soil was turned to a thick, glutinous 
mud worse even than that of Flanders.

Roads were scarce and usually in an appalling state, so that 
military transport was severely handicapped and mostly confined to 
the rivers.

General Townshend pressed onwards from Kut in order to take 
full advantage of the Turkish retreat, but the difficulties of navigation 
held him up. He established a river base and then moved overland 
until in November 1915 he was only twenty-five miles from Baghdad.

Five miles away, the Turks were preparing to make a stand at 
Ctesiphon. In ancient times this was a magnificent city, but in 
A.D. 637 it had been destroyed by Omar and his Arabs. All that 
remained was the Arch, a fragment of the palace of Chosroes rising 
some ninety-five feet above the desert, and the High Wall which 
was formed by two narrow mounds at right angles. At the base they 
were about two hundred feet thick and in places they rose to forty 
or fifty feet.

The Turkish position on the left bank of the river followed a line 
of low mounds. There were fifteen closed redoubts connected by a 
continuous trench. Two very strong ones at the northern end were 
called Vital Point by Townsend. High Wall formed the Turkish 
centre, and Water Redoubt was to the south.

The Turkish commander, General Nur-ud-din, had about 18,000 
men and 52 guns. This represented four divisions; but one was in 
reserve and Townsend was not aware of its existence when the battle 
started. A British pilot, Major Reilly, flew over the area and spotted 
the arrival of more troops; but on his way back to report, his aircraft 
was shot down by machine-gun fire and he was captured.

So Townshend, with over 13,000 men, believed his strength to be 
about equal to that of the enemy. His original 6th Indian Division 
had been reinforced by a brigade which included the 2/7th Gurkha 
Battalion. In addition, he had a brigade of cavalry. This force he 
split into four columns which moved up into position during the 
night. The Gurkhas were with Column A, commanded by Major-
General Delamain and their task was to make the decisive frontal 
attack on Vital Point.

It was easy for troops to lose their way, for the open plain was 
featureless apart from low scrub. Delamain sent out some Punjabi
scouts, who returned at 2.30 in the morning to report that they had located the objective, confirming that the column was in its appointed position.

Nothing remained but to wait for the attack to begin. The temperature dropped fifty degrees during the night and the troops had a miserable time, unable to sleep or to keep warm. When dawn broke they were stiff with cold. Bright moonlight had given way to a thick mist which even the rising sun failed to dispel.

Half an hour after sunrise the naval flotilla, giving support from the river, opened the bombardment. Fifteen minutes later Townshend's thirty guns joined in.

In the mist one of the other columns, due to make a preparatory attack on Water Redoubt, lost direction and failed to draw fire from that quarter as had been planned.

Just before nine o'clock Delamain received the expected order and moved against Vital Point. The Gurkhas were on the left of the front line of the attack, which was over a six hundred yard front. Because of the mist and the flat nature of the country, they could only distinguish the Turkish positions by the flashes of exploding shells fired by the British guns to cover the advance. Soon, Turkish shells were bursting among them, and at about a thousand yards from Vital Point they were met by rifle and machine-gun fire. Instead of returning it, they charged. In spite of casualties they reached the wire, passed through it, and rushed the redoubt. By ten o'clock it had fallen and the Turks, suffering heavy casualties, were fleeing in disorder.

Because one of the British columns went astray, part of Column A came under heavy fire from a redoubt. This caused considerable disorganisation among the units, as portions of each battalion had to swing round to face the positions which the Turks still held. The troops so far involved were under Colonel Climo. General Delamain, bringing up reserves, saw large numbers of Turks retreating from Vital Point and believed the way was now clear to press on the attack against the Turkish second line. He did not know that Climo had suffered heavy losses, or that the units were now mixed up.

By the time Delamain reached Vital Point, Climo had obeyed the order to advance, and so the general was still unaware of the exact position.

Climo had observed eight Turkish field guns which had been abandoned, but because of a mirage he thought these were behind the second line of the enemy defences. He set off to capture them and
10. Festival of Dosaha. The bullock must be decapitated with one clean cut to bring good fortune to the battalion in the coming year.
11. "When I grow up I'm going to be a soldier, too . . ."

12. The Young Warriors! Recruits for the Boys' Companies.
succeeded, taking a number of prisoners as well; but he was unable to make further progress.

When early afternoon came the Turks had completely evacuated their first line; but they were determined to hold their second line. They brought up two field batteries and started to bombard Vital Point. Heavy batteries across the river and in front of Ctesiphon Arch added their weight.

Under Turkish pressure Climo's force was slowly pushed back. The colonel was wounded for the third time and had to be removed on a stretcher. By this time most of the British officers had been lost and there was a withdrawal into Vital Point. The captured field guns had to be left behind.

By five o'clock Townshend, who had galloped forward earlier to Vital Point through a hail of shell-fire, decided to call off the attack and concentrate his force on the position he had won, making bivouac for the night. He hoped to reorganise his units and resume the offensive the next morning. The Turks were equally weary. One of their divisions had been reduced to a mere skeleton.

Throughout the night Delamain held Water Redoubt and Vital Point. The wounded were collected and brought into the latter. Their sufferings were appalling; those unable to walk were carried on springless transport carts and suffered almost unendurable pain as they were thrown about in a bumpy ride. They were shivering with cold all night, and the cries of many for water could not be satisfied because there was not enough to go round. The medical corps could adequately deal with four hundred cases but they found themselves struggling to care for some three thousand five hundred, including many of the enemy.

With daybreak a fierce wind arose, whirling great clouds of dust across the plain and adding to the discomfort of the troops. Townshend now knew that the casualties were over four thousand. Men and animals were exhausted and water was scarce. He decided there was no hope of renewing the attack as planned.

He began to reorganise. Early in the morning he sent the cavalry brigade from Vital Point to the Arch, in order to water their horses. They met with no opposition on the way and started to take the horses down to the river, with the dismounted troops ready to give cover. While they were doing this three hundred of the 2/7th Gurkhas with their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Powell, moved forward to occupy a low, small mound a few hundred yards south of the Arch. This was to become famous as Gurkha Mound.
They had with them a hundred men of the 24th Punjabis, a Maxim battery and a section of the 82nd Field battery.

They had taken over the mound when Turks, some two thousand yards away, opened fire on the cavalry. This was returned briskly from Gurkha Mound, but the cavalry were forced to withdraw their horses.

Encouraged by the comparative inactivity of the British, General Nur-ud-din planned a counter-attack, which started in the afternoon. Almost immediately two of his divisions came under fierce fire from Gurkha Mound. They were thrown into confusion and retired.

The rest of the Turkish attack was thrown back but at five o’clock it was resumed against Gurkha Mound. By this time the cavalry had withdrawn to Vital Point and the field guns had gone with them. Powell’s small force was now in an isolated and apparently vulnerable position well ahead of the British line at Vital Point. The 35th Turkish Division, several thousand strong, advanced on them. The three hundred Gurkhas and hundred Punjabis put up one of the most gallant fights of the campaign. All night long the Turks attacked from all sides but the defenders stood firm. Wave after wave of Turkish infantry charged against them, shouting and firing, and each wave was met by a steady barrier of rifle fire and the deadly chatter of the Maxim battery. It was fire control of the highest class, with each man calm behind his rifle butt. The Turks were never able to get close enough for their weight to tell in hand to hand combat.

Even a Turkish historian, Muhammad Amin, paid a tribute to the gallant troops on Gurkha Mound. “... I must confess to a deep hidden feeling of appreciation of the deed of that brave self-sacrificing enemy detachment, which for hours, although only four hundred strong, opposed and finally drove back the thousands of riflemen of the 35th Division...”

The following day Colonel Powell’s magnificent little force was withdrawn into the British position.

Townshend realised the gravity of the situation, though he saw it as worse than it was because he believed the Turks had received reinforcements. He decided to fall back on Lajj, from where he had launched his attack. The wounded were sent first and throughout the day they left in the bumpy transport carts. Each one took three lying down cases and three sitting up. It was a very tight squeeze which added to the suffering of the wounded.

By noon Townshend changed his mind in favour of holding on; but the following day he received a report that strong Turkish rein-
Forcements had arrived. It was false. But he believed it and decided there was nothing for it but to fall back on Lajj. He was not the only one to be deceived. Nur-ud-din was withdrawing because of a false report that the British were attempting to outflank him to the north. However, as soon as he realised that the British were in retreat he swung round and gave chase.

On December 3rd 1915 Townshend’s troops marched into Kut. It was the end of an eighty-mile retreat. The peninsula of Kut el Amara was roughly two miles long by a mile broad. The town itself was situated to the south-west. With a population of around six hundred it had little or no sanitation and was filthy beyond description.

Two days later the troops had sufficiently recovered from the ordeal of the withdrawal to strengthen the defences. The loop of the Tigris formed a natural barrier on three sides. The fourth side had a mud-walled fort at the north corner and a line of four blockhouses, but these were small and would hold only ten or a dozen men. While defence work was in progress the first Turks appeared. They started to shell the town and as more troops arrived it was fully besieged.

Townshend, apparently, was not greatly worried, expecting that a relief force would soon arrive. Meanwhile, there were two months’ rations and a fair amount of ammunition in Kut. By holding on he could deny the river to the enemy and so give reinforcements time to consolidate for a strong advance. His supporting naval flotilla had left, and so had the cavalry, getting clear away before the Turks arrived.

A boat bridge had been completed across the Tigris, and two hundred Punjabis crossed in order to protect it; but General Melliss, in charge of this section of the defences, pointed out that in the event of a night attack it would take some time to send reinforcements over, because the nearest troops were committed to defences some distance from the bridge. Townshend agreed that the Punjabis should be withdrawn and the bridge dismantled. The Punjabis were brought back the next morning, and the sappers started to take down the bridge; but they very quickly came under fire from enemy snipers. Melliss at once ordered the Punjabis across the river again so that they could occupy their defensive trenches. Realising that the presence of snipers meant Turkish infantry were moving up, he rode to where the 2/7th Gurkhas were positioned and ordered them to the bridge. He then galloped off to report to Townshend.

A strong Turkish attack developed, and when Melliss rode back to
the bridge he found the Punjabis retreating across it. One British officer had been mortally wounded, another had severe wounds, and an Indian officer had been killed.

The Gurkhas arrived in time to prevent the Turks from coming on across the bridge. However, the enemy were now in possession of the trenches from which the Punjabis had been driven, and there was the threat that they might try to cross in force. Townshend gave orders that the bridge should be destroyed that night.

It was a highly dangerous mission as it meant crossing to the enemy side and laying the fused explosives within a short distance of the trenches. Lieutenant Sweet of the 2/7th and two Gurkhas volunteered, together with Lieutenant Matthews of the Royal Engineers and two Indian sappers.

They waited until dark and then moved out. Sweet and Matthews crossed with the explosive and set the charges within grenade-distance of the Turks, while the men stood by to cut the anchor cables. The bridge blew up with a roar, so dazing the Turks that they were unable to fire for a while, giving the demolition party time to escape.

Townshend recommended both officers for the V.C. but they were subsequently awarded the D.S.O. The Gurkhas and sappers were immediately awarded I.O.M.s.

While Townshend was holding Kut a relief force under General Aylmer, V.C., was advancing up the Tigris. Among his troops were the 1/2nd and the 1/9th Gurkhas. The advance was slow, strongly contested. The first major engagement took place at Shaikh Saad, and the Turks were forced to retreat. Bad weather and a ghastly delay in evacuating some four thousand wounded prevented Aylmer from pursuing the enemy right away.

A few days later an air reconnaissance showed that the Turks had taken up a position on the right bank of a wadi some eight miles away. Aylmer attacked but failed to get a decisive victory over the enemy, who managed to withdraw under cover of darkness to the Hanna defile farther up the Tigris. They had lost two thousand men, while British casualties were over sixteen hundred.

Within a week Aylmer attacked them again at Hanna, but two assaults failed to carry the position. The weather was at its worst, heavy rain turning the earth into deep slime which made movement slow and tiring and disorganised communications. For the wounded it was a frightful ordeal as they waited, shivering and suffering, for the transport carts which would take them on a ride of horror.
through the dark, wet night to where the few doctors toiled to exhaustion point in nightmare conditions.

During the weeks which followed, all through February and into March, bad weather, floods, and deficiencies of organisation held up the British advance. After Hanna no major action had been fought, and Aylmer, conscious of the slow progress, decided on an ambitious and daring attempt to force a way to Kut.

His plan was to travel across country to Dujaila Redoubt about eight miles east of Kut, then wheel round and cut the Turkish communications while a reserve force passed round the flank of the redoubt and advanced on Kut. He hoped the defenders would be able to fight their way out and join up with them in the battle.

The first part of the scheme was extremely successful. Twenty thousand men, with transport, ambulances and guns, formed a column two miles long and six hundred yards wide. Guided by an officer with a compass they moved by night across twelve miles or more of unknown desert country whose flatness was scoured by irrigation channels. They moved in silence, passing Arab tents on the way, and reached their objective on time. With all the advantage of surprise they were on the brink of success. But they seemed to have run out of boldness, for they waited for the artillery to come up. By the time the guns were ready to open fire the Turks were fully on the alert and reinforcements were pouring into the positions around the redoubt.

The battle was fierce and, as in the previous ones, the casualties were heavy. The 1/2nd Gurkhas, fighting their first action in Mesopotamia, lost three out of four British officers killed and the remaining one wounded. Ninety-four men were killed or missing and another ninety were wounded. The 1/9th also suffered severely. Two British officers and twenty-nine men were killed. Three British and six Gurkha officers were wounded, as were a hundred and seven Gurkhas. Among the wounded officers were the colonel and the subedar-major. The total casualties were nearly three thousand five hundred.

Acutely short of water and totally exhausted, the British forces withdrew eighteen miles the next day. The wounded suffered abominably through a hot day which seemed to have no ending. For the rest it was a terrible ordeal.

This costly failure, so brilliantly conceived and so near to success, sealed the fate of Townshend and the defenders of Kut.
In Kut, the garrison was still holding out; but by this time there was a shortage of food and diseases were starting to take a heavy toll. As no fodder was available the transport animals were slaughtered to provide meat. The Indians refused to eat this on religious grounds; but the Gurkhas had no such qualms and joined their British comrades in eating horseflesh.

Early in April 1916 there was a fresh attempt to reach the beleaguered. General Aylmer had been recalled and his place taken by General Gorringe, who advanced on Hanna to find that the Turks had now evacuated the defile to take up a position further west. He failed to drive them from this and so he crossed the river and attacked Bait Isa.

The 1st and 9th Gurkhas led the attack. Without waiting for the British artillery barrage to lift they rushed and captured the enemy’s front line trenches, killing nearly every man. When the officer commanding the 1/9th bombing section was killed Naik Puranbahadur Karki took over and led the attack down a long communication trench. Naik Matbar Thapa advanced along the top of the trench level with him and, as successive bays were grenaded, shot down the survivors. Both were later decorated for gallantry.

The remainder of the battalion cleared the second and third lines of enemy trenches. Later on, No. 1 Company captured two light field guns and took twenty prisoners, including two officers. After the capture of the guns there was intermittent sniping and it was discovered that the horses which had pulled the guns were dug in some three hundred yards further on. The firing was coming from a trench nearby and harassing No. 2 Company. Rifleman Randoj Karki, armed only with his kukri and one grenade, charged alone. Under fire he reached the trench, flung his grenade and then disappeared. He was soon in sight again, bringing in eight prisoners. Another rifleman, Astal Rai rushed out to help him. Both were wounded, but they brought their prisoners in. Randoj received an immediate I.O.M. and Astal won the I.D.S.M. later.

Bait Isa was a day of reckoning. Dead Turks choked the trenches so that before our troops could move along them corpses had to be lifted out and dumped on the parapets. The Gurkhas seemed to be everywhere. With blood on their bayonets and clothes they ran up and down the trenches bringing ammunition and carrying baskets of bombs. They were described as “happy and keen and busy as ferrets”.

Only discipline kept them from rushing after the fleeing enemy, for caution was no part of their temperament. “Little blighters,” an
officer of the Sikhs said, "they're always scurrying on miles ahead, and if you don't look after them they will make a big salient and bite off more than they can chew."

By evening the Turks had brought up more men for a counter-attack and this was led by the 2nd Division of Constantinople, veterans of Gallipoli. The full weight of the attack was concentrated on the two battalions of Gurkhas who, for twenty minutes of desperate fighting kept the horde of enemy at bay. Their casualties were severe and they had to pull back; but this delay had given the supporting brigades time to organise for battle. They were able to halt the Turkish advance and finally throw it back. The enemy retreated, leaving three thousand dead.

This raised hopes of a faster advance up the Tigris, but the Turks were still holding a strong position which was protected on one flank by a marsh and on the other by the river. At the start of this, the third attack on the particular position, the trenches were about six hundred yards apart and a wide stretch was flooded. Some trenches were neck-deep in water, in between them men sank to their knees in mud. Rifles became choked and useless. The 1/8th Gurkhas were among the British troops to reach the first line of the Turkish trenches, only to find them flooded. All this time they were under heavy fire. With Highlanders, Indians and Gurkhas floundering up to their armpits in mud and water the attack faded out.

The Turks started a truce to bring in the wounded by coming out under the Red Crescent, and the British quickly responded under the Red Cross.

A last, desperate, attempt was made to help the defenders of Kut. The paddle-steamer Julnar, loaded with food supplies which would keep Townshend's men going for another three weeks, attempted to force the river blockade. Because of the noise made by the engine and paddles, surprise was impossible. The steamer made her way up-river in moonlight. She was well-plated and sandbagged and was able to pass through the heavy small-arms fire from the river banks without serious damage. But four miles from Kut there were steel hawsers stretched diagonally across the river and these stopped her. The place had been cunningly selected by the Turks, for at this point the ambush was out of range of the British guns at Kut as well as of those with the relieving force. The steamer was captured, many of the crew being killed, and her precious supplies went to the Turks who, appropriately, renamed her "The Gift".
There could be no further attempt to save Kut. General Gorringe's men had fought to the limit and were exhausted. They had suffered twenty-two thousand casualties in a vain attempt to reach the ten thousand men besieged in Kut. For the defenders there was no longer any hope. On the 29th April 1916 General Townshend surrendered after destroying all his guns and military stores.

The captivity which followed was an appalling experience for the garrison. Four thousand died in captivity. The Turks separated the Gurkhas of the 2/7th from their officers; but the morale of the little men was not destroyed.

Their historian wrote: "From first to last they were magnificent—a class apart. Their conduct was not without reward for it won the respect of the Turks and the Germans; it also won the healthy regard of the Arabs so that the treatment they were subjected to, deplorable though it sometimes was, never reached the callousness of that meted out to some, particularly to the abject and to stragglers. In the 2nd battalion there was no straggling; each man took strength from his comrades, cohesion and membership were never lost. This essential soundness we owe to three remarkable men whose names should appear in illuminated letters in our records. They were Colour-Havildar (equivalent of colour-sergeant) Fateh Bahadur Limbu, the senior non-commissioned officer who took command of the Battalion; Colour-Havildar Bhotri Khattri who assumed the duties of Adjutant; and Havildar Hari Singh Khattri, the Sikh Quartermaster Clerk. These three ran the Battalion and carried it triumphantly through every trial so that when it disembarked in Egypt after the Armistice it bore itself as smartly as it had done in 1914 when it first set foot in Suez.

"Throughout, the organisation was rigidly kept, standing orders were observed and discipline maintained. At the sound of a whistle orderly non-commissioned officers doubled to receive their orders. On falling in, section commanders called their rolls, and a word of disapproval was the severest punishment ever resorted to or required."

After the surrender of Kut both sides were so exhausted by hardships and casualties that there was little activity until the end of the year.

Summer and autumn passed with the British troops enduring dreadful conditions. Transport was bad and replacement of clothing extremely difficult. Men of the 4th Gurkhas improvised trousers out
of sackcloth. There was much sickness and, owing to the lack of green vegetables and fruit, scurvy appeared. Cholera broke out, adding mental panic to physical ills.

Medical arrangements were totally inadequate and evacuation downstream an ordeal of indescribable horror. Between June and August 1916 thirty-five thousand officers and men were invalided out of the force. At one stage the 2/4th Gurkhas were reduced to three hundred men, and most of these should have been in hospital.

General Maude was now in command, having taken over in July. By September there was an obvious improvement in organisation. It even became possible to lay on light entertainment. The Gurkhas particularly liked a certain jazz band, while at the “Bioscope” they became ardent Charlie Chaplin fans. Considering their remote background, they adapted themselves wonderfully to what must have seemed strange inventions. When they saw their first aeroplane in Mesopotamia, and a subedar-major’s attention was drawn to it, he said: “That’s nothing new. After all, the Gods flew to Ceylon hundreds of years ago.”

By December new drafts had arrived, communications were secure, transport and supplies re-organised and the troops were morally and physically superior to the enemy and eager to avenge Kut.

For the Gurkhas, the magical numerals 2/7th were not allowed to disappear into a prison camp. The battalion which had won such honour at Gurkha Mound was re-formed with a fresh draft and, strangely, it first went into action near the spot where the old battalion had first joined 6th Division.

In preparation for an advance General Maude wanted to find out whether the Turks still occupied their pickets in their old strong position near Sannaiyat. He asked for a patrol to cross the river and carry out a reconnaissance. From the large number of Gurkhas and 91st Punjabis who volunteered, four Gurkhas and three Punjabis were chosen.

After dark the patrol slipped quietly into the numbingly cold water and began the long swim. Each man was given a “safety jacket” of empty oil tins which were uncomfortable and of little assistance against the swift, treacherous current of the Tigris.

The watchers on the bank waited anxiously. At last, out of the darkness, there were heads bobbing in the water. They strained their eyes, counting, but they could see only four. There were two Gurkhas and two Punjabis who were helped out of the water, exhausted and
so frozen that they were speechless. It was some time before they were able to report that the Turks were still in position and were digging trenches. The survivors were decorated. Of the two Gurkhas, Havildar Budhiman Limbu, I.D.S.M., received the I.O.M., while Rifleman Randoj Rai was given the I.D.S.M. The two Gurkhas who perished were Lance-Naik Tulsiram Rana and Rifleman Keturam Rana, both from the Assam Military Police.

During January and most of February 1917 the British started to drive the enemy from the river bends.

After the attack on one of these, Dahra Bend, the Turks were driven from all except a position in the north-west corner on a front of a mile and a half. An attack on this was planned for three hours after midnight. During the early part of the night Major Scott, D.S.O., was sent with C and D Companies of the 2/4th Gurkhas to watch the Turks because of reports that they were collecting pontoons and might cross the river. If he met opposition he was to wait for the main attack at 3 a.m.

He moved his men forward and then decided to take a closer look at the enemy positions. He sent out a probing party under 2nd-Lieutenant Harrison, which, after covering about two hundred yards, ran into some Turks. The Gurkhas opened fire immediately and the enemy scurried down to the river, which they began to cross on three pontoons. The Gurkhas, in hot pursuit, flung their bombs and two of the pontoons, littered with dead and dying, swung into the current and went downstream out of control. They opened fire with Lewis guns on the third, which stuck on a sandbank in mid-river.

Scott’s Gurkhas, continuing to move along the river bank, met more of the enemy. They charged them and took about fifty prisoners. Suddenly shells began to fall thick and fast. Unaware of Scott’s success, the British were opening up their preliminary bombardment. Fortunately only one man was hit, and Havildar Karna Sing Gurung, who had distinguished himself during the night, managed to run back and get the news through. The planned assault was stopped.

In all, the battalion took over three hundred and sixty prisoners in their river-bank action. Scott received a bar to his D.S.O., Harrison the M.C., and Karna Sing the I.D.S.M.

At Shumran Bend, just over a week later, a boat bridge was constructed, though not without heavy casualties. The actual crossing was made by the 2/9th and 1/2nd Gurkhas and the 2nd Norfolks. The river was some three hundred and fifty yards wide, swollen with
flood water which was flowing at five knots. There was a loop-holed bund on the far bank, entrenched with head cover. The Turks held this and had machine-guns. They could be covered by artillery support.

The crossing was carefully organised, with a beachmaster, a ferry-master, and tows of pontoons, each with five rowers. Many of the volunteer rowers were Southampton watermen in civilian life.

The first tow of the 2/9th Gurkhas was commanded by Major Wheeler and included 2nd-Lieutenants Russell, Alington and Kerr. They embarked at a quarter to six when the light was just sufficient for them to see the other bank, but not to distinguish features. Thirteen boats set out and in mid-river were met by heavy small-arms fire. Ten of the boats grounded but the other three drifted downriver out of control.

Wheeler and the first party splashed ashore and rushed the opposing trench. Passing through a hail of bombs and bullets they reached it and slaughtered the occupants with grenades.

Kerr was wounded in the crossing but Alington and Jemadar Kishan Sing came through with two Lewis gun crews. Alington was shot dead on arrival at the trench, but the Lewis gunners went right and left to cover the flanks. One of the guns jammed and this enabled thirty or forty Turks to counter-attack. Coming across the foreshore they were also in the rear of the newly-won position. Dealing with the threat immediately, Wheeler, Russell and three Gurkhas charged the advancing enemy with bombs and bayonets and killed or wounded most of them. Wheeler was fired at and missed by three Turks at point blank range. One threw his rifle with fixed bayonet and this opened a scalp wound six inches long across the major's head. Russell was hit in the shoulder.

In spite of his severe wound, Wheeler remained active, gathering his men together and consolidating on both flanks and forward to a trench some hundred and fifty yards ahead. For this tenacity he was subsequently awarded the V.C., while Russell was given the D.S.O.

After landing the first tow, the ten boats started the return trip. They were under heavy fire, from shells to bullets, and only six reached the ferry. They quickly loaded up. On the second crossing there were heavy casualties, especially among the rowers. Three out of four in the leading boat were hit and the coxswain was severely wounded. Captain Blandy seized an oar and guided the boat in. Two bullets tore through his sleeve. Just as he was coming ashore he was
shot in the abdomen, but the bullet was deflected by his belt buckle and so the wound was not fatal.

Later crossings were more successful, although the firing was still heavy. By afternoon a boat bridge three hundred yards long was completed and the remainder of the division started crossing. The 2/4th Gurkhas were among these troops and they moved on and dug in about a thousand yards from the river bank. Their task was to clear the Shumran Peninsula of the enemy so that a cavalry division could pass through and make a drive to cut the Baghdad road.

Losses were heavy the next day and there were many acts of bravery. Captain Lentaigne constantly exposed himself to fire while he moved among his men. The Medical Officer, Lieutenant Dabholkar, was hit near the base of the spine while attending to wounded in the open. In spite of pain and weakness he carried on throughout the afternoon and all the following night. He was awarded the M.C.

In the early afternoon an enemy machine-gun opened enfilading fire along the ridge occupied by the Gurkhas. A Lewis gun team of C Company at once moved out over exposed ground to engage the machine-gunners. All except two, Ude Pun and Gamir Sing Thapa, were hit; but these two managed to bring their gun into action, although under accurate fire all the time. They silenced the Turkish machine-gun. Both were awarded the I.D.S.M. Another decoration, the Italian Bronze Medal for Military Valour, was given to Asamaru Newar, who volunteered to bring up ammunition and made no less than three trips, each time carrying a full box on his head. Although he was exposed to heavy fire he escaped injury.

During this engagement there was an example of the macabre humour of the Gurkha, which often comes to light in the midst of battle. When one of their Lewis gun teams rushed into action its leading gunner was immediately shot through the head. No. Two, taking over, was hit in the shoulder after firing a few bursts. His place was taken by No. Three. This had been observed by Gurkha riflemen who were near the gun, and they had watched with increasing interest. There was a roar of laughter from them when the third gunner was unfortunate enough to stop a bullet. They had laid bets on how long he would last, and the winners were highly delighted.

The advance on Baghdad gathered momentum. The Turks still resisted fiercely, and the Gurkhas were in the midst of the fighting and
always eager for more. A racy account of his adventures with the 2/4th at Tel Aswad in March was written by 2nd-Lieutenant Harrison.

"Scott was in front with Siriparsad; then I came along, Lentaigne being with the right wing. We got into the bullet radius pretty quick, extended and advanced by half companies.

"Scott halted in a nullah to allow the Buffs to get on, as we had to move in support of them, and I went up to him to find out our orders. Shells were coming over pretty thick by this time, and Scott had hardly started his pow-wow before Nye came up to report that poor old Perreau had been got by one of them. So he gave me some hurried orders and a 'Do you understand?' and hurried back to Headquarters, which left only Lentaigne and myself with the companies . . . and Scott and Nye (as Adjutant) with Battalion Headquarters.

"Well, I understood one thing—and that was to get out of the blinkin’ shell area, and double quick at that. So off we went. We got some nasty accurate shelling, but really remarkably few casualties. The Turks had nasty white lines on the ground, and when [we] got about fifty yards away they plunked shells over and on it as hard as they could, where-upon you girded up your loins and ran like hell. We kept striking nullahs and got a breather in them. Just before we got into one of them Siriparsad went over with a bullet through his thigh. One of the new draft wanted to attend to him, but I said . . . 'Don’t worry about him—he’s the supporting line’s job now.'

"In the nullah I ran into a party of Buffs, the subaltern in charge being as vague as regards the situation as I was. My be-all and end-all, as I explained to him, was ‘to get into the blighters’. We had lost direction a bit, so moved along the nullah towards the river. Then I saw a small party of ours quite isolated—probably the Buffs—to the right about four hundred yards ahead, apparently in difficulties. There was a large body of Turks on the river ‘bund’ some two hundred yards from them standing up to fire. Then we saw these fix bayonets and start off for the isolated position. So up and over we went hell for leather—and the Turks at once ran back to their old position and blazed at us. After going about a hundred and fifty yards I felt the devil’s own bang in the middle of my back, and turned two somersaults. Then I wondered what on earth had hit me. I soon guessed on hearing Narbir shout: ‘Come on! The Sahib’s the supporting line’s job now!’

"A few more lines passed over me, and I saw Jaman Sing sprinting
like a madman with a bare kukri in his hand to catch up the front line. One of his platoon fell out to look after me.

"I could see good old No. 4 Company going strong, headed by Narbir and Jaman Sing. They were heading for a village and for the isolated post we first went for. It afterwards transpired that the lot in the village were the ones that had bowled me over—through the left shoulder and out at the right of my spine. Jaman Sing got in with the bayonet, cleared the village, and then took up a position on the far side. . . . It was a real fine bit of work, all on his own initiative and for it, plus all his other consistent good work, he got an I.O.M. and a mention . . . Narbir also did excellent work in this show, as he led on the front line without a pause after Siriparsad and I were both out of it."

On March 11th 1917, in company with the Buffs, who led, the 2/4th Gurkhas entered Baghdad. The capture of the city was important both strategically and psychologically. But as a prize for which so much blood had been shed it proved a city of disenchantment. The historian of the 4th Gurkhas wrote: "... Some of the buildings were in flames, and the Arabs were looting the place wholesale, tearing out windows and dragging off everything they could lay their hands on; a few shots, however, dispersed them.

"... The outskirts were covered with corpses and bones of dead animals, and within the mud embankment which encircled it were crowded thousands of Mahommedan graves, presenting a mournful and unkempt appearance, while in the City itself, the miserable-looking and rather dilapidated houses of mud-brown brick and the narrow filthy streets completed the disillusion . . . There were neither sanitary nor scavenging arrangements, noxious smells abounded and hundreds of discarded, diseased and half-starved dogs roamed everywhere."

So looked the City of the Arabian Nights in 1917.
“I am very anxious, if possible, to get a brigade of Gurkhas, so as to complete the New Zealand Divisional Organisation with a type of man who will, I am most certain, be most valuable on the Gallipoli Peninsula,” wrote General Sir Ian Hamilton, commanding the Expeditionary Force, to Lord Kitchener on March 25th 1915. “The scrubby hillsides on the south-west faces of the plateau are just the sort of terrain where these little fellows are at their brilliant best... each little ‘Gurkh’ might be worth his full weight in gold at Gallipoli.”

This appeal was at first ignored, and Gurkha units were not sent until five days after the initial landings of April 25th.

The Dardanelles Campaign was planned in response to appeals for help from Britain’s ally, Russia, hard pressed by the enemy and desperately short of munitions. The aim was to divert a large part of the Turkish Army which was operating against the Russians in the Caucasus, and to open a way to Russia’s southern ports so that munitions could flow in when the northern ports were ice-bound. It was also hoped to obtain wheat from Russia. And a firm footing in this area, it was believed, would prevent any new alliance among the Balkan states detrimental to the Allied cause.

Partly because of indecision and dispute at high level, the campaign was as good as lost before the first troops were landed. British and French ships bombarded the land forts but as they penetrated deeper into the Straits there were heavy losses in capital ships and the naval operation was called off. The Turks had received ample warning; they were aware of the Expeditionary Force building up in Egypt, and the shelling of the forts was a clear pointer to what was to come. They mustered some forty-five thousand troops on the
peninsula and covered all possible landing places with strong fortifications.

In most places where the Allied troops stormed ashore under the supporting fire of the Navy, they were confronted by perpendicular cliffs at least fifty feet high rising from a few yards of beach. Further inland crests of up to a thousand feet dominated both sides of the peninsula. For five days, suffering dreadful slaughter, they clung tenaciously to the precarious beach-heads. Effective command broke down, units were mixed up, and the men were exhausted.

This was the unhappy position when the 1/6th Gurkhas landed on 1st May. For nine days they were moved from one point to another as Turkish counter-attacks threatened, losing twenty-two men from shell-fire. Then they took over front line trenches from the King’s Own Scottish Borderers, and three days later embarked on the capture of what was to be known as ‘Gurkha Bluff’.

This bluff, some 500 yards from the trenches, rose to a height of three hundred feet and marked the Turkish right flank. The Allied offensive had been brought to a halt by this formidable cliff which had been converted into a powerful bastion and was held by Turkish machine-gunners. Brave attempts by the Royal Munster and the Royal Dublin Fusiliers to secure a footing had failed.

The Gurkhas sent out reconnaissance patrols, and some daring scouting was done by Subedar Gambirsing Pun and Havildar Santabir Gurung, who later received congratulatory cards from the divisional commander.

The attack was launched after dark on May 12th. First, the Gurkhas had to cross the mouth of a ravine, subsequently named after them, which was commanded by enemy machine-guns. Under covering fire from the Navy, a company of Gurkhas rushed across the open and swarmed up the heights. They reached the top by 8 p.m. and to their astonishment found no Turks holding it. They dug in quickly, in preparation for beating off counter-attacks. One was launched at four the next morning but was halted by artillery and by fire from two other Gurkha companies coming up to reinforce the position. During the next twenty-four hours the Turks kept up a constant fire but launched no actual attack, and the Gurkhas were able to push forward another five hundred yards.

For the rest of the month action was confined to trench warfare and raids; but casualties steadily mounted. During fierce fighting over possession of a trench, Captain Whytehead and Subedar Dhanbir Thapa were killed and Captain Jackson wounded. Second-

14. One for the pot! Off duty the Gurkha loves hunting wild game.
15. All India Boxing Champions—Open and Novice Teams, 1945/46.
Lieutenant Sutton, R.E., led a Gurkha charge which killed all the opposing Turks; but a bomb exploded prematurely and blew off his right hand. The trench, almost clogged with the dead of both sides, was finally filled in and abandoned. The Gurkha casualties amounted to thirty-three, including two British officers.

During this same month Jemadar Balsing Thapa volunteered to attack a Turkish position in a ravine. It was unassailable from the front, and Balsing's plan was to take the thirty Turks from the rear, via the beach. Leading his platoon along the shore he climbed a spur and came to within a hundred yards of the enemy without being detected. Opening rapid fire the platoon killed the entire Turkish group before withdrawing to rejoin the battalion.

On 2nd June the 1/5th and 2/10th Gurkhas arrived to replace two Punjabi battalions of the 29th Indian Brigade, it being considered undesirable to employ Moslem troops against the Turks. Two days later the Gurkhas were flung into the Third Battle of Krithia.

The objective was the capture of Achi Baba which, seven hundred feet high, commanded the Narrows. At a cost of seven thousand casualties the British gained about four hundred yards along a three mile front.

A heavy bombardment was directed against the Turkish trenches to destroy wire entanglements; but when the Gurkhas, 14th Sikhs, and Lancashire Fusiliers advanced they found most of the wire still intact and casualties reached alarming proportions. Only 120 Sikhs survived out of 500. The 1/6th Gurkhas lost 95, including Captain Birdwood, mortally wounded in the storming of Mushroom Redoubt. He was recommended for the D.S.O., but his death deprived him of that decoration.

Later in the day the 1/5th Gurkhas were called upon to advance into the inferno of shrapnel, bullets and grenades. On the arid slopes among the scattered scrub and coarse grass, 129 fell, including seven British officers, among them the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Boisragon, V.C.—the hero of Nilt—shot through the knee cap.

Undeterred by failure and heavy losses the Gurkhas kept on attacking. During one of the charges Captain Brown, probably the only officer on the peninsula who wore a sword, drew this and waving it high in the air led a rush towards the crest. He was shot dead, as were Jemadar Harishankar Gurung and others following him.

Near the top of the cliffs on another spur No. 1 Double Company found their way barred by a concealed trench. Every attack made by
the Gurkhas withered before scorching fire. Captain Turner, shot through the head, died instantly. His friend, Lieutenant Beddy, ran across the open ground towards him. Incredibly, he covered the greater part of the distance but then spun round with a gaping hole in his side. He died that night.

Brought to a standstill by heavy fire from front and flanks, Major Batty gave order for No. 3 Double Company to dig in. A few minutes later he fell dead.

One last attempt was made by Major Nightingale of No. 1 Double Company. He was awarded the D.S.O. “for distinguished gallantry in leading an attack up a difficult spur after he had been wounded. He reached the crest and was again wounded, but coming back a few yards he rallied his men and again led them on. He was wounded a third time, but still endeavoured to advance till he fainted.”

During one of this series of assaults Subedar Juthe Gurung was wounded in the leg. He refused assistance, bandaged his own wound and was on the point of rejoining his company when hit by a second, fatal bullet.

As dusk fell the battalion was ordered to withdraw. Naik Dhan Sing Gurung was in charge of the covering party, for whom things went hard. He was captured by Turks but broke loose and hurtled down a cliff face. He reached the beach in safety only to fall into the hands of another body of Turks. Escaping yet again, he plunged into the sea. Although weighted down with equipment and boots he struck out under fire from his late captors, turned parallel to the coast and finally succeeded in landing in an Allied position.

As the ill-fated campaign continued, conditions became worse. Some trenches were only fifty yards from the enemy, and the gap of No Man’s Land, never more than two hundred yards wide, was a graveyard of rotting corpses—mostly Turkish. The stench was overpowering. Intense heat, flies, lice and fleas added to the discomfort of the troops. Along many stretches of trench the dead had been buried inside or just outside the parapets. The Gurkhas stuffed their nostrils with flannelette issued for pulling through their rifle barrels.

Constant spade work was essential to maintain trenches, and this had to be done with snipers active both day and night. Patrols clambered over the bodies in No Man’s Land, collecting rifles from the dead. This led to frequent night encounters, with the Gurkhas using their inborn hunting skill to good effect.

At the end of June the Battle of Gully Ravine opened and raged in full fury for eight days. The objective was the same line of five
Turkish trenches for which the Krithea battle had been fought earlier in the month. On the first morning the 2/10th Gurkhas, followed by the 1/6th and 1/5th, advanced a thousand yards. During an afternoon of counter-attacks, parts of the trenches repeatedly changed hands but by sunset the Gurkhas still occupied the ground they had first won.

Jemadar Bajirdhoj Rai of the 2/10th distinguished himself by fearless and skilful direction of bombing parties, winning the I.O.M. Lieutenant Moran, severely wounded in the head, died in Malta on July 8th. An unusual effect of his brain injury was that although his mother-tongue meant nothing to him he was able to converse intelligently in Gurkhali.

During the eight days and nights all three Gurkha battalions were engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting. In a Turkish counter-attack on the first night, Captain Atkinson was killed. The following night Captain Higgin and a complete section failed to return from a bayonet assault aimed at recapturing a lost trench.

When the supply of grenades gave out the Gurkhas used bayonets, kukris, picks and shovels. Subedar Sahibir Thapa of the 1/6th inspired his men to magnificent heights of bravery in a desperate situation. The Turks had bombed their way right down a trench and Gurkha after Gurkha, unable to retaliate in kind, was shot while defending the last two traverses. As each man fell another took his place, keeping the enemy at bay until a fresh supply of bombs was brought up. Sahibir won the I.O.M.

Subedar-Major Gambirsing Pun, also given this award, led an assault backed with forty bombs which drove the enemy from the whole length of the trench. Badly wounded in the head, he became paralysed three years later from the after effects of his injury.

During one daylight assault the Turks lost 800 killed, in fifteen minutes, in front of the Gurkhas' trenches. In another pre-dawn attack they came on line after line, but not a single man reached the Gurkhas' parapets, and the dead lay heaped one on top of the other. The rifles of the little men became so hot that fresh ones had to be passed up from the supporting trenches. When the discarded weapons were stripped a fortnight later the wooden fore ends and hand guards were found to be badly charred. After this attack had melted away it was estimated that two thousand Turks had been killed.

The 1/5th lost their commanding officer, Major Govan, in this battle and so Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. C. G. Bruce, M.V.O., of the 1/6th took them under his command. Together, the battalions
drove off more Turkish counter-attacks. The cost was heavy. Four British officers fell, and the 1/5th had ninety-five other casualties. Among several awards were the M.C. to Lieutenant Erskine and Second-Lieutenant Cosby for leadership and bravery. To the 1/6th went two D.S.O.s, one M.C., six I.O.M.s, and one I.D.S.M.; but their casualties amounted to just over two hundred.

By July 9th 1915, the entire Indian Brigade was in dire need of rest and reorganisation and it was withdrawn to the Isle of Imbros. Since their arrival on Gallipoli the three Gurkha battalions had suffered over a thousand killed and wounded. The most badly hit were the 2/10th who lost seventy per cent of their officers and forty per cent of their other ranks. Including those on Staff, only eight British officers remained in the brigade.

By August the campaign had ground down to a complete stalemate. The Turks were being reinforced and, concerned at the growing disparity between the two forces, Kitchener agreed to send fresh troops.

A massive operation was planned in three parts, a thrust in the Cape Helles area, a surprise landing at Suvla Bay and an attack in the Anzac sector aimed at capturing the heights of Koja Chemen Tepe, Hill Q and Chanuk Bair.

The three Gurkha battalions were landed at Anzac on the night of August 6th/7th to take part immediately in an attack with a column which contained the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade, a field company of New Zealand Engineers, the 21st (Kohat) Mountain Battery and the 14th Sikhs.

The ground was a nightmare land of rugged, steep spurs. The gullies were densely covered with thick, prickly scrub. Available maps were inaccurate and the guides had little knowledge of the ground. It was almost inevitable there would be delays and confusion during the approach march; yet somehow the objective slopes were reached and the battle began. The gallantry of the Australian, New Zealand and British troops in this bloody engagement was chronicled in many books after the war. The valour of the Gurkhas received less mention, yet at one period the key of the whole peninsula was in their hands!

The 1/5th Gurkhas, including the newly arrived C Company of the 2/5th, together with the 2/10th advanced against Hill Q. The 1/6th was to reinforce the Australians storming Koja Chemen Tepe. At first progress was rapid, but snipers infested the thick scrub with
the result that even groups as small as sections were broken up. The advance lost impetus. Men struggled on, sometimes together, sometimes alone, uncertain of where the danger lay. Often a sniper's bullet claimed a victim while a companion only a yard or two away knew nothing of it.

The night march was ghastly but day brought no respite to the exhausted troops. The sun blazed down, adding to the torment of thirst.

After an attempt to assist the Australians the 1/6th swung right up the slopes of Hill Q and so came alongside the 1/5th. Everywhere Turkish resistance was stiffening and casualties mounted. By the time the advance came to a halt, still some five hundred yards from the crest, the 1/6th had lost seventy-six men, including a Gurkha officer.

Throughout the following night the assault troops clung to the ground they had won. The next day they put in another attack which met with annihilating fire. The Gurkhas came to within two hundred yards of the summit and then were pinned down. For three days the fighting on the slopes raged.

Meanwhile the surprise landing at Suvla Bay had been achieved; but, tragically, leadership was lacking. There was a sorry story of muddle and lack of offensive spirit among the commanders. Twenty-five thousand men idled away vital time bathing or lying on the beaches, waiting for orders which never came, while on the heights above their comrades fought and held on grimly, praying for the reinforcements which had not even started out.

Back on Hill Q the Gurkhas fought on. They reached the top of the ridge. In the words of their historian: "Le Marchant fell, a bayonet through his heart. Major Allanson [commanding] was also wounded by a bayonet thrust in the right thigh. For ten minutes hand-to-hand fighting of the most bitter character ensued, bayonets, rifles and pistols used as clubs, [even] fists. Then the Turks turned and fled.

"The Key of the whole peninsula was in the hands of the battalion. Below could be seen the Straits, motors and wheeled transport on the roads leading to Achi Baba. Looking round, the Commanding Officer saw that the battalion was not supported. He therefore ordered the battalion to pursue the retreating Turks down the eastern slopes of Sari Bair. . . . Much depended on what happened in the next few minutes."

What happened was typical of the ill-fated campaign. The supporting brigade had a splendid chance of seizing the initiative; but
it had lost its way in the darkness. Then, to complete the disaster, the Navy suddenly opened fire on the crest line the Gurkhas were occupying. As shells screamed from the sea to explode among them, the Gurkhas were badly shaken. The Turks, realising the British were bombarding their own troops, rallied and launched a vigorous attack. “Soon the position so splendidly won after three nights and two days’ fighting passed out of the hands of the battalion.”

By daybreak the 1/6th had lost all their British officers, and command devolved on Subedar-Major Gambirsing Pun, I.O.M., whose behaviour was magnificent. Casualties amounted to 204 all ranks. The 2/10th, already badly hit, had gone into action two hundred and fifty strong and lost twenty per cent in an hour’s fighting. The 1/5th lost over two hundred and fifty men.

The new Turkish Commander, Mustapha Kemal Pasha, now unleashed a fresh division, reinforced by three extra battalions, on the shattered survivors of the Anzac sector battle. The last hopes of an Allied victory were extinguished.

Bitter fighting was to drag on for months, and the deeds of individual Gurkhas weave a tapestry of achievement fit to hang in the halls of fame. Naik Dalsing, himself severely wounded, dragging his badly wounded British officer under cover. Lance-Naik Kaharsing Gurung, I.O.M., saved the lives of four sleeping comrades by picking up a bomb which had just fallen into the bay of his trench and throwing it behind the parados, where it immediately exploded.

Lance-Naik Harkabahadur Thapa, I.D.S.M.—then a rifleman—was one of a scouting party. Having lost their way in the dark they came under heavy fire from both sides. One Gurkha was killed and the havildar in charge wounded. Showing great presence of mind Harkabahadur, though wounded himself, took over command and succeeded in extricating the survivors without further loss. Havildar Dalbir Chand, I.O.M., was with other volunteers constructing a sap well in advance of the front line and only forty yards from the Turkish trenches. Under heavy fire, at point-blank range, the task was efficiently completed.

Rifleman Kale Gurung, finding he was unable to use his rifle in the thick scrub, hit on the idea of cutting loopholes with his kukri. By encouraging others to do the same, fire superiority was established over the Turks in the vicinity. Although wounded, Kale refused to go back until a second wound made it impossible for him to continue. Havildar Chintaram Bura, I.D.S.M., already distinguished for bravery, led his men against Hill 60 with brilliant leadership. His
skilful use of available cover saved many casualties and he was first into the Turkish trenches. Under his direction, every counter-attack was broken up by steady, controlled fire. Later he was promoted to Jemadar.

Rifleman Harkasing Thapa, I.D.S.M., was a stretcher bearer who collected and evacuated wounded with complete disregard for his own safety.

All these men won a place in the proud records of their regiments.

The hopeless struggle dragged on for over three months. In November, adding to the general hardship and suffering, a fierce gale swept across the peninsula. Torrential rain flooded the trenches and turned every stream into a raging torrent. Worse was to follow, for there was a blizzard which covered the slopes in snow. In three-and-a-half days two hundred men died from exposure. Ten thousand sick were evacuated.

Captain Watson Smyth, commanding B Company of the 1/6th Gurkhas, wrote: "The 29th was the first time since the 26th evening that I was able to get off the men's boots, and the state of their feet appalled me. In nearly every case they had lumps of ice between their toes; their feet were white as far as the ankles and insensible to touch.

"... Throughout all this time I never heard a single complaint; The men were cheerful and ready to laugh at a joke. No praise could be too high for them.

"To give one instance. My field orderly, Hastabir Pun, had accompanied me everywhere during the three days; always he was at my heels, and never had been anything but cheerful and keen. Yet on the 30th, when I made him show me his feet, to my horror I found them black with gangrene from neglected frostbite. He had never said a word to me and never would have. His case is not an exceptional one, but merely a typical example of the courage these Gurkhas displayed."

At last the end came. Following a personal visit, Kitchener ordered a general evacuation. Ironically, the withdrawal, completed on the night of 19th/20th December, was the most efficiently organised operation of the campaign.

To the 5th Gurkhas went the honour of being the last troops to quit the peninsula. Disengaging from positions only a hundred yards from the Turkish trenches, C Company of the 2/5th, with boots
wrapped in pieces of blanket to deaden sound, faded away into the night.

Behind them, the Gurkhas left only their dead and a reputation among the Turks of bravery and fighting ability second to none. And, as the Turks well knew, they had come so near to victory.
Dasahra

The Hindu festival of Dasahra is the most important annual event in the life of a Gurkha soldier. It is to him a warrior's festival, profoundly influencing his skill and success in whatever fighting lies ahead. Even while on active service every effort is made to enable him to celebrate Dasahra, although it sometimes has to be in a shortened form.

The festival commemorates two heroic fights; one between Ramchandra and a powerful, evil giant called Rawan; the other between the Goddess Durga and a huge buffalo-headed demon named Mahishashura.

Ramchandra was the son of King Dasrath, who ruled the Surya tribes during the Silver Age. The young prince, knowing his fight with the giant would demand all his courage and strength, spent nine days in prayer to the Goddess Durga. The first of these days was called Nauratra, when the slim curve of the new moon could be seen in the black velvet sky. This was in the month of Asoj, usually our October. At midnight on the eighth day, Durga appeared and gave him the power he needed. This day was called Kalaratri. Ramchandra kept vigil all through the ninth night, and on the tenth day he received Tika, the holy mark, on his forehead, went out to do battle with Rawan and was victorious.

Apart from aiding Ramchandra, the Goddess had also to face Mahishashura and his accompanying demons. Once, when he had been in favour with the Gods, Mahishashura had asked Brahma to grant him the boon that he could not be killed by anyone of the male sex. No sooner was this given than the buffalo-headed demon turned on the Gods, who appealed to the Hindu Holy Trinity of Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu. Because of Brahma’s original promise only a Goddess could destroy Mahishashura and so Durga was appointed
champion of the Gods. She had eighteen arms and so they gave her a different weapon for each hand. Among these were thunder and lightning from Indra, bow and arrows from Agni, and a sword, an axe and a kukri from Biswakarma.

So equipped, Durga set off, mounted on a lion. Her fight against the demons raged for six days and then, on the seventh day, one of the demon lieutenants named Nishumbha was killed. To celebrate this the Gods offered flowers, and henceforth the day became known as Phulpatti, the Day of Flowers. On the night of the eighth day, Durga fasted and sacrificed a goat. The next day Mahishashura, on a bull, attacked her, and a fierce combat took place until Durga cut off his head with her kukri.

Apart from its religious significance there is a gay side to the festival, with dancing and the consumption of rakshi (rum). It is normally spread over ten days starting with Nauratra when the Regimental Bhawan (Chaplain) commences his prayers, as did Ramchandra in the Silver Age. The same day he sows seeds of maize, barley and rice in a darkened room. On the seventh day, Phulpatti, the Bhawan sets out from the barrack heading a procession in which the effigy of Durga is carried. An armed guard is provided, usually fifty strong, their rifles loaded with blanks. The length of the procession depends on how many men can be spared from essential duties. It moves across the countryside, the men collecting flowers. At intervals the armed guard fires a fusilade of blanks, a signal for the whole party to call upon the Gods to listen to their prayers. On their return the men place the flowers on the Maula, a carved and painted post at which a buffalo will later be sacrificed.

With the eighth day the festivities begin to work up to a climax. In the evening the soldiers gather about the Maula in a semi-circle. The drummers beat out a fiery rhythm on their madals (drums) and sing songs. Dancers whirl to the music, ankle bells jingling. Because Gurkha women do not dance in public, female impersonators take their place. These young Gurkha soldiers dressed in female attire are called Marunis, while their partners, in male Nepalese costume, are called Pursengis. This dance, or natch, is carried out with high spirits.

Facing the men and the dancers are the British and Gurkha officers, usually seated at a long table. They are kept well supplied with rum, and as the party warms up there is great hilarity as now and
then a Maruni will approach, seductively inviting an officer to join in the dance.

At midnight the merry-making is halted while the Gurkhas sacrifice a goat to Durga. Then the party is resumed, to last all through the night.

The following morning the mood changes. This is Naumi, the ninth day and, when circumstances permit, all the weapons are piled behind the Maula and decked with flowers. The men gather around the sacrificial post, and the officers, heads throbbing from the effect of the night’s festivities, slowly make their way to the front.

A buffalo, representing Mahishashura the buffalo-headed demon, is led to the Maula. The man specially selected to perform the act of sacrifice, steps forward. He carries the sacrificial kukri, which is much larger than the service weapon and is wielded with both hands. The animal is being offered in the name of the battalion and for the prayers to be answered it must be decapitated in one clean sweep of the kukri. Failure in this means that the prayers are not accepted and misfortune will dog the battalion.

There is a hush of anxious expectancy as the kukri is raised and then brought down swiftly. With this one stroke the head is severed and as the beast’s body slumps and the blood gushes, the silence is broken by loud cheers, the blowing of bugles, and the banging of madals. Weapons are taken up and blanks fired.

Further sacrifices follow, made on behalf of the different companies. Lastly, individuals who can afford it sacrifice goats, pigeons, or chickens. There is the heavy smell of death in the air and a humming, as the flies settle in black masses on the patches of blood. But among the men there is a sense of content and well-being, especially if the heads have fallen as they should. All believe that if the battalion is called upon to do battle during the next year, Durga will be with them, adding her strength. And to those who fall in action there is the certainty of death with honour.

The rejoicing is taken up, the rakshi flows again, and on the tenth day the men receive the holy mark of Tika on their foreheads. The following day, the end of the festival and a return to the normal routine are usually marked by the whole battalion setting off on a long route march.

In climbing, the Gurkha has a natural ability which enables him to traverse mountains with the ease of a plainsman covering flat ground. This mobility in difficult country was used with great success
in nineteenth century military operations. During the first world war there was little opportunity for it, but in the second it was to prove its value in North Africa, in Italy and on the razor-edge ridges of Burma. But this same skill has also brought the Gurkha fame in the peaceful realm of sport.

When the Gurkha regiments were still comparatively young it was thought in military circles that they could not compete in athletics with such Indians as the Punjabis and the Sikhs. To a certain extent, in those days, it was true. But General Bruce, at that time a young officer with the 5th Gurkha Rifles, had different views. He was convinced that, in the mountains, the Gurkha had no equal. Most of the credit seems to go to him for the institution of the annual Hill Race, known as the Khud Race. The first took place in 1890. There were 133 starters from various regiments and the first 33 places were won by Gurkhas.

The 5th Gurkha historian describes a typical Khud Race. “The men, barefooted, dressed in singlets and shorts. The race was run over a steep and rocky hillside, so precipitous in many of the downhill portions that the ordinary plainsman would need to use his hands. Not so the trained Gurkha, who would drop full speed from one rock to another eight feet below, land on one leg and bring the other forward to continue unchecked his headlong career.

“A fairly typical course would work out something like this. First a rise of about 900 feet, very abrupt, rocky and bare. The runners, heads well down, hands put out occasionally to steady themselves, would take this at a seemingly unhurried jog-trot, ascending well over a hundred feet to the minute. Next would come a long slant to the top of a ridge, and for half a mile or so the competitors, beginning to string out, would straighten up and stride out boldly despite the uneven surface. Then a steep descent of 500 feet or so, providing the spectators with their first real thrill as they watched the leaders fairly hurl themselves at the declivity, bounding from foothold to foothold, arms high in air, and seemingly barely to touch the ground.

“. . . the big field would be well spread out, the rearmost perhaps just beginning to breast the rise as those in front settled to another longish run over 1000 feet of sheer khud; sharp-edged rocks, great rounded boulders, or tussocks of rough grass, nothing served to check the tremendous pace of the leaders, with their perfect sense of balance . . .”

There were some great runners in those days. Budhiparsad of the 1/3rd who won the 5th Gurkha Challenge Cup seven years in suc-
cession, Tulbir Gurung of the 1/6th, Dharmjit Pun of the 1/5th, Maniraj Gharti of the 2/6th, and Harkbir Thapa of the 1/5th. Harkbir was the Gurkha who had accompanied Manners-Smith on the famous climb in the storming of the Nilt. He was also to make a name for himself thousands of miles from his homeland when in 1899 General Bruce brought him to England on a six months' climbing holiday.

They moved up to Skye to walk in the Chuchullin Hills and were staying at the Sligachan Inn when Macleod of Macleod came to visit them. When the Macleod heard through his gillies that the Gurkha had run to the top of Mount Glamaig and back in an hour and a quarter he refused to believe it possible. It would mean covering a distance of two miles across open moorland and then climbing some 2,600 feet to the summit.

Bruce went to look for Harkbir, who was in bed, asleep. When awakened and told of the Macleod’s disbelief he said he did not mind repeating his performance. Donning a pair of shorts and barefooted, the Gurkha havildar set off once more, with everyone timing him. He reached the summit in thirty-seven minutes and then took eighteen to return to the Inn, where he arrived not looking in the least tired.

Harkbir eventually became a subedar-major and further distinguished himself fighting against the Turks in the First World War.

It was that war which ended the khud races in their original form. When they were revived in 1931 as the first Gurkha Brigade Race, the rules were changed. Instead of an individual attempt it became a relay race, with each team consisting of eight men, who ran in pairs.

There were four legs, two uphill, two down. The uphill stretch was 1000 feet and the downhill some 400 feet longer. The terrain was very precipitous and strewn with boulders and scrub. The race started on an uphill stretch and the first man of each pair to arrive at the change-over released both runners for the next leg. The average time taken uphill was ten minutes, while many of the Gurkhas managed the downhill one in three and a half!

The Gurkhas became interested in other sports. At the turn of the century they were introduced to football and they quickly developed considerable skill. Between the two major wars the game’s popularity rapidly increased until today it is probably the one the Gurkha delights in most. Go to any Gurkha battalion and in the evening you
are almost certain to hear leather being well and truly thumped to
the enthusiastic accompaniment of advice and laughter.

At their Regimental Centre in Quetta the 8th Gurkhas took up
boxing. Colonel Willasey-Wilsey, M.C., introduced this, and a num-
ber of the men quickly proved they were as good at dealing with an
opponent in the ring as they were on the battlefield. At Lahore in
1944, seventeen-year-old Naik Lalbahadur Thapa won the Burt
“All India” Fly-Weight Championship, the first Gurkha to achieve
this distinction. After the bout the major commanding the American
Services team turned to Willasey-Wilsey. “Give me that boy,” he
said, “and I’ll make a World Champ of him.”

The sport continued among the Gurkhas after the Second World
War, and Rifleman Megbahadur Rai, of the 7th Gurkha Rifles, was
Fly-Weight Champion of Far East Land Forces for three years in
succession in a tournament open to all ranks, British, Common-
wealth and Gurkha.
In the early hours of Friday May 31st 1935 Quetta, capital of Baluchistan in north-west India, was quiet in sleep. At precisely three minutes past three the earth trembled. Then for a terrible devastating half-minute it heaved in violent convulsions. In those thirty seconds the city was tumbled into ruin and at least 30,000 people were killed.

The Cantonments where the Army was stationed were only shaken by the fringe of the tremor, though it was strong enough to arouse everybody. Among the units was the 2/8th Gurkha Rifles, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Scoones. Checking that his battalion lines had not suffered badly and realising things must be bad in the city, he quickly organised rescue teams.

Wearing singlets and black shorts the groups of Gurkhas set off briskly. Toiling all through the rest of the night they did some magnificent work in rescuing Indians trapped among the ruins. Then with dawn they helped to organise the evacuation and to prevent looting.

During the grim hours of searching a Gurkha rifleman saved many lives which otherwise would have been lost. Harkbir Thapa had an unusually acute sense of hearing and by listening he could not only tell whether people were alive under the ruins of collapsed buildings but locate them with almost uncanny success. Not content with this, he insisted on going down among the quivering rubble to effect the rescue. For his splendid work he was awarded the Albert Medal.

By a strange coincidence this was the second earthquake in which the 2/8th had been involved. Thirty years earlier the battalion had been stationed at Dharamsala, a small town some 600 miles east of Quetta. They arrived there on March 12th 1905 and were accom-
modated in spare barracks of the 1st Gurkha Rifles and in some disused two-storey British barracks.

At six-fifteen in the morning of April 4th a violent earthquake shattered Dharamsala. According to an eye-witness the buildings did not sway or topple over but just collapsed. Morning parade was not due until eight o’clock, and the Gurkhas were still asleep in the barracks. The Battalion Band and A Company, in the two-storey barracks, suffered the worst of the shock. Within seconds the Band was practically wiped out.

The Gurkhas behaved with great calmness, as did the women of the Cantonment, both British and Gurkha. Many of the men dragged from the ruins and brought round by artificial respiration promptly struggled to their feet and insisted on going back to look for their comrades still trapped in the rubble.

The officiating commanding officer, Major Clay, managed to scramble free from the wreckage of his bungalow. Although injured, he mounted his horse and rode down to the Quarter Guard. The guard room was in ruins but the men had “fallen in” and on his arrival smartly presented arms. The guard commander, stiffly at attention, reported: “There has been an earthquake, Sahib. What are your orders?”

Among the many courageous acts was the behaviour of a rifleman who, it seems, was “not considered ordinarily a particularly good soldier”. As the earthquake shook the town, he jumped from an upper-storey window, hurting himself badly. Disregarding the pain he took a message to Major Wake, who was in camp below the barracks with scouts and families of the battalion. A rescue party was at once formed and the rifleman returned with them to the wrecked barracks, taking part in rescue activities all that day and the next. He then reported to his officer: “Sahib, the urgent work seems to be done; I think I’ll go to hospital.” He was found to have a broken pelvis!

At Quetta the 2/8th luckily sustained no casualties; but Dharamsala was a very different story. A British and a Gurkha officer were killed, while 137 other ranks lost their lives, including five who died from injuries. Two British and two Gurkha officers and fifty other ranks were severely injured. There were nearly a hundred and fifty with lesser injuries.

The figures resembled the casualty list following a major battle and as in a battle some outstanding actions were rewarded. The
silver and bronze medals of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem were given for the first time to other than British troops. The Prince of Wales (later King George V) was in India and he made the presentations at Benares.

In November, all those left of the 2/8th—six British and eight Gurkha officers and a little over two hundred other ranks—moved to Rawalpindi. There they were honoured by being employed on guard duties for the Prince and Princess of Wales, who were visiting the city. The battalion, morale unshaken by tragedy, performed its duties according to Lord Kitchener “in a manner worthy of Gurkhas”.
11 Tobruk

From their positions on the perimeter of Tobruk, the men of 2/7th Gurkhas could hear the incessant rumbling of guns steadily growing closer as Rommel's Afrika Korps relentlessly broke through the British Eighth Army in May 1942. Tobruk was about to be under seige again; but this time it was not prepared. General Klopper of the 2nd South African Division was in command and his garrison consisted only of his own division and the 11th Indian Brigade. He had to defend a 35-mile perimeter, and the eastern half of this, about thirteen miles long, was the Indian brigade's responsibility. Brigadier Anderson placed his three infantry battalions in this order: the 2/7th Gurkhas from the sea to astride the Bardia Road, the 2/5th Mahrattas in the centre, and the 2nd Camerons astride the El Adem Road. His own H.Q. was at King's Cross, the junction of the El Adem and Bardia roads, and the guns of the 25th Field Regiment were sited in this area.

Because of the shortage of troops, only the outer perimeter could be manned, and this by men in isolated section posts. They were behind a minefield, but many of the mines had been lifted for use in Gazala and a proportion of those left were no longer in good order. Brigadier Anderson asked urgently for another twenty thousand to build up the aprons; but only four thousand were available.

The South African division, supported by 30th Army Tank Brigade, held the western half of the perimeter and were reinforced by the remnants of 201st Guards Brigade falling back from Knightsbridge. By comparison, the Indian brigade was thinly spread.

A British officer of the Gurkhas wrote: "The 11th Brigade, with everything in the shop window, could make little more than token resistance unless supported by a powerful mobile reserve in the hands
of the local Commander and capable of immediate action as soon as the enemy had committed himself to a determined attack.

"The lapse of two days before the attack started, during which planning and regrouping might have been carried out, produced nothing more illuminating than the fact that the destiny of Tobruk was once more in the hands of the Almighty, and the conviction that all ranks would fight to the last man and last round."

On June 16th 1942, Captain Wilson of the Gurkhas, on liaison duty, went to El Adem on a routine visit. It was in German hands, and he was captured; but he managed to escape and report back to Tobruk. It was Klopper’s first intimation of the fall of the El Adem position.

Two days later an armoured car patrol going out in the morning observed enemy units approaching from the east. These were dispersed by the guns of the 25th Field Regiment and the enemy withdrew, leaving a number of burning vehicles behind. That night Anderson sent out patrols from each of his battalions to probe the enemy advance positions. The reports built up to a clear indication that the enemy was moving in force with the eastern sector as the target, and at six in the morning of June 20th there was the full fury of the attack. Over a hundred Stukas tore out of the desert sky to blast the centre and left of the 11th Brigade position. This was the signal for enemy artillery to open up with high explosive, followed in turn by smoke shells so that a thick screen hung across the centre. The luckless Mahrattas had to endure the brunt of the shelling, and it was against them that the full weight of the German attack developed. As soon as the bombardment lifted the Sonderverbund rushed forward to deal with any unexploded mines. Then the tanks of the 21st Panzer Division came through. Troops followed up, closely supported by 8 mm. guns. The forward sections of the Mahrattas were forced back.

Colonel Orgill, commanding officer of the 2/7th Gurkhas was informed that enemy troops were only four hundred yards from the Mahratta H.Q. and was asked to have his Gurkha carriers stand by for a counter-attack to be made at nine o’clock. But the position became so serious that an hour before this there was a frantic message asking for his carriers to go to the immediate aid of the Mahrattas, who were trying to launch a counter-attack.

Lieutenant “Sailor” Stonehouse led his carriers into battle, linking up with a reserve company of the Mahrattas. In the fierce action
which followed three of the carriers were destroyed and it was only by grim determination that the German advance was halted.

The gap torn open by the enemy attack had to be closed immediately. In response to Anderson's appeal General Klopper promised that a tank regiment with a company of Coldstream Guards and a number of anti-tank guns would at once launch a counter-offensive. Time dragged on, with the position becoming more desperate every minute. By nine o'clock there was still no sign of the promised support. Half an hour later the first of the Valentine tanks rolled up, followed during the next half hour by others in twos and threes.

The delay was fatal. The Germans broke through the gap again, overwhelming the gallant Mahrattas and overrunning their H.Q. The British tanks, fighting from a defensive hull down position, did all they could and their crews displayed extreme bravery; but courage could not make up for deficiencies of armour and the heavier guns of the German tanks smashed them. By midday sixty panzers were inside the perimeter heading for Anderson's H.Q. at King's Cross.

There was a desperate combat between the German armour and the artillery in this area. The British gunners waited for the range to shorten and then returned fire, knocking out tank after tank. But the enemy still rolled forward, destroying gun after gun. The last two were blown up when capture seemed inevitable.

Brigade headquarters fell, but Anderson managed to avoid capture and reached an emergency headquarters, from where he renewed direction of the fight. But the Germans had cleaved a way straight through into Tobruk. The airfield fell to them and by five o'clock they were on the outskirts of the town. But on either side of the devastated corridor there still remained two undefeated battalions, the 2/7th Gurkhas and the 2nd Camerons.

The Gurkhas were completely cut off and out of wireless contact. Because of enemy infiltration, battalion headquarters was now in the front line, defended by runners, signallers and a "rather sorry-looking single African 6-inch howitzer".

Subedar-Major Sherbahadur Limbu and Subedar Jarasindu Lama hurriedly unpacked a Spigot Mortar which had only recently arrived. With the aid of the handbook they quickly assembled it, and prepared to attack the Germans with a weapon that they had never before fired.

"The German tanks", wrote an eye-witness, "appeared as frightened of the Spigot Bombers as we were of firing them. For the
uninitiated... one jams the canister, the shape and about half the size of a five-gallon oil drum, on to an instrument that resembles a blunt marlinespike. The bomb hits the ground some unpredictable distance away. It then precipitates itself along the ground like some prehistoric monster, belching fire for an equally uncertain time and finishes its career with an ear-shattering explosion. This may not be according to the book, but it is the way they behaved on that day, scaring any tank that looked as though it might try conclusions with our protective wire.”

Two enemy armoured cars and a truck, making for the Gurkha line, veered sharply away at the sight of the Spigot Mortar in action and went into what they must have thought was a minefield. They were not to know there were no mines there and probably sweated with relief at what seemed a lucky escape. Obviously not daring to risk another “minefield” they scuttled around inside the twelve square miles of the battalion area trying to find a way out. For some time they eluded capture but at last approached D Company Headquarters. Here Captain Hortin “who was rarely without an assortment of lethal missiles distributed about his person”, showered them with grenades and the company 2-pounder gave them the “coup de grace”.

Before noon, Colonel Orgill had told his officers that the situation was grave and that they were out of touch with brigade headquarters. As time passed a thick cloud of smoke from burning vehicles, stores and petrol had begun to spread across the sky. The noise of battle rolled over the area. It was obvious that things had gone from bad to worse. By later afternoon there was intense shelling of the areas held by battalion headquarters and B and D Companies. At dusk the enemy made a direct attack on the first of these. Six lorries came up and troops jumped from them right in front of the position. Darkness came swiftly and the Gurkhas could hear the rumble of tanks and the shouts of the enemy.

Orgill decided to move across to C Company, which was at the extreme north and nearest the sea. The heavy weapons, like the Spigot and the carriers, were made unusable to the enemy.

The 2/7th settled down to resist the Germans. They had little more than their courage and skill, for there was no possibility of obtaining reserve ammunition and they had no anti-tank guns. All that night troops from other units came scurrying through their lines in the hope of escaping. There was the scent of panic, but the Gurkhas were in no way affected by it.
Meanwhile, Klopper was planning a break-out; but General Ritchie asked him to hold out for another twenty-four hours. Klopper agreed; but early the next morning he learned that a hundred and fifty tanks of the 15th Panzer Division were forming up for a dawn attack. This coincided with disastrous news that his artillery had only sufficient ammunition for two hours’ fighting. He decided to surrender at daybreak to save the unnecessary bloodshed of a hopeless action.

The Gurkhas and Camerons knew nothing of this.

With daybreak enemy tanks and lorries advanced on all sides against the 2/7th. The first attack was upon D Company, who put up a stout resistance among the wadis criss-crossing their position. They fought until their ammunition ran out and they were forced to surrender.

Two Italian battalions were then sent in against A Company. The Gurkhas beat them off, and they had to be reinforced by a German battalion. By midday A Company had to surrender and the same fate befell B Company.

C Company, with the headquarters personnel, fought on with their backs to the sea. By one in the afternoon ammunition was nearly exhausted and enemy tanks hovered menacingly only six hundred yards away. “It was plainly a one-sided show,” remarked the subedar-major dryly, talking about it at a later date.

Orgill, an hour and a quarter later, gave instructions for all weapons to be sabotaged and then surrendered.

The remaining battalion, the Camerons, were called on to surrender at dusk. They refused to be hustled and marched out into captivity the following morning, headed by pipers.

One Gurkha platoon still carried on the fight. Subedar Bulbir Rai was sent on a coast-watching patrol on June 18th. When the battle started on the morning of the 20th shells began to fall on his platoon position. These were probably overshoots from the main target of the South African Artillery some eight hundred yards to the south.

The field telephone rang. It was the Adjutant. “The fight with Jerry has started, Subedar, but there is no need for alarm.”

The subedar replied calmly: “Nothing to worry about, Sahib, my position is well-mined.”

In the early afternoon, when the South African guns were put out of action, the major in charge and some of his gunners came across to Bulbir’s platoon and asked for shelter, which was readily given.
Sections of the enemy were closing in, covered by shell-fire. In the subedar's view some of his men appeared more excited than he thought proper.

"Only one opinion will be observed in this platoon," he said, eyeing them fiercely, "and that's mine." The younger Gurkhas calmed down quickly in the face of his fine example and of that of the platoon havildar, Tekbahadur Limbu. Their Brens chattered firmly against the surrounding enemy.

By this time the Gurkhas were beginning to feel the lack of water and food; but the South Africans gladly let them have some of their water, and also gave them some biscuits and margarine.

Dense clouds of smoke overhung the area and Bulbir could not see what was happening beyond a hundred yards' range. Eventually, the Adjutant telephoned again, this time giving orders that they were to withdraw into C Company position. Bulbir decided to do this in small groups and ordered Tekbahadur to leave first with a section of Gurkhas and a South African lieutenant. They were met by machine-gun fire from Italians who had occupied a swimming pool between them and the C Company position. The South African was hit in the leg. Tekbahadur gave the order to return and helped the wounded officer.

Bulbir quickly reorganised his men into firing positions. He realised the only way out was to withdraw towards Tobruk; but this was too dangerous because of air raids on the harbour. These were kept up until four o'clock and by then the patrol post was being shelled. This stopped at five but was soon renewed to cover the advance of two German platoons. Narainparshad Limbu and Bombahadur Limbu rushed forward with a Bren, killed several of them and made the rest take cover. Then a shell burst near the two Gurkhas, showering them with stones which cut their faces and bruised them. The Bren barrel was smashed. They dashed back to the platoon.

Bulbir used the field telephone, hoping to get information. Instead of the Adjutant it was a signaller who answered, telling him: "There is a tremendous fight going on, and none of the officers is available to answer the 'phone."

At dusk Bulbir crept out himself to find out as much as he could of the position. He came upon a Bren gun in working order and took it back to replace the one they had lost earlier. Throughout the night he and his Gurkhas, with four Bren guns, patrolled just in front of their position. He suggested to the Gunner-Major that some of his men should help to man the posts at dawn.
In the early hours Bulbir again tried to contact battalion headquarters, but the line was dead. He removed the batteries from the field telephone and managed to use them in a lamp. He tried signalling in various directions, but there was no response from out of the darkness.

Early in the morning several officers from brigade headquarters sought shelter at the post. There was now quite a gathering within the small perimeter. At eight o'clock the Germans put down smoke shells and this was followed immediately by fire at the coastal side of Bulbir's defences from "two medium sized steamers". The Gurkhas' Bren guns retaliated and after a long duel succeeded in preventing the ships from landing assault troops. There was a cheer from the post as they sailed back to Tobruk harbour.

Ammunition was running out and the end was drawing near. Towards evening a truck approached showing a white flag. The Gunner Major went out to meet it and returned with news of the general surrender. There was nothing Bulbir could do but comply. It was the end of a magnificent defiance.

Later, a British officer wrote of the 2/7th Gurkhas: "They were fairly bursting with confidence. Things were a bit chaotic, but it was war and it was fun. They had knocked everything that had been put up against them for six, and had received almost perfect battle inoculation. Their overwhelming sense of superiority did not leave them till the end. They met panic, the most devastating of all battle influences, and watched streams of demoralised troops passing through their positions, with amused tolerance. The stunned expression on their faces when they had fought it out against overwhelming odds and lost, was a sight that very few who saw it will ever forget."

But the shock soon wore off, and many of the Gurkhas at once made plans to escape. Havildar Kharkabahadur Rai led a party of three men through the desert for thirty-six days before reaching the British lines. Havildar Singbahadur Rai was marched off to a P.O.W. camp ten miles from Tobruk. He tied bandages over his feet to make as little noise as possible, dodged a sentry and escaped through the wire. He travelled only by night, using the coastline as a guide. Occasionally he came upon an Arab hamlet where he was able to obtain food and water. Eventually he reached Sollum and began to follow the railway line. He dodged several enemy detachments and at last reached El Daba, a large Arab village, where he was able to buy a camel for fifty piastres, all the money he had on him. Mounted on this and disguised as an Arab he travelled for four more days and
reached the British lines. His journey to freedom had taken him five weeks.

Havildar Harkabahadur Rai was sent to Germany and then to the south of France. He escaped in April 1944 and joined up with a Free French group commanded by an American colonel. “All the Frenchmen I met,” the havildar said, “always took me for a man from Indo-China, and I usually had to show them on a map where Nepal was situated.” He was with the Free French for five months, taking part in several ambushes and attacking German posts along the borders of Switzerland. When American troops reached the area he was sent to Paris and from there to London.

Many other Gurkhas made their escapes from Italian P.O.W. camps. Some of them were greatly helped by Italian peasants, apparently getting on very well in spite of language difficulties. Subedar Ishorman Rai wrote of one incident: “That night we met an old man who took us to his village and fed us very well. Some people also came to see us from another house. There were a lot of young girls and we had a great time, laughing and joking. Perhaps we were getting on a bit too well for the old man’s liking, because he drew me on one side and said the girls were Fascisti and we should not stay too long! So I called the party off and we set out again into the forest and the hills.”

Among the others who escaped from Italy was the tough Subedar Bulbir Rai, whose platoon had been the last to surrender at Tobruk.

That history has a habit of repeating itself is often said. It was so concerning the 2/7th Gurkhas. Three 2nd-lieutenants, Cloy, Tait and Taylor, had been left behind in Cairo at the reinforcement camp. When they heard of Tobruk’s fall they asked for an urgent appointment with the Assistant Military Secretary.

The Regimental Journal records: “He saw them and estimated their combined service at about eighteen months. They came with a request that they should be allowed to form the nucleus of a new 2/7th which should be formed and trained to take part in the retaking of Tobruk. They quoted a precedent of the last war when the 2nd battalion was taken at Kut el Amara and the newly raised battalion was in the force which eventually retook it. He was so impressed by their earnestness that he put the matter up to Headquarters India and it was granted. So the 2nd Battalion lived on to fight in the same brigade of the 4th Indian Division.”
AFTER Tobruk it seemed nothing could stop Rommel from a triumphant entry into Cairo; but he was brilliantly held at El Alamein by Auchinleck. A few months later, with Montgomery now in command of the Eighth Army, the second battle of El Alamein was about to begin.

General Tuker's 4th Indian Division, the Red Eagles, was not to take part in the main assault. It occupied Ruweisat Ridge and its rôle was to keep the enemy troops facing it so busy that they could not be withdrawn to help in the main battle. Two strong raids were planned, one to be made by the 1/2nd Gurkhas against Point 62, a strongly fortified feature on the northern flank of the ridge.

Early in the morning of October 23rd 1942 Lieutenant Carrick set off on the raid with two platoons of C Company. A section of carriers led the way. They were fitted with assault grapnels to pull clear the wire aprons and make a gap for the riflemen, who would be followed by sappers and miners whose job was to destroy the captured strong points.

Already the main battle had started to the north. The Gurkhas were disappointed not to be there; but were determined to make a success of their diversionary attack.

British field guns opened up for twenty minutes to soften up Point 62. Then Jemadar Harkabahadur Thapa rushed his carriers to the fringe of the minefield which protected the wire. Three of his men were wounded; but in full view of the enemy the grapnel throwers darted across the minefield to hurl the hooks over the concertina wire. The Germans had rushed to man their positions and there was heavy fire, accurately returned by the carriers.

With the grapnels fixed, the carriers reversed to pull away the wire. But one had been disabled and the 200-yard rope of another
snapped. But the third was successful and Carrick charged the gap with one platoon.

There were four outposts, and the Gurkhas took these in a few moments, bleeding their kukris and killing eight of the enemy. They pressed on against the main sangar but were met by a hail of grenades. Carrick and two riflemen rushed in near enough to throw their own but the first failed to explode. One of the Gurkhas was killed, the other wounded, and Carrick was seen to fall.

The second platoon failed to find the gap in the wire, and as they were striving desperately to find an opening they were caught in a fusillade of small arms fire at very close range.

Ten minutes after the start of the assault the survivors were forced to withdraw. Although the Point had not been taken the raid had succeeded to the extent that it kept the enemy in the positions; but nine Gurkhas were missing and fourteen were wounded.

Under cover of night Lalbahadur Gurung, shot through both legs, succeeded in crawling back, after having hidden all day in a slit trench. Carrick, thought to be dead, was later reported to be alive by a captured German paratrooper.

That night the battle raged to the north, and the Gurkhas had to remain disconsolately in their trenches. Worse was to come, for although this Indian division was one of the most efficient in the army it was not used in the pursuit of Rommel out of Tripolitania and into Tunisia. It was gallling to troops from some of the finest fighting races in the world.

But their chance was to come early the next year.

The Eighth Army and Rommel faced each other on the Mareth line and this was country where mountain barriers flanked the coastal strip. From the Matmata mountains the German heavy guns blasted the road junction at Medinine. It was obvious that expert mountain troops were needed to seek out and destroy the artillery positions. The 4th Indian Division had the right men; but they were still in Tripoli.

The 1/2nd Gurkhas set off on a long, forced march and reached Medinine. Within forty-eight hours a platoon under Captain Ramsay-Brown made a night probe into the mountain range. They came upon a sangar which they charged, capturing two Germans of a Panzer Grenadier Regiment.

Two nights later, Ramsay-Brown moved again; this time with the whole of B Company. They set out in lorries, which took them for
seven miles and were left with a small party to guard them. For the bulk of the company there was a four-mile march until they could make out the line of a flat-topped ridge with two distinctive bumps. A platoon was sent scouting forward to secure a way to the crest. They did this without meeting any opposition, and the other platoons moved cautiously up to join them.

Two platoons now pressed on for about two hundred yards, at which point the leading section dropped to the ground, having spotted an enemy post some fifty yards ahead. The moon had disappeared behind the horizon and there was a slight mist which gave a little cover to the shadowy figures of the first platoon as they advanced with drawn kukris. Suddenly there was a flash of red flame and an explosion as one of the Gurkhas set off a booby trap. Immediately there were shouts, and a machine-gun started to chatter.

With a noise like a pack of hounds the Gurkhas charged, through the hail of bullets and in among the Germans. For five minutes there was a desperate struggle, with squeeze guns banging, stick grenades exploding, and kukris seeming to slice out of the darkness. A German reserve section broke and fled across to the far slope, screaming with terror. The enemy who remained were wiped out, except for a Viennese sergeant who kept firing his machine-gun until he was captured.

The grim struggle ended as suddenly as it had started. In the strange silence the Gurkhas collected the wounded and withdrew, covered by the second platoon. Four Gurkhas had been killed, while the enemy had lost fifteen men.

The Germans were forced out of the Mareth Line by the end of March 1943, about a fortnight after this action on the ridge. Rommel would probably have preferred to retreat at speed, making a stand a hundred and fifty miles to the north where the Tunisian mountains offered a strong defensive line. But the First Army was moving up through central Tunisia and German policy insisted that on no account should they link up with the Eighth Army.

Rommel had to look for a position closer to hand. The best was the Zemlet el Beida, a narrow high ridge running east to west about twenty miles north of the Mareth Line. The coastal corridor was guarded by Roumana and continuing eastwards to the sea was the deep Wadi Akarit. West of the ridge was the high point of Fatnassa. This was considered too difficult to attack, and the British plan was to attempt to break through along the coastal area, with the 4th
Indian Division being detailed to seize Roumana. General Tuker disagreed, pointing out that it placed his division in jeopardy because success would not be achieved by day so long as the enemy held the dominating heights. Asked to put forward an alternative scheme, he suggested an assault by night on Fatnassa as the capture of this, the highest ground, would make the rest of the Akarit position untenable to the enemy.

"There can be no doubt," writes the historian of the 2nd Gurkhas, "that the availability of two Gurkha battalions and particularly the presence of the battalion which he himself had trained in Waziristan, played a predominant part in shaping General Tuker's decision. Here was a classical opportunity to prove the effectiveness of his theories of mountain warfare. Surprise would be achieved by a silent night assault timed to begin some hours before the opening of the main battle. Immediately on seizure of the key features by the leading brigade, a second brigade would punch through and would swing into the rear of Rommel's defences. If these moves succeeded, no matter how the battle went on the Mediterranean foreshore, a corridor would be opened through which British armour might reach the Sfax plain and close for the kill before the enemy's forces could disengage."

Tuker's plan was accepted. The front for the 51st Highland Division was extended to include Roumana. Between there and a hill called El Meida the Germans had prepared an anti-tank ditch. The 50th Division was moved up to make a frontal attack on this, while armour was deployed to take advantage of any break through on the centre or the right flank. A brigade under Brigadier Lovett was to storm Fatnassa, with another brigade following up to push through after a way had been cleared.

The 2nd Gurkha Rifles' historian described Fatnassa as "a high pinnacled feature of extravagant contours—a tangled maze of escarpments, rocky spires, deep fjord-like chimneys and ridge peninsulas with precipitous approaches."

This fastness was defended by Italians of the Pistoia and Spezia Divisions, with some German elements in close support. The 1/2nd Gurkhas were chosen to lead the British attack. Their first target was the capture of a sentinel peak known as Point 275, the second to destroy the enemy on the main crests of the massif.

At dusk on April 5th three groups of signallers moved forward to take up advance stations. With lamps darkened towards the enemy they flashed back direction signs. One of these lamps was within five
hundred yards of the enemy. At seven o’clock, under the thin crescent of a new moon, the Gurkhas started their approach march. General Tuker, watching his old battalion moving out, said to a friend with mingled concern and pride: “It is now in the lap of the gods. Only one thing worries me. Perhaps I have asked too much of them, and have set them a task beyond human accomplishment.”

It took an hour and a quarter for the Gurkhas to reach the forward deployment area. The Royal Sussex should have reached this point, too, because they were to attack the El Meida bastion to turn the anti-tank ditch. They hadn’t arrived; but Brigadier Lovett decided not to wait. He instructed Colonel Showers to go ahead with the 1/2nd. The Gurkhas had been reinforced by machine-gunners from the Rajputana Rifles. C and D Companies led, and Showers had his tactical headquarters between them. A and B followed, with the main headquarters between them. Marching at the rate of fifty yards to the minute they followed guide tapes until they came to the advance stations from which they could pick out the silhouettes of Fatnassa.

By this time it was 10.30 p.m. The only sound was of enemy aircraft which were dropping chandelier flares. The dark crests of the hills ahead were silent. There was a long, suspenseful wait of an hour; but at last the command came for the attack to go in.

D Company, with a platoon of machine-gunners, headed for the mouth of a rocky chimney. The remainder swung slightly left. Point 275 loomed up. The leading sections of C company climbed in silence. For the moment A and B took cover in a narrow wadi.

Suddenly a sentry cried out as he was struck down by a kukri and his dying scream aroused the enemy. With a great shout C Company at once surged up the escarpment. From their sangars the enemy opened fire with automatic weapons and showered the slopes with grenades, most of which exploded harmlessly over the heads of the scurrying Gurkhas. As hand-to-hand fighting started there was an eerie sound. It was the hunting cry of C Company, guiding each other to the kill.

“Lieutenant Giradot, who had joined First Battalion only two days before, led the forward assault platoon. At close range he shot down an Italian officer who sought to rally his men. In turn he sustained an unfortunate wound which drove the fragments of his wrist-watch into his forearm. Captain Fraser and the remainder of the company burst over the lip of the escarpment, cutting down all who stood.”

Meanwhile, A and B Companies began to move up the boulder-
strewn slopes. Enemy aircraft dropped chandelier flares, trying to locate them, but the bright light favoured the Gurkhas, showing them the way. The two companies rushed into a bowl-shaped hollow and met the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. B Company swept to the right and a platoon under Jemadar Bhimbahadur Rana came up against an anti-tank gun covering the narrow path. Immediately, Havildar Bibahadur Pun rushed the gun crew, killing three with his kukri and wounding others as he carved a way through.

A Company, under Captain Stubbs, headed for Point 275, cutting down the enemy in a post on the way up. Then they were baulked by an unscaleable slope. Red flashes streaked down from machine-guns in fixed line positions. This firing could be seen so easily that the men were able to dodge as they moved round to the western slopes. Here the ascent was easier and the leading platoons raced to the crest, securing the first objective of the attack.

The most critical part of the assault had fallen on D Company under Captain Nicholl. They had to cut a way through to the very heart of the enemy’s defence system. They would be followed by the 1/9th Gurkhas and the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles.

There was a narrow cleft which widened into a natural arena five hundred yards across, surrounded by cliffs two hundred feet high. A steep and narrow path led to the crest of the main escarpment. At the head of the attack were two sections of No. 16 Platoon, commanded by Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa. Like a machine of destruction he leapt through the darkness, running the gauntlet of enemy positions.

The Italians in the first sangar were unaware of his presence until he dropped among them out of the darkness, wielding his kukri with deadly precision. Hardly pausing to draw breath he raced on, his sections at his heels, into the arena. Machine-gun fire hammered down from the escarpments on both sides, criss-crossing the open space with bullets. Grenade bursts echoed against the rocky sides. A number of Gurkhas fell, but Lalbahadur sped on to the next enemy sangar. He used his revolver on two, and killed two more with his kukri. He reached the corkscrew track leading up to the escarpments. Followed by two riflemen, Harakbahadur Gurung and Inrabahadur Gurung, he closed in all his fury on a machine-gun nest which guarded the top of the path. His kukri swung in its death-dealing arc twice more, while the riflemen shot the two remaining gunners. The way was open and the battle virtually won two hours before the full-scale assault was due to open at 4 a.m. Lalbahadur and his two
riflemen stood guard while the rest of D Company passed through and quickly silenced the remaining machine-gun posts and sangars. Lalbahadur was later awarded the V.C.

A platoon under Havildar Manilal Thapa crept silently up to a high point and winkled out the enemy. From here he led his men against the enemy on the right-hand escarpment. They swept along the crest, mercilessly destroying machine-gun nests, and reached some of the Italians who were hurling grenades into the arena below. So intent were some of the bombers on this that they were unaware of the Gurkhas until the last minute. It was a spine-chilling experience, and a number of the Italians were so unnerved that they stepped back in panic and went over the cliff edge into the darkness below.

While this attack was in progress Brigadier Lovett waited anxiously for news of the battalion which he had so recently commanded. An enemy barrage had opened up and a hit was scored on brigade headquarters, wounding the brigadier and knocking out the artillery observation group and radio signal section. In spite of his wound Lovett continued to command.

Headquarters was now out of touch with the 1/2nd, but Colonel Showers managed to move forward and discover the position, bringing back the good news that the way was open for the reserve brigade to move up for the next stage of the assault. The 1/9th Gurkhas were to lead this but their numbers were considerably reduced. Lovett had earlier sent his reserve Punjabi battalion to drive the enemy from ground which sloped away to the left of the Gafsa Road. Here the Italians were in some strength and in dealing with them the Punjabis took a large number of prisoners, too many for them to handle. Lovett had asked Brigadier Bateman of the other brigade for the loan of two companies, and these were supplied by the 1/9th.

As a result the next phase of the attack could only be led by C Company of the 1/9th under Captain David Amoore, together with specialist platoons and battalion headquarters. Climbing up was like ascending a narrow mountain stream after a sudden torrent has raced down from the snowy peaks. Like so much flotsam and jetsam, the bodies of the Italians sprawled across machine-gun nests and sangars, grim evidence of the 1/2nd and their successful assault.

And, ahead, the 1/2nd continued to advance. Two thousand yards beyond Point 275 loomed El Alig, and B Company secured the base of this height before sunrise. Captain Marley-Clarke ordered three
16. Ayo Gurkhali! Kukri charge in North Africa. A sight which has brought terror to many an enemy.

17. A Gurkha machine-gunner washes off the grime of battle.
18. Okel Gurung, I.O.M., M.M., and a rifleman engage the enemy at Mozzagroga, Italy . . .

19. . . . "I got five!" says Okel later.
platoons to dig in as a blocking force while a fourth, under Jemadar Bishanbahadur Gurung, cleared the narrow crest. There was a cross-fire from machine-guns from Fatnassa itself, and artillery and mortars firing from Oudane el Hachana on the right. Gurkha after Gurkha fell until only nine remained. The enemy began to close in and the situation looked desperate. Bishanbahadur sprang to his feet, in full view of the enemy, and waved his arms as though calling up support troops. The ruse made the enemy hesitate; but soon after this he and the survivors had to withdraw because they were out of ammunition. They reached the company position, where contact had now been made with the 1/9th.

After exchanging only a few shots, a hundred and twenty Italians had surrendered to the 1/9th. "They were thumbed to the rear and doubled off happily without escort," according to an eye-witness.

Pushing on rapidly C Company of the 1/9th occupied its final objective, Point 152, overlooking the Sfax plain. They dug in with battalion headquarters slightly in the rear. By early afternoon the two companies on loan had been released from guarding prisoners and moved up to the battle line. They arrived opportunistly, for German supports were launching a counter-attack. A strong patrol tried to turn C Company's left flank, and because of heavy cross-fire Amoore was forced to pull back his leading platoon. A German machine-gun was working forward in quick rushes.

On higher ground to the left the 1/2nd Gurkhas were heavily engaged. Over to the right the Royal Sussex were clearing the area immediately behind the western end of the anti-tank ditch. Between them and the 1/9th the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles were heading for the Oudane el Hachana ridge. All these would be placed in jeopardy if the 1/9th were flung back.

Amoore sited a platoon so that it could block the German infiltration. When the word was given they sprang to their feet and charged. The enemy were taken by surprise and left several dead as they retreated.

German tanks and lorries packed with infantry could be observed moving up to assault positions, but no attack developed.

Meanwhile in the 1/2nd's sector on Point 275, where there was little cover, enemy shells were bursting. Rock fragments and splinters whizzed alarmingly through the air. But the Gurkhas clung to their positions.

Lance-Naik Nare Thapa, wounded during the battle, was being bandaged when two enemy heads appeared over the edge behind
his comrade’s back. Springing to his feet, Nare killed them both and raised the alarm.

On another sector, Rifleman Lalbahadur Pun, seeing a party of enemy infiltrating between him and the 1/9th on his right, sprang into the the open and exchanged shots at point blank range. Although all but blinded by a head wound he killed two of them with his last five rounds and silenced a machine-gun.

Early in the afternoon the enemy started to concentrate along the western lip. A German officer led a gun team in a rush to the crest, but a Gurkha charge hurled back this attempt and the officer was killed.

Ammunition was running dangerously low, and the Gurkhas were spread thinly along a front almost two miles long. An enemy counter-attack seemed imminent, but at four o’clock a line was established to the artillery and a salvo scattered the enemy. One of the platoons of A Company managed to bring up some small arms ammunition and with darkness the Gurkhas were ready and in great heart. With artillery support they broke up the enemy’s counter-attacks during the night. By three o’clock in the morning there was silence over Fatnassa and dawn showed the enemy in full flight.

Unfortunately the battle of Wadi Akarit, so ably started by the 1/2nd and continued by the remainder of the 4th Indian Division, failed to end with a crushing defeat of the enemy. With a six-thousand-yard break made by the Red Eagles the way was open for the armour. At 8.30 a.m. on the 6th, General Tuker said to General Horrocks: “Now is the time to get out the whips and to spare neither men nor machines.”

But the armour was delayed and the chance missed.

Apparently a small group of German gunners had held the British armour at bay with guns pinpointed on to the anti-tank ditch. “Several times during the day,” wrote Colonel Roche, “I noticed that a series of crash shots fell on a piece of dead ground beyond the anti-tank ditch crossing and always when it was filled with troops and vehicles. I remember looking round the horizon to see from what possible observation point the enemy might be directing such accurate and timely shooting. I heard afterwards that a German forward observation officer had lain doggo on Roumana after its capture by the 51st Highland Division. When taken he remarked: ‘I don’t mind now. I have had a very good day’s shoot.’”

After the battle, the list of casualties. These were much lighter than might have been expected. The 1/2nd lost fourteen other ranks
killed; five British and three Gurkha officers and thirty-two other ranks wounded. The 1/9th suffered two killed, thirty-two wounded and two missing.

The historian of the 1/9th wrote: “... the Wadi Akarit battle remains a classic of its kind, boldly conceived and magnificently executed. At a cost of under four hundred casualties, 4th Indian Division had won fresh bays in that most difficult of operations, a night attack on mountainous terrain. At a time when British and American formations in northern Tunisia were under heavy punishment, Eighth Army's clean-cut victory caught the world headlines. Indian troops and the Gurkhas in particular earned a shining hour upon the Front Page.”
13 Djebel Garci

Time was running out for over a quarter of a million Axis troops as they prepared for a last stand around Tunis in the Spring of 1943. Montgomery decided to break through the defences held by Rommel and Von Arnim by an attack in the Enfidaville area. The 5th Indian Brigade was selected for an assault on Djebel Garci.

The battalions sent out scouts who were to locate enemy gun positions. The ground either side the promontory was favourable to patrols trying to slip past enemy outposts. However, two Gurkha carriers broke down within easy range of a known gun position. The Gurkhas acted without panic and were able to escape unharmed. Possibly it looked like a trick to the enemy.

On the eve of battle, Lieutenant Wilson of the 1/9th Gurkhas set out with Havildar Rikki Ram and nine volunteers to mine a cross-road in the rear of the djebel. Shortly before midnight they reached the end of an anti-tank ditch and discovered an enemy minefield.

This had to be crossed in order to reach the target and there was an enemy post covering the minefield. Wilson led his small party through the danger zone and his luck held out until they came to the wire on the other side. Here they were spotted by the enemy, who opened up with machine-guns and mortars. The Gurkha patrol scattered but they were among mines and some were blown up. Except for Rifleman Tilbahadur the survivors were wounded and taken prisoner. He crawled away and eventually managed to reach the French lines. After a spell in hospital he returned to his battalion.

The night of April 19th/20th was selected for the assault. The main Enfidaville road looped around the base of the mountain, and at one point there was a small hamlet above the road on the slopes of a knoll. This mound described by someone as “a wart on the
snout of the mountain” was picked as the jump-off position for a drive to the crests a thousand feet above.

Djebel Garci was a rugged natural fortress. The summit was roughly a thousand by two thousand yards and the approach was a jumble of wadis, outcrops and false crests. Strongly held by determined troops its capture could prove costly. Intelligence reports declared it to be only lightly held; but the attackers doubted this. Their disbelief was soon confirmed, for shortly after a company of the 1/4th Essex had secured the knoll the artillery opened up and the speed of the enemy response showed there would be plenty of opposition. Shells burst along the southern approaches and there was a hail of mortar bombs on the lower slopes. For the first time the Germans brought into action a multiple-barrelled mortar called the Nebelwerfer, which was fired by remote control.

The second phase of the assault had been delegated to the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles; but as they swarmed up the slopes they ran into German troops coming down to counter-attack. In darkness there was one of the most bitter hand-to-hand struggles of the war. Bombs, bayonets and stones were used. Men even killed with their bare hands. All the British officers fell; but a Jat, Company Havildar-Major Chelu Ram, rallied the men and saved the situation, an action which won him a posthumous V.C.

This unexpected fighting meant the assault was behind in timing, and night was passing all too quickly. The 1/9th Gurkhas, waiting to follow up the Rajputanas who were still short of their objective, began to suffer casualties from overshoots. By three in the morning Colonel Roche, their commanding officer, decided not to wait any longer. Already a point had been selected as an alternative target should the planned attack be held up. He swung his Gurkhas round the right flank of the fighting and drove up the mountain. He ordered Captain Jones of D Company to seize the highest ground he could find. Fortunately Captain Watts of the Essex came along and offered his services as a guide. His own battalion had pressed on after winning their objective of the knoll and were somewhere up the slopes.

The advance of D Company was spotted by the enemy and the leading sections ran into heavy mortar fire. Stick grenades were flung from enemy outposts. The charging Gurkhas fell upon the flank of some hundred Germans engaging the Rajputanas. These at once turned to deal with the fresh attackers.

Subedar Bhimbahadur led D Company, and the two groups met
head on. From battalion headquarters the desperate struggle on the rocky slope could be seen in the flashes of shellbursts and mortar bombs. With kukris out the Gurkhas cut their way through, leaving sprawling dead everywhere. Havildar-Major Dhirbahadur despatched four of the enemy single-handed. Rifleman Nirbahadur Mall leapt over the body of his section leader to plunge into a mass of struggling men. With deadly efficient knife-work he accounted for a dozen in a few moments.

Captain Jones was wounded but he charged a Spandau nest and, although wounded again, destroyed it. At last the Germans fled from the ferocity of the Gurkhas, leaving forty-four dead. In the middle of the fight A Company under Captain Denis Donovan had joined in, and Lance-Naik Tilbahadur with Rifleman Khimbahadur pursued the fleeing enemy and destroyed two machine-gun posts from which the withdrawal was being covered.

Colonel Roche’s alternative point had been seized and a reserve platoon of D Company was digging in. Donovan, with both legs broken, refused to relinquish his command. He saw the colonel standing in the open with Captain Mike Radcliffe, the Adjutant. Shells were falling about them and Donovan shouted to Radcliffe: “For God’s sake tell the old man to keep down!” But Radcliffe only laughed and ran on up the hill.

Roche was deeply concerned at the number of Gurkhas who had fallen and said so to Jemadar Jaibahadur, who answered: “Sahib, now that we have taken the position we certainly shall hold it.”

Another jemadar, Dewan Sing Basnet of D Company scouted ahead of his platoon front. He said later: “I was challenged in a foreign language... To make quite sure I crept up and found myself looking into the face of a German. I recognised him by his helmet. He was fumbling with his weapon, so I cut off his head with my kukri. Another appeared from a slit trench and I cut him down also. I was able to do the same for two others but one made a great deal of noise which raised the alarm. I had a cut at a fifth, but I am afraid I only wounded him. Yet perhaps the wound was severe, for I struck him between the neck and the shoulder.

“I was now involved in a struggle with a number of Germans, and eventually, after my hands had become cut and slippery with blood, they managed to wrest my kukri from me. One German beat me over the head with it, inflicting a number of wounds. He was not very skilful, however, striking me with the sharp edge, but oftener with the blunt.
“They managed to beat me to the ground, where I lay pretending to be dead. The Germans got back into their trenches, and after a while I looked up. I could not see anything, for my eyes were full of blood. I wiped the blood out of my eyes and quite near I saw a German machine-gun. I thought: ‘If only I can reach that gun I shall be able to kill the lot.’ By now it was getting light and, as I lay thinking of a plan to reach the gun, my platoon advanced and started to hurl grenades among the enemy. But they were also falling very near to me, so I thought that if I did not move I really would be dead. I managed to get to my feet and ran towards my platoon. Not recognising me I heard one of my men call: ‘Here comes the enemy! Shoot him!’ I bade them not to do so. They recognised my voice and let me come in.

“My hands being cut about and bloody and having lost my kukri, I had to ask one of my platoon to take my pistol out of my holster and to put it in my hand. I then took command of my platoon again.

“I met my company commander (Captain Jones) who bade me go to the Regimental Aid Post. I said: ‘Sahib, there is fighting to be done and I know the enemy’s dispositions. I must stay and keep command of my platoon.’ But he firmly ordered me, and I had to go.”

When Colonel Roche inspected the position he realised to his dismay that it was commanded by a platform of rock five hundred yards higher up the mountain. A company of the Essex attacked this in the morning but after hard fighting was driven back. A platoon of C Company of the 1/9th was next sent in but this was pinned down still two hundred yards short of the objective. They dug in as an outpost and refused to move back.

The battle line was only thinly held but in the afternoon B Company returned from guard duties and came forward as most welcome reinforcements. They also provided additional porters. All the battalions detailed men to bring up vital supplies of ammunition. It was a tough job as they were unarmed and had to run the gauntlet of enemy fire. Some porters from the Essex returning for loads found their way barred by a wounded Gurkha porter who cried out: “No retreat, Tommy! No retreat!”

The Subedar-Major of the 1/9th, Agandhar Khandka, personally supervised the porters of his battalion, driving them on relentlessly. He is even said to have ordered them to bring back receipts for their loads. During the day he was wounded in the head by shrapnel, but
he refused to leave his post even for medical attention. Eventually he collapsed into a slit trench.

Hearing of this Colonel Roche rushed back. "I thought he was dead, but he regained consciousness as I arrived. I was greatly reassured by the flood of maledictions which he poured on his batman, who had been so grossly incompetent, negligent and heartless as to let his officer bleed to death without applying a first-aid bandage. Needless to say the batman, who also believed the Subedar-Major to be dead, jumped to it in double quick time."

Three battalions were firmly established but they had sustained four hundred casualties in gaining about a hundredth of the djebel. It was clear the enemy was in great strength and determined to fight to the last. The most the battalions could do was to hold on and take heavy toll as counter-attacks developed.

In the 1/9th positions Captain P. D. Radcliffe had taken over D Company, which had been without an officer for twenty-four hours. Lieutenant Trethewy, who had arrived to join the battalion only that morning, took over A Company from Donovan, who at last let himself be carried down on a stretcher to the aid post.

On the afternoon of April 20th the guns took over the battle. The artillery responded to eleven infantry calls and broke up counter-attacks by heavy bombardment. The Germans kept up a similar heavy fire on the positions held by the three battalions. This went on into the following day. The Gurkhas had little cover. One officer wrote: "The barrage produced an uncomfortable dilemma. Should one kneel and watch in a most inadequate slit trench or should one keep down? The forward companies, although strong in morale, were weak in numbers. By all indications the situation was serious. At any minute we expected a rush of Jerries. In the dust and smoke the visibility was down to thirty yards. By keeping down one would fall an easy prey to such a rush; but on the other hand kneeling in readiness...meant exposure to a good deal of flying debris and also to deafness from near misses. In the end a compromise was reached by adopting a series of ups-and-downs—the ups being of considerably shorter duration than the downs."

Captain P. D. Radcliffe, taking over personal command of the Gurkhas' firing line, walked up and down in the open indicating targets and bringing cool, accurate fire to bear on the enemy.

Meanwhile the artillery kept up a shield of fire. General Tuker, commanding the 4th Indian Division, sent forward a personal note
to Colonel Roche: “The more I hear of your fine battalion and its fight on Garci hills the more certain I am that it has written one of the most glorious pages of its history. The Division is proud of you. . . . We put the Boche casualties at about a thousand.”

But it was clear that there was no profit in continuing the struggle on Garci, and the battle ended on the afternoon of April 22nd. An advance party of Gordon Highlanders arrived to arrange the relief and during the night the 1/9th Gurkhas marched down the mountainside, proud of their performance in this their first serious ordeal. They had lost thirty killed, ten missing and ninety-one wounded.
14 Medjez el Bab

After the withdrawal from Djebel Garci the 4th Indian Division was moved in readiness for an offensive along the foothills above the foreshore. It was a plan nobody liked and it had to be reconsidered after an incident on April 29th 1943. A fresh brigade, under fire for the first time, was consolidating a point which had been taken the previous night. Suddenly there was intense artillery fire, followed by a German counter-attack which flung the brigade back to within two thousand yards of the first line of divisional artillery, which was in some olive groves.

The 1/2nd Gurkhas were nearby. All the British and Gurkha officers, with the exception of Captain Ormsby, had gone forward on a reconnaissance. But with riflemen in charge of sections and N.C.O.s commanding platoons and companies, Captain Ormsby led out the battalion to meet the German threat. The Gurkhas rose to the occasion. They charged uphill to secure a low ridge while their carriers swung to the left flank and kept contact with the 51st Highlanders. This prompt action by a battalion with only one officer undoubtedly saved a dangerous situation.

This German counter-attack called for a revision of the general plan but while this was in progress General Alexander arrived to ask for the 4th Indian Division and other forces needed for a main attack to be launched at Medjez el Bab. In all 30,000 men and 10,000 vehicles were shifted from one front to another by a two hundred mile trek into Central Tunisia. For the men it was a great change to reach fertile valleys, almond and fruit orchards and rich pasturage where sheep grazed peacefully.

The Medjez el Bab position was a low valley, four to six miles wide, broken by ridges and knolls and rolling hillocks whose lower
levels were cornfields. The 4th Indian Division was to attack, with the 5th as the leading brigade, and the 1/9th as the leading battalion. The seizure of the immediate objectives would be the signal for the 7th Armoured Division to drive on Tunis, thirty miles away.

This was to be a new experience for the Gurkhas, for they were to take part in a combined infantry–armour operation. For this purpose they were joined by Churchill tanks, an anti-tank battery, a heavy mortar detachment, a troop of Pheasants and other units including sappers and miners.

Colonel Roche wrote: “Until a few hours before we had never known these armoured friends . . . yet the accuracy and timing of their arrival could not have been improved on, in spite of the fact that one of the leading tanks ran into a stack of enemy mines and blew up with a frightful explosion.”

At nightfall on May 5th an advance party laid tapes and fixed guide lanterns. Shortly before midnight the 1/9th started their march through high cornfields. From time to time the Gurkhas had to jump to get glimpses of their comrades.

Overhead thousands of shells streaked towards the enemy positions. This was the first time the Gurkhas had attacked behind a barrage, and they found it bewildering. However, tracer from the Bofors showed them the way, and the attack went in dead on zero. Their objective, the crest of Ragoubet Souissi was seven hundred yards away. B and C Companies were in the lead, and halfway towards it Captain P. D. Radcliffe lost contact with No. 10 Platoon in the high corn. He pushed on with 11 and 12 Platoons. There was some small arms fire from the right but no one was hit; ahead, however, the enemy had section posts in depth, and these were well concealed. It was here that the real fighting started. The Gurkhas went for the enemy in a great, overwhelming rush that swept aside all resistance. The momentum of this charge carried them towards the next objective, a thousand yards to the north-east. Here the barrage had been less effective and they met firm resistance as they rushed the slope. But there was no stopping the Gurkhas now that their blood was up and the scent of battle in their nostrils. Jemadar Bhimbahadur Sen and his men bounded over the crest to find the enemy in undamaged trenches. There was a brisk exchange of fire. Naik Chankabahadur Basnet was temporarily blinded by a grenade. Throwing down his rifle he drew his kukri and groped his way forward to destroy an enemy gun team.
The Gurkhas swarmed in from all sides, and three officers and fifty-nine men of the 155th Panzer Grenadiers quickly raised their hands in surrender.

There was still mortar and small arms fire, so Radcliffe set his men to dig in quickly in case of a counter-attack. Meanwhile Roche arrived with the Rajputana Rifles machine-guns. At first he had thought the first objective had not been taken, because there was no sign of his Gurkhas; but there were sixty German bodies. He moved on and so reached the second position. In taking the two objectives the Gurkhas had lost thirteen killed and forty-two wounded.

On the left the Rajputana Rifles moved up and deployed. The anti-tank guns took up position to deal with the expected counter-attack. It did not materialise, and precisely on time the 1/4th Essex passed through to strike and take the final objective. They overran a battery of Nebelwerfer, the first to be captured. Later they presented one of these mortars to the 1/9th, but “the battalion had little interest in foreign weapons, having full confidence in our own. So we left it behind.”

The 4th Indian Division had smashed enemy resistance. Unfortunately, as at Wadi Akarit, the follow-up by armour was delayed and groups of the enemy were able to escape towards the Cap Bon beaches. But it was only a matter of time. Tunis fell on the afternoon of May 7th and the remaining pockets of enemy resistance were quickly mopped up.

“In the days that followed First Battalion took its victory quietly and its honours modestly in an unobtrusive encampment amid the foothills.”

Early in June 1943, King George VI arrived in North Africa and visited the 4th Indian Division. On the afternoon of June 19th he pinned the V.C. on the breast of Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa of the 1/2nd Gurkhas.

“You did a very brave act,” the King said. “I am proud of you.” He drove off between a line of cheering riflemen.

When the King visited the 1/9th Gurkhas, Subedar-Major Agandhar Khandka—who had recovered from his wound received at Djebel Garci—was presented to him. The gallant Gurkha was overwhelmed by the honour and said afterwards: “The King has passed through our battalion and we have seen him close, not at a distance through glasses; nor were there any police trying to keep us
away. I have shaken hands with him. I feel as if I had been in the presence of God.”

But some of the younger Gurkhas were disappointed. They had expected the King to be dressed in all his regal attire as they reckoned a king should be—not in a bush shirt.

“It was only another general after all,” said one, sorrowfully.
The first Gurkha battalion to reach Italy was the 1/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles. There, in the 17th Indian Infantry Brigade, they became part of the 8th Indian Division. Landing in September 1943 the division moved north against the Gustav Line, which on the east side began near the mouth of the Sangro and followed the river valley up to Monte Greco.

The Indian division occupied a front between the Maiella Mountains and the sea. The weather had broken and there was mud everywhere. Streams and rivers were in spate, hillsides slippery. Every bridge had been destroyed by the enemy. Traffic was confined to the fcw roads but where these approached fords there were mines. The whole area was peopled by homeless civilians miserably wandering and providing ample cover for enemy agents. In such circumstances it was impossible to launch surprise attacks.

The 1/5th Gurkhas occupied a village on high ground, meeting no opposition; but they suffered casualties from artillery fire when they crossed the Sinello and took some high ground beyond the river. Apart from four men killed, fifteen were wounded but refused to be evacuated.

The next objective was Atessa, on still higher ground, which guarded the approaches to the Sangro. An evening patrol of Gurkhas under Lieutenant Thomas surprised a German sentry post near the village. They killed the occupants and brought back valuable information about the siting of enemy machine-guns. Two nights later the battalion, under its acting commander Major Morland-Hughes, M.B.E., launched an attack on Atessa. Several Gurkhas distinguished themselves. The major wrote: “All through the night I kept on encountering Jemadar Pitraj Pun with a revolver in one hand, a grenade in the other and his kukri in his teeth. He just appeared out
of the darkness and then was gone again.” Rifleman Lankhu Pun, later awarded the I.D.S.M., volunteered to accompany the major on a reconnaissance of the eastern side of the village. As they approached an olive grove, fire was opened at point blank range by some hidden Germans, wounding the Gurkha in the shoulder. Lankhu tore straight in with the bayonet, killed the first German he met and scaring the rest into headlong flight.

Soon after the village had been taken, the Germans counter-attacked in great strength and nearly reached the battalion command post. The main thrust was on 115 Platoon of C Company. Attack after attack was beaten off, but the Germans kept swarming forward firing their Spandaus from the hip. In the end Lance-Naik Bhagtabahadur Gurung allowed the enemy to come within twenty yards of his post. He was almost down to his last round but with bared kukri he leapt forward and charged. His section followed and after a moment of stunned surprise the enemy broke and fled. One of their machine-guns was overrun and Rifleman Okel Gurung turned it on its panicking owners. This young Gurkha, before being killed in the final battle of the campaign, gained the I.O.M., the M.M. and Mention in Despatches and promotion to Naik.

With the counter-attack broken the Germans retired, leaving the Gurkhas in possession of the village. The many German dead included the Iron Cross officer who had led the attack.

The enemy withdrew beyond the Sangro. All approaches from the south were flat and open. The river was three hundred yards wide and liable to flood. On the German side the ground rose to an escarpment covered with stunted trees and crossed by gullies. Several villages along the ridge were honeycombed with deep shelters, machine-gun nests and trenches, proof against even heavy shelling. Mozzagrogna was the most important of these, and when the British attack was launched this was the target assigned to the 8th Indian Division. Two other divisions were to take part. The first of these, the 78th British, managed to secure a bridgehead but a cloudburst brought disaster. A six-foot wall of water swept down the river and demolished the sappers’ bridges.

The attack by the 8th Division had to be postponed, and it was not until a week later, on November 27th, that the 1/5th Gurkhas crossed and reached their starting line under heavy shelling.

As the artillery barrage lifted, two Gurkha companies, in utter darkness and pouring rain, penetrated the German outposts and started to mop up in the village. There was no time to search houses
and cellars, and no sooner had the leading companies passed than Germans emerged from their deep shelters. Soon a confused, savage battle raged inside the village, men springing upon each other from all quarters. Some men of the 1st Royal Fusiliers appeared out of the darkness and joined the Gurkhas in hunting down small groups of the enemy.

By dawn the major part of the village had been taken and Morland-Hughes set up his headquarters in the church which dominated the village square. There was still some fighting going on and as the light improved the noise of battle increased. Ammunition was running dangerously short because early in the night the Gurkha mule train had run into a minefield. Another minefield was holding up the Sherman tanks which should have been in support.

However, the position was far from hopeless, and when orders came from brigade headquarters that the Gurkhas and Fusiliers were to withdraw in order that an artillery barrage could be brought down on the village, Morland-Hughes protested. He was overruled and given fifteen minutes to get his men clear.

Suddenly two German tanks, one a Mark Four and the other a flame-thrower, lumbered into the square, having broken through the line held by the forward companies. Fusiliers and Gurkhas flung themselves desperately away from the flaming jet which was directed at walls, windows and doors. The cupola of the Mark Four was lifted and the commander put his head out, calling for surrender in guttural English. He was immediately shot through the head by a Fusilier.

The second tank turned the nozzle of its flame-thrower to avenge the German officer’s death; but in doing this the operator momentarily exposed himself to Morland-Hughes, who had climbed the church tower and now picked him off with a brilliant shot. The Mark Four turned its guns on the belfry, bringing down bricks and mortar and setting the bells ringing wildly. The major was brought down with the débris but was miraculously unhurt.

Time was running out fast, for there was no way of stopping the British barrage. The survivors of battalion headquarters dashed through the church door and crossed the square under the very noses of the two tanks. On the other side a party of Fusiliers had succeeded in hauling a PIAT to the roof of a house by means of a rope. With one shot they blew off the turret of the flame-thrower. The Mark Four rumbled away, backing out of danger.

Some of the Gurkhas could only withdraw by running the gauntlet of close range fire from the enemy. Without help they were doomed.
20. Marching up to Cassino.

21. Beneath the smoke of battle the grim fight continues for Cassino and the Monastery.
22. Stalking Germans amidst the ruins of Tavoletto.

23. Clearing an Italian farmhouse after a German self-propelled gun has been silenced.
The Fusiliers refused to abandon them and with shouts of "Run, Johnny!" they poured rapid fire on every doorway, window, loophole, or crevice where a German might appear. They kept this up until the last Gurkha had escaped. Then, retreating together, they took up fresh positions outside the village, listening with desperate anxiety to the inferno of noise coming from the forward positions, which were still held by A, B and D Gurkha Companies. Their wireless sets were out of action and the order to pull out failed to reach them. So they fought on grimly, even beating off an attack supported by two tanks. Each company commander was a casualty. One was killed in hand-to-hand fighting; another, after being wounded four times, was taken prisoner when his position was overrun.

Suddenly the British artillery barrage crashed down. Tragically it caused more casualties among the Gurkhas. The senior Gurkha officer, Subedar Ujirbahadur Gurung, realised the barrage meant all was not well and took over the withdrawal of the survivors. Amidst the blast of shells, carrying as many of the wounded as possible, they fought their way out of the shattered village to safety.

The battalion was now practically back on its starting line and the men were bitter at giving up the ground they had won by such hard fighting. Typical of their cool-headedness during the battle was the action of their Intelligence Officer, Jemadar Ram Sing Rana. He was in a house busy with his maps when he heard noises in the cellar. Exchanging map board and pencils for kukris, he and his draughtsmen crept down the stairs and burst in upon nine Germans. After killing them they returned to their work, sheathing their kukris and taking up their pencils again.

During a day spent in reorganising for the next phase, some more survivors trudged in to rejoin the battalion, including three who had been taken prisoner. One of these had managed to conceal his kukri in his battledress blouse and had later used it with good effect on a sleepy German sentry.

By evening a fresh attack on the village was launched by the 1/12th Frontier Force Regiment. The sappers had laboured on the track leading up from the Sangro, and British tanks were expected within hours. Once again there was a life-and-death struggle among the ruins. Several Gurkhas had remained in the village. Now they emerged from their hiding places. One, armed only with a kukri, leaped on a flame-throwing tank and neatly decapitated the observer.

As dawn broke, the British tanks roared and clattered up from the
river and their arrival put an end to German resistance. Meanwhile 78th Division was storming San Maria; but the only way through for their supporting armour was by way of the Indian front, and so it was vital to secure a road junction at the north-west corner of the village. After a preliminary bombardment the 1/5th surged forward and took the position, capturing an anti-tank gun which had already played havoc with the British armour.

By the 1st December a last desperate German counter-attack was flung back. The Sangro was in the hands of the Allies, and British troops held all the anchor positions of the Gustav Line. Over a thousand prisoners had been taken and many German units had been decimated. The 1/5th had lost three British and four Gurkha officers and a hundred and twenty-nine other ranks.

After the battle, according to their historian: “Major Morland-Hughes selected a house for his headquarters and gave orders for the removal and burial of nine German bodies lying in the cellar. A party of Gurkhas carried these on a ladder and dumped them into a shell-hole. They had disposed of eight and were carrying up the ninth when the ‘corpse’ leaped to his feet with a scream of terror. Kukris were drawn and the helpless German was about to be despatched when some British anti-aircraft gunners standing near intervened, saying: ‘Hey, Johnny, you can’t kill him like that!’ The reply, a typical example of remorseless Gurkha logic, was: ‘But we were ordered to bury nine dead Germans. Surely you don’t expect us to bury one of them alive!’”
LIKE a great watchdog, Monte Cassino crouched over Highway Six, guarding the only way through the unbroken chain of high mountains which stretched across the narrowest part of Italy.

In January 1944 the Americans tried to storm this stronghold. After desperate fighting their drive came to a halt still short of their target. In spite of exhaustion, frostbite and shortage of rations, they held on to the ground they had won at such heavy cost. The attempt to turn the position by the Anzio landing was not succeeding because the Americans there were unable to break out from the beachhead. Cassino was still the key.

A temporary New Zealand Corps under Lieutenant-General Freyberg, V.C., was formed for a further assault. It included the 4th Indian Division and arrived early in February to take over from the Americans.

The 9th Gurkha Rifles’ historian described the scene: “In the grey inclement dawn officers and men stared across the stark tangle of the upper Rapido valley at the great battlements of the Cassino massif. On the right, high above a pedestal of foothills, sprang the snow-clad cone of Monte Cairo. From its western slopes a rugged promontory of high ground, like a frozen lava floe, protruded for 5 miles into the valley and ended in the stubby snout of Monte Cassino, which rose 1,500 feet above the village of the same name on its lower slopes. . . . On its tip stood the still unscarred Benedictine Monastery. Below it Highway Six circled the base of the mountain and disappeared in the spacious Liri Valley. That was the road to Rome.”

When the commander of the 7th Brigade went forward and saw the condition of the American soldiers he realised they would have to be taken out as soon as possible; but because of bad weather, the
terrain and counter-attacks, the relief operation took longer than had at first been hoped. It was not until the morning of February 15th that the last of the gallant Americans, who numbered less than two hundred, was helped down the hillside. Many of them had to be lifted out of their fox-holes and carried.

On this morning the bombing of the monastery was suddenly announced, the date being advanced because of bad weather. There was no time to clear the forward troops, some of whom were within 600 yards of the target. They could only be warned and told to take what cover they could.

The Flying Fortresses appeared, flying high, and the monastery was enveloped in smoke and rubble. The forward troops felt the earth tremble beneath them. But many of the salvoes dropped wide of the mark, one ending up on Army Headquarters fifteen miles away. Later there were two raids by medium bombers at lower level and with greater accuracy. Unfortunately, this was not used in conjunction with an infantry assault, and while the bombing destroyed the building it made little difference to the defensive nature of the position. It had been hoped to follow up with an infantry attack by the 1/9th Gurkhas and the Rajputanas; but they were still on the far side of the Rapido and the only track was clogged with traffic.

Two attacks upon Point 593 by the 1st Royal Sussex failed against fierce opposition. A new one was planned for the night of the 17/18th. Taking part in this, the 1/2nd Gurkhas were to pass through the Snake’s Head position held by the 4/16th Punjab and storm the monastery. The 1/9th were to attack on the right, and the 2/7th were to provide porters for both battalions.

At midnight the Rajputanas went in against Point 593. The blackness was streaked by criss-crossing tracer and lit by the flashes of mortar bombs and grenades. But by two in the morning the Rajputanas were still short of their objective.

The follow-up was postponed until 4 a.m., when Colonel Showers of the 1/2nd Gurkhas blew his whistle. B and C Companies moved forward through chest-high briars which ripped their uniforms and tore at their skin. Topping the ridge they began their eight-hundred yard advance towards the monastery. Immediately devastating fire broke out from three sides. Spandaus, machine-guns and grenades lashed at the Gurkhas, who rushed forward into a veritable death trap. The scrub was riddled with booby traps and anti-personnel mines. Nearly every man of the leading platoon was blown up; later as many as four trip wires were found tangled round the bodies of
dead riflemen. Within a quarter of an hour two-thirds of the leading company were struck down. Only Major Ormsby and a few men of C Company broke through to reach the forward slope of a ridge where they found a little shelter. Only twenty-four men were left in B Company and they were unable to advance.

As A Company advanced, it too ran into a wall of fire. While bravely charging a Spandau post Lieutenant Loftus-Tottenham was killed. Colonel Showers, coming up behind this company, was wounded in the stomach, and Major Ramsay-Brown took over command.

Out of the confusion some semblance of order was restored. While D Company dug in and with the survivors of B linked up with the 1/9th on the right, A Company was recalled and with the twenty men left from C made contact with the Punjabs on the left.

The death grapple by night under the shadow of the monastery was described by the 2nd Gurkha Rifles’ historian as: “... the individual stories of scores of men who defied mischance ... Subedar Pirthilal Pun with four survivors of his platoon carried the battle to the enemy for five hours in spite of desperate wounds. Jemadar Balbahadur Gurung, with his clothing ripped to rags by bullets and splinters, charged one machine-gun nest after another. Naik Birbahadur Gurung, with one hand shot away and a second wound in his thigh, leapt ... on an enemy post and lived to tell the tale. Lance-Naik Dhansing Thapa, twice struck down, followed in under the blast of his own grenades to slay and turn a captured Spandau against his enemies. Rifleman Til Ale, with an eye blown out and multiple wounds, burst through the thicket and fell upon paratroopers at close quarters. Naik Jabarsing Thapa, with a shattered left arm, carried the fight to the enemy for six hours until ordered back by his platoon commander. Stretcher-bearer Sherbahadur Thapa crossed the deadly mined ground sixteen times to bring out wounded. Lieutenant Jones, Medical Officer, followed the forward companies, bandaging and evacuating the wounded from a regimental aid post ... until forced to cut saplings on the hillside and to rig improvised stretchers.”

During the height of the battle the Gurkhas of the 2/7th, who were acting as porters, dropped their loads, drew their kukris and joined in. On the right, the 1/9th were held up after a desperate attempt to break through which cost them ninety-four casualties. The 1/2nd lost forty-eight killed or missing and over a hundred wounded.

By afternoon the 1/2nd and 1/9th were ordered to withdraw
and when darkness came they were back in brigade reserve positions.

For the next few weeks fighting was confined to local activity; but on March 15th the New Zealand Corps launched its second assault on Cassino. This led to the capture of Castle Hill, standing above the Rapido Valley. From this point the New Zealanders attacked the town. Bombing had blocked the streets so that they were unable to use tank support, and by nightfall only a quarter of the town had been cleared. There was grim fighting against enemy paratroopers who came up from shelters among the rubble.

After the 1/4th Essex had relieved the New Zealanders at Castle Hill and pushed on to capture the lowest hairpin bend of the road up to the monastery it was time for the 1/6th Rajputanas and 1/9th Gurkhas to join in the action.

The battlefield was a triangle of steeply-tilted hillside with a base of some twelve hundred yards along the foot of the mountain. The configuration compelled all assault forces to enter through a bottleneck which could only be widened as the New Zealanders made progress in Cassino town.

The plan of attack was for the Essex to establish a firm base at Castle Hill. The Rajputanas were to pass through and secure "the hairpin bends of the road which cut double niches in the hillside halfway to the top." The Gurkhas were to move across the face of the mountain towards a rocky outcrop immediately below the monastery. This bore on its platform a shattered pylon which had formerly carried an aerial ropeway. On military maps this was Point 435, but the troops had named it Hangman's Hill. It was only a hundred yards from the south-western corner of the monastery and its steep, boulder-strewn slopes offered considerable cover.

In pitch darkness and chilled by a cold drizzle the Rajputanas led the way down the Rapido Valley. All around fighting was continuing between the New Zealanders and the Germans. Nearing the town the Rajputs were caught in a stream of fire and part of the battalion had to scatter for cover. The rest carried on, reached the Castle and launched an attack up the road, but without success.

By midnight the 1/9th were moving down the Rapido Valley in heavy rain along a narrow track which was jammed with supply traffic coming in the opposite direction. Colonel Nangle, the commanding officer, wrote: "We could only force our way through by pushing and shoving; as a consequence we were wet and exasperated when we reached the quarry on the outskirts of Cassino." Here Colonel Nangle contacted Colonel West of the Rajputas and learned
of the hold-up ahead. He decided to press on, moving his battalion across the rubble marking the edge of the town.

Moving in single file along a walled alley which led to the lower slopes above the town they came to two exits. One, to the west along the folds of the mountain, was taken by C Company. The other, going up to open ground was climbed by D Company.

At once D Company was met by Spandau fire at close range and by showers of grenades. Fifteen men fell in five minutes in a vain attempt to bypass the enemy. Daylight was coming up fast, and Nangle was anxious that the enemy should not find his three companies strung out in single file. Accordingly he tried to deploy his men to get clear of the streets and to occupy a line on the lower hillside. Before the manoeuvre could be completed the full light of day came. Nangle instructed his men to stand fast; but there was no sign of C Company. He returned to consult with Colonel West, but in the middle of this conference a shell exploded and caused a landside which buried many officers and men, including West and his Adjutant. With the Rajputs temporarily out of action, Nangle asked Brigadier Bateman for further orders. Meanwhile the New Zealanders continued their struggle to occupy the town.

All that morning the 1/9th held on. At one stage close-range fire bore down on them. Jemadar Karnbahadur Mell and his platoon retaliated, exterminating nests of snipers in nearby buildings. Towards afternoon the Corps artillery decided to open up on Hangman’s Hill but New Zealand observers suddenly reported signs of movement in that vicinity.

“At 1400 hours a radio telephonist of A Company grew tense; faint signals were coming through. Within a few minutes Battalion, Brigade, Division and Corps had received the electrifying news that C Company had traversed the hillside, seized Hangman’s Hill, and had consolidated it against opposition. High on the shoulder of the mountain, with enemies on all sides, an audacious success had repaired the failures elsewhere.”

When Captain Drinkall, C Company commander, was ordered to take his men along the track leading to the west he gave instructions for all heavy packs to be dumped. Then he led the way into the unknown. In the blackness gaps opened up between the platoons. Drinkall and the leading platoon were soon well ahead of the rest. Skirting the base of Hangman’s Hill they climbed the western slope in cautious silence. Still undetected, they gained the rear of the pylon
platform and took cover in a small hollow between the outcrop and the monastery garden on the mountain crest. In doing this they came upon an enemy outpost in a small cavern. Grenades were flung; two Germans fell, and the rest fled.

At first light Subedar Jaibahadur Chand came up with the remainder of the company, strengthening the position. They were only just in time because the Germans opened fire with mortars. One salvo landed in the middle of company headquarters and damaged the wireless set. Both Drinkall and Jaibahadur were wounded, but they managed to carry on. There was some mortar fire from a pit in the lower hillside. Naik Amarbahadur Khattri with great coolness crawled forward to close range and silenced it.

The shelling continued all through the morning and casualties began to mount alarmingly. Drinkall sent two runners, but they could not slip through the enemy and had to return. By midday the captain decided that if he could not establish communications by nightfall the company would have to withdraw. But they were still tinkering with the wireless set and it was eventually sparked into life, sending out the vital message which was to change the course of the battle. Drinkall was told to hold on at all costs.

At four o'clock in the afternoon Nangle summoned his officers and told them the battalion must fight its way through to C Company that night.

At nine o'clock the 1/9th moved forward towards Castle Hill, harassed by mortar fire which kept halting the column. A curtain wall ran downhill from the castle, and snipers and bombers had crept down this to block the way. Casting around, Nangle discovered a goat path about a foot wide which led up the almost sheer face of the ravine. Above this there was a small gap in the curtain wall.

One by one, the Gurkhas with astonishing agility climbed the path and squeezed through the gap to join the Essex in the castle; but there were less than three hours of darkness left. On the slopes ahead the Rajputs were fighting at the upper hairpin bend; below, the New Zealanders were attacking the Continental Hotel. The battalion pressed on, leaving two officers to collect the stragglers who had lost touch in the darkness.

One of these stragglers, Rifleman Manbahadur was lost in Cassino and took shelter in a wrecked tank. "From this cover he shot a German sergeant through the throat, dressed his victim's wound
and eventually turned up on Hangman's Hill with a useful stock of American cigarettes which he had found en route."

The battalion was forced to keep to a narrow corridor between the fighting above and the struggle below. The dangerous sector above the Continental Hotel was negotiated, and then Hangman's Hill loomed above them. As they climbed, a German artillery bombardment crashed down, enveloping the crest in dust and smoke. There was shouting and the crack of small arms fire. Without hesitation Captain Samuels rushed ahead with D Company.

The Germans were attacking the defenders and on the right flank there was only Jemadar Manbahadur Adhikari with a single rifleman of C Company holding them at bay. Samuels picked up a Bren from a dead Gurkha and pumped deadly bursts into enemy paratroopers as they came up over the crown of a low ridge a few yards ahead. Meanwhile, two of the Gurkha platoons charged the enemy, beating them back. The men of D Company then spread along the platform, strengthening the rather thin line of C Company.

Very soon the rest of the battalion arrived. A Company extended the position on the left flank, occupying the hillside above the road. B Company took up positions on the eastern slopes to the right, and in a small ravine at their rear Nangle sited his headquarters.

This was the start of an ordeal which for nine days made the Gurkha battalion the best-known in Italy. Clinging like limpets to their positions in the shadow of the monastery walls they held the encircling enemy at bay. The battle for Cassino took shape around them.

General Heidrich, the ruthless but able paratroop commander, must have realised that if he could defeat the Allies on the lower slopes the garrison on Hangman's Hill would be doomed. The New Zealand Corps were determined not to abandon them, and so the hill became the focal point of the battle.

At dawn on March 17th the Allied artillery put down a smoke shoot on Monte Cassino to prevent enemy observers from directing fire on New Zealand sappers bridging the Rapido. "The shoot," wrote Colonel Nangle, "began at dawn and continued until dark for the best part of a week. The pitch varied slightly—sometimes upon us, sometimes a little above, sometimes a little below. The shell cases, base plugs and smoke canisters showered upon us . . . They caused many casualties, including Tony Hobbs, the Adjutant. The stink of the smoke filled our nostrils, choked and blinded us. We tried hard to have the nuisance abated, but to no avail. I am sure the shoot
served its purpose, for one afternoon when the smoke blew clear I watched German mediums accurately following the movements of a New Zealand tank in the streets of Cassino."

The smoke brought one advantage to the Gurkhas; they were able to search for wounded and bring them to a culvert under the road which had been turned into a dressing station. When this was filled the other casualties were placed in sangars along the embankment.

By the evening of the 17th food, water and ammunition were running low. A porter party was supposed to have been despatched after dark but by half past eight there was still no sign of it. Nangle sent Lincoln-Gordon, who had taken over as Adjutant, down to the castle. He ran the gauntlet successfully and discovered that the Rajputana Rifles had lost the upper hairpin bend and that paratroop bomb squads and Spandau teams were investing Castle Hill, seriously dislocating communications. Because of the constant shelling the porters had refused to move out.

Two companies of the 4/6th Rajputana Rifles under Captain French had been detailed to escort the porters. French now volunteered the services of his men as porters. Carrying as much as possible they set out, with Lincoln-Gordon acting as guide. The rear of the column was scattered by mortar bombs; but the leading company reached Hangman’s Hill safely. The second managed to reassemble and, after wandering all over the mountain and almost walking into the monastery, reached the Gurkhas at dawn. Most of the loads consisted of ammunition and only a small quantity of dry rations had been brought up. As it was impossible for the Rajputs to return by daylight they were allotted a defensive position on the northern slope.

Early in the morning it was found that a New Zealand company under Major Reynolds was close at hand. It had worked its way along the lower slopes to seize Point 202. Reynolds’ intention had been “to take the Continental Hotel from the servants’ entrance”. This had failed; but the New Zealanders were continuing to hold Point 202. Their headquarters was in the shaft of a well and this provided a valuable supply for the Gurkhas who, by this time, had drunk all the rain water from surrounding craters and were rapidly emptying a small well higher up the hill, which could only be approached at night and even then with considerable danger. Reynolds was also able to bring in wounded who had fallen near this point during the Gurkha battalion’s march.

Throughout the day Hangman’s Hill was shelled. One jemadar and his orderly were twice buried and had to be dug out under
heavy sniping. After dark, Lincoln-Gordon assembled all the walking wounded and took them down the hill. By now the situation was much worse, with the castle knoll besieged and the gateway under fire. Grenades exploded among the wounded, scattering them, and when they were eventually reassembled in the castle courtyard many were missing. Yet, strangely, a Rajput company at the same time took up supplies to Hangman’s Hill and returned without any trouble.

The battle had now reached its climax. The monastery was to be stormed on the 19th. The Rajputs were to relieve the Essex at the castle, and the Essex were then to move up the right flank and join the Gurkhas in an attack on the walls. With the failure of the New Zealanders to take Cassino town this was really a forlorn hope. The Essex had only seven hours to complete a complicated relief at the castle, cross more than a thousand yards of mountainside swarming with the enemy and reform on an unreconnoitred start line for an assault against a veritable fortress with walls ten feet thick and only one entrance. Almost as much was demanded of the Gurkhas who were expected to go into action after five nights and days of exposure in bleak winter weather, during which time they had been mauled by the enemy and had been reduced to short rations.

Moreover, this action was against the German 1st Parachute Division, one of the greatest fighting formations ever to take the field. And General Heidrich had also decided to launch a decisive stroke. As the change-over at the castle was taking place and two companies of the Essex were moving forward, a battalion of paratroops charged down the hillside, overran the lower hairpin bend and came on at the castle walls. A fierce fight developed at close quarters, with the Germans hurling grenades over the battlements into the courtyard. The defenders fired Bren guns through the arrow slits, taking a heavy toll. The assault wavered, and the enemy was recalled by a flare; but it was only to reorganise and attack again.

Dawn found two companies of the Essex still in the open. They managed to reach the Gurkhas, their spirits high in spite of a dreadful journey. The 1/9th were in a bad way through lack of food and were chilled by exposure; but they prepared to attack. Then news came through that the attack was to be postponed until afternoon, following a barrage.

However, before this attack could be launched a diversionary movement had resulted in a breakthrough by an armoured force which crossed a series of shallow defiles. The German commander
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on Monastery Hill sent out a wireless call for help in clear. General Freyberg at once decided to advance the attack time provided the armour could bring fire to bear on the monastery. Unfortunately a number of tanks came to grief among mines and the rest had to withdraw later under cover of darkness. In consequence the attack by the Essex and Gurkhas was cancelled.

During the afternoon aircraft dropped supplies on Hangman’s Hill. The release was accurate but many of the loads bounded out of reach and some of the men who tried to retrieve them were wounded by snipers. The packets of American K rations had to be shared. “The best we ever managed,” commented Colonel Nangle, “and that only once, was three K rations (each a meal) between two men for a whole day. The worst was one K ration for the men on the crag and one-third of a ration for the others for a full day.” Apart from the lost rations all the radio batteries dropped were either smashed or lost.

On this same day Captain Sonnie, the Gurkhas’ Medical Officer, led a stretcher party under the Red Cross flag from the aid post in the town to Hangman’s Hill. On his return he was stopped by the enemy and searched, but then permitted to proceed.

After nightfall on the 19th the two companies of the Essex were ordered to return to the castle, but Corporal Hazle, D.C.M., and Lance-Corporal Piper remained in charge of the culvert dressing station, where they did magnificent work looking after the wounded who were too badly hurt to be moved. They even performed operations, including amputations, using the slender resources of a first aid kit.

At midday on the 20th Captain Sonnie again reached the hill with stretcher bearers. On the return trip he was once more stopped and searched but this time he was given written instructions that no more stretcher parties would be allowed.

During that afternoon there was a marked increase in German sniping from the front walls of the monastery which rose to a height of thirty feet and were a hundred yards from the most advanced Gurkha post. Naik Dilbahadur Khattri and two riflemen sent out on a reconnaissance made skilful use of cover and reached the shelter of these walls. They were the first Allied soldiers in four battles to gain that objective. Drawing fire, they were able to pinpoint the sniping posts and on their safe return the artillery were able to silence these.

By the 21st the Gurkhas and two officers and forty men of the
Essex whose return to the castle had been cut off were weak from hunger. Early in the afternoon aircraft again dropped supplies in the face of enemy fire. Some of the men were so desperate for food that they raced out to gather up outlying canisters and were shot down. However, the supply drop provided one K ration to every three men and the next day, in spite of enemy fighters in the vicinity, there was another drop.

Colonel Nangle gave permission for any walking wounded who so wished to leave. Several were intercepted by the Germans but, after being searched, were allowed to continue on their way. Captain French of the Rajputs walked boldly through the enemy lines into the town and swam the Rapido to reach the New Zealanders.

The general position was of stalemate, and on March 23rd the New Zealand Corps abandoned its offensive. The big problem was how to withdraw the Gurkhas safely from Hangman’s Hill, an operation which had to be carried out with utmost secrecy as it was obvious the enemy would try to prevent the withdrawal. Three volunteers undertook to deliver a verbal message to Colonel Nangle. They were Captain Mallinson of the Essex, Captain Normand of the 1/9th (who had recently returned from hospital) and Lieutenant Jennings of the Rajputana Rifles. Each was given a carrier pigeon to send back confirming his safe arrival. The birds were called St. George, St. Andrew, and St. David, after the respective nationalities of the officers.

The three set out on the night of the 24th, taking different routes. Mallinson was through first, followed ninety minutes later by Normand. Jennings had run into the enemy and had had to go back. As for the pigeons, Colonel Nangle recorded: “When Mallinson let go his pigeon it obviously did not like working in the dark. It sat on a rock and preened itself until daylight. Then it flew home. Andy Normand’s pigeon was not in good order. He had stuffed it into the front of his battle dress and thereafter he had crawled on his belly.”

A system of triplicate signals, radio code words, groups of Verey lights and Bofors tracer was arranged. The cypher word to order the withdrawal was ROCHE. Older officers felt this an ill choice “for that well-remembered commander had never abandoned any position.”

The code word was received soon after noon the following day. Lincoln-Gordon descended to the nearest point held by the New Zealanders; but Major Reynolds had already received orders that he was to stand fast until the Gurkhas had passed through and then join the rear of the column.
A final air drop took place early in the afternoon, partly to deceive the enemy. Captain Samuels gathered most of the generous rum issue which had been included and planted it in his dug-out as bait for a booby trap. He failed to collect all the rum, however, and as darkness fell Gurkha music was heard across the hill. The men were still full of fight and some, when told of the withdrawal, at once asked: "But who is going to relieve us?"

Continuing the deception, the monastery was bombarded at seven-thirty in the evening, the New Zealanders became active in the town, and fighting patrols were sent from the castle. At 8.15 p.m. Captain Normand guided B Company down the hillside, and the withdrawal had started. Steadily the Gurkhas descended and marched through the New Zealand position; their strength was down to eight officers and a hundred and seventy-seven other ranks. They were accompanied by small groups of the Essex and Rajputs. When they had all passed through, the New Zealanders followed, covering the rear.

They came safely to the castle, artillery fire covering the noise they made as they stumbled over loose stones. From the castle they went to the quarry and eventually they reached lorries which drove them back to San Pietro, where there were food and hot drinks and "the indescribable luxury of bedding."

Owing to the shortage of stretchers a number of seriously wounded had been left behind and the next morning, at great risk, Captain Sonnie took a stretcher party for the third time to Hangman's Hill. On the way back the enemy appeared and stopped him. It was a nerve-racking moment. But the Germans allowed him to proceed after handing him a card stating that the German commander would not permit any more Red Cross missions.

So the Gurkhas left Hangman's Hill. "On the crest of that shaggy outcrop a giant boulder today bears the 9th Gurkhas' badge,"—their historian records—"and the story of how men won and held that eyrie in middle air will be told again and again as long as memory remains."
17 Breakthrough

After the Cassino failure General Alexander decided on an attack up the Liri Valley and with brilliant strategy concealed the build-up of his forces from Field-Marshal Kesselring.

The rôle allotted to the 1/5th Gurkhas was that they were to follow up the 1st Royal Fusiliers and 1/12th Frontier Force Regiment across the Gari, pass through the bridgehead and capture the village of San Angelo, an important point on the Gustav Line.

Action started at moonrise on May 11th 1944, and it quickly fell behind schedule. Enemy fire, coupled with smoke canisters which added to the river mist, pinned down the Fusiliers, and when the Gurkhas moved down to the river they found that only four of the sixteen assault boats had survived enemy fire. They had to cross by a shuttle service and it took nearly four hours to get the battalion over. The first companies to reach the start line began an attack but had to disengage because they were only at platoon strength.

The Gurkhas, taking up positions with the Frontier Force, waited all day for the next order to attack and while they waited they endured shelling, sniping and mortar fire. The hold-up was mainly due to the difficulty of getting tank supports across the river; but by evening some Canadian tanks had reached the west bank and the Gurkhas put in their second attack. They seized a German machine-gun position known as “White House” and overran a low spur dotted with seven machine-gun nests. The tanks became bogged down in marshy ground. Without them further advance was impossible, so the Gurkhas dug in until the following morning.

By midday they were ordered to withdraw because of a heavy artillery shoot about to batter the village. When this lifted C and B Companies attacked for the third time. More tanks arrived but they were all held up outside San Angelo by a blown road bridge. Some
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attempted to cross the marshy ground but only one succeeded in time to help the Gurkhas.

The 1/5th quickly gained a footing inside the village. This was followed by two hours of vicious and desperate fighting among the rubble.

A machine-gun post in a deep cave held up the advance. Fire from it wounded a platoon commander and several men, and Havildar Raimansing Gurung led a bayonet charge into the hail of lead. Only a frontal attack was possible, and man after man fell until only Raimansing was left. Riddled with bullets, he collapsed in the very mouth of the cave but in his dying moments drew the pin from a hand-grenade and threw it. The surviving Germans rushed out to surrender, stumbling over his dead body. His action led to a posthumous I.O.M.

Lance-Naik Dalbahadur Pun's section also came under fire from a machine-gun post, this one dug into a very steep bank. He led a charge up the bank and flung a grenade. He withdrew the pin of a second one but was mortally wounded, falling down the bank on top of his men. He still clutched the grenade and gave orders for this to be taken from him before he became too weak to hold down the lever. This done he ordered a final charge and died cheering on his men.

There were many other brave actions. Jemadar Dhankaji Gurung rushed ahead of his platoon and shot six Germans dead with his tommy-gun. Severely wounded in the head, he survived to receive the M.C. Company Quarter-Master Havildar Ranbahadur Gurung, taking over when his platoon commander fell, captured a key position, but in the attack half his platoon became casualties. The Germans counter-attacked before he could organise for defence, and the remnants of his command were about to be overwhelmed when he flung two grenades at the advancing Germans and launched a one-man attack, tommy-gun blazing. He forced the enemy back and they surrendered. He took one officer and fourteen other ranks as prisoners, a total greater than the number left in his own platoon. He won the I.D.S.M.

Eventually a second Canadian tank came through, taking a heavy toll of fleeing Germans, and by early afternoon San Angelo was in the hands of the Gurkhas. The price had been high. Forty-one killed and a hundred and twenty-nine wounded.

This was the first crack in the Gustav Line, which the 8th Indian Division smashed within five days. The Hitler Line was also broken,
and complete victory was in General Alexander's grasp when he was ordered to release several divisions for the invasion of France. This enabled Kesselring to make a series of strong rearguard actions while he prepared to defend the Gothic Line in the north.

At the time of the Liri Valley operation the 10th Indian Division was on the Adriatic sector. Among its battalions were the 2/3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles and the 2/4th Prince of Wales' Own Gurkha Rifles. So far they had only taken part in strenuous patrol activities, but towards the end of June the division was relieved and after some intensive training moved up to join the advance against the Gothic Line.

The route was up the Tiber Valley, through the heart of the mountains. On the high ridges were small villages whose church towers made splendid observation posts. Woods and scrub on the slopes gave good cover to both sides.

The 2/3rd were down in the valley. Progress was slow because the Sherman tanks attracted heavy fire from the enemy. Orders came through for the battalion to relieve the 3/5th Mahrattas who were supposed to be holding a crest; but C and D Companies found the Mahrattas dug in some two hundred yards short of this objective and under heavy mortar and small arms fire. Most of this was coming from a German post in front of C Company, so at first light Jemadar Dudbahadur Gurung led a platoon assault. It was largely due to his leadership that the crest was taken. Very heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy at the cost of only three Gurkhas wounded.

Tragically, a short time later the battalion was shelled by its own artillery. This blunder was due to the failure, at a higher level, to cancel the code names of the fire tasks allotted for the Mahratta attack. Two Gurkhas were killed.

The 2/4th were also in action, their objective being Trestina, where the Germans held a position overlooking the Nestore. The enemy defensive fire was heavy, and tactical H.Q. was pounded by mortars until it took refuge in the waist-deep water of the river.

Although there was moonlight it was difficult for the troops to keep direction, for the low ground was intersected by ditches and banks and swept by harassing fire from the village, farm buildings and haystacks.

When A Company was caught in the supporting shell-fire, it had some bad moments but suffered no losses. Scaling a cliff face it sur-
prised and routed the enemy, taking twelve prisoners and capturing valuable equipment. C Company attacked at the same time, putting some Germans to flight and capturing twenty-two.

There was a bigger engagement on July 13th when the 2/3rd were ordered to seize the massive Monte Delle Gorgacce, key to a communications centre in the valley below, by the following morning. To assist the main attack B Company were detailed to attack a nearby hill. To add to the deception of this diversion they were supported by guns and mortars.

Within an hour the hill was taken; but the troops were under enemy observation from three sides and before they could dig in they were heavily shelled. Captain Taggart was hit in the leg but refused to be evacuated, and his quiet confidence encouraged his men as the Germans increased their pressure to retake the hill. The subedar who had taken over was mortally wounded.

Despite losses the company hung on grimly. Colonel Somerville, the commanding officer, sent Lieutenant Cantlon, the signals officer, to take over. He was slightly wounded immediately but remained on duty.

This action completely deceived the Germans, and when C Company set off as darkness fell it covered three thousand yards of difficult country, which included a wooded ravine, without opposition. The company moved silently into position on the ridge.

At first light A and D Companies put in the main attack on Gorgacce, moving with such speed that the enemy was routed after some hand-to-hand fighting. The two companies then penetrated another two hundred yards to clear up isolated machine-gun nests. Captured documents revealed that the position had been held by the greater part of a German battalion who had been ordered to hold it at all costs.

The way to a broader part of the Tiber Valley was now open. The next major operation was to dislodge the Germans from the Arno Valley. To do this it was necessary to capture the Alpi Catenaia, a series of massive heights between the Tiber and the Arno. The Maharattas led the advance and took two of the crests after a difficult march and a climb of three thousand feet.

The 2/3rd Gurkhas continued the assault and occupied the highest crest of all. There was no immediate German counter-attack; but there was heavy shelling in the mist and the rain. It was kept up for hours. The Gurkhas counted a thousand shells during daylight; yet no man was killed and only a few were wounded!
The plan to attack another strong German position was postponed when it was learned from a prisoner that it was held by four hundred infantry. It was decided that a reconnaissance was necessary; but before this could take place the enemy struck. Early on August 6th there was a heavy bombardment and the Germans came in from three sides. Two Gurkha sections and one of a machine-gun battalion were overrun. Realising that the enemy had passed the forward companies in the mist, Colonel Somerville ordered them by wireless to turn about and fall on the Germans from the rear.

Moving silently, before the dawn light came up, the Gurkhas encircled and trapped their prey. As daybreak thinned the mist, the Germans were suddenly terrifyingly aware that the woods were swarming with Gurkhas.

Kukris drawn, the Gurkhas rushed them, coming from behind trees, bursting through undergrowth. The woods echoed with the screams of dying Germans. Those who fled were hunted down.

As the sun grew stronger it revealed a battlefield littered with dead bodies and abandoned equipment, which included thirty-six machine-guns. There were over a hundred dead, and fifty-six prisoners were taken.

After Cassino the 2/7th Gurkhas took part in the rush towards the Gothic Line. By the end of July they were in the Arno valley. A night attack was made by the 3/12th Frontier Force on Campriano in the Alpe di Poti. On the right the assault was unsuccessful, probably because a copse to the east housed an artillery observation post which brought shell-fire against that wing.

The 2/7th were ordered to attack the next day covered by artillery support, but just before they moved off movement was seen in the area and it was thought the position had fallen to the Frontier Force battalion. The shelling was cancelled and the Gurkhas were told to take over the copse and dig in.

As C Company crossed open country it at once came under heavy enemy artillery fire which caused some casualties. The advance continued but when the Gurkhas were a hundred and fifty yards from the copse it exploded into life as Spandaus blazed across the slope and mortars hurled their deadly missiles. The company went to ground and replied with Brens and grenades.

One of the section leaders on the right was Lance-Naik Jitbahadur Rai, an ex-mess-orderly in action for the first time. In front of his section dry grass was kindled into flame by tracer bullets. As a result
the Spandau fire wavered, and at once Jitbahadur leapt to his feet and charged into the copse with a loud cry of "Ayo Gurkhali!" Kukris out, his section raced after him.

He was a smallish man "but with two swipes of his kukri he killed two rather obese German gunners who collapsed on top of him. He was, therefore, under about 350 lbs of 'Jerry' when a third gunner came at him. With a supreme effort he got his kukri arm free and made a blind slash at him and almost severed his arm above the elbow."

The wounded German was taken prisoner. Jitbahadur was seen walking beside the stretcher, a blood-stained kukri in one hand and patting the prisoner's shoulder with the other while he explained to the petrified German, in fluent Gurkhalı, that he had no intention of completing the job he had started at such disadvantage.

The jemadar, who had the same name as the lance-naik, sent a section to enfilade the enemy still remaining in the wood and then swept through with the other two, winking out the Germans from well-built dug-outs.

Both Jitbahadurs were decorated, the jemadar with an M.C. and the lance-naik with an I.D.S.M.; but what probably gave them more pride was to learn that their capture of the copse had been watched from a forward observation post by King George VI, who was visiting the front line.

The next step for the Gurkhas was the capture of Tavoleto, only a small village but of tactical advantage because of its position on a ridge. It was well defended and throughout September 1st the 1/9th Gurkhas worked their way through the vineyards aligning the Tavoleto road in the face of stiff opposition.

That night the 2/7th Gurkhas came up to the right flank, guided to their objective by burning haystacks. Both battalions pressed on but dawn found them held up and under German artillery bombardment which lasted throughout the day.

Soon after midnight the 1/9th were relieved by a Sikh battalion and moved back into the brigade reserve position. During the day it had borne the brunt of the shelling but had held on grimly. On the front still held by the 2/7th, C Company was along a dry riverbed near the village and closely overlooked by the Germans. The other companies were further back. In the afternoon orders came through for an attack on Tavoleto. The Gurkhas were to seize the village while the 2nd Camerons took a ridge to the east.
The attack was to go in at midnight. The plan was for A Company to get astride the road and divert enemy attention to the west. C Company was to clear the village, with B Company standing by to assist. Finally, D Company was to maintain flank protection as a reserve. Major MacDowell, commanding the battalion, moved up at dusk with his tactical H.Q. into B Company area.

Before the attack could be launched there was a surprise move by the Germans, who came down the hill supported by tanks. The Gurkhas resisted stoutly, flung the enemy back and then started to get their own assault going. With artillery support A Company, under Major Owen, M.C., advanced over broken, scrub-covered ground against heavy Spandau and mortar fire. The Gurkhas won through and by three in the morning were astride the road and digging in. Rifleman Manbahadur Rai later received the M.M. for his bravery in bringing out wounded under heavy fire.

Lieutenant "Birdie" Smith, leading C Company, encountered little opposition at first. They moved past outlying farmhouses and through vineyards and orchards; but as they neared the village the Germans opened up with automatic weapons from every house. Some Gurkhas fell, the rest scrambled for what shelter they could get from the village walls.

Jemadar Jitbahadur Rai moved his platoon to the left of the church and main street and led a dash down a side lane which led to where A Company was spread out. They cleared the enemy from some houses. Some of the Germans surrendered, others fled into the night with cries of alarm. Reaching A Company, the platoon started to dig in.

In the centre, C Company was faring worse. As one platoon scaled a wall machine-gun bullets chipped sparks off the masonry. Several men were hit but the rest pressed on into the main street. The leading section ran into a murderous burst of fire which wiped it out to a man. The havildar quickly herded the rest of the platoon into a house from which they returned the fire down the main street and against the church towering above them to the right. This was where the enemy had established a stronghold.

As the night wore on there were many wireless messages from the brigadier each in the same strain. "Tavoleto must, repeat must, be taken by dawn." "Birdie" Smith never received this order because the company's set had been put out of action but he knew what he and his men were supposed to achieve. Although wounded, he filled
his pockets with grenades and moved into the village with the remain-
ing platoon.

With Bren guns giving covering fire as houses were taken he worked down the right-hand side of the main street. Gurkhas and Germans stalked each other in the buildings and backyards. The night was filled with the sudden chatter of Spandaus, the deep rattle of tommy-guns and the explosions of grenades. There were dying screams as Germans were cut down by Gurkhas who sprang upon them with drawn kukris.

Gradually small parties of Gurkhas managed to work round be-
hind the church and the village hall and at last the moment came for “Birdie” Smith to lead a final charge against these enemy posi-
tions. During the confused fighting Rifleman Jagatbahadur, the company runner, did magnificent work taking messages; but he made one mistake. He passed a message to two soldiers in a cellar and they acknowledged in German. He retrieved the error by throwing in a grenade as well.

With the taking of the main centres of German resistance, the village became much quieter. Smith bustled around organising his depleted force into positions around the church in readiness for any counter-attack. Along the road wounded of both sides lay, and Ger-
man and Gurkha stretcher bearers worked alongside each other.

Although A and C Companies were now dug in the danger was
not yet over. They were short of ammunition and under heavy mortar fire. Enemy snipers were becoming more active. Then, most opportunely, B Company moved in, supported by tanks and bringing more ammunition in the battalion carriers. They helped to clear the last remnants of the enemy from the village.

Lieutenant Smith won the D.S.O. for his brilliant part in the action, and “Tavoleto” was awarded to the 7th Gurkha Rifles as one of their battle honours, one of the few to be gained by a single battalion in any way. But the price of glory was high; in C Company alone there were forty-four killed and wounded.
In August 1944 the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade landed in Italy. It consisted of three battalions, the 2/6th, 2/8th and 2/10th. They were destined to earn a reputation second to none in the Italian campaign.

Rome, Florence and Pisa had been captured. The brigade moved up to join the 1st British Armoured Division in storming the Passano Ridge. The order of battle was for the 2/10th to be on the right and the 2/8th on the left, while the 2/6th were in reserve.

There was an amusing preliminary. Before the attack a patrol of the 2/10th heard muffled voices coming from underground and on investigating discovered two tunnels near the start line. While the bulk of the patrol watched one entrance the rest charged along the other tunnel which led into a large cavern. Good luck or intuition restrained the Gurkhas from opening fire. The cavern was crowded with Italians in various stages of undress. Cave life had certainly not repressed their natural amorosity, which was embarrassingly revealed as torches were flashed at the startled occupants. During the battle the cavern was grimly changed, for it became a regimental aid post.

After artillery barrages the attack began, and enemy star shells quickly illuminated the Gurkhas advancing down the forward slopes preparatory to storming the ridge. There was heavy enemy shelling as the 2/8th crossed the first ravine, but luckily only a few men were wounded.

Rows of grape vines ran up the ridge at right angles to the line of advance; but while these helped companies to keep direction they also isolated groups. In consequence there were many desperate hand-to-hand encounters which placed great demands on junior leaders.

Apart from the heavy shelling both battalions had to endure fire
from farmhouses which had been converted to Spandau nests. Clearing such buildings one Gurkha officer killed six Germans, while another accounted for five. Three German tanks were seized after their crews had been wiped out.

Shortly after midnight the 2/8th had taken all their objectives and an hour later the 2/10th were equally successful. Over ninety prisoners were captured.

The great problem was to consolidate the positions which had been won. Both the sappers and the armour had a terrible time trying to bring up support weapons. The sappers suffered many casualties from shelling and there were many vehicles blazing and smashed beyond repair. At last, however, in spite of darkness, dust, obliterated tracks and heavy bombardment, the task was accomplished and the ridge was won.

North from Passano was the Marano Valley the far side of which was dominated by the Mulazzano ridge. On September 15th, the brigade attacked the ridge following a heavy R.A.F. and artillery blitz. The 2/8th cleared the enemy out of farm buildings with grenade and bayonet while advancing for forty-five minutes in the face of heavy fire. Some of the enemy in the area were not rounded up, and one German patrol, led by an officer, surprised a 6-pounder crew digging in. Before the officer could fire, Havildar Deobahadur Pun felled him with a shovel. The gun team grabbed their weapons and killed three of the Germans, while the rest fled into the darkness.

By morning the Germans had vacated the ridge, leaving only remnants which were mopped up by B Company aided by tanks of the 10th Hussars.

The next objective was the Marecchia River and the town of Santarcangelo which was situated on high ground beyond. Four Allied divisions fought bitterly for three days during which the tanks in particular suffered very heavy losses. Fresh forces were needed, so the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade was thrown into the battle.

The general situation was confused, no detailed maps were available and there was no time for reconnaissance. There was to be no artillery support as a "silent" attack was more likely to succeed. This was to be two-pronged against the ridge south of the town and made by the 2/8th and 2/10th.

At three in the morning of September 23rd the 2/8th, with A and D Companies in the lead, approached the thousand-yard wide Marecchia. Its bed was of shingle and stone, impassable to wheeled traffic. The bridge had been blown.
The leading companies waded across in a nightmare of suspense. "Monty’s Moonlight"—searchlight beams reflected from the clouds—lit the way. One officer who was there said that the effect was in the nature of spotlights and he was uneasily aware that it appeared to shine on the men from behind, making them easy targets for any lurking Spandau teams.

However, the river was safely negotiated and the Gurkhas reached the parallel railway embankment a thousand yards beyond. They came upon a house and this was occupied as battalion headquarters.

From the railway the ground rose towards the crest of the hill, and as the men swarmed up the slope machine-guns opened at close range, with red tracer coming like sparks from a blacksmith’s anvil. Many men fell at the foot of the ridge but in spite of casualties the slope was taken.

At dawn all hell was let loose. The British front on the Gurkha right was not as far forward as intelligence had suggested, and as a result the Gurkha advance had created a dangerous salient. Almost completely surrounded by machine-gun nests and self-propelled guns which blazed mercilessly the two companies clung grimly to the bare crest, taking what shelter they could in shallow, hastily-dug trenches. Making matters worse, they were overlooked by a cemetery which had thick walls and also by a castle with walls twenty feet high.

After A Company had suffered heavy casualties, B, with one platoon held back, was sent to reinforce them. They had to fight their way through, clearing three houses, killing a number of Germans and taking some thirty prisoners as well as knocking out two Spandau teams in the remaining houses. Although they suffered heavily from this encounter at close quarters and also from relentless shelling, the survivors reached the ridge and joined A Company.

Meanwhile, back at battalion headquarters, C Company was actively engaged in mopping up Germans in the vicinity but this too proved costly. Fierce mortar bombing and constant fire from machine-gun nests made bringing casualties to the aid post very dangerous.

Tank support was desperately needed but although the Sappers worked without pause it was not until eight-thirty in the morning that two Sherman tanks were able to cross the river. They were unable to reach the crest of the ridge but they knocked out two Spandau nests and blew a gap in the cemetery wall. The enemy retaliated with armour-piercing shells.

Half an hour later three more Shermans crossed, accompanied by
C Company of the 2/6th Gurkhas; but on the way up thirty men were lost and it was decided the position on the crest was untenable. Under a smoke screen the forward companies were withdrawn to the railway embankment.

On the left the 2/10th Gurkhas had fared no better. They had crossed the river the same night. The slope to the ridge was a maze of orchards and vines and many of the trees had been cut down by the Germans. As D Company climbed the obstacles, there was murderous Spandau fire directed against them.

Around four in the morning battalion headquarters and C Company were established in a white house which they had seized after a sharp fight in which six Germans and a regimental sergeant-major, narrowly saved from execution with kukris, were taken prisoner. The house was surrounded by Germans who were well dug in, and any movement beyond the walls was met by heavy fire.

While B Company was capturing a nearby paper factory, D was still advancing up the slope, which was dotted with houses. Machine-gun fire streamed from all of them. The Gurkhas cleared two and then closed in on a large mansion which was the main strong point. This fell at the second attack; but the enemy around opened up an intense fire and, as it looked as though a counter-attack might develop, C Company was sent forward to give support. On the way they bumped into the expected counter-attack which was being made by Germans in company strength. At the same time they were exposed to cross-fire from other Germans in well-dug positions on their flanks. C Company was forced to scatter.

Lacking tank support, with no anti-tank guns or PIATS, D Company was in no state to hold off a powerful counter-attack by five tanks followed up by infantry. The hastily dug, shallow trenches were overrun. Small groups of Gurkhas resisted to the end.

Rifleman Ganjabahadur Rai was in a section which charged some advancing Germans. He went in with kukri drawn and came up against a six-foot tall German. In the death struggle which followed the German tried to fend off kukri slashes with his rifle but the Gurkha finally broke through his guard and hacked him to death. Later, the rifle with kukri marks all over the stock was picked up and is still in the possession of the 2/10th.

Having killed his man, Ganjabahadur sprang at another German and cut open his back from neck to hips before being shot down by some of the enemy coming up from the flank.

Although the Gurkhas had been forced back from their main
objectives they hung on to their secondary positions, determined to make another attempt. Early in the afternoon C Company of the 2/8th tried to storm the ridge; but ruthless fire prevented them from reaching the crest, so they dug in on the slopes. Two companies of the 2/6th moved up to help them; but it was obvious that any further advance in daylight would be suicidal. During this attempt Lance-Naik Satbir Gurung dashed through mortar and shell fire to bring back his badly wounded company commander. He had to cover fifty yards bearing his burden but managed to get through unscathed.

The plight of wounded was appalling in this battle, though heroic attempts were made to bring them in. C Company clerk, later Captain, Symal Rai of the 2/10th, became acting Company Havildar-Major owing to the many casualties and he was responsible for saving the life of a Forward Observation Officer of the 90th Battery R.A. This officer's foot was shot away by a shell, and Symal, under fire, carried and dragged him back to safety across the river.

In the 2/8th the devoted work of their Medical Officer, Captain Hopkins-Husson, was rewarded by an M.C. He evacuated all his casualties from his Aid Post, carrying the last one on his back to a new post through heavy shell fire. He was a small man, carrying a heavy burden and in addition he was struck by a shell fragment but he managed to bring his patient in.

As the Gurkhas, still under fire, waited for nightfall Jemadar Nandaman Rai of A Company of the 2/10th spotted some four hundred Germans and twenty tanks obviously forming up for attack. He was able to pass back a map reference and, just as darkness fell, all available British guns brought down a heavy concentration of shells on this target. German prisoners said afterwards that more than half their number were killed by this bombardment, which effectively broke up the attack.

With darkness, two companies of the 2/6th drove for the crest of the ridge, overcame stiff resistance and captured it. This relieved the worst pressure and early the following morning B Company of the 2/10th advanced to the position once held by their D Company. The Germans had withdrawn, leaving D Company men who had been given first aid. The bodies of Lieutenant Robinson and twelve Gurkhas who had died in an attempt to storm the hill were also found.

For some time there was heavy shelling, but at last patrols from
the 2/6th entered the town of Santarcangelo by night. The Germans had pulled out and the Gurkhas were met by partisans led by the local barber.

Since their attack on Passano, eleven days earlier, the Gurkhas had been in continuous action and had behaved like veterans, although most of the men were under fire for the first time.

Under pressure, but still resisting strongly, the Germans were pushed back to the Ronco which was in spate and twelve feet deep. Patrols of the 2/8th reported the river line to be strongly held. One patrol found an aqueduct intact but when they tried to cross machine-guns opened up. Two men actually got over and had to swim back across the river lower down.

At dawn on October 26th Jemadar Judbhir Gurung of the 2/8th was ordered to establish a small bridgehead at the aqueduct. The leading section of his platoon crossed; but there was then heavy fire in an obvious attempt to isolate it. The gun was forty yards away but the Gurkhas charged, throwing grenades, and the enemy fled. The remaining Gurkhas dashed across in support, and the gun was captured.

Jadbhir pushed forward three hundred yards. There was an enemy counter-attack round the loop in the river; but instead of remaining on the defensive, the platoon charged the enemy, who turned and fled.

The establishment of this bridgehead opened the way to Forli for the 8th Army. The Jemadar was awarded the M.C.

The Ronco was crossed by the 2/6th and 2/10th and the bridgehead was enlarged to a depth of three thousand yards with a width of two thousand. It turned the enemy defences. On October 30th another brigade passed through, and the Gurkhas came out of the line for a well-earned rest.

During the last bout of fighting Naik Ranbir Gurung of the 2/6th, finding that his company was held up by heavy fire from a farmhouse, gathered the platoon headquarters' men for a charge. Braving point-blank fire he rushed into the building to emerge a few minutes later followed by twenty-three German prisoners. A large quantity of signal and other technical equipment was captured.

The final act of heroism in the Ronco battle was performed by Havildar Bhimbahadur Thapa, also of the 2/6th. A platoon of A Company was ordered to occupy a farmhouse but as British shell fire was falling on the building they were called back. As they with-
The struggle became more static that winter, but with the spring of 1945 there was a big push to the north. The Gurkha Lorried Brigade took part in the hard battle of the Senio River and early in April they raced to seize Medicina, a crossroads through which any German counter-attack was likely to be launched.

A troop of tanks from the 14/20th King's Hussars and two companies of the 2/6th Gurkhas in Kangaroos—armoured troop carriers—roared into the town. They swept aside all resistance on the outskirts; but in the lengthening shadows of the late afternoon the tanks failed to spot a well-camouflaged, self-propelled gun. Fortunately it was discovered by Major Greenwood of B Company. He pulled up his Kangaroo and jumped out, Gurkhas after him, to attack the gun. Two of the German crew were killed and the rest fled, abandoning the gun.

Reaching the centre of the town, the tanks rumbled into the square and right up against a self-propelled gun and two 88-millimetre guns.
Without hesitation Major Browne led his troop into action. The self-propelled gun was knocked out and fire was turned on the crews of the other two. A daring German rode near on a bicycle. He had a bazooka on his shoulder and, dismounting, he fired at Browne’s tank, which slowed to a halt. The German hastily reloaded for a second shot but at this moment Subedar Raghu Gurung appeared, a solitary dust-covered figure in the fading light. Spandau fire, clattering against the hulls of the tanks, also streamed in his direction. But Raghu dashed upon the German, killing him with the kukri before the second and doubtless fatal bazooka missile could be launched.

Amid the rubble of the town the Gurkhas were jumping from their Kangaroos and starting a house-to-house hunt for enemy paratroopers. It took them into cellars and across damaged roofs. Each man was a lone hunter and one, Naik Maiman Thapa, charged a machine-gun post which was hammering out red death in the darkness. He killed the enemy gunners and then paddled off after a fresh quarry.

By ten o’clock Medicina was in Gurkha hands. Seventy-five men of the 4th Paratroop Regiment were taken prisoner. It was impossible to count the dead. In commemoration of this battle the 2/6th now wear the Prussian eagle badge of the Hussars on their right sleeve, an honour granted nineteen years later.

Continuing the chase, the brigade reached the Gaiana River. D and A Companies of the 2/6th were ordered to cross but it soon became very clear that the Germans on the other side were well dug in and were going to make a determined stand.

Lieutenant McDougall, rising in his Kangaroo to guide his men forward, was mortally wounded. Major Watson was hit, but refused to leave his men. Jemadar Bhimbahadur of A Company twice tried to lead his platoon across the river, although he was wounded. The second time he was killed, and his men, their numbers reduced by heavy casualties, started digging in.

Subedar Ramansing Rana, M.C., managed a fighting crossing with his platoon to the western bank and led a charge against a house, in which a number of Germans were killed and twenty taken prisoner. But from all sides heavy fire was directed against the house, which became so battered that it gave little cover. Although wounded, the subedar encouraged the men to fight on; but they were so exhausted that they could not prevent their prisoners from escaping.

The subedar was not the man to crouch down and be shot at. He seized a Bren gun and staggered into the open, firing until he was
killed. Havildar Chambahadur Gurung took over command. He was hit several times and his left arm hung useless; but he kept on firing his rifle with his right hand.

At last all the platoon were dead or wounded, and ammunition was nearly exhausted. Chambahadur ordered a withdrawal, which he proceeded to cover. Naik Nandabir Rana insisted on remaining with him and by skilful marksmanship enabled the others to get away.

Both companies were now so weakened that there would be little hope of withstanding a strong counter-attack. They were ordered to retire. This was difficult because burning buildings lit up the area and all movement drew fire. Havildar Chambahadur and the faithful Naik Nandabir suddenly appeared, having managed to recross the river. Major Watson at last consented to leave his post and have his wounds dressed. So did Jemadar Harakbahadur Gurung, who was terribly weak from loss of blood.

For a brave attempt against odds the battalion was awarded three I.O.M.s, three M.C.s and four M.M.s. Havildar Chambahadur was one who received the I.O.M., which was also given posthumously to Subedar Ramansing Rana. Naik Nandabir Rana was given the M.M. Although the gallant attack had failed, no honour had been lost.

The next day a stronger attack was launched with the 2nd New Zealand Division. The 2/8th and 2/10th Gurkhas took part in leading the assault and in a fierce fight Kiwis and Gurkhas seized the German positions and took many prisoners.
19 For Supreme Valour

By May 2nd 1945 the German Army in Italy had surrendered. For the Gurkhas it was the end of a long and bitter campaign in which they had won the admiration of friend and foe alike. Soon they were to be homeward bound; but they would leave behind many comrades who had fought and died in this foreign land, and the story of the campaign would not be complete without recording two among the fallen whose supreme valour had won for each a posthumous Victoria Cross, adding to the glory of their battalions.

In the battle for San Marino in September 1944 the 1/9th Gurkhas were detailed to secure two objectives, one a high ridge to the west of Faetano, the other a bend on the main road into San Marino. The first was seized after five hours of fierce fighting, and just before dawn A and C Companies, under Major Costeloe, attacked towards the bend in the road.

The Germans were strongly entrenched and the fighting was bitter. During the height of the action Rifleman Sherbahadur, a Chettri Thapa, charged an enemy strong point together with his section leader. The enemy machine-gunner was killed, and the others fled. The German commander immediately ordered a counter-attack, which came storming at the two Gurkhas. The section leader was wounded, but Sherbahadur rushed forward firing his Bren gun from the hip. He scattered the enemy and reached higher ground from where, single-handed, he kept the Germans at bay for two hours. He was in an exposed position and under constant fire but he ignored orders to withdraw and even refused to take cover in a slit trench because from there he would not have been able to watch the enemy. From his one-man strong point he knocked out several enemy machine-guns and denied the ridge to infiltrators.
24. On patrol in Italy, scouts scan the ground ahead for the enemy.

25. The Gurkhas had to fight in all kinds of weather.
26. The victors of "Scraggy". One of the savage hand-to-hand battles fought against the Japanese near Imphal.

27. The dusty road to Mandalay.
At the end of the two hours both Gurkha companies had used up their ammunition. The crossing of the Marano had been held up and so there was no chance of reserves coming up. In consequence there was a general order to withdraw. Major Costeloe, having seen the companies safely out of danger, returned for Sherbahadur, who had been giving valuable covering fire but had now expended his last bullet.

"Come on, Chhoro! (Son)" shouted the major. "You've done more than enough."

But Sherbahadur had seen two of his comrades lying wounded in full view of the enemy. Through small arms and mortar fire he ran forward and brought one back. Then he returned for the other. Hoisting the wounded man on to his shoulder he started back. Costeloe raced forward to help him. Within a few yards of safety a hail of bullets killed all three.

On November 11th 1944 the 1/5th Gurkhas sent a platoon from A Company on a fighting patrol towards Monte San Bartolo, the objective for a future attack. The platoon commander was ordered to reach a high bluff with steep approaches devoid of cover. It was known to be occupied by the enemy and that these approaches were covered by a number of machine-guns.

Two scouts from the leading section were sent forward. One of these was Rifleman Thaman Gurung. Moving with all the skill of natural hunters they reached the base of the bluff without being seen. Thaman, slightly in the lead, was starting to crawl up towards the summit when his companion drew his attention to two Germans in a slit trench just below the crest. They were swinging their machine-gun round to bring it to bear on the leading Gurkha section, which was following up.

Thaman immediately leapt to his feet and, although in full view of other enemy positions, charged up to the slit trench, so unnerving and surprising the machine-gunners that they surrendered without firing a shot. Handing over the prisoners to his companion Thaman crawled to the summit. Looking over, he saw that a group of Germans were about to hurl grenades over the top of the bluff at the approaching Gurkha section. There was no cover, but Thaman advanced against close-range machine-gun fire with his tommy-gun blazing. He dispersed the Germans and enabled the section to reach the bluff. They were making their way along a narrow saddle which connected the bluff with their own battalion position and as the
last of the platoon came over there was intense enemy fire. This came from mortars and machine-guns not only from both flanks but from Monte San Bartolo as well. It was clearly impossible to capture or hold the bluff against such concentrated fire and so the platoon was ordered to withdraw. Even this was hazardous with bullets flying and grenades exploding.

Once more Thaman appeared on the skyline, emptying his tommy-gun into a German slit trench and hurling two grenades as a final gesture. Miraculously unscathed after being exposed to heavy fire at short range, he rejoined his section.

The Gurkhas were still in difficulties, however, as cross-fire was pinning them down. Thaman collected two more grenades and doubled across the crest to hurl them at the enemy. In the brief respite the two rear sections were able to get clear without further loss. But the leading section was still caught on the saddle. Returning, the gallant Thaman seized a Bren gun from its owner and also snatched up some spare magazines.

“Quick!” he shouted. “Get out of it!”

Then, before anyone could restrain him, he raced to the summit once more. He must have known that he had gambled his life too long; but regardless of his own safety he stood there, outlined against the blue Italian sky, defiance in every line of his short, stocky body. Bren gun at hip he emptied magazine after magazine into the nearest enemy position. Machine-gun and rifle fire buzzed angrily about him; but still he appeared to be sheathed in a protective armour.

By the time he had used up most of the magazines he must have realised that his section was well on its way to safety. He turned to follow and at that very moment he spun and fell with a bullet through his throat.

The Gurkhas have a motto: Kaphar hunne bhandar marnu ramro. It is better to die than to be a coward. The sacrifices of Sherbahadur and Thaman vividly show the limits to which a Gurkha will go in order to realise the ideal of these stirring words.
The monsoon broke over the jungle-covered hill ranges of the India-Burma frontier. It was May 12th 1942, and the Burma Army on the last stage of its retreat struggled through valleys which had become morasses of mud, and along hill slopes lashed with stinging rain. It was an ordeal of wretchedness at the end of a long fighting withdrawal; but it did bring respite from the Japanese pursuit, which was halted by the terrible conditions.

In the space of five months the British had been driven out of Malaya and Burma; but these dishevelled troops who reached Imphal in pouring rain were still disciplined and ready to fight back. Among them were Gurkhas, still cheerful. One company commander, leading his men along a steep muddy track in heavy rain, heard them chuckling. He also heard what he took to be the quacking of a duck. But it was Rifleman Manbir, the company joker, impersonating the bird, waddling with knees bent and arms flapping like wings, while the rain streamed down his full-moon face. And this in spite of weariness, of night-and-day fighting with little rest, of tightly rationed food.

These troops deserved much better than they received at Imphal, where there were virtually no reception arrangements. For several days clothes and other essential supplies were not available. Even food was so short that at first men were on little more than half rations.

When the monsoon brought the war to a temporary halt, the Chin Hills area was one of the few in Burma still in British hands. Its administrative centre was Tiddim, a large Chin village surrounded by pine trees on a ridge over five thousand feet high. It was forty
miles inside the Burma border and a hundred and sixty-two miles south of Imphal.

Communication was difficult, a long stretch of it by mule track. For a time the defence was a battalion of the Burma Frontier Force and the Chin Levies. As the rainy season came to an end the Japanese started probing patrols; then in February 1943 they moved up three battalions. On the British side the 2/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Hedley, moved into the Tiddim area. Behind them there was intensive work on the route from Imphal, and by the end of April the whole distance could be traversed by jeeps.

Early the next month a Japanese attack seemed imminent. B Company was placed at Dolluang to guard a footpath leading from the plains up to the dominating eight-thousand-foot Kennedy Peak. Battalion H.Q. and D Company were in Tiddim, while A and C Companies were at No. 3 Stockade to watch the main entry into the hills from Kalemyo, where there was a strong Japanese garrison.

This stockade was a staging camp which had a rest bungalow and a few tin-roofed huts. It was at the head of a re-entrant running up from No. 2 Stockade, some three thousand feet below. To the south was a ridge known as the Mualpi Spur; to the north was Signal Ridge, with a position known as Signal Piquet. Basha Hill was a continuation of the ridge to the west of the stockade. Seven hundred yards long, it dominated it and had three ridges: West, Centre, and East.

On the evening of May 22nd five Japanese companies advanced from Kalemyo. It had been decided not to hold No. 2 Stockade against heavy attack and so the Chin Levy detachment pulled out and climbed up to No. 3. Unaware of this, the Japanese attacked the deserted stockade the following evening. The listening Gurkhas heard the firing die down and knew that somewhere in the quiet darkness of the jungle the enemy was planning to strike again.

The assault started at 4.30 the next morning with over three hundred Japanese advancing in waves against the Gurkha platoon, under Havildar Kishenbahadur Gurung, holding Signal Piquet. The first enemy wave was held up by deadly, sharp-pointed bamboo panjis which formed the outer defence. The Gurkhas opened fire, causing severe casualties. But the enemy still came on. The Chin Levy contingent, sent to reinforce the Gurkhas, broke, leaving only their commander and a few men. As a result the Japs were able to establish a strong footing within the position.

The Gurkhas fought stubbornly; but the odds were too great and
Kishenbahadur was forced to withdraw when ammunition was almost expended. He brought out all his wounded. Two dead were left and there were three missing. Two of these were captured but escaped later and rejoined the battalion.

Early in the afternoon the Commando Platoon, a tough collection of Gurkha volunteers, together with two platoons of C Company moved out from No. 3 Stockade to recapture Signal Piquet. Captain Grieve, M.C., was in command. The remaining platoon took up a position north of the stockade and astride a track running north to the Piquet. The 3-inch mortars prepared to give covering fire.

Grieve had decided to attack down the ridge from the west and he led his men well away from the track. At the same time the Japanese sent a column forward to seize the stockade. The two must have passed within a few hundred yards of each other in the thick jungle!

The platoon commander at the stockade suddenly saw some movement about a hundred yards ahead and thought some men of C Company must be there. Then a Jap officer came into the open, scanning the stockade through binoculars while a small group of men gathered near, obviously waiting for orders. A Gurkha Bren gunner opened fire with a well-aimed burst which killed the officer and dropped several of the others as they fled.

Almost at the same moment as the Bren hammered into life, the mortars launched their first bombs at Signal Piquet. In order to silence this firing the Japanese attacked the stockade. With the mortars continuing their appointed task, the Gurkha platoon kept the enemy at bay; but after a time it was observed that large numbers of Japanese were moving round the flanks. They were in such strength that the mortars were in danger of being captured; there was no help for it but to withdraw with them from the stockade position.

Grieve's small force was advancing up the ridge. He realised the mortars had stopped sooner than arranged but had no idea of the reason. Because his own men were engaging the enemy and clearing two posts he could not hear the distant firing at the stockade.

Fifty yards from the main objective enemy resistance became too strong and he was forced to break off the attack. According to plan he was to withdraw to Basha Hill in this eventuality. Arriving there, he linked up with A Company under Captain Houston and learnt of the action at the stockade.

With the Japanese in such strength, Grieve decided to lead the
two companies to Fort White, from where he could make contact with battalion H.Q. On the way, D Company joined him. They reached Fort White about midnight. He was ordered to move further back to Kennedy Peak as Lieutenant-Colonel Hedley wished to re-form the battalion and take over personal command of future operations.

On the morning of May 25th Hedley learned that the enemy had not advanced as far as Fort White. He ordered D Company of his own battalion and A Company of the 1/4th Gurkhas, reinforcements who had come up by jeep, to occupy the ridge just north of Fort White. By afternoon Fort White was occupied and reserve ammunition was brought up.

Hedley had three of his own companies and the reinforcements from the 1/4th and he was anxious to retake No. 3 Stockade. The first step was to reoccupy Basha Hill. Of the three ridges only Basha East was held by the Japanese. Captain Houston led A Company of the 2/5th against this, supported by fire from a 3-inch mortar. Along the knife-edge summit they were met by fierce machine-gun fire. The enemy had mortars, too, and all attempts to turn the enemy flanks failed.

The Gurkhas withdrew to Basha Centre where Hedley had been watching the attack in company with Brigadier Cameron, D.S.O., the 48th Brigade Commander. C Company of the 1/4th Gurkhas had reached Tiddim and Cameron sent for them.

There was an acute water shortage and the Gurkhas spent an uncomfortable night on Basha West, which was to be the starting point for the next attack. It was intended this should be preceded by an air bombardment but a sudden storm waterlogged the airfield. When, by midday, there was no sign of the aircraft Captain Grieve was ordered to start the assault with the Commando Platoon and C Company of the 2/5th. The mortars put down a ten-minute barrage and then the Gurkhas advanced.

The Japanese opened up with heavy machine-gun and mortar fire, at the same time shelling the Gurkha mortars and battalion H.Q. The shelling was not very effective, but the small arms fire from the green shelter of the jungle was deadly. Nevertheless, the commando platoon gained a footing round the left shoulder of the hill after severe hand-to-hand fighting. On the right C Company reached the razor-edged summit only to come under heavy fire from Mualpi Spur on their exposed flank. They were forced back and this
left the Commando Platoon so isolated that it, in turn, had to pull out. Grieve, severely wounded by a grenade, was brought to safety.

The next attack was made by D Company 2/5th with A and C Companies of the 1/4th. D was to capture the ridge. C was to advance with them on the right flank, ready to swing off and make for the stockade if the opportunity arose. They had A Company behind them in support.

From Basha Centre, Cameron and Hedley watched the battle. The Gurkhas of D Company appeared from a hollow below the ridge. Captain St. G. Dennys was leading them. Firing from the hip, the company twice almost reached the crest of Basha East only to be checked by heavy fire. The hills reverberated with the chatter of machine-guns and the crump of mortars.

One of the platoons was commanded by a young N.C.O., Havildar Gaje Ghale, in action for the first time. All the men under him were young, and as the third advance started heavy mortar fire burst among them. Gaje rallied them and led them along a narrow track with precipitous sides which wound up to the summit of the ridge. The Japanese, in cleverly concealed positions, opened a withering fire at close range with machine-guns. The bullets ripped down the five-yard-wide approach and hand grenades curved out of the undergrowth. There was the scream of shrapnel across the ridge.

Gaje felt sharp pain as grenade splinters hit him in the arm, chest, and leg; but his wounds did not stop him. Shouting "Ayo Gurkhali!" he charged through the hail of lead, his men rushing behind him. Covered in blood he reached the Japs, his kukri slashing. His men plunged into the fight. It raged furiously until with a supreme effort the Gurkhas drove the enemy from the crest. Gaje was still standing and he refused to have his wounds dressed until ordered to by Captain Dennys. Soon after this the captain was wounded in the leg by a sniper who was hiding in a tree.

While D Company was trying to gain the crest, C Company of the 1/4th under Major Oldham reached the southern slopes of Basha East. They started climbing to help in the attack, because until the southern end was cleared of the enemy no attack on Stockade No. 3 could be launched.

The enemy held their fire until the leading platoon of the Gurkhas was a few yards from their well-dug trenches. Then the curtain of jungle was slashed open with savage fire which decimated the leading Gurkha sections. All the leaders fell and twelve out of twenty-four
other ranks were killed or wounded. Every Gurkha of company headquarters, following up, was hit. Oldham, with his tough little orderly, Rifleman Narbahadur Rai hugged the slope as they fought a duel with a Jap sergeant and private who were in a trench twelve yards to the right. Both Oldham and his orderly were wounded in the leg as grenades showered. Narbahadur saw a Bren gun lying near a dead Gurkha. He dived for it, stalked towards the enemy trench and with a sudden burst killed the two Japs.

Oldham struggled to his feet and assembled the survivors of his depleted force. He was joined by Havildar Dale and a few men. Firing from the hip and hurling grenades he led a rush towards the crest, where Gaje Ghale and D Company of the 2/5th were just routing the enemy.

While Subedar Gobardhan Thapa of the 4th Gurkhas was organising the position on the ridge, Oldham, with a dozen men, chased the fleeing enemy. He reached a ledge three hundred yards forward. It was an exposed position and ammunition was running short, so he decided to return to Basha East. As he did so the Japanese counter-attacked. For a time things looked critical, but Subedar Gobardhan’s efforts were largely responsible for beating this off. Subedar Jabre came up with more ammunition and the Gurkhas were confident of holding out.

Gobardhan set off to get in touch with A Company, which had moved on and become involved in heavy, confused fighting. Major Nangle, acting commandant of the 1/4th, joined him and they managed to recall A Company. By this time Oldham’s wounded knee was giving him trouble, and Nangle ordered him to go to the aid post.

With Basha East captured, Brigadier Cameron reviewed the situation. It was far from satisfactory. Supplies were precarious and water was short. According to reports, the Japanese were building up reserves at Stockade No. 2. There were a thousand men there and another thousand at No. 3. Realising the danger of being outflanked, Cameron not only had to abandon the idea of attacking No. 3 Stockade but had to make the reluctant decision to withdraw from the hard-won Basha Hill and take up positions further back which were easier to defend. However, the Japanese had suffered heavy casualties and gave up any idea of offensive action in the Chin Hills for a considerable time.

During the night the 2/5th withdrew, covered by the 1/4th who
pulled out safely the following morning. For their gallant part in the battle Rifleman Narbahadur Rai won the I.O.M., Subedar Gobar-dhan Thapa the I.D.S.M. and Major Oldham and Captain Dennys the M.C. To Havildar Gaje Ghale went the supreme award of the Victoria Cross.
Hidden in a forest of bamboo, Major Calvert’s No. 3 Chindit Column waited for nightfall. There were C Company of the 3/2nd Gurkhas, a Karen platoon of the Burma Rifles, a Gurkha muleteer company, twenty-seven British Commandoes, a Royal Signals detachment and a section from the R.A.F.

Under cover of darkness they were to make the dangerous approach to the Irrawaddy, cross to the east bank and penetrate even further into Japanese occupied Burma. The column had already covered over three hundred miles since crossing the Chindwin in February 1943 as part of Wingate’s 77th Indian Infantry Brigade. For four weeks the men had struggled through teak forests, over ridges and down into deep gorges. A daring raid had been made on the railway at Nankan resulting in the blowing of bridges to the north and south. While this happened, Subedar Kum Sing Gurung with a handful of Gurkhas held several lorry-loads of Japs at a roadblock, knocking out two vehicles with a Boyd anti-tank rifle. The enemy were kept at bay until Taffy Griffiths came storming along with his stout-hearted Karens to join in the fight. Kum Sing won the I.D.S.M.

Not weakened by any casualties, the column had left the wrecked railway and reached the Meza River on schedule for a much needed supply drop. This gave six days’ rations for every pack.

Following the west bank of the Meza the column neared a large village called Tawma. A patrol reported it to be strongly held by Japanese. It was a target Calvert could not resist. With the main body of the column hidden in the jungle he attacked the village with one platoon supported by mortars and medium machine-guns. Creeping up on the village he blasted it with everything he had and then quietly withdrew leaving the surviving Japanese firing into thin
air. The attack must have been a nasty shock to the enemy but it also raised a hornet’s nest which was to add to the difficulty of the Irrawaddy crossing.

Waiting for nightfall, with sentries tensely alert, the rest of the men snatched some sleep or gathered in quietly talking groups. All had lost their original smart appearance, the same clothes had been worn for over a month. There was a strong odour of dried sweat and unwashed bodies, but as all smelt alike nobody seemed to notice this. The officers and the British troops all sported beards, while even the normally smooth-skinned Gurkhas had a covering of light down.

As the shadows lengthened in the criss-cross curtain of bamboo, the men opened their packs and started to eat. With every man carrying his own rations it was almost impossible to keep an effective control; but most of them had learnt to resist temptation. They knew from hard experience that the next supply drop was always uncertain and that six days’ rations had often to be stretched for as long as two weeks. Hunger was yet another enemy for after heavy marching the body craved more sustenance.

One of the officers worked out his menu in advance. An extract from his diary reads: “March 10th. Breakfast: 2 biscuits, ¼ packet dates. Lunch: 2 biscuits. Dinner: 2 biscuits, tea, cheese. Special luxury today: ¼ bar chocolate.”

It was only by this sort of rigid self-discipline that the rations could be made to last out the extra period. But towards the end of the expedition, when even the mental power which had driven the body on began to go dull, this discipline became a terrible strain.

A few hours after nightfall Calvert led his column out of the bamboo forest. They moved in single file, a long line of men, mules, horses and even an elephant captured from the Japanese a few weeks earlier. They had started out with pack bullocks as well; but these had gradually fallen by the wayside. As the Gurkhas are Hindus this was not an additional source of food for them.

“The religious faith of the Gurkhas was quite remarkable,” an officer wrote. “. . . on one occasion when our stomachs were crying out with hunger and there were only roots to gnaw at, we shot a nilgai (blue bull). The men regretfully decided that it would be against their religion to eat the meat. Our Karens and the British commandos had no such restriction to prevent them from enjoying a hearty meal. But I found myself quite unable to eat my portion while
the Gurkhas went without. The meat just stuck in my throat, although the men very tactfully averted their faces.”

Shortly before midnight the Meza was crossed at a waist-deep ford. There was no time to remove boots, so the men splashed through and up the muddy bank beyond, boots squelching, socks shrinking, and the tops of the boots chafing unprotected ankles.

The dark mass of Tawma was away to the right as they hurried across open country. It seemed impossible that the long line of the column could pass unobserved. The booming note of a gong rang out suddenly in the clear night air, and every man held his breath in anticipation of the chatter of machine-guns and the distant plop of a mortar. But nothing happened. Probably the gong only signalled the change of sentries.

Calvert pressed on, completing a wide detour which he hoped would put the Japs off his track. He returned to the river and just before dawn led the way up a hill, where he ordered the men to bivouac, adding strict instructions that nobody was to move beyond the perimeter.

The column settled down to an uneasy rest. There had been no time to fill water-bottles at the river and very few had any left. The dawn came up and suddenly everyone was startled by shots fired at the foot of the hill. Men leapt to their feet. There was a rush to put on packs and to load mules. Even Calvert was amazed by the speed of the operation.

Then a Gurkha and a Karen came scampering up the hill. The urge for water had been too great and they had slipped out just before dawn to a small stream where they were spotted by a Jap patrol. Calvert was livid; but time was much more important than punishment. As the column moved out, booby traps were left.

Within ten minutes mortar bombs could be heard exploding on the abandoned camp. The barrage was followed by the faint shouts of a charge abruptly broken by the booming of booby traps. These last noises raised everybody’s spirits, which was just as well in view of what was to follow.

Calvert had realised that if they were to cross the Irrawaddy unmolested it was essential to have at least twenty-four hours out of contact with the searching enemy. Throughout the morning the column kept moving through broken hill country with only sparse forest cover. The winding tracks were covered in fine red dust which was kicked up by trampling feet, adding to the discomfort of parched, cracked lips. The sun beat down relentlessly and every man was
streaming with sweat. Movement became mechanical, so that it was like a column of robots. Calvert doubled on his tracks, went one way and then another, like a cunning fox trying to throw off the scent. It was three in the afternoon when he granted the respite of an uneasy halt.

With the cool of the evening the column moved on. The men had had little sleep apart from snatched cat-naps and they had been on the go for the best part of twenty-four hours, so from the start this march was a weary struggle. They came down from the hills and into thicker jungle, making for the river with frequent halts to make sure there were no Japanese around.

It was just past midnight when Calvert and the leading platoon crossed a narrow strip of water and then splashed ashore on a small island in the Irrawaddy. They forced a way through tall elephant grass for about a hundred yards and then came to a clearing where Calvert decided to bivouac until daylight. The men were so exhausted they just flung themselves down and fell asleep. The open ground was covered with sprawling groups, and the first men had dropped off while those in the rear were still crossing.

The officer commanding the rearguard platoon wrote: "We seemed to be standing still for hours. On either side was tall elephant grass, so I couldn’t see where we were. I went ahead along the line of mules... pushing past half-asleep men, and came out suddenly on the bank of a river. Men and animals were slowly crossing over, delayed by the steep muddy bank on the other side. Suddenly a mortar bomb exploded about half a mile upstream, followed by several more. The Gurkhas, almost dead on their feet, just continued to cross as though quite unaware of the explosions. There was also no activity from the front of the column. More bombs exploded, this time a bit closer....

"I rushed forward, up the slippery bank, struggled past the line of men and animals in the elephant grass on the opposite bank, and came out on to an open stretch of ground dotted with sleeping men. After a search I found Mike Calvert, apparently fast asleep. In the distance the bombs were still exploding. I woke him up. ‘Mortar fire,’ I said. ‘I know,’ he replied, which rather took the wind out of my sails. ‘Don’t worry,’ he said, ‘they don’t know where we are. They are just firing at random.’ I believed him. He was that sort of man. ‘I think it would be a good idea if you guard the ford,’ he added. Then he covered his head again under the blanket.”

Early in the morning Calvert and Lockett rode across the island
to see if they could find boats for transport across the river which was nearly a mile wide. Back in camp Captain Silcock was warned by the rearguard commander that there were Japs on the west bank. Silcock decided to move out. He left a Gurkha platoon and the commandos on the edge of the island in a covering position. As the column started to move the Japanese opened fire with machine-guns. Mortar bombs zoomed over to explode among the mules. Fortunately most of the men were now taking cover.

The unfortunate captured elephant was hit and ran trumpeting through the tall grass, never to be seen again. The column seemed fated not to take elephants along. Right at the start of the march three or four had been provided by Colonel "Elephant Bill" Williams. On the way to the Chindwin one of them lost his footing on a hill track and completed an acrobatic somersault. He staggered to his feet, bewildered but not hurt. His load, though, had broken loose and the hill track was littered with contraceptives! These were used by the commandos to keep detonators dry! Crossing the Chindwin another elephant nearly drowned, so they were all returned.

While the captured elephant stampeded, the rearguard platoon, hidden in long grass, opened up against the Japanese flank which was exposed because of a bend in the stream. With rifle and Bren gun fire one enemy machine-gun was knocked out immediately.

Teenage Rifleman Tilbahadur turned to his 19-year-old rearguard officer. "Would you like a shot, huzoor?" he asked, with a broad grin. The officer placed a couple of Bren bursts into another Jap machine-gun post, much to the delight of his Gurkhas.

The next few hours were grim. The ground beneath the Gurkhas was muddy and there was a foul, musty smell from the yellow stalks of the elephant grass. Bullets slashed through the plants with the sound of a scythe and mortar-bombs crunched uncomfortably close behind them.

From near the main camp Silcock retaliated with his 3-inch mortars, and suddenly there was silence from the enemy position.

Hearing the firing Calvert had galloped back. Sizing up the situation, he started to move the major part of the column across the island from where they could start ferrying the river in country boats. The rearguard, ordered to stay in position, waited in oppressive heat as the sun came up. The reek of elephant grass was overpowering and mingled with the smell of cordite.

Towards evening they were withdrawn. It was clear that the Japanese had been driven off with severe losses. The column’s
casualties were light. Only two had been killed. It seemed there were four wounded; but then another wounded Gurkha was found in the elephant grass. The Medical Officer examined his serious wound and gave no hope of survival. This was the moment every Chindit dreaded.

"The little fellow was lying in the grass out of the sun," the rear-guard platoon commander wrote. "He was terribly wounded, but he was trying not to show his pain, although every now and then he gave a little whimper. He asked me for water. I found a chakal and put it to his lips. He drank some, the rest spilled over his shirt front. George Silcock called me to one side. He was twirling his moustache in the way he had when worried. 'The Doc said to put him away,' George said. It was the law of the Chindit's jungle. Every officer had a supply of morphia in little tubes. You removed the protective cap and there was the needle. You inserted it in the arm and pressed the tube. This was what we had to do to the little Gurkha. Four tubes were inserted into his forearm. It seemed to take a long time to act. Then he closed his eyes quietly. George touched me on the shoulder. 'It's all over. Let's get out of here.' I covered the body with some parachute cloth and then we moved away from that evil elephant grass."

By the following morning the column was across the Irrawaddy and heading east. But the success of the crossing had brought with it one anxiety which was to remain until the end—the fate of the wounded.

Disaster befell most Chindit columns as they made their way back to India. The Japanese were out for revenge and every escape route was guarded by them. The greater part of the 3/2nd Gurkha's losses of four hundred and forty-six all ranks occurred in this final stage. Some hundred and fifty of these filtered through as time went on, forty-five escaped after capture, and over seventy were reported as prisoners of war. The fate of many will never be known.
28. In the bamboo jungle even the water fatigue party is ready for instant action against a surprise Jap attack.

29. Carrying a wounded comrade—often the only method of bringing back the wounded along the narrow, jungle hill tracks.
30. Jungle ambush.

31. Harrying the Japs out of a blazing Burmese village.
In the Arakan, Burma’s western seaboard, General Christison’s 15 Corps advanced against the Japanese during the latter months of 1943. It was a country of jungle-covered hills, paddy fields and winding tidal creeks. The main feature was the Mayu Range, running north to south. Crossing it was the Buthidaung–Maungdaw road, passing through two tunnels which the enemy had turned into formidable fortresses.

A hill christened Abel overlooked this road, and the 7th Indian Division planned to seize this as part of an attack on Buthidaung. In January 1944 a footing was gained by the King’s Own Scottish Borderers on the eastern side of the hill. As the fighting progressed the 4/1st Gurkhas were ordered to take the main crest.

The approach march, made soon after four in the morning, was across open paddy fields intersected by steeply-banked chaungs, where the loads of sixty mules had to be removed, manhandled across, and replaced. A dense mist reduced visibility to twenty yards, and this was thickened by a pall of smoke and dust from the supporting artillery bombardment.

The men swept up two spurs in a pronged attack, “yelling like a pack in full cry”. The Japanese on the immediate front were wiped out; but higher up on both flanks, enemy machine-guns and rifles poured in a murderous fire from deeply dug bunkers and cunningly hidden fox holes. Constructed before the monsoon, these were now further screened by a natural growth of vegetation.

As dawn broke, half the Gurkha battalion was still out in the open. A desperate assault gained twenty-five yards at the cost of as many casualties. But fighting continued stubbornly, and late in the afternoon the battalion managed to dig in. The situation remained static throughout the night, and early next day B Company made...
another unsuccessful attack. They suffered heavy losses from showers of grenades. Subedar Partabsing Thapa was brought back with twenty-four grenade wounds. Later Gurkha attacks with tommy-gunners and grenade throwers also failed, and during the afternoon the battalion was ordered to retire from what seemed an impossible position. They did so after dark, covered by Lieutenant C. D. Nixon and twenty-five men.

Gurkha casualties numbered sixty; but the Japanese had also suffered heavily and unexpectedly abandoned their positions. Gurkhas moving up to take over found a large number of blood-stained rags and bandages littering the fox holes.

The following day D Company, under Major Careless, crossed the road and occupied a hill known as Cain on the southern side. This cut the Japanese line of communication across the Mayu Range other than by pack train.

The Japanese, however, were building up for a major offensive, planning to burst through into India in a much vaunted March on Delhi.

Four days after abandoning the Abel position they struck. The 7th Indian Division had constructed a road through the Ngakyedauk Pass, known to the troops as Okedoke. A maintenance area, to become famous as the Admin Box, was set up in the valley this road served. The Japanese Tanahashi Force secretly rounded the left flank of the division and cut the pass. It overran divisional H.Q. but General Messervy escaped with most of his staff to organise the defence of the Admin Box.

With the 7th Division trapped on the eastern side of the Mayu Range another Japanese force, the Kubo, struck further north, cutting the main communications which also served the 5th Indian Division west of the mountains. A third enemy force, the Doi moved up for a frontal attack on both Indian divisions, the intention being to destroy them before invading India.

In the “Box”, staff officers, clerks, Corps and service troops with elements of a brigade of the 5th Indian Division prepared a perimeter in a dry, dusty bowl of paddy fields surrounded by a rim of scrub-covered hills. Within this area men, mules, tanks, vehicles and guns were crammed together. For eighteen days they were pounded by enemy artillery, while from the hills mortars and machine-guns were
ranged on them. Day and night there were constant attacks on the men holding the perimeter.

Among these were the 4/8th Gurkhas. They were attacked while digging in, and a platoon of D Company under Subedar Narainsing Lama was overrun. They put up a fierce resistance, and there were only four survivors out of twenty-nine Gurkhas. The subedar was posthumously awarded the I.O.M.

In withdrawing into the perimeter, the battalion also lost touch with five platoons cut off by the Japanese on a two mile ridge. After twice failing to break back into the “Box”, these platoons fought their way over the Mayu Range and reached the 5th Indian Division.

Back in the “Box” the desperate struggle continued. Clouds of smoke hung over the bowl, and explosions echoed around the hills as petrol and ammunition dumps blew up. Four times the defenders, dangerously short of ammunition, received fresh supplies dropped from Dakotas. Every part of the area was vulnerable to enemy fire and a glimmer of light brought a hail of bullets. Jap snipers, roped in trees, took a regular toll.

The Medical Dressing Station was on a hill, and one evening six Japanese officers and about sixty men burst into the hospital area. They rushed yelling through the wards, cutting down all who stood in their way, doctors, orderlies, and patients. For thirty-six hours they used the hospital as battle H.Q. During that time they organised a cold-blooded massacre. They shot and bayoneted every man on the medical staff. Orderlies and patients tried to escape by crawling on their bellies along a nullah in the darkness.

In the hospital the Japs refused dressings to the wounded and water to the dying. They killed those whose groans might reveal their positions. Five doctors were lined up and shot, each with a bullet through his ear. A sixth escaped by feigning death when a Jap officer’s pistol misfired twice.

Seventy Japs attacked B Company of the 4/8th Gurkhas but were beaten back, leaving over forty dead. After this the Japanese attacks slackened, and gradually the garrison went over to the offensive.

Help was on the way. The 26th Indian Division was moving down from the north while the 5th cracked open the Okedoke Pass and came across from the west. Vengeance dive bombers appeared and plastered two hills held by the enemy. On February 23rd the relief of the “Box” was completed. Two days later ambulance convoys
rolled out, and within hours the wounded were evacuated by air to hospitals in Bengal.

Japanese losses were heavy, with over five thousand killed. The remnants of the Tanahashi Force, left without supplies, disintegrated. The 1/8th Gurkhas coming south with the 26th Division took part in sweeping the spine of the range clear of Japs, killing many and herding the rest down into the valley, where they were exterminated by the “Box” troops. During a week of this fighting the 1/8th lost in killed and wounded two British and one Gurkha officers, and twenty-three other ranks. Four decorations were won.

While the Admin Box was being besieged, the 4/1st Gurkhas on Abel made ready for an enemy attack. D Company was withdrawn from Cain on the other side of the road; but small parties were left to keep up an appearance of occupation by lighting scattered fires. These small groups, with patrols operating their side of the road scored several successes against the probing enemy.

Gradually the Japanese closed a ring round the battalion, so that its supply route to brigade H.Q. could only be operated by night. On one occasion a convoy attached itself unwittingly to an enemy one; but fortunately was turned back in time.

The first direct attack was made in the early hours one February morning by some forty Japanese who tried to rush the position held by B Company. They were thrown back with more than half their number killed. Two prisoners were taken and one had a diary which revealed orders to seize Abel at all costs so that the road could be opened for convoys.

During the following days the enemy established well dug positions close to the western perimeter. After several unsuccessful sallies against these Major Careless led two platoons against them. He fell, wounded by point-blank machine-gun fire. In spite of the bullets Major C. J. Nixon crawled forward and dragged him back, but he died later that day.

The Japanese switched their attention to Cain, and under relentless pressure the Gurkha sniper screen withdrew. Sixty Japs who chased them were drawn into a pre-arranged trap and eighteen were killed. As if in retaliation the enemy brought down a very severe artillery and mortar concentration, and only the deeply dug Gurkha positions saved heavy casualties.

As the tide of battle around the Admin Box turned Japanese pressure on Abel increased. The Gurkhas endured a five-day ordeal
of constant shell-fire from 150 mm. guns only three thousand yards away. This devastated the defences, which had to be re-dug again and again. The Japanese artillery was so well buried that counter shelling and even air bombardment had no result.

On February 22nd the Japanese launched a heavy attack and for two hours the battle raged simultaneously on five different platoon positions. Japanese bodies piled up along the front and, unable to remove many of their dead and wounded, they tried to cremate them by setting fire to the undergrowth.

During this battle the Japs managed to creep close to B Company and to shower grenades into the forward trenches. Leaping on to the parapet, ignoring the raking fire, Subedar Danbahadur Rana lobbed the last of his company’s grenades at the attackers, none of whom survived. During another attack C. D. Nixon, now a major, was wounded, but he refused to be evacuated until the fighting was over.

After the failure of direct assaults the enemy tightened the ring about the defenders, hoping to close the supply route. The night convoys, however, always managed to get through, entering Abel directly beneath Japanese positions. In spite of what was brought in, the garrison, which had been on half-rations since the siege began, had to cut down to a third. This meant half a mess tin of dhal-bhat (lentils and rice) and two chapattis a day per man. Water was strictly rationed. With food shortages and little sleep it is not surprising that by the time enemy pressure started to slacken the defenders were feeling the strain. To make things worse dysentery was on the increase.

From March 1st there was the encouragement of passing over to the offensive. The Japanese still held strong positions on the west and north-west. Thirty machine-gun nests were eventually located but could not be put out of action by the available artillery. The difficulty was to deploy more than a few men on the knife-edged ridges, which contrasted with the Gurkha’s blasted and burnt out positions by being covered with scrub and bamboo.

Gurkha patrols started to patrol south of the road. An enemy convoy was spotted entering a nullah and mortars were used against it without delay. Later, nineteen Jap bodies were found.

A particularly daring reconnaissance deep into the Japanese positions was carried out by Havildar Hushiarsing Karki, who was later awarded the I.D.S.M.

The struggle on Abel continued, with bitter fighting for two features called Kidney and Nose. The former was carried and held thanks to the daring of Havildar Gampha Gurung. In a dusk attack
he and three other Gurkhas outstripped the rest of their platoon and charged the crest while their own 25-pounders were still plastering the Jap trenches. Gampha emptied his tommy-gun and then used it like a flail, wreaking havoc amongst the enemy. He, too, was awarded the I.D.S.M.

The rest of Abel was cleared two days later, the battalion was relieved and moved across the Kalapanzin River to join 114 Brigade. Here it took part in hunting down Japanese fugitives.

During the fighting the 4/1st Gurkhas lost six British and two Gurkha officers and two hundred and twenty-five other ranks killed or wounded. Major C. D. Nixon and Subedar Lachhiman Thapa won the M.C., and five Gurkhas were awarded the M.M.

This fighting, in which Gurkha battalions played such an important part, resulted in the first major defeat inflicted on the Japanese. They had been thrown back in disorder, providing the first boost to morale to encourage the British Forces in the bitter fighting that lay ahead up in Assam, where the spine of the Japanese Army was broken on the bloody Imphal Plain.
AWARE of the Japanese intention to make a major attack in their drive on Delhi, General Slim planned to withdraw the forward troops of his 14th Army to the Imphal Plain, where he could make good use of his armour and receive supplies by air drop. But surprise was still with the enemy, who attacked quicker than expected, endangering Slim's plan.

The Indian divisions to the south of Imphal were immediately ordered to pull back. On March 14th 1944 the 17th Division began to retire along the Tiddim Road towards Imphal. The pursuing Japanese tried to sweep ahead and set road blocks in an attempt to crack the division from front and rear. They succeeded in cutting the road at Milestone 132 near Tuitim Ridge but after fierce fighting the Gurkhas of the 1/3rd, 1/4th and 1/10th Battalions scattered them, destroying half their number. After this the 1/10th held the Tuitim Saddle for a week against progressively stronger attacks as the Japanese rushed up reinforcements. A fighting patrol under Jemadar Lalbahadur Limbu surprised eighty of the enemy. Positioning a cut-off section behind the Japs the jemadar led the other two sections in a bayonet charge which left at least forty enemy dead. He was awarded the M.C. for this action.

On the seventh night the fighting reached its climax against C Company, commanded by Major Fairgrieve. By dawn there were fifty Jap bodies lying outside the position, and in addition four tanks had been caught in a minefield and the crews killed. To the major went a well-deserved D.S.O.

Still leap-frogging, the Japanese established two strong blocks near Milestone 100. The first of these was attacked by the 2/5th Gurkhas, and a blitz-charge by the two leading platoons of A Company seemed to make the enemy waver. Then resistance suddenly increased and
the next ten yards cost some twenty casualties. The Gurkhas were forced to ground only a rush away from their objective. Spirited grenade-throwing followed and during this a Jap officer jumped from his trench, charged forward and killed a Gurkha with his sword. Immediately Jemadar Kishanbahadur Gurung sprang at the Jap, wrenched the sword from his grasp and hacked him to death with it.

On the left the attack was also halted by heavy fire. With A Company held down, Lieutenant-Colonel Hedley ordered B Company, under Captain Tannock, to make an attempt. No artillery or mortar fire was possible because in places A Company men were only five or six yards from the enemy. The Japs held their own fire until the Gurkhas of B Company were within thirty yards, then they opened up with machine-guns and grenades. Captain Tannock, with Jemadar Jangbahadur Thapa, rallied the men for a charge up the hill. The Japs fled, leaving forty dead, including four officers. The captain was awarded the M.C. for his courageous leadership.

Beyond this point the narrow road ran in a series of bends climbing to a spur where the Japanese were in a commanding position. The 2/5th with A Company of the 1/7th in reserve crossed the "Valley of the Snakes" by night to attack the enemy from the rear.

There was no track, and the Gurkhas had to pull themselves up the steep slopes by hanging on to bushes and trees, a task made all the more difficult because of the need for silence. Naik Sunbahadur Gurung improvised a ladder, using the rifles of his section, in order to climb a twenty-foot cliff. By doing this he was able to lead his men to within ten yards of the enemy.

With morning the Gurkhas attacked. Although the Japanese were taken by surprise they were well-positioned and recovered quickly. A grim struggle went on all day and into the night. Naik Sunbahadur advanced through a hail of fire to silence a vital machine-gun. He killed the two gunners and then, taking a trench at the head of his section, he beat off a counter-attack before being killed. He was awarded a posthumous I.O.M. Machine-guns, mortars and grenades took a heavy toll of the attackers. The company commander, two Gurkha officers and nearly every havildar became casualties; but by morning the Japs were in flight.

The division's withdrawal continued. It was constantly harried, and once again the Japanese interposed another block, holding two positions which overlooked the road from the east. The 2/5th attacked the enemy right. Again this meant scaling a precipitous hillside, and, as before, the Japs held their fire until the Gurkhas were within
twenty yards. With men falling on all sides under grenade and automatic fire, the Gurkhas refused to give up. Singly and in small groups they crawled through the long grass. Once more Jemadar Kishanbahadur Gurung, who had slain the Japanese officer with his own sword, distinguished himself. Although wounded in three places he stayed on, inspiring his platoon. He was awarded the I.O.M.

After three hours of bitter fighting, darkness fell and the Gurkhas dug in; but during the night their probing patrols reported that the Japanese were slipping away. At dawn the crest was occupied and the road was open once more.

During the first week in April the division reached Imphal. Seven hundred Japs were known to have been killed trying to bar its way, and there must have been many more enemy casualties. But the division had suffered heavily in the dog-fights up the Tiddim Road. The 2/5th Gurkhas alone had nearly two hundred and fifty casualties.

In the course of the withdrawal a Gurkha commando platoon, on a special mission, was attacked by a far superior force of Japs. Rifleman Bhojraj Pun was wounded in the throat by a mortar bomb. His platoon, having no means of carrying casualties and thinking him near to death, was forced to abandon him. The following day he recovered consciousness. Weak from loss of blood and lack of food he made his way slowly and painfully to what had been the battalion area near Milestone 82, only to find the enemy there. Crossing the road by night, he went westwards until he came to a village, where he was sheltered and his wound roughly dressed. As part of his tongue had been shot away he could not eat properly but after resting for a few days he continued his journey. Uncertain of the situation at Imphal he made for Silchar, which he reached on April 22nd, eighteen days after being given up for dead. He was awarded the M.M. for his courage and endurance.

At the village of Bishenpur, some sixteen miles south-east of Imphal, the Silchar Track ran in from the west to join the Tiddim Road. The 32nd Indian Brigade was moved to the village to prevent the Japanese from cutting the track and breaking through into the Imphal Plain. Among its battalions were the 3/8th Gurkhas. An anticipated enemy attempt to get round behind the brigade was checked by the 1/4th Gurkhas sent from the 17th Division. In one of the many actions Lieutenant Evans, M.C., attacked the enemy with only one platoon. Driven back by grenades, he refused to give
up. Sending a section out to each flank he, his orderly and the remaining seven Gurkhas charged from the front. Awed by this determination the Japs lost their nerve and fled. Both the lieutenant and his orderly were wounded but Naik Pritam Sing, with a great shout, blitzed his way through the wavering enemy. He lobbed grenades into bunkers where some were still holding out and he spattered the heels of those in flight. Then, grinning happily, he sited the platoon in readiness for any counter-attack. He was deservedly given the I.D.S.M.

A few weeks later the battalion was involved in the episode of Scrub Ridge, described by the 4th Gurkha historian as "probably the most tragic in the whole history of the regiment".

The ridge had been taken by the enemy during the night. Major Hammond of A Company, ordered to retake it regardless of cost, put in a three-platoon attack at 4.30 the next morning. Very quickly he and three Gurkha officers were wounded and the platoons were stopped at the crest of a slope just below the enemy position. MacLeod, a young lieutenant who had joined the battalion only two days before, eagerly took over and rallied the men for another attempt but before this could be launched he was killed.

From a nearby picket Captain Frankenburg was watching the attack. On his own initiative he rushed across to take command but in leading the men against the heavy enemy fire he, too, was killed. It still appeared that a determined effort would succeed, and Major Broderick-Pittard was sent forward to take command. Under him the men reached the enemy's wire but could get no further, and the major, the third very brave officer to die, was killed actually on the wire. The momentum of the attack was again lost. But the Japanese, too, had almost reached the limit of endurance and their success on Scrub Ridge was stayed.

The battalion's commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Oldham, D.S.O., M.C., was killed towards the end of the operations which followed. The 1/4th Gurkhas casualty list over this period reveals all too clearly the easy targets British officers made in close range fighting. Ten were killed and eight wounded.

The 3/8th Gurkhas were fighting in the vicinity of Wireless Hill, which was finally taken by a company led by Major Clements, M.C. Throughout May and into June there were many bitter actions and patrols, such as one at the end of June.

Jemadar Shamsher Gurung led a platoon engaged in flushing out Japs. Suddenly a screaming mob of the enemy carrying grenades and
clubs charged down on the rear section. They were reinforced by more Japs with rifles and machine-guns and they were obviously out to take prisoners. A fierce hand-to-hand fight developed. One lance-naik was knocked down by a Jap who then seized his cross-braces. Thinking fast, the Gurkha unclipped his belt and with a heave broke free to strangle his enemy. One man of the rear section was hit over the head with a club and dragged away for interrogation; but when he regained consciousness he awaited his opportunity, knocked out his Jap guard and escaped. During the fight a third man was struck over the head, hips and knee. Resenting such treatment the little Gurkha jabbed his rifle into the stomach of the club-wielding Jap and pulled the trigger. He not only killed his assailant but also a second Jap standing behind.

The other Indian division to the south of Imphal when the withdrawal started was the 20th, and while the fighting was going on in the Bishenpur area it was preventing the Japanese from advancing up the Tamu-Palel-Imphal road. South-east of Palel the road was dominated by the Shenam Saddle, a ridge with steep jungle-covered slopes falling almost sheer in places to the valley a thousand feet below. Until the British could be dislodged from this the road was not open for the enemy to bring up their main artillery and armour for the storming of Imphal. This struggle lasted for sixteen weeks, including ten in the face of the monsoon.

There was a detached post known as Sita, which A Company of the 3/1st Gurkhas took over. There was an outer ring, some fifty yards in diameter, of weapon pits connected by shallow crawl trenches. Beyond defensive wire there was thick jungle sown with anti-personnel mines; but there was no minefield chart. On three sides the post was overlooked by heavily wooded hills.

At 3.30 a.m. on April 5th a shell suddenly burst among the tree-tops. It was the signal for an hour-and-a-half bombardment from Jap 75 mm. guns, the nearest of which was firing at point-blank range. Finally, mortar bombs dropped among the fox holes, and there was the staccato chatter from six medium machine-guns, whose bullets lashed at the defenders from three directions.

As the bombardment died away the mines in the surrounding jungle started to blow up, giving warning of an infantry attack. Jap suicide sections blasted a way through the minefield, and then the rest rushed out of the jungle hurling grenades. Led by officers with drawn swords, wave after wave of yelling Japs hurled themselves at
the wire. Steady fire from the Gurkhas drove them back with heavy casualties.

In the thin light of approaching dawn a Japanese engineer platoon some thirty strong crept forward to place Bangalore torpedoes under the wire on the most battered part of the perimeter. It was a critical moment but Havildar Minbahadur Rana, platoon commander of that sector, was a cool, resourceful soldier. With the help of Rifleman Narbahadur Thapa he carried two sandbags filled with grenades over the parapet and across to the threatened wire. Fully exposed to enemy fire, he flung grenade after grenade among the crouching Japs, who were trying to fix their explosive charges. The flashes of the bursting grenades enabled him to see the enemy massing in the jungle out of bombing range. He shouted orders and brought effective mortar and Bren fire to bear on them. With his last grenade thrown and the Jap engineers wiped out to a man, he was about to return when he fell to a sniper's bullet.

Narbahadur immediately avenged his havildar's death. Then he was ordered to return under cover; but he shouted back: "Minbahadur has won the Victoria Cross. I must bring in his body." And this he managed to do. All eye-witnesses agreed that the havildar had earned a V.C. Yet all he received was a posthumous Mention in Despatches. Narbahadur was given the I.D.S.M. but about a month later he died of wounds received in another action.

With full daylight the Japs launched a further attack. Captain Blascheck directed a fierce resistance, and once more the enemy was beaten back. Soon after 7 a.m. all the surviving Japs had withdrawn, leaving the Gurkhas exhausted but in full possession. The captain was awarded the M.C.

Ammunition was low, and a wireless appeal had been sent for help; but it was not until darkness covered the hilltop that the promised relief column arrived. Next morning the battle area was searched. Jap corpses lay everywhere, and the full count was a gruesome task. Over two hundred bodies lay on Havildar Minbahadur's sector alone and these included a major, three captains and nine junior officers. Some eighty bodies were in the mined jungle, where they had to be left to rot. A diary captured later revealed an enemy casualty list of over five hundred, evidence of the fanatical determination of the Japanese to seize the peaks overlooking the motor road. The Gurkhas lost only ten killed and seventeen wounded.

Throughout the month the 3/1st kept up this bitter fighting on various hills. In one action on Crete West, Jemadar Dharmsing
Thapa was leading his platoon in a charge when they were met by machine-gun fire from Crete East as well as from the objectives ahead. In spite of this the Gurkhas stormed two bunkers, killing their occupants. The enemy fought back fiercely from two remaining bunkers ahead and from the flanks. Dharmasing gave the order to draw kukris, and with blood-chilling yells his men rushed the bunkers, slaughtering every Jap. The sight of the Gurkhas charging with bloodstained kukris was too much for some twenty of the enemy out in the open and they fled. One fleet-footed Gurkha caught up with a Jap carrying a light automatic, cut him down on the run and seized the gun in triumph. For his splendid leadership the jemadar was awarded the M.C.

The Gurkhas were relieved by the Devons, but their rest in reserve positions was broken a week later when the Japs seized Lynch Pimple in an attempt to isolate Crete West. The 3/1st were sent in to retake this and extricate the Devon company on Crete West. By ill fortune the Japanese reinforced Lynch Pimple with a complete company only an hour before the Gurkhas attacked. The assault failed and the Devons were ordered to abandon Crete West before daylight.

The forefront of the battle now switched to a hill named Scraggy. The Gurkhas toiled through the 10th May improving the defences, a task made urgent because of reports of Japanese transport moving up. During the night the battalion was alerted by mounting machine-gun fire accompanied by grenades. At midnight artillery from Crete West opened up on B Company’s forward positions, augmented by fire from three medium tanks. Half an hour later the enemy infantry attacks were launched. Time and again the Japs charged, suffering appalling casualties. As the dead bodies draped the wire more Japs climbed over the corpses and overwhelmed the forward platoon of Gurkhas, which had run out of grenades and ammunition. The rest of B Company was forced back to a line only twenty yards in front of Lieutenant-Colonel Wingfield’s command post.

Major Goldney was sent to order Captain Blascheck to counter-attack with A Company. On the way he was mortally wounded by a sniper but he managed to crawl in and deliver his message before dying in the aid post.

The rear area was under heavy bombardment and this delayed A Company’s advance. Meanwhile, three enemy attacks were thrown back. Wingfield was everywhere, personally directing a mortar to knock out a Jap machine-gun and then going to a threatened forward post to hurl grenades and use a rifle. Eventually A Company arrived;
but under such pressure and with officers rushing forward to help the hard pressed platoon in front, it took some time to organise the counter-attack. When it was launched there were heavy casualties for little progress. The plight of the wounded was intensified as both dressings and morphia had run out.

Shortly after 4 a.m. Wingfield asked brigade headquarters for another company. He and all his officers then turned out to man advance posts to meet another Japanese attack. The situation looked desperate and Wingfield faced up to it courageously. He asked for the British 25-pounders to put down a concentration on his own position, ordering his men to take cover in the slit trenches. Within two minutes the shells began to fall. Miraculously, the Gurkhas suffered few casualties, though Wingfield, Blascheck, Major Grove and Lieutenant Twells were all hit. In spite of wounds they carried on. The Japanese attackers, unprepared, suffered heavily. Many were blown to smithereens, and the survivors fled.

Soon afterwards a company of the 2nd Border Regiment arrived, shouting greetings to "Johnny Gurkha". They took over the forward positions but soon had casualties. Later, the rest of the regiment was sent in and the 3/1st were relieved. They had suffered over a hundred casualties; but Scraggy was still in British hands, and a captured Jap diary later revealed that the enemy had lost one colonel, two majors and eight hundred men.

There were more decorations for the Gurkhas. These included the D.S.O. to Lieutenant-Colonel Wingfield and Major Grove, the I.O.M. to Subedar Ramsaran Pun and three I.D.S.M.s as well as four M.M.s.

On May 17th the 37th Brigade of the 25th Indian Division took over the sector. It included the 3/3rd, 3/5th and 3/10th Gurkhas, who carried on the fierce fight along the same battle-scarred hills until the Japanese were finally broken and driven off at the end of July.

According to Major Picard of the 3/3rd, when his battalion took over Scraggy the Japanese positions were only ten yards away. This made it impossible to dig in, and the foremost Gurkhas were only about two feet underground until mortar boxes filled with earth were pushed along to build a parapet. No wiring party could be sent out. Conditions were horrible. There was no sanitation, dead Japs lay around in varying stages of decomposition, and the men had to plug their nostrils with cloth and cotton wool.

The position was under heavy artillery fire from Nippon Ridge, in
addition to close-range grenade, rifle and mortar fire from Scraggy itself. Each side made night raids on the other’s trenches, with the Gurkhas at a disadvantage because they were short of grenades as the main supply line had been cut at Kohima. It was the type of fighting which demanded the highest courage. With the monsoon, conditions grew even worse, for the troops lived in a perpetual mist which saturated everything. Visibility was often less than fifty yards, making air support impossible. Help from artillery was severely limited because of a shortage of shells.

In the violent torrential storms trenches collapsed and dug-outs and shelters were ankle-deep in mud.

For the 3/5th, occupying the Malta position, the story was the same. They made numerous night raids, and one of these was led by Naik Narbahadur Gurung. He had with him Naik Manbir Pun, three riflemen and two men with a Bren gun. They set off shortly after midnight and after leaving the Bren team at a selected point they crawled into the enemy position. Narbahadur located two large bunkers with slit trenches and listening posts, and he decided to make these his target. He left the three riflemen about five paces from the first bunker with orders to destroy it the moment they heard his own attack on the second one. This meant a wait of half an hour and although there was a Jap listening post immediately beyond the bunker, with three men on duty, the presence of the Gurkhas was not discovered.

Narbahadur and Manbir crawled past another listening post to the second bunker. This was over fifteen paces long, and they could hear snoring and muttering inside. To obtain the maximum effect with their grenades they calmly proceeded to dig through the roof of the bunker immediately over the heads of those inside. There were enemy troops all round them, but they succeeded in removing six inches of packed earth and a layer of sandbags. Beneath these there were large logs but they found a gap between them and suddenly dropped two grenades through the hole. They followed with a couple more through the ends, and immediately lobbed another two into the listening post. The sudden blast of the exploding grenades brought Japs scrambling out of fox holes and slit trenches. The Gurkhas tossed grenades wherever they saw movement.

The three riflemen at the first bunker went into action immediately, attacking it and knocking out the listening post. The Bren opened up on the rear of the Japs, who were firing wildly in all directions. In the mad scramble and confusion Narbahadur quietly assembled
his little group and sneaked away, leaving pandemonium behind them. For audacity and courage Narbahadur won the I.D.S.M. and Manbir the M.M.

On the night that the 3/10th took over Scraggy there were repeated Japanese attacks. The last of these penetrated the wire so that some of the enemy were mown down at the very mouths of the Gurkha bunkers. The following night the battle flared up again and A Company, under Lieutenant Burns, repulsed attack after attack. In one of these Burns was mortally wounded. The climax came when three waves of Japs surged over the crest throwing grenades and gelignite bombs. The Gurkhas sprang from the forward trenches and met them in hand-to-hand fighting, driving them back. The Gurkhas lost twelve killed and had nearly fifty wounded, but daylight revealed over ninety Japanese corpses.

A few nights later the Japanese, two hundred strong, moved through the jungle and climbed a precipitous slope to capture Gibraltar, a hill some six hundred yards from Malta. They dislodged a platoon of the Rajputana Rifles, and at daybreak the Japanese flag was flying over the hill, while the remainder of the Rajputana battalion were clinging grimly to the lower slopes.

The 3/10th Gurkhas were ordered to send A Company to retake the hill. They had to climb, often on hands and knees, up the steep sides, and when the first platoon reached a sharp-edged ridge just below the summit it was checked by shelling and grenades, suffering many casualties. No. 3 Platoon, commanded by Jemadar Bakhatbahadur Rai was following up. With drawn kukris he and his men swarmed up a sheer slope to close with the Japs, who after a few minutes of fierce fighting broke and fled. The flag was hauled down to cheering from the watchers on Malta. The jemadar was given the M.C. for his outstanding leadership.

Bitter fighting was still going on at the Silchar Track and Tiddim Road sector. Early in May the 1/3rd and 1/10th Gurkhas took a village and inflicted over three hundred casualties on the enemy. At the same time 48th Brigade carried out a thirty-mile hook to put a block across the Tiddim Road behind the Japanese. This, known as Operation Ayo, was to be the anvil against which the enemy were to be hammered by 63rd Brigade. The block itself was held by the 1/7th Gurkhas, and high ground above it, known as Point 3404, was held by the 2/5th. For several days the Japanese made suicidal onslaughts. At the road block two Gurkhas were awarded the post-
humorous I.O.M. for their bravery in fighting off these attacks. One, Jemadar Parbashamshur Rai, was killed by a sniper, and the other, Havildar Garudhoje Rai died leading a bayonet charge.

The 2/5th on Point 3404 fought just as stubbornly. During one Jap attack, Lance-Naik Asare Thapa and Rifleman Dalbahadur Ghale held a small bunker on the flank. The remainder of their platoon was overrun, but the two Gurkhas, undismayed, fought off all attacks. Asare used up all the ammunition for his tommy-gun, and their grenades were running low. Under fire he somehow managed to go back for fresh supplies. While he was away Dalbahadur hurled the last of the grenades at the enemy and then, when they closed in for the kill, kept them at bay with rifle and bayonet. He killed five Japs in this way, and then Asare returned. Re-united they continued to hold the bunker until another Gurkha platoon put in a counter-attack and relieved them. Both these brave men received the M.M.

During this same engagement Havildar Jasbahadur Gurung, commanding the Pioneer Platoon, realised that the Japs had penetrated the perimeter. He seized a Bren gun and raced towards the sound of the firing. Two Japs were coming down a path. He shot them and continued to go forward. He was now under heavy fire but he reached a small knoll below which some Japs were forming for an attack on brigade H.Q. He opened up with his Bren and, single-handed, pinned the enemy to the ground for nearly twenty minutes until a counter-attack eliminated the threat. From the knoll he had bagged fifteen victims. He was awarded the I.D.S.M.

Towards the end of May Operation Ayo had to be abandoned. The Japanese, with a supreme effort, drove deep into 17th Division's positions and were threatening Imphal itself. Instead of standing fast at the road block, 48th Brigade was ordered to come to the assistance of 63rd Brigade, which could no longer act as the hammer driving the Japs south. On the way back the 1/7th Gurkhas formed the vanguard, and the 2/5th the rearguard. Each was involved in savage fights all the way along the road as the enemy attempted to encircle the column.

At one point Jemadar Debiraj Gurung led his platoon in an attempt to force a way through the opposing Japanese trying to halt the brigade. His first attempt was stopped by heavy fire and he lost a number of men. Sizing up the situation he switched his attack against two machine-guns which were an outstanding threat. He led so determined a charge, through a hail of bullets, that both guns were
taken and all the enemy in the vicinity killed or put to flight. This action, which opened the escape route again, won him the M.C.

The road to Imphal was dotted with villages. Most of these were occupied by the Japanese, whose main strength was in a hill range which overlooked the roadside paddy fields. For four days the Gurkhas fought from village to village. The increasing number of wounded presented a serious problem, for all these had to be carried, often into the next outburst of fighting.

At Ningthoukhong the 1st West Yorkshires with Lee tanks faced the Japs across a stream which divided the village in two. The bridge had been blown. The 1/7th Gurkhas, coming up, attacked the village but failed to take it and reach the stream. On the second day of fighting they managed to secure a footing. It was decided that they should hold the Japanese on this line while the rest of the brigade took to the swamps of Logtak Lake to the east, and by-passed the village. In addition to the screen of tall rushes there was the further help of air cover. Splashing through water three feet deep the brigade managed to reach the road at a safer point, though one which was still under shell-fire. Ambulances were waiting for the wounded; but as they moved off two of them were hit, killing all the occupants. As the Gurkha rearguard crossed the lake and came towards a village a heavy mortar shell fell among the headquarters staff, killing Lieutenant-Colonel Outram, the commanding officer.

While 48th Brigade was battling up the Tiddim Road the Japanese had secured Red Hill, threatening 17th Indian Division H.Q. General Cowan asked the 20th Division for help, and the 3/1st Gurkhas, who had fought so magnificently at Shenam, were despatched in response. They reached H.Q. Harbour, which was almost isolated in flooded paddy fields, late in the day. The next afternoon B Company started the attack, which began well but was checked by a commanding bunker. Company Havildar-Major (later Jemadar and I.D.S.M.) Chitrabahadur Thapa rushed it, killing the occupants single-handed. The attack was pressed on. Casualties continued to mount, and eventually the company commander, Major Darby, was killed.

Lieutenant-Colonel Wingfield immediately went forward to take over. Hurling grenades and leading the men in rush after rush he started the charge which was to take B Company's first objective; but he fell, shot in the head by a sniper. His loss was deeply felt because he had raised, trained and led the 3/1st Battalion.
The battle for Red Hill raged on. Lieutenant Plenderleith, leading his company up in support, was hit in the leg. He struggled on in spite of a painful wound only to be killed a few yards from the summit. Meanwhile, near the command post, another Jap sniper took toll. Captain Jacomb-Hood, who had now taken over, was hit in the stomach. He struggled back to report to the brigadier before fainting. Next day he died while being taken away.

Subedar Bhadrabir Rana, although wounded himself, took command of both forward companies. Ammunition was running short, as the carriers had bogged down in the flooded fields. Porters had been organised and these, with some reserves, arrived in time to stave off enemy counter-attacks; but it was impossible to consolidate before dark, and Lieutenant Murray was ordered to withdraw the battalion to H.Q. Harbour. He, with the help of the subedar, skilfully extricated the remnants of the two companies without further losses. Both officers won the M.C.

Next morning the 1/4th Gurkhas stormed the hill and met little opposition. It seemed the Japs had no heart for fighting more Gurkhas and had fled.

The heavy losses during these engagements had prevented Japanese reinforcements from coming up, and had blunted the offensive. Their divisions in the North had been beaten, and the British had started an advance from Kohima towards Imphal. The commander of the Japanese 15th Army threw everything into a final effort. His Special Order of the Day stated bluntly: "On this one battle rests the fate of the Empire."

Half the village of Ningthoukhong, which 48th brigade had bypassed the previous month, was still in Jap hands. The British half had been taken over by the 2/5th Gurkhas when the Japanese launched a fearsome attack. A heavy bombardment was reinforced by tanks firing from concealed positions, some as close as two hundred yards. The first Japanese onslaught, by two companies supported by five tanks which moved along the position firing at point blank range, forced the Gurkhas of A and D Companies back; but the line was reinforced by headquarters personnel and held.

One British anti-tank gun received a direct hit but the other, handled by R.A. gunners, shot off the barrel of the leading Jap tank's 47 mm. gun. The tank turned away, and the next two, taking avoiding action, became bogged down in the mud. Although im-
mobilised, they continued to fire. A fourth Jap tank, stuck in a narrow lane, was silenced.

In response to calls for help, R.A.F. Hurricanes made a welcome appearance. Sweeping across the village they smashed up a new Japanese attack as it was forming up. Some British tanks moved up but were forced to retire after the leading one was knocked out.

Communications, which had been disrupted at the beginning of the battle, were restored, and Colonel Eustace, the Gurkha commanding officer, asked for reinforcements so that he could counter-attack. Asked about the situation by the brigadier, he answered: “It could not possibly be worse; therefore, inevitably, it must get better.”

The arrival of two companies of the 1/7th Gurkhas was marred by casualties inflicted by their own supporting artillery. Then the leading platoons were pinned down by three Japanese tanks which poured in rapid fire. Rifleman Ganju Lama, who had already won the M.M. for destroying two enemy tanks during Operation Ayo, crawled forward on his own against these three. He was spotted and every Jap weapon in the area seemed to concentrate on him in a deadly cross-fire. He was hit in the arms and legs, and his left wrist was broken; but he still crawled on with his PIAT and his grenades. Struggling across slimy mud, bleeding profusely, he came to within thirty yards of the first tank. In spite of his broken wrist he brought the PIAT into action and destroyed one tank and then another. An anti-tank shell hit the third. Ganju moved nearer and flung his grenades at the escaping tank crew.

Only when his company had rushed forward and stormed the enemy positions was Ganju willing to be taken to the aid post and have his wounds dressed. For his single-handed battle against the tanks he was awarded the V.C.

That night the monsoon burst, and there were three days of torrential rain which filled every weapon pit and bunker with water. Yet the fight for the village went on. It was six weeks before the Japanese gave up their half of the shattered village. The victory cost the Gurkhas over two hundred casualties.

In the hills to the west the Japanese again cut the Silchar Track, and there was bitter fighting around the positions overlooking it. One of these, called Water Picket, was in enemy hands, and the 2/5th Gurkhas were detailed to clear it. A small garrison, about forty strong, was placed on Mortar Bluff under Subedar Netrabahadur
Thapa. That night there was heavy rain. The enemy opened artillery fire, and then a company of Japs advanced out of the darkness.

The subedar moved from post to post encouraging his men, most of whom were very young. They held their ground; but under cover of darkness and blinding rain a heavier attack came against them. Japs rushed from the jungle and across the short stretch of open ground. From the flank both small arms fire and that from 37 mm. guns swept the Gurkhas’ positions. One Bren was hit and another jammed. The two sections bearing the brunt of this had twelve casualties out of sixteen. There were no reserves, so the subedar went to their assistance, checking the enemy advance with grenades.

The situation was grim. With half his men casualties and ammunition low, Netrabahadur would have been justified in withdrawing. The Japs were practically on top of him, so he called over the field telephone for artillery fire on his own position. He also asked for a section to come up with grenades and ammunition.

As the light improved eight men could be seen, struggling up the slippery hillside with heavy loads. Unfortunately, the Japs spotted them and they fell, riddled with bullets. The subedar dashed to collect some of the ammunition and then led a counter-attack with grenades and kukri. A bullet smashed into his mouth, and then as he went down a Jap grenade killed him. His body was found the next day. His kukri was still in his hand, and at his side there was a dead Jap with a cleft skull. He was posthumously awarded the V.C.

By now only six men of the small garrison were still capable of action. The platoon havildar, Lachimbahadur Thapa realised that full daylight would reveal their weakness and that it was impossible to hold out. Taking as many of the wounded as he and his five men could carry he managed to steal away to B-P Picket. This was named after Major Brodrick-Pittard of the 1/4th who had been killed at Scrub Ridge. It had already been attacked but the enemy had been repulsed. When the survivors from Mortar Bluff arrived Captain Little, M.C., who was in command, sent them with some of his own men to form a sniper screen on Green Dome, a small knoll nearby.

Early in the morning A and C Companies arrived and the latter formed up behind Green Dome for an attack on Mortar Bluff, which was being bombarded. The attackers had to descend the slippery slope of Green Dome and then climb a steep slope devoid of cover to the Bluff. The forward platoons came under heavy fire. Subedar Kirpasor Gurung, in charge of the reserve platoon, ran to the top of Green Dome, blowing his whistle, shouting orders and
waving his arms in signals to imaginary troops. This diverted much of the enemy fire and gave the advancing platoons a chance to reform. Under Lieutenant Henderson they advanced rapidly until they reached a crest about eighty yards short of their objective. Here they were pinned down by fire from a machine-gun as well as from a 37 mm. in the jungle. Naik Agansing Rai led his section straight at the machine-gun and killed three of the crew of four. The remaining Gurkhas charged and the Bluff was retaken.

There was still the jungle gun, which was keeping up a heavy bombardment. Agansing and his men rushed towards the jungle. Before they had covered half the distance their number was reduced to three; but Agansing pressed on. He reached the gun and killed three of the crew. The other two were killed by the survivors of his section. With the gun silenced, Agansing and his companions returned to Mortar Bluff, where the rest of the platoon was forming up to attack Water Picket.

As this attack developed, deadly machine-gun fire and showers of grenades came from an isolated Jap bunker. As this took toll of his comrades Agansing, covered by a Bren gunner, advanced alone with a grenade in one hand and a tommy-gun in the other. Somehow he survived bullets and bombs and reached the bunker, killing the four Japs who were holding it. The rest of the enemy in the vicinity seemed to be unnerved by the Gurkha’s utter disregard of danger and they started to run, so that the first assault carried the position. Agansing was awarded the V.C. for a magnificent display of initiative, bravery and leadership.

Only one more enemy position remained to be taken, and A Company crossed sixty yards of open ground to reach the jungle-screened enemy positions. Subedar Dhirbahadur Gurung led his men in defeating the enemy and clearing up pockets of resistance. He already had the I.O.M. and was now awarded the M.C.

In these actions, which resulted in immense quantities of guns and equipment being captured, the Gurkhas suffered well over a hundred casualties. The lives of many of their wounded were saved by their Medical Officer, Captain Sanyal, I.A.M.C., who had brought blood plasma with him and was able to give many transfusions.

The northern prong of the Japanese attack across the Chindwin encircled Kohima. For sixteen days a small British garrison held off attacks. Among troops rushed to their aid was the 7th Indian Division, flown in from Arakan. The seige was raised, but the Japanese
still held every hump along Kohima Ridge, and it took six weeks of bloody fighting to drive them away.

The 4/1st Gurkhas, who had fought on Abel in the Arakan, were among the 7th Division battalions and were soon involved in attacks on Jail Hill, where they lost four British officers and ninety Gurkhas in six days. Among the dead was their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hedderwick, shot through the chest while standing up in a trench cheering on his men. His place was taken by Lieutenant-Colonel D. G. T. Horsford from the 8th Gurkhas, who was ordered to occupy Treasury Hill. This was done and the hill was held for thirteen days against shelling and Jap raids. During these Major May, awarded the M.C. for leadership on Jail Hill, was wounded.

There was Naga Village on the heights to the east overlooking Kohima, which direct attacks had failed to take. It was necessary to find a weak spot in the enemy defences and infiltrate by night. The task was given to the 4/1st and they were allowed three days and nights for probing the approaches. Patrols consisted of only two men, one N.C.O. and a picked rifleman. Each patrol went out from Treasury at night with orders to return one hour before first light in order to avoid rousing enemy suspicion. All did splendid work and brought back valuable information from which it was possible to pinpoint many of the Jap strong points.

On May 25th the infiltration took place. C Company, led by Major C. J. Nixon, moved quietly out of Treasury. They picked their way down a steep hillside and along a stony nullah at the bottom. They then edged up the other side of the ravine, a steep climb of five hundred feet. At last, from False Crest, Major Nixon reported by wireless whisper that his company was "in position and consolidating. No Japs around."

Captain Carr, leading A Company, was similarly able to report that a hill called Nose had been occupied.

The actual attack was against a hill called Basha, held by about forty Japs in bunkers. B Company under Major McCann moved to the start line, which was on Nose Hill.

The artillery barrage opened up. As B Company followed behind this, assisting tanks began to fire high explosive to clear the jungle. The leading Gurkhas wore white towels on their backs to indicate their positions; but there was a cloudburst just as the attacks started, and Horsford, unable to see the towels, thought the company was behind schedule. He ordered the tanks to keep up fire for another
five minutes. In actual fact the Gurkhas were on time and the shells dropped only ten yards in front of the leading men. As a result many of the Japs were still crouching in foxholes as the Gurkhas rushed them. Twenty were killed, most of them bayoneted or grenaded while still cowering in their holes.

Six inter-supporting bunkers on top of Basha forced B Company to dig in just below the crest. The remainder of the battalion moved up and all laboured on defences to resist counter-attacks. For two days and nights the Gurkhas were shelled and grenaded with such accuracy that little movement by day was possible. Very little sleep could be snatched at night. During the first, three fierce Jap attacks broke against the rock-like defences.

The Gurkhas resumed attacks and for three days raided and destroyed no fewer than sixteen bunkers. Two flame-throwers were brought up, but these proved a dangerous novelty. Captain Green was instructed how to use them; but this had to be done in pitch darkness and entirely by touch. He, in turn, gave instruction to four of his men. Then they sallied forth to attack bunkers, covered by fire from tanks. The first flame-thrower failed to work. Captain Green went forward with the second, but it would not ignite and only spat out liquid. Crouching low because of Jap bullets, he and his Gurkha companion tried to start the flame by using matches. At last there was a flame which they directed against a bunker slit only ten yards away. Japs on the left opened up with machine-guns, and the Gurkha fell with ten bullets in his chest. Green, hit three times in the leg, collapsed; but he managed to roll away from the flame-thrower, knowing that if hit it would explode. As he lay helpless out in the open he seemed to have no chance of survival; but Subedar Narjang Ghale dashed forward, tied up his wounds and carried him back for nearly a hundred yards under heavy fire. Bullets showered them with dirt and splinters from the trees but Narjang just managed to reach the lip of a bomb crater into which they both rolled. For this gallant act he was awarded the M.C. After this experience it is hardly surprising that the flame-throwers were never used again.

The general fighting raged for several more days. The efforts of the 4/1st were crowned by a splendid platoon raid led by Jemadar Patiram Gurung of C Company. Some thirty Japs were dug in on a small jungle-cloaked hill which was also believed to be the position of a very troublesome 75 mm gun. The jemadar was told the object of the raid was to kill the Japs and not to capture the hill.

Leading his platoon, Patiram mustered his men, avoiding an
obvious forming-up point in a nullah. His wisdom was confirmed when this was suddenly plastered with mortar fire. As the first section rushed up the slope they came under fire from a Jap machine-gun in a bunker on their flank. Patiram crept up on it and killed four Japs with two grenades, which also destroyed the gun. Rejoining his men, the jemadar rushed through the enemy positions, closely followed by his section. They came up on the 75 mm. gun, drew their kukris and killed the four-man crew. Patiram threw grenades down the gun barrel to put it out of action for good.

He and his men then withdrew. A counter-attack threatened to cut them off but it was beaten back by the headquarters platoon of signallers, stretcher-bearers and the jemadar’s own batman. Then they all rejoined the battalion, having suffered no casualties. Other platoons were eager to engage in similar actions, but the next day the 4/1st were relieved by the 4/5th.

By mid-July the Japanese Army started a reluctant withdrawal which was to end in Rangoon. The 17th Indian Division, after fighting non-stop for four months, was evacuated to India for a rest and retraining before returning as the armoured spearhead that was to strike the decisive blow of the war in Burma.

Lack of sleep, food shortages and the absence of shelter in appalling conditions of monsoon weather had brought officers and men to the limits of endurance. Casualties had been heavy. The 2/5th Gurkhas alone had suffered eight hundred.

But out of the hundred thousand Japanese who had started on the victory drive to Delhi seventy-five thousand had perished, either in battle or from disease and starvation. It was a failure written in blood.
In March 1944 Michael Calvert was a Brigadier. He had won the D.S.O. and he was now in command of the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade. This was in Wingate’s Special Force landed in gliders far behind the Japanese lines. One of the Gurkha battalions involved in this operation, the 3/6th, suffered four hundred and eighty-five casualties in three months. This was typical of the bitter fighting.

By June 1st Calvert’s brigade had marched and fought for a hundred and sixty miles, pushing towards Mogaung, which was on the railway line from Rangoon to Myitkyina. The Chinese Army in North Burma had failed to take this strongly held position, and Calvert was given the task. He chose to attack the town from the east and set up his base in Gurkha Village behind a ridge which ran north and south. This was two and a half miles from his objective, and it was first necessary to secure the passes over the ridge in order to deny its use to the Japanese for artillery observation posts.

The southern end of the ridge was cleared by the South Staffords but only after heavy losses. The next day the 3/6th Gurkhas, under Captain Fairful Smith, captured a pass at the northern end. During a daring reconnaissance a gap was discovered in the wire in front of a well-dug Jap post. Crawling silently through this, Smith’s company adopted the enemy tactic of flinging showers of grenades and then going in with the bayonet, shouting and roaring. The survivors of the thirty enemy fled. One Gurkha had carried a heavy PIAT around for three months with no opportunity of firing it. He seized this chance and aimed it at a Jap soldier. “The result was remarkable and exceeded his wildest dreams.”

There was a vital bridge in low-lying swamp ground, and the western approaches to this were strongly held by the enemy. A first
attack failed, so reducing the Lancashire Fusiliers that afterwards they could only muster one weak company.

Calvert changed his plan, attempting to attack the bridge from the rear. The 3/6th succeeded in gaining the road but Captain Smith, who had won the M.C. for the previous operation, was among the wounded. At first light the next day the Gurkhas attacked the bridge. Met by a grenade barrage, A Company lost thirty men and were pinned down. The leading platoon of B Company was stopped twenty yards short of the objective. From this place Captain Allmand rushed forward alone, flinging grenades and killing at least three Japs with his kukri. His men followed up and the bridge was taken.

The following day the battalion was sent to capture Natygon, a village surrounded by thick lantana scrub which concealed Jap snipers armed with light machine-guns. These took a heavy toll in two days of fighting before the Gurkhas entered the southern part of the village.

During this action Captain Allmand again distinguished himself. With his seniors casualties, he assumed command of B Company and led his men in a dash through the long grass which sprouted from the swampy ground. In spite of sweeping machine-gun fire he killed a number of enemy gunners and was able to take a ridge which was the immediate objective.

Then came the final assault on the main target, Mogaung. C Company seized the railway bridge on the right flank. B Company, in the centre, engaged in bitter fighting near a house, using flamethrowers, grenades and PIATS. Allmand, although suffering so badly from trench foot that he could barely walk, struggled alone through deep mud to attack a Jap machine-gun post. He was mortally wounded; but his three acts of outstanding bravery were acknowledged by the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Another hero of the attack on what was called Red House was a Gurkha rifleman named Tulbahadur Pun. He was in one of the leading platoons, and his own section was reduced to three men. With the two others he charged the house, going on alone when they fell badly wounded. Firing a Bren gun from the hip he had to cover thirty yards of open ground, the dawn light behind him making him a perfect target. Ankle-deep in mud, through shell holes and over fallen trees he somehow survived a shattering concentration of automatic fire and reached the building. Killing three Japs and putting five more to flight, he captured two machine-guns. He then gave

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covering fire to the remainder of the platoon. His matchless courage won him the Victoria Cross.

A third Victoria Cross was won at this time. Major Frank Blaker, already awarded the M.C. for bravery, was a company commander in the 3/9th Gurkhas. Together with the 3/4th this battalion was sent to take a hill to the south-east of Mogaung which overlooked the approaches to the railway line.

Major Blaker’s company carried out a wide encircling movement across unknown, precipitous, densely jungled country. It required considerable military skill to bring his men with utmost precision to a position on the right flank of the enemy. Another company, after taking the forward Jap positions, was denied the main crest by strong opposition. At this critical moment Blaker’s company came under a storm of close-range fire from machine-guns. Their advance was halted; but then Blaker advanced through the fire. A grenade wounded him severely in the arm but he located the enemy guns and charged them. Three rounds tore through his body and he fell, collapsing as his men caught up with him. Urging them on, he so inspired them that they stormed the crest and sent the Japs scampering in terror to the shelter of the jungle.

While being evacuated from the hill the major died of his wounds.
KIPLING made Mandalay a symbol of the romantic East to the British; but in 1945 the city of gilded pagodas also became one of bitter fighting.

The Japanese had withdrawn across the Irrawaddy during the night of January 14th, and General Slim sent the 19th Indian ‘Dagger’ Division after them. For twenty days and nights a bridgehead battle raged at Kyaukmyaung, forty-five miles north of Mandalay. India, Gurkha and British infantry faced non-stop violent counter-attacks and the heaviest bombardment yet experienced in the Burma War.

Early in February, the 20th Indian Division assaulted across the fast-flowing river below Mandalay. Again the Japanese launched furious counter-attacks. These lasted for fourteen days and nights.

While the enemy was convinced the main attack was being directed against the city the 7th Indian Division was moving, with all secrecy, from the Imphal Plain. Marching through the hills, supplied by air drop, they covered some three hundred and fifty miles before they reached the west bank of the Irrawaddy near Pakokku. Following them up, with the same wireless silence, the 5th and 17th Indian Divisions were to pass through the bridgehead secured by the 7th and drive across the central plain to strike a mortal blow at Meiktila, the nerve centre of road, rail and air communications behind the main Japanese Army holding Mandalay.

The 7th Division made a crossing of the two-mile wide river before dawn. There was at first no intensive Japanese reaction, because the enemy assumed this to be a diversion.

A few days later Slim unleashed the storm. The “Dagger” Division broke out through the Kyaukmyaung bridgehead where the Japs had already had at least two thousand men killed in counter-attacks.
During this break-out Subedar Dhanbahadur Gurung of the 1/6th Gurkhas was awarded the M.C. His platoon was held up in heavy jungle by close range fire and grenades. Peering ahead, keen-eyed, he spotted the barrel of one of the hidden enemy guns. Taking a Bren, he crawled forward and wiped out the Jap gun crew. He followed this up by leading two sections in a charge on the enemy position.

By March 7th the British were at the gates of Mandalay. The Japs had taken up strong-points among ruined buildings. At the north-east corner of the city Mandalay Hill, studded with monastery buildings and pagodas which glistened in the setting sun, jutted out like a high bastion, overlooking the city, fort and palace. The summit was approached by a porticoed stairway, reaching along the whole length. The slopes were bare and rocky. It was not unlike a lesser Cassino.

The 4/4th Gurkhas were given the task of capturing the holy hill. Under cover of darkness Subedar Aiman Gurung led the advance platoon. They passed through a deserted village at the foot of the hill and then they were hit by grenade and rifle fire. Two men fell at once, and the rest rushed to secure a footing on the hill as several machine-guns opened up. Subedar Damar Sing Pun, following up with his platoon, lost one man killed and three wounded before joining Aiman.

Six more men were lost in taking a small pagoda a little distance up the hill. Machine-guns and grenade dischargers came into action from a higher point; but Aiman had two Bren guns brought out on the flank and silenced the enemy.

They could hear Japs running up and down a staircase about a hundred yards to the right and above the Gurkha position. Aiman was sure these noises indicated preparation for a counter-attack. He did not wait for it, and with cries of "Ayo Gurkhali!" the stairway was rushed. Two Gurkhas were killed but the rest pressed upwards, shooting from the hip. There were Jap bunkers flanking the stairway and grenades flung into these by the Gurkhas were hurled back. There was soon a fierce struggle, with the enemy attacking from all directions; but with the first tinge of dawn silhouetting the crest the Gurkhas closed in upon the Japs holding the temple at the top. With drawn kukris they chased the enemy around the pillars of the central hall. The gruesome killing at close quarters was too much for the surviving Japs, who fled.
As this final attack went in, Damar Sing called for an artillery salvo on the crest. The Artillery Officer, Captain David Hynes, was not sure of the situation up on the hill, but he and the subedar were old comrades with a mutual respect for each other. He did as asked, and the shells and the leading Gurkhas struck the enemy at the same time.

The Jap survivors soon fled but there was hardly a pause before a counter-attack, with supporting bombardment, was launched. Enemy infantry swarmed up the long southern slope of the hill. With the temple masonry crashing about their ears the Gurkhas brought every weapon to bear. They were assisted by the artillery, which caused havoc among the Japs as they were forced, by the configuration of the ground, to crowd together.

The battalion’s commanding officer, listening to the fearful sounds of conflict, grew anxious and called over the wireless to ask Damar Sing if there was anything he wanted. The cheerful answer was: “No—only breakfast.”

Another Gurkha company fought its way up the hill to reinforce those holding the crest. They lost seven killed and fourteen wounded on the way but the rest reached the summit, where the two companies were able to consolidate the position so that Mandalay Hill was taken.

Both Damar Sing Pun and Aiman Gurung were awarded the M.C. for their splendid achievement, while to the battalion went the battle honour of “Mandalay”. By a strange coincidence all four battalions of the 4th Gurkhas celebrate their Regimental Day on the same date for separate Battle Honours. This is March 11th. The Honours are: the 1/4th, Neuve Chapelle 1915; the 2/4th, Baghdad 1917; the 3/4th, Irrawaddy 1944; the 4/4th, Mandalay 1945.

The next task was to clear the east flank of Fort Dufferin and in doing this the Gurkhas lost an officer and forty-five men. Medium guns bombarded the fort at point-blank range, while bombers of the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. assisted with precision bombing and rockets. No fewer than twenty-five breaches were made in twelve days.

Rafts and scaling ladders were prepared for the final assault across the Moat; but, realising it was imminent, the Japs abandoned their positions at night. Among the mango and banana groves of the villages between Mandalay and the Myitnge River their retreating troops suffered heavy losses during the next few days.

On the morning of March 20th Anglo-Burmese prisoners freed by
the enemy evacuation ran up a white flag and a Union Jack over the walls of the fort.

Meanwhile the motorised and armoured troops of the 17th Indian Division had crossed the Irrawaddy. Two days before the fall of Mandalay they passed through the bridgehead held by the 7th Division.

With tanks of the 255th Tank Brigade they struck for Meiktila. Armoured cars were followed by tanks and infantry, after these came the three thousand vehicles of the column, and there was a rearguard of infantry and tanks. It was a fearsome sight as they crossed the flat, open plain. They were supplied by air, and each night the division camped behind a perimeter which bristled with weapons and broke all enemy attacks.

After slaughtering a Japanese garrison at Taungtha one company of the 1/10th Gurkhas tragically turned north instead of south and drove straight into an enemy road block. Major Russell, the commander, was killed by a burst of machine-gun fire full in the chest as he moved between the platoons. Captain Willcock took over and, assisted by Subedar Manbahadur Rai, reorganised his men and held out all night. Tank support came up at dawn, and so he put in a counter-attack which inflicted very heavy losses on the Japs. He was awarded the M.C., and two weeks later there was the announcement of a similar award to Major Russell for gallantry in action at Imphal the previous year.

The division moved on, and the road was strewn with Jap bodies, mute witness to the effect and surprise of the armoured thrust. With the capture of Thabutkon airstrip 99 Brigade, which included the 1/3rd Gurkhas, was flown in from Imphal.

At last Meiktila, which had a garrison of over three thousand Japs, was reached. The town was divided into two by a lake which was shaped like an hour-glass. The waist was a channel three hundred yards wide, bridged by a causeway and a railway bridge.

On the north side of the lake the Japs had blown a sluice gate and had mined the area. The 1/7th Gurkhas drove back initial opposition and pushed two of their companies to the causeway where they were held down by an Oerlikon gun backed by machine-guns in the precincts of a white pagoda. They withdrew under cover of darkness but during the night B Company again advanced, holding a position until dawn, during which time they killed some twenty Japs. Major Cotter, who had a narrow escape when a bullet passed through his
32. The Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officers.

33. Gurkha Pipers at Hong Kong. They have also delighted thousands at the Royal Tournament and the Edinburgh Tattoo.
34. Recruits swearing allegiance.

35. Gurkha Major Prembahadur Ghale, M.B.E.
tin hat, was later awarded the M.C. and Naik Matpersing Chettri was cited for extreme gallantry. In a later attack the pagoda was rushed. Inside, the Gurkhas found the bodies of Japs who had committed hari-kari with grenades.

The next objective was the railway station. Jap suicide parties were hidden in the broken country. One British tank became isolated with only three Gurkhas near. The same number of Jap officers rushed forward to deposit a sticky bomb on the tank. Rifleman Manbir Thapa shot the first of these. The second Jap hurled a grenade at him, but the Gurkha swiftly reversed his rifle and played a cover drive which sent the grenade spinning back to explode and kill the two Japs. The tank crew witnessed this and put forward Manbir’s name for a decoration. He received the M.M.

The attacking companies were at last held up by mines which were covered by fire from near-by buildings. Towards afternoon they pulled back, but by this time they had killed over a hundred Japs for the loss of one killed and ten wounded. It was during this assault that “Toad-in-the-hole” Japs were first encountered. These were single suicide Japs sitting in small trenches with an aerial bomb. The intention was to wait for a tank to pass over and then strike the bomb nosecap with a piece of rock. The literal-minded stupidity of many fanatical Japs was illustrated when a British officer came up behind one of these human traps. The “Toad” looked round but, seeing only an officer, looked ahead again, watching for a tank. The officer promptly ended his vigil.

The death rate among the Japanese mounted steadily as the battle raged around Meiktila until the average rose to about a hundred a day. The area was riddled with bunkers and trenches, and they fought with great courage and had to be killed one by one. Many times they were shot off the tops of tanks as they tried to push grenades through the firing apertures.

Gurkha acts of bravery were numerous, both in the attack and in resisting subsequent attempts by the enemy to retake Meiktila. Subedar Rakamsing Rai of the 1/10th was awarded the M.C. for outstanding leadership and devotion to duty. Jemadar Jhapiram Thapa of the 1/3rd received a bar to his M.C. for inspiring leadership when operating with tanks. Lance-Naik Bandaram Ghale, one of the smallest men in the 1/3rd, was severely wounded while firing his mortar from point blank range at a Jap anti-tank gun. He was awarded the I.D.S.M., as was Naik Girbahadur Gurung, who
silenced two anti-tank guns which had damaged eight tanks. He, also, was severely wounded.

In an action during which the 1/3rd killed over a hundred and sixty of the enemy, Major Kind and Major Read both won the M.C. Subedar Sulbahadur Rana won the M.C. for leadership in this attack and on a fighting patrol the next night. Naik Padamsing Rana silenced a number of bunkers, throwing grenades at a range of never more than thirty yards.

When A Company attacked a strong enemy position in the butts of the Meiktila Rifle Range, Naik Dalbir Rana charged across the open ground firing his Bren from the hip. He was closely followed by Rifleman Narbir Pun, who saw two Japs run into the target shed and followed them. Among the targets, stores and equipment he hunted them down and killed them with his kukri before sauntering out to rejoin his section. Both Dalbir and Narbir won the M.M.

Captain Gangaprasad, the battalion's M.O., who was later awarded the M.C., particularly distinguished himself by his extreme coolness and efficiency while treating the wounded under constant shell-fire.

In all this fighting three Japanese divisions were practically destroyed, and this resulted in the collapse of the enemy front in Burma. A general withdrawal developed into a rout.

The race for Rangoon was on, and time was a vital factor because it was essential to capture this large supply port before the monsoon, which was due to break. Failure would leave the 14th Army floundering in the water-logged plains with its armour bogged down.

The 5th and 17th Divisions leap-frogged each other down the Mandalay–Rangoon railway, while the 19th Division followed up and also drove the Japs back into the hills to the east. The 20th Division moved down the Irrawaddy valley.

In all these divisions the respective Gurkha battalions played an outstanding part in exterminating the enemy. Right to the end, when victory was finally gained, they were called upon to exhibit the gallantry that is the hallmark of their race.

At Milaungbya the 4/8th killed two hundred and fifty Japs. B Company, attacked one morning while taking up fresh positions, threw back the enemy after a three-hour battle. Picks and shovels were still on the mules, and the Gurkhas were forced to lie in the open under heavy artillery fire in the blazing sun. Jemadar Jitbahadur Ale won the M.C. during this engagement, while Naik Jit-
bahadur Gurung, who led a bayonet charge to rout an enemy infiltration, was given the I.D.S.M.

Not all who deserved it were decorated. Havildar Bhombahadur Gurung inspired the men, seeming to be everywhere, hauling up extra boxes of grenades and ammunition and filling machine- and tommy-gun magazines. His name was put forward for a decoration, without success, and later he gave his life under similar circumstances. Another recommended in vain was Rifleman Krishnabahadur Ale. In the first shock of the unexpected Jap onslaught he stood in full view of the enemy on a barren ridge, firing his Bren from the hip until a burst from a machine-gun virtually scalped him and left him lying, unrecognisable in a pool of blood. Miraculously, he survived.

Naik Tejbahadur Thapa of the 1st Gurkhas was recommended for the V.C. but was awarded a posthumous I.O.M. When Japs overran his platoon, he drew his kukri and slashed his way through the enemy to get more grenades for the survivors of his section. He returned and issued these, but found that the Bren gun team had been knocked out. Still using his kukri he carved his way through to it, bringing it into action. He had only fired one or two bursts when a grenade riddled his chest and abdomen with fragments. Lying mortally wounded, he continued to shout orders and to encourage his men until the Japs were beaten off. He was carried to platoon headquarters, where he died within ten minutes.

Another posthumous I.O.M. award was to Naik Lachhiman Pun of the 3rd Gurkhas. They were ordered to clear a village where a Rajput battalion had already suffered severe casualties. Single-handed, Naik Lachhiman charged a machine-gun post in a bunker sited beneath a house. Although mortally wounded in chest and stomach and in great pain, he crawled through the heavy fire right up to the bunker and destroyed it with grenades.

Three days later another posthumous I.O.M. was earned by Company Havildar-Major Harkabir Gurung of the same battalion. On three occasions he led assaults against an enemy position on top of a cliff, hurling grenades which his men passed up to him. In the last attack he was mortally wounded, but continued to cheer his men until the position was taken. In this same action Rifleman Bhagtabahadur Newar received the M.M. for climbing the steep walls of a pagoda, taking his Bren gun and driving out a Japanese platoon.

During an attack on a village in the flooded Sittang River area, Rifleman Manbir Ale of the 4/8th was unable to use his Bren gun
from a lying position owing to the state of the ground. So he stood up and fired it from the hip as cover for his section, which was attacking a machine-gun bunker. Return fire smashed his right hand and lower arm, but he still managed to support his gun with the shattered limb and carried on until mortally wounded. Posthumously, he was Mentioned in Despatches.

In the same flooded area the 4/8th Gurkhas were engaged in their last fight of the Burma Campaign. The railway line to the Sittang River ran across flooded paddy fields. Jemadar Manbahadur Gurung and his men of No. 4 Platoon, B Company, were isolated from the rest and had dug in either side of the track on top of an embankment. This was at a bridge some distance back from the river, on the other side of which the Japanese were in commanding positions on high ground.

During the night, after a heavy bombardment, the Japanese attacked first from the north and then from the south. The first three assaults were direct charges, the enemy coming on in lines shoulder to shoulder; these were repulsed by the platoon, which inflicted heavy losses. Then the Japs changed their tactics and crept forward in twos and threes, armed with grenades and swords. There was heavy rain and this, with the darkness, helped them to reach the Gurkha trenches undetected. In one of these attacks Naik Rankit Thapa hurled back three grenades which had dropped into his trench. He received a Mention in Despatches.

The defenders were under great strain, for heavy shelling continued, and by morning casualties had reduced their strength to a half. When daylight came they were pinned down, for the smallest movement attracted the attention of enemy snipers hidden in the nearby villages. Ammunition was running low. The jemadar ordered that future attacks were to be beaten off with bayonet and kukri. When night came he managed to evacuate the more seriously wounded, but this work was hindered by more infiltration attacks. During one of these Lance-Naik Sarsaram Thapa successfully defended the wounded in his trench, meeting Jap after Jap in hand-to-hand struggle and receiving a sword cut across the forehead. He was awarded the I.D.S.M.

Later in the night, after an intense bombardment, the Japs launched an attack with about fifty men. The Gurkhas were forced to use their scant supply of ammunition. The enemy fell back, leaving half their number dead. After that, for the rest of the night, shell-
ing was alternated with infiltration attacks, all of which were repulsed with cold steel. This ordeal was shared by a machine-gun section of the 13th Frontier Force Rifles, who kept firing until both their guns were knocked out by shells.

Both by night and day the rest of B Company tried to get through to the isolated platoon, but each attempt was broken up by heavy shelling. On the third night Manbahadur and his men were literally blasted out by the heaviest bombardment yet experienced. Every trench was blown in, and the survivors were forced out on to the railway line, after three days and nights of fighting, without even a brew of tea to sustain them. According to the jemadar they were in a condition akin to drunkenness. As they staggered along the track, the Japs followed up the shelling with a charge. The Gurkhas turned on them and bayoneted five. The rest of the enemy wavered and then retreated. But the respite was brief. The Japs started to assemble for a final assault which was to destroy the Gurkhas. Manbahadur realised this and knew that it was impossible to hold out any longer. He ordered the seven survivors, only two of whom were unwounded, to withdraw. For his outstanding leadership he was awarded the M.C.

The highest decoration of all, the Victoria Cross, had come to the 4/8th at Taungdaw two months before this when they were blocking the Japanese escape route from the Arakan. At that time the battalion was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Walker, D.S.O., and in the course of a fierce battle which raged for three days and two nights both B and C Companies were cut off and surrounded. The latter, under Major Myers, M.C., held a hilltop position, and a little over an hour after midnight it was attacked by at least two hundred of the enemy. The brunt of this was taken by the most forward section, which was guarding a jungle path. One of the many grenades landed on the lip of Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung’s trench. He bobbed up to hurl it back. Another fell into the trench and this he returned in the same manner. A third then fell just in front of the trench and exploded as he was throwing it back. It blew off his fingers, shattered his right arm and severely wounded him in the face, body and right leg. His two comrades were also wounded, falling helpless in the bottom of the trench.

Screaming and shouting, the Japs rushed the position, threatening to overwhelm it by sheer weight of numbers. In spite of his terrible wounds Lachhiman somehow managed to load and fire his rifle with his left hand, keeping up a steady fire. For four hours the gallant
Gurkha remained alone, calmly awaiting each attack and meeting it with steady fire.

When dawn came the Japs slunk back into the cover of the jungle, leaving eighty-seven corpses, thirty-one of which were in front of Lachhiman's trench. Had this sector fallen the entire position would have been dominated and turned. There was no doubt that the Gurkha's extreme devotion to duty against almost overwhelming odds had saved his company. He richly merited the supreme award.

The advance to victory in the Arakan was along a seaboard broken by innumerable creeks, through mangrove swamps and across jungle-covered knife-edged ridges which rose sheer from the coastline. The Japanese had turned the village of Kyweguseik into a formidable fortress guarding the land route to Tamandu and the An Pass, which was their main escape route over the Arakan Yomas into Central Burma.

It was decided to outflank the enemy by a landing at Ru-ywa. On either side of this village 53rd Brigade secured a beachhead; but the Japanese counter-attacked strongly, and 74th Brigade was sent to strengthen the position. The 3/2nd Gurkhas were among these troops.

North of the village a road ran along the narrow coastal strip. Inland there were dense, jungle-covered, formidable ridges. Few accurate maps were available, and as a result the enemy were left in occupation of a knoll known as Gurung which dominated the road.

Lieutenant-Colonel Panton, who had taken over command of the 3/2nd ordered B Company to send a patrol against Gurung. Climbing the bamboo-covered slopes, the Gurkhas drove the enemy away in spite of machine-gun cross-fire. To the north-east there was another feature called Pun, and here the Japs had a formidable bunker position. C Company, under Major Clarke, M.C., was sent to capture it.

The climb was sheer, and the Japs rolled down anti-tank mines with grenades attached; but, like Gurung, Pun fell to the attackers.

For the next few days the Gurkhas, supported by the 14/10th Baluchis, systematically cleared the heights overlooking the coast road. They were puzzled to find so few of the enemy dead, knowing well that their losses had been heavy. At last they found the gruesome answer, a pile of corpses at the foot of a cliff over which they had been thrown in order to avoid identification.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Gold Coast Brigade, pressing on to the An Pass by jungle tracks to the east, had suffered heavy casualties. So
that some two hundred Africans could withdraw safely, 74th Brigade was given three days to seize Tamandu and destroy all enemy positions in the vicinity. In the course of this operation there were again difficulties because of the lack of accurate maps, and an initial drive failed to gain the objective of Snowdon, a horseshoe-shaped ridge about a mile east of Tamandu. The 3/2nd were then brought up and ordered to wrest this from the enemy.

The advance platoons of D Company moved through thick jungle and secured the southern tip. Passing through their positions A Company found Snowdon West, the left side of the horseshoe, unoccupied. Then Jemadar Gangabahadur Lama’s platoon was despatched along the narrow crest to seize Snowdon East. This meant the entire ridge was in Gurkha hands.

B Company settled into a jungle harbour halfway between Snowdon and the T-junction just short of Tamandu, where the An road linked with that from the coast. C Company and battalion H.Q. took up positions in the jungle undergrowth along the road. On Snowdon itself D and A Companies began to dig in.

An enemy patrol probing at Snowdon was driven off with grenades but it must have discovered that Jemadar Gangabahadur’s platoon was isolated on the narrow east of the ridge. Two hours after midnight enemy transport could be heard. It was the preliminary to an attack by a formidable force. A desperate fight started in the dark tangle of jungle covering the razor-edged ridge. Naik Bombahadur killed five Japs with his tommy-gun before a grenade smashed the weapon, severely wounding him. In spite of this he drew his kukri, rushed at the enemy and killed two more.

With the situation becoming more dangerous the jemadar skilfully withdrew his men along the crest and joined Major Birtwhistle and the rest of the company. Starting with thirty-four men he had lost eight dead and eleven wounded.

During the remaining hours of darkness the Japs kept moving around but no attack was made. At dawn, Lieutenant-Colonel Panton reached Snowdon West to examine the position and decided that Major Neill’s B Company could regain Snowdon East.

Heavy ground mist delayed Neill’s attack until early afternoon, when, after a short artillery bombardment, he led his company out across the ridge. They were quickly under fire. Machine-guns hammered streams of lead along the connecting ridge and into the bamboos. Grenades exploded. The platoon commander of the left flank
fell, and Havildar Amarbahadur Pun, M.M., immediately took over. He won through to his objective with only ten men still standing.

The right flank was protected to some degree by smoke and covering fire from Snowdon West. The men inched forward, but twenty yards from the enemy position they were stopped by snipers and showers of grenades. The situation seemed hopeless until one man changed the whole pattern of the battle. Rifleman Bhangbaghta Gurung was in one of the leading sections. It was held up in an exposed position by a Jap sniper who picked off man after man. The sharp-eyed Bhangbaghta spotted him skilfully hidden in a tree, sprang to his feet and rushed across open ground to shoot him down at short range.

The section, followed by the rest of the platoon, advanced again only to be pinned down once more. Again the rifleman went on alone, hurling a grenade into the nearest Jap post and killing two of the enemy. One left unharmed he finished off with the bayonet. Then, amidst exploding grenades and with bullets ripping past him, he hunted out two more Japs from their foxhole.

The platoon resumed its advance; but there was still a steady stream of machine-gun fire from a solitary bunker on the eastern tip. Once more Bhangbaghta went on alone. Reaching the bunker he climbed to the roof and dropped smoke grenades through the air slits. A group of blinded and spluttering Jap gunners staggered out. He killed them off with his kukri.

But the machine-gun was still firing, so the rifleman crawled into the dark, unknown interior. His companions waited anxiously. The gun ceased firing abruptly, and a few seconds later the grinning Gurkha emerged and triumphantly shook the dust off his uniform.

The battle was not over yet, however. The Japs rallied and attacked in an attempt to retake the bunker. Bhangbaghta, now joined by two other riflemen and a Bren gunner, led a charge against the enemy, meeting them head on. Several were killed at close range and the rest fled down the jungle slope. For his consistent bravery Bhangbaghta was awarded the Victoria Cross.

During this battle at least sixty-six Japs were killed, while B Company suffered eleven killed and over thirty wounded. It was typical of the fierce actions fought in the jungles of the Arakan.
On the bitter day in February 1942 when the British surrendered Singapore to the Japanese, a tough subedar-major of the Gurkhas turned quickly away from his colonel to hide the tears of shame which sprang to his eyes. But for him, as for the rest of the Gurkhas, the fighting was not over; it was only to change in character. It was to be a grim, long drawn out battle; a supreme test of loyalty to the Regiment and allegiance to the British.

The Japanese quickly separated the Gurkhas from their British officers and confined them in River Valley Camp. Initial treatment was good, as attempts were made to woo them into joining the Indian National Army. This force was made up of Indian prisoners who had agreed to change sides and fight the British in India. But the Gurkhas were unmoved by Japanese promises.

The men naturally looked to their Gurkha officers for guidance, and the Japanese realised it was necessary to break the resistance of these leaders. They were rounded up and taken to a concentration camp where they suffered every indignity, were forced to labour on heavy tasks and were beaten with bamboos or clubbed with rifle butts. No shelter was allowed at nights. They were deprived of blankets. Sand was mixed with their food.

When they still refused to join the I.N.A. they were taken to another camp where they suffered even more brutal treatment. Subedars Dilbahadur Gurung and Jitbahadur Gurung of the 1st Gurkha Rifles were repeatedly knocked senseless, brought round and knocked out again. Dilbahadur's left wrist was broken while shielding his companion from what was likely to have been a final and fatal assault. At last the Japanese desisted and permitted medical treatment.

Dilbahadur put in strong requests to see Mohan Sing, who com-
manded the I.N.A., but permission was refused. However, the Gurkha officers had won. Holding their heads high they rejoined their men in camp at Seletar.

Subedar-Major Hari Sing Bohra of the 2nd Gurkhas set a similar example of heroism. On one occasion he addressed a dignified letter of protest to the Japanese commander, pointing out that the Gurkhas were not citizens of India and therefore were not interested in serving in the Indian National Army. Their services had been contracted to the British Raj, and as prisoners of war they were entitled to honourable treatment under the laws of war. The letter aroused the utmost malice in the Japanese. In May 1944, blind from ill-treatment, he died of an internal haemorrhage caused by many beatings. But inspired by his example his men never flinched, enduring everything stoically. As some acknowledgment of the debt owed to this great-hearted Gurkha he was posthumously awarded the I.O.M.

Subedar-Major Chethabahadur (later Honorary Lieutenant, M.B.E., M.C., O.B.I.) of the 9th Gurkhas was put in a cage, starved and left for long periods in solitary confinement. When removed to Penang for special indoctrination he informed his gaolers that they might as well kill him because he would never submit.

Even in outlying prison camps Gurkhas who could well have considered themselves forgotten men stood proudly by their allegiance and defied their captors to the end. When the Japanese finally gave up their attempts to persuade or coerce the Gurkhas, they dispersed them all over South-East Asia. Australians in New Guinea came upon Subedar Chumbahadur Mall of the 9th Gurkhas. He was the sole survivor of a group which had been shot down in cold blood. His face had been smashed with a rifle butt, and he was seriously ill with tuberculosis.

A small number of the younger Gurkhas threw in their lot with the enemy; but some did this with the idea of escaping, a feat which they accomplished when moved to Burma.

After the failure with the Gurkha officers, the Japanese attempted to break the N.C.O.s. They were removed to Skeleton Camp for an intense coercion campaign. Propaganda talks and lectures often lasted until one or two in the morning. Pressure and threats built up; but the Gurkha N.C.O.s held out, even refusing to write cards home or sign for Jap working pay in case they should unwittingly enrol in the I.N.A.

Twenty-six of them were selected for systematic third degree treatment. After a grim period they were returned to camp "to think
again” for three days. At the end of the time there was still no volunteer. So five of them were put into solitary cells for forty-eight hours and soundly beaten up. Each man still refused to join the I.N.A.

This lack of success, following the failure to break the Gurkha officers, virtually brought to an end Japanese efforts to recruit those Gurkhas who were in Singapore.

In general, there was a slight change for the better in the camps by the autumn of 1942. Suddenly the Japs tried a new angle. Subedars Dilbahadur Gurung and Jitbahadur Gurung, who had previously been so badly beaten up, together with two Gurkha officers from the 2nd and two from the 9th, were taken to Penang. For two and a half months they were lodged in a very pleasant bungalow with Indian servants to look after them. The new offer, in itself a token of the respect the Gurkhas were earning, was that they should join the Japanese Army itself. Great stress was laid on the claim that the two races were kindred and that there were similarities of appearance. But none of the Gurkha officers was converted, and the “holiday” came to an abrupt end. They were returned to normal captivity.

Brutal as the Japs were in their treatment they seemed to be afraid of their Gurkha prisoners. There is no doubt that the bearing of the Gurkha officers and N.C.O.s in adversity had a profound effect. When he returned to his men, Subedar Dilbahadur took advantage of all this and refused to have them hustled or pushed about. As well as doing all they could to protect their men the Gurkha officers gave up a third of their meagre pay of thirty Straits dollars a month to help those under them who were only paid when actually working and even then seldom received as much as half a dollar a day.

Many of the Gurkhas were in a prison camp where Captain Hari Chand Budhwar, an Indian officer of the 3rd Cavalry, was the senior officer. They were greatly helped by this gallant Indian, who constantly defied the Jap bullies in his devotion to the welfare of the prisoners. He was subsequently decorated for his outstanding behaviour, the citation stating: “... the enemy regarded him as an arch-ringleader in resisting attempts to undermine the loyalty of Indian soldiers.”

He was frequently punished. In the Bangkok market-place he underwent the ordeal of being suspended in a cage for eighty-eight days. He was unable to sit or to lie down. He was not only fully exposed to the sun by day, but a spotlight shone on him at night.
His only comfort was the food provided by friendly Thais when the guards were not looking.

The Gurkhas not only regarded him with admiration and affection but also felt that he represented the British officers who had been taken away from them.

When the Japanese capitulated, these British officers, freed at last, flocked down to the Indian Camp. “Captain Hari Budhwar, with the Union Jack flying over his headquarters, greeted the officers with broad smiles and hearty laughter and handed back the Gurkhas whom he had so ably and conscientiously looked after.” He was later elected an Honorary Life Member of the Second Goorkha Rifles Mess and presented with a silver kukri. He was the first Indian officer ever to be honoured in this fashion.

During the captivity the British officers of the Gurkha battalions also suffered intense hardships and brutal treatment working on the notorious Death Railway. In December 1943 the exhausted survivors were brought back to Singapore. They were not permitted to rejoin their men, but the Gurkhas quickly found ways of making contact with them. After that many of the officers risked execution or at least severe beatings by making secret visits to those who had once served under them.

Captain Chapman of the 1st Gurkhas found that his men were still remarkably smart and soldier-like in appearance. In contrast his description of himself was that he resembled a tramp. By wizardry, it seemed, the Gurkhas fitted him out with a complete uniform, badges included. They also gave him the first news of the Normandy invasion.

One Gurkha broke out of his own camp, and in and out of the British one, in order to deliver an English news sheet clandestinely produced by the Chinese in the city and containing the B.B.C. news bulletins.

In captivity the Gurkhas earned the respect of all. Three British soldiers of the 2nd Cambridgeshire Regiment, together with the chaplain, the Rev. J. McLean, collected twenty pounds from their meagre resources and gave it to the 1st Gurkhas as a tribute and token of admiration. After the war the Regimental Centre refunded their generous donation and presented silver tankards embossed with the Regimental Crest.

Of the day when the enemy surrendered and the British officers were reunited with their men, clasping hands and making no attempt
to hide the emotion which overwhelmed them all, Lieutenant-Colonel Allsebrook, D.S.O., M.C., who commanded the 9th Gurkhas in Malaya, wrote: "It was wonderful to see the men again and it was very touching to see their joy at seeing me. They were indeed a wonderful sight, all scrupulously clean and neatly dressed in ancient and patched clothes, sometimes in garments made by themselves. (My former orderly was wearing a very neat shirt and shorts sewn by himself out of a khaki sheet.) Headgear was most variegated of all, many men retaining their old Gurkha hats or relics of them. Others had fallen back on the good old Nepali topi, beautifully made in snappy lines of yellow and red.

"Having had lunch with the Gurkha officers—my best meal in three and a half years—I held a parade to give the men a sabash.* To my amazement they marched as smartly as on peace-time ceremonial. A picturesque sight they were. Their soldierly behaviour and appearance brought tributes from everyone—Australians, British and the local communities. How proud I was of their loyalty and fidelity!"

* Sabash: "Well done!"
With the end of World War II the Gurkha Brigade completed over a hundred and thirty years of loyal service since the first Gurkha regiments had sworn allegiance to the British. The long road had led them in glory through the nineteenth century and the two great conflicts of the twentieth. Now cross-roads lay ahead.

In March 1947 Mountbatten announced the establishment of India and Pakistan as from August 15th. It was realised that the political changes would affect the Gurkha regiments but just what would happen was uncertain. Even as late as June the Gurkhas knew nothing of their fate. It was an unsettling and disheartening experience for them, especially as most of the men had little understanding of the intricate political situation.

At last, on August 8th, the long awaited signal was received. The 2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th Gurkha Regiments had been selected for continued service with the British. The remainder would serve the Indian Government.

For the British officers in the regiments designated to India it was a moment of heartbreak. “It was not our regiment going to India that hurt,” wrote Colonel Mackay, D.S.O., “but our separation from it.” The sadness was not one-sided. The men felt that they had, in some inexplicable way, been rejected. But alongside this there was a determination to take pride in the hand-over.

“From the beginning of the change,” wrote the 4th Gurkha historian, “the Regiment was guided in everything it did by a firm resolve to hand over with dignity and generosity so that it should have the best possible start in its new life. Everything was in order and everything was made over without reserve. It was not always easy, and it was not without misgivings that the decision was taken to hand over unreservedly to officers who were unknown and serving
under a régime that was untried, private funds that had been nourished over many years with care, and treasures that were personal—the Mess trophies, its valuable library, its rich furnishings. Had the change been gradual, as it had been in Indian regiments, it might have been different; the difficulty sprang from the suddenness, the haste and uncertainty of what was being done, but it was happily dissipated by the reassurance that was to be found in the quality of the first of the new officers who joined the Regiment. These officers were eager to absorb what knowledge they could of the men they were to command in the utterly inadequate time that was available.”

To add to the difficulties of the hasty hand-over, the Gurkhas found themselves involved in the flood of madness and terror that swept over the refugees during the early days of Partition. It says much for the Gurkhas that they carried out their duties with complete impartiality, remaining incorruptible and quite unaffected by the events.

Many British officers answered an appeal to stay on until the end of the year to ease the problems of handing over. Unfortunately, permission for them to do this was withdrawn. In the event it was lucky that great care was apparently taken in the selection of the Indian officers who were to receive charge of the Gurkha regiments.

Eventful years have passed since those uncertain days of 1947. The Gurkhas who continued along the road with the British have maintained their high tradition in the jungles of Malaya and Borneo, just as they have impressed and brought delight to thousands by the playing of their Pipe Bands in the Royal Tournament and at the Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

The regiments who took that other road with the Indians have in no way lowered the standards of the old Gurkha Brigade. And, in spite of all the haste, the calibre of the new officers and the goodwill of the old have formed a strong branch to the family tree.

An example of this co-operation was Colonel Davidson’s appointment as Commandant of the 4th Gurkha Regimental Centre for a period of three months during the handing over period. Scarcely had he assumed this office than Lieutenant-Colonel Rajbir Chopra was appointed to it. Davidson stayed on in an advisory capacity. “The measure of his success,” wrote the Regiment’s historian, “is evidenced by the graceful text chosen by Colonel Chopra to open his first issue of the new Regimental Newsletter: He is like a man which built a house and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and
when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded on a rock. (St. Luke vi. 48)."

The spelling of the regiments which remained in India was changed to Gorkha, so that the 8th Gurkha Rifles, for example, became the 8th Gorkha Rifles. The reason for this is that the small Nepalese principality of Gorkha, from which the Gurkha gets his name, is always spelt with an "o". The form Gurkha was a British derivation.

Since the division of the old Gurkha Brigade, the Indian regiments have played an important part not only in local actions but in world affairs. When the Congo was split by rebellion the 3/1st Gorkha Rifles and the 2/5th Gorkha Rifles were sent to Katanga as part of the United Nations Force.

On December 5th 1961, Captain Salaria, an Indian officer, was ordered to clear a strategic road block in Katanga with two sections of the 3/1st and two Swedish Armoured Personnel Carriers. About fifteen hundred yards from the road block the right flank came under heavy automatic and small arms fire from Katanganese forces who were well dug in. Salaria gallantly led his men into the attack, during which forty of the enemy were killed and two armoured cars knocked out. Unfortunately, Salaria was wounded at a critical moment. Command passed to Havildar Durgabahadur Gurung.

There was still a heavy concentration of fire from the enemy, and the Gorkhas were running out of ammunition. They were unable to call up support as they were out of wireless contact. The havildar with great tactical skill reformed his troops into a defensive position which was held against frequent attacks until orders came through for a withdrawal.

On the same day Naik Karnabahadur Thapa of the 3/1st was leading a section against a road block. Thirty yards from it they were caught in the open by heavy automatic fire. This was coming from a camouflaged enemy post surrounded by thick undergrowth. The men of the section flung themselves to the ground and had to stay there, but Karnabahadur started to crawl forward. He managed to locate the enemy position and to get within ten yards. Then he stood up and fired three bursts and followed this by flinging a hand-grenade accurately. The five Katanganese manning the post were all killed.

Both Karnabahadur and Durgabahadur were awarded the Sena Army Medal for bravery.
In extreme contrast with conditions in the Congo the 8th Gorkha Rifles were on India’s far northern borders at Ladakh in 1961. Although the frontier dispute with China had not yet broken out into open hostility, there was a smell of danger in the cold thin air of the high mountain ranges. In lonely outposts which seemed isolated from the rest of the world, the Gorkhas kept watch. They carried out patrols under dreadful conditions.

The 8th Gorkhas had an advance party at Chushu, and in April Captain Purushotam Lal Kher received orders to carry out a reconnaissance with a view to establishing military posts. The Indian captain was faced with a most difficult task. From Chushu he had to lead his men through an 18,000-foot pass which was covered with snow to a depth of over fifteen feet. There would be the constant danger of avalanches and blizzards, and into a blizzard they ran immediately. Because of it they were only able to negotiate the pass after three attempts. In the three days of fighting the elements at their most savage they lost their guide and all their yaks. Progress was painfully slow. The blizzard screamed across the mountains, driving the snow so hard against the struggling men that it was like a battering ram.

Kher carried on grimly. When it was almost impossible to keep track of his bearings he halted his men, left them to shelter as best they could and set off alone in an attempt to find a way. He climbed to over 20,000 feet in this search, driving himself by sheer determination, keeping on when all his physical energy seemed to be spent. At last his tenacity was rewarded. He returned to his men and an hour after midnight lead them into Gunle. But there was no shelter here, and all the bedding had been left behind when the yaks collapsed. The men were completely exhausted, ready to drop. Kher moved among them, encouraging them, and somehow they survived a terrible night out in the open at a height of 17,000 feet. They pressed on again with daylight and reached Tsogtsalu in the evening.

During the same month another platoon was moving up to take over Tsogtsalu Post when it was caught in a blizzard at 18,000 feet. As they groped forward against the blinding snow, it was realised that one of the Gorkha riflemen was missing. Although very near to the limit of endurance Lance-Naik Narbahadur Thapa volunteered to go back and search for him. In such dreadful conditions he and the Ladakhi porter who accompanied him were risking their lives.
They retraced their steps, found the lost man and brought him safely back.

For their courage in these struggles against the bitter elements both Captain Kher and Narbahadur were subsequently awarded the Sena Army Medal.

It was in these testing conditions of altitude and weather that the 8th Gorkha Rifles had to fight when the Chinese attack was launched in October 1962. The enemy had an overwhelming numerical superiority, and the Gorkhas were ham-strung by the lack of sufficient arms and ammunition and above all by the absence of heavy support weapons. In some respects it was a repeat of the Japanese invasion of Malaya, where will, determination and courageous sacrifice were not enough to halt the enemy.

Grim, last-ditch, hand-to-hand struggles took place with the temperature at sub-zero levels. On October 20th, Major Dhan Sing Thapa was in command of a forward post in Ladakh. The Chinese opened their attack with an intensive artillery and mortar bombardment until the mountains echoed with the blast of exploding shells. When the barrage was lifted, there was a fierce infantry attack against the post. Greatly outnumbered, the Gorkhas resisted with desperate courage, inflicting heavy losses and driving the enemy back. At once there was another intensive bombardment followed by a second wave of screaming Chinese infantry.

Major Dhan Sing’s cool courage inspired his men to fight on, and the enemy were thrown back again. Determined to crush this stubborn resistance the Chinese brought tanks into action. By this time Dhan Sing’s brave force had been considerably reduced by casualties. He encouraged the remnants to go on fighting. This third attack came in behind the solid armour and the guns of the tanks. When the Chinese inevitably broke through, Dhan Sing sprang from his trench and rushed to meet the enemy hand-to-hand in the true tradition of the Gorkhas. He killed several of the enemy before being brought down by sheer numbers and taken prisoner. For his conspicuous bravery and leadership he was awarded the highest Indian decoration for valour—the Param Vir Chakra.

This action was typical of many others at isolated outposts, where men of the 8th Gorkhas like Naik Rabi Lal Thapa, awarded the Maha Vir Chakra, and Rifleman Tulsi Ram Thapa, who won the Vir Chakra, fought on with their kukris when their ammunition was exhausted.
Many miles from Ladakh, on the north-east frontier, other Gorkhas were facing the Chinese onslaught. The 1/9th had only recently been relieved and were on their way to take a rest from outpost duty when news of the Chinese invasion came through. At once the battalion turned back, making its way to the 14,000-foot operational area by forced marches across rugged countryside. This meant passing in a short period from the heat of the plains to the cold of the mountains, this last made all the more bitter because they were still wearing summer-weight uniforms.

There was little time for organisation or even for bringing up ammunition and arms supplies before they had to meet the first Chinese attacks.

The battalion was holding a defensive position in the Tsangdhar area when, on October 20th, the Chinese struck in great strength against the left flank, practically overrunning the company on this front.

Jemadar Dhanbahadur Chand, whose platoon had resisted the enemy rush, realised that his commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Ahluwalia, and tactical headquarters were in a vulnerable position. He at once sent a light machine-gunner to give protection. This Gorkha kept the enemy at bay until he was wounded. As soon as this happened Dhanbahadur, with no regard for his own safety, raced across the bullet-swept ground to pick up the machine-gun, which he brought into action again.

Checking the enemy in this manner he gave the Lieutenant-Colonel time to withdraw to battalion H.Q.; but this was the next target of the Chinese attack. Inspired by Dhanbahadur, a small bodyguard put up a stubborn fight. Lieutenant-Colonel Ahluwalia was wounded in the shoulder, but the jemadar, with accurate fire, kept the enemy at a distance so that first aid could be rendered. Then, the position no longer being tenable, there was a withdrawal to another position. Dhanbahadur was awarded the Sena Army Medal.

In spite of the desperate fighting waged by the Gorkhas of the various battalions which were rushed to the area the Chinese broke through and continued their advance until the uneasy truce of November 22nd when they withdrew to the disputed frontier zone.

Many courageous actions were performed on the high, bare hills and in the thick forests of the lower slopes; but only a few were recorded.

When, in November, the Chinese started shelling a Gorkha post
on a position known as Gurung Hill, Jemadar Tejbahadur Gurung moved among his men encouraging them to resist the imminent attack. He continued to go from post to post as wave after wave of Chinese infantry charged against the Gorkha position. When the officer in command was wounded, the jemadar took over. The battle lasted four hours, and heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy. In one of the attacks Tejbahadur was wounded in the chest by a burst of automatic fire; but he refused to be evacuated and continued to fight until even his brave spirit was unable to overcome his dreadful and fatal wounds. Posthumously, he was awarded the Vir Chakra.

Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor commanded a battalion of the 8th Gorkhas and led them skilfully among the bare, cold peaks of the north-east hill ranges, with no thought for his own safety. And there, among the barren summits, he died of exposure and extreme cold.

An Indian colonel of one of the Gorkha battalions has written: “Please assure the British ex-officers when you meet them that these new officers and their men did not consider any sacrifice too dear.”

It seems that the traditions are in safe hands.
The four Gurkha regiments which formed the Brigade of Gurkhas became a part of the British Army and so had to conform to certain administrative changes. One result was that British ranks took the place of the old Indian ones. Naiks became Corporals, and Havildars Sergeants. The officers became King's (now Queen's) Gurkha Officers, Jemadars as Lieutenants (K.G.O.), Subedars as Captains (K.G.O.) and Subedar-Majors as Majors (K.G.O.). For the first time, too, Gurkhas were commissioned into the British Army, the new commission being styled: Gurkha Commissioned Officer.

Hardly had the Brigade of Gurkhas moved to its new station in Malaya (with another in Hong Kong) than the Chinese Communist terrorists launched a campaign of violence. The main targets were lonely rubber estates and tin mines. Many plantation managers and workers were murdered. The Army was called in to deal with the mounting wave of violence which was threatening Malaya's economic stability. Individual battalions were assigned to large areas with orders to seek out and destroy the terrorist bands.

For ten years, until the end of the Emergency, the Gurkhas and their British officers performed the most exhausting and heart-breaking tasks with efficiency and cheerfulness. Penetrating into the jungle, sometimes for weeks at a time, they searched for the terrorists' camps, laid ambushes and gradually destroyed the furtive enemy. While on these gruelling operations they were constantly exposed to the sniper's bullet or the sudden burst of automatic fire from dense cover. The mental strain was as severe as the physical.

By the end of the Emergency the Gurkhas had killed or rounded up several hundred terrorists as the result of countless jungle operations and patrols.
Goh Sia was the most notorious terrorist in the Segamat district. He and his band had plundered so extensively and murdered so many of the local inhabitants that he was gaining the reputation of being invulnerable. There was a reward of 35,000 Straits dollars on his head.

In November 1955, the 1/7th Gurkhas sent out a small party consisting of Corporal Partabsing Rai and five men to lay an ambush in the hope of accounting for Goh Sia. The site chosen was a patch of elephant grass, twenty yards by thirty, in the middle of a rubber plantation. This was in an isolated clearing near which a terrorist food dump had been discovered, well stocked by intimidated rubber tappers. There was no covered approach to the elephant grass so that once the ambush party was in position it had to stay there.

The vigil lasted for three days with no cover from the sun by day or from the wet and cold of the night. Cooking was out of the question, and the only water was the supply Partabsing and his men had brought with them. Success depended on absolute silence and no movement; they even had to relieve the calls of nature where they lay.

About nine in the morning of the third day, when there seemed little hope of the trap being sprung, Goh Sia suddenly appeared. He seemed full of confidence. He clearly suspected no danger, for his carbine was slung over his shoulder. He approached the food dump, picked up a parcel and began to depart without haste. Partabsing had hoped to account for some of the terrorist’s band but he knew that this opportunity of destroying the ruthless Goh Sia must not be missed. At a given signal Rifleman Haikamsing Tamang rose swiftly to his feet. A shot rang out, and the terrorist leader dropped dead.

There was profound relief among the local people when the news spread of Goh Sia’s death.

In February 1953 a British pilot spotted a terrorist camp from the air. Operation “Metcalf” was swiftly launched. One of the battalions engaged in the ground search was the 2/7th Gurkhas. Moving into the area reported by the pilot, Captain Thornton, C Company Commander, sent Lance-Corporal Rabilal Rai on a reconnaissance patrol with two riflemen.

The Gurkha discovered a jungle track leading to the terrorist camp. He and his men crept forward as silently as jungle animals. They came to a river where three Chinese terrorists were at their ablutions. Resisting the temptation to fire, Rabilal withdrew and
crossed the river by a small bridge a little distance away. When they were near the camp he edged his way through the latrine area and made observations of the camp layout from within ten yards of the perimeter. Remaining on watch, he sent the two riflemen with a message to Captain Thornton.

The day was far advanced, and Thornton wisely decided to postpone an attack until early the next morning. He sent orders for Rabilal to withdraw, which the lance-corporal did, carefully covering his tracks almost under the noses of the enemy. His detailed description of the camp was so excellent that Thornton was able to work out a plan of attack which had every chance of success.

Towards dawn the Gurkhas surrounded the camp, crawling on their stomachs into assault positions. At daybreak Rabilal killed the terrorist sentry with a shot which was the signal for the attack. Immediately the terrorists ran for safety, but their escape was covered and eight were killed. Among the dead were two State Committee members, the Editor of the State Press and a District Committee Secretary. Rabilal was awarded the D.C.M., while Captain Thornton received the M.C.

Information about another terrorist camp had reached the 1/6th Gurkhas, who were operating in the Upper Perak area. Following a careful reconnaissance by Captain Atkins an assault force of seven platoons under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Walker, D.S.O., O.B.E., crossed the Perak river by night. When they reached the camp it was unoccupied; but there was evidence that the terrorists used it from time to time, so two plucky Gurkhas concealed themselves within the perimeter. A signal cord connected them with the commander of the assault platoon. The remaining six platoons cordoned off the camp.

Fortunately for the two Gurkhas in the listening post, their vigil was not a long one. That same day six terrorists came to the camp. The hidden Gurkhas tugged at the signal cord and the assault platoon opened fire. All the terrorists were killed, and while there were not many of them they included senior members of the Communist party.

Very often tedious searching was unrewarded, and it seemed this was going to be the result when Major Evans, M.C., was conducting the search of a palm oil plantation. But as it was getting dark two shots rang out. A terrorist had fired on the leading Gurkha at about fifty yards range. Instantly, the platoon charged. Rifleman Bir-
bahadur Rai, armed with a Patchett gun, rushed forward and accounted for an enemy Sten gunner. Keeping on in the same direction he came upon the terrorist camp. Two of the Chinese fired short bursts at him and then fled towards the cover of swamp grass. Before they could reach it, Birbahadur killed them with a long, sweeping burst.

After changing the magazine he penetrated the swamp grass and followed a rough track. Rounding a bend in this he came face to face with another terrorist, who hastily fired but missed. The Gurkha's first burst hit the man's rifle, the second killed him. Jumping over the body, the Gurkha shot his fifth terrorist at long range through the grass. Birbahadur was awarded the D.C.M.

An extremely successful operation was carried out by the 2/10th in South Johore. There was information that a party of terrorists was believed to have a camp in swamp near Sengkang Village. Major Myers, M.C., set off at four in the morning with two platoons and reached the swamp at daylight. For two hours the Gurkhas probed the difficult terrain, and Myers was beginning to think the information, like so much received, was false. Then two terrorists came into sight. These were killed, and Myers at once ordered his men to extend and surround the swamp. For the next few hours the Gurkhas moved through thick scrub, eight-foot-high elephant grass, and splashed through waist-deep water seeking terrorists. The final bag was seven; but this included Foo Ah Kwong, the highest ranking Communist in South Johore with a price equal to £14,000 on his head.

It was not always a terrorist the Gurkhas found in the Malayan jungles. Men of the 2/7th rescued a baby elephant which had fallen into a pit dug by villagers to trap wild pigs. After his rescue he refused to leave them, so they took him back to camp in a truck. Being still at the milk stage he was expensive to feed as well as difficult to control, and there was relief as well as regret when the Sultan of Perak claimed the animal as royal property. But the Gurkhas were most annoyed when they heard later that the baby elephant had been sold to a circus for several thousand dollars.

Not to be outdone, the 1/7th brought in a six-weeks-old tiger cub whose mother had been driven off after charging a patrol. The cub was named Nepti because of her snub nose and she was kept by the men for several months. Eventually she was flown to England where she settled down happily in Regent's Park Zoo, and in due course
produced cubs of her own. When the Gurkha contingent came to London for the Coronation the men were able to visit her. She died in 1958.

The strangest find of all was made by a patrol of the 1/10th Gurkhas on October 20th 1949. Deep in the jungle they came upon a shack, and the solitary occupant was one of their own people. He was Naik Nakam Gurung of the 1st Gurkhas who, during the retreat in Malaya in 1942 had contracted a bad bout of malaria. He had been left behind with a supply of rations. It took him a month to recover from his illness. Then he built the shack, and there he had stayed for seven years, living on wild pig and fish caught in traps. He had no idea the war with Japan was over.

For well over a century the Gurkha was considered to be, first and last, a top infantryman. But in 1948 there was a major break with tradition when, in Kluang, Malaya, the nucleus of a Gurkha Engineers Unit was formed. The next year the 67th Gurkha Field Squadron, R.E., was raised, followed shortly after by the 68th. Gurkha officers and N.C.O.s were posted from all battalions of the brigade and most of the men were re-enlistments.

The difficulties of starting something new were intensified by the outbreak of the Korean War, which caused the two squadrons to be sent to Hong Kong as infantry. But the setback was only temporary. In 1951 the 50th Field Engineer Regiment was formed, the first commanding officer being Lieutenant-Colonel Hill, R.E. Most of the British officers were from engineer units and had no knowledge of Gurkhal, so when Captain Walsh of the 2/6th Gurkhas was posted to them as Adjutant he was particularly welcome.

In 1952 Lieutenant-Colonel Carver, M.A., R.E., took over command, and by this time the 2/2nd Gurkhas had arrived in the Colony. This famous battalion gave tremendous help to the new engineer regiment. During the next two years the 50th continued their activities as engineers and infantrymen. One of their many tasks was to remove booby traps from aircraft of the China National Airways, which were being taken over by the Americans.

Gradually, more and more Gurkhas attended training courses in field engineering, basic and Bailey bridging, the construction of roads and tracks, and other facets of their new trade. At the end of 1954 the 50th returned to Malaya to take their rightful place as the Divisional Engineer Regiment of the 17th Gurkha Division. They constructed air-strips and helicopter landing zones in swamps, and
they built the Rompin-Gemas road, on which one of the piled bridges was named “Gurkha Bridge”.

With increasing experience behind them they completed two major roads, including the necessary bridge building. The first was a fifteen-and-a-half-mile road from Ayer Hitam to Kemayan, a hard task because nine miles were through primary jungle. The second was reconstruction and bridging work on a six-mile stretch from Ulu Serting to the Ayer Hitam road.

In such tasks design and planning are carried out by the British officers, with the Gurkha officers taking charge of the day to day work. The Gurkha is as capable with his hands as the average British soldier; but he is at a disadvantage when the work requires calculations or there is a mechanical background. The young Gurkha recruit comes straight from the hills of Nepal, and most modern appliances are completely strange to him. But once given the necessary education he is on a level with, or can even better, the British sapper. He brings an extra quality to his work because he delights in military drill and immaculate turn out. In addition to this he is amenable to discipline and always eager to improve his knowledge and skill.

One of the outstanding engineers during the early period was Gurkha Captain Kalusing Limbu. In 1960 he was awarded the Durand Medal. This was instituted as a memorial to Major-General Sir Henry Durand, an ex-Sapper, who died as the result of an accident in 1871. The award is presented annually in rotation to the Indian Officer, N.C.O. or Sapper who has “distinguished himself as a soldier and a sapper by good and efficient service”. Kalusing Limbu was the first Gurkha ever to receive it.

In 1958 the affiliation of the Gurkha Engineers to the Corps of Royal Engineers was approved by the Queen.

Other breaks with tradition had followed the founding of the Gurkha Engineers. In 1950 the Gurkha Independent Brigade Signal Squadron was formed for operations with the 48th Gurkha Infantry Brigade. There had been Gurkha signallers in the Gurkha battalions for many years but this was the first operational Gurkha signal unit. Within the next two years Gurkha Infantry Brigades contained detachments from the Signal Squadron and by 1955 the Gurkha Signals had become a unit in its own right within the Brigade of Gurkhas, taking part in many operations against Communist terrorists in Malaya. In 1958 the Queen approved their affiliation to the Royal Corps of Signals.

This same year also saw the birth of the Gurkha Army Service
Corps. Several Queen's Gurkha Officers and N.C.O.s were transferred from infantry battalions, the first officer being Gurkha Major Prembahadur Ghale, M.B.E., from the 1/6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles.

Several companies were formed in the next few years. But while soldiering came naturally to raw recruits from Nepal, instruction in driving and mechanics took longer. Before going out on the roads some of the students were given concentrated driving practice on a concrete air-strip seven hundred yards long and thirty wide. On one occasion an Army Air Corps pilot flew over the strip in a Beaver, signalling his intention to land. The Gurkhas grinned up at him and waved cheerfully, but still drove round and round. They thought it strange that an aeroplane should wish to join in the driving course—but then, you never could tell what the Sahibs would get up to next.

Lessons also had to be given on the various traffic signs. As always with Gurkhas it needed continual repetition and patience before the students finally grasped the meaning of each particular sign; but once learned it was never forgotten.

Writing in the *Royal Army Service Corps Review*, Major Price described the scene in a classroom. "The quiet, steady voice of a sergeant instructor teaching road signs for the umpteenth time droned on. 'Yo ke ho?' (What is this?) he cried suddenly, pointing to a replica of a No Parking sign and stabbing a finger towards a student on the back row. After nudges and grunts a startled: 'Yo halt sign ho!' Gales of laughter from the class, but did anyone else know the correct answer, and a resigned expression on the sergeant's face was all the pitiful learner needed to tell him he was wrong. And so to revise again."

The main routes on which the practical driving training was carried out seemed to be frequented either by speeding Chinese taxi drivers or articulated vehicles, carrying huge logs, which thundered along the twisting, jungle-bordered roads. The taxi drivers thought the trainee Gurkha drivers would be easy targets for the "See-who-will-give-way-first" game. The first two who tried this out found it an experience they had no wish to repeat. They had not realised the Gurkha's singleness of purpose. Word quickly spread, and there was no more trouble with taxis. The log-carrier drivers were also challenging, but after a couple of them had ended up in the jungle at the side of the road they, too, treated the Gurkhas with much more respect.

The first driving course was concluded with only one serious acci-
dent in which a vehicle was completely telescoped. Miraculously, the Gurkha trainee escaped injury. When asked what had happened, he explained: "It was like this, Sahib. I was driving along, doing everything I had been taught, when suddenly that concrete bridge at Ayer Hitam jumped into the road and struck my lorry a terrible blow in the middle of the radiator."

It was not long after the end of the Communist Terrorist Emergency in Malaya that the Gurkha battalions were once more engaged in jungle warfare.

The Japanese occupation had left Borneo in chaos. Reconstruction brought inevitable changes. Labuan and North Borneo were merged into the Crown Colony of North Borneo, later called Sabah. The rule of the White Rajahs ended in Sarawak, which also became a Crown Colony. Brunei remained as an independent Sultanate with British advisors; but in other respects it was closely linked with the other two territories. With the success of the Indonesian revolution, the vast Dutch territory became Kalimantan.

Another revolution was planned. It broke out at two in the morning of December 8th 1962. The aim was to set up an independent state, to be named Kalimantan Utara and formed from the three Borneo territories. The first targets included the Brunei Town Police Station, the Sultan's Palace and the Prime Minister's house, but the only rebel success was the capture of the power station. In other parts of the Sultanate the rebels had more success. They not only seized property but took fifty Europeans as hostages.

In response to urgent appeals for help the 1/2nd Gurkhas were flown in, the first men arriving that evening at Brunei airfield. Major Lloyd Williams established his H.Q. at the Police Station, and patrols were quickly organised. Several of these bumped the rebels, and there was brisk fighting with casualties on both sides. Somewhat confused fighting raged in the vicinity of the government buildings. C Company fought their way to Tutong with great dash and cleared the town.

Other troops were coming in. Seria was relieved by air. A Royal Navy Commando took Limbang by direct assault under heavy fire just in time to save eight European hostages from execution. In the south L.C.T.s from H.M.S. Tiger landed the 1st Green Jackets, who put in a determined attack and captured Bekenu.

The revolt was virtually over and most of the rebels crept back to their kampongs. The hard core, however, took to the jungle, where
they were relentlessly hunted down. The most important group, headed by Yasin Effendi, leader of the Brunei revolt, was rounded up by the 2/7th Gurkhas in a swamp a few miles from Brunei Town. This finally extinguished the rebellion.

Meanwhile an external threat was developing, born of Sukarno’s dream of a greater Indonesia and the confrontation of Malaysia. Along the frontier, mostly in West Sarawak, gangs of border bandits carried out indiscriminate raids. One of these was broken up by the 2/6th Gurkhas in the Ba Kelaban area. A cunning headman entertained the bandits while his messengers speeded through the jungle for help.

In August 1963 there was a deeper and more dangerous penetration by a strong band of raiders whose aim was to capture Song in the Third Division of Sarawak. They were intercepted and forced back by the 2/6th and 1/2nd Gurkhas. The follow-up action for the purpose of completely destroying the raiders entailed a month of hard tracking in dense jungle.

Another serious raid was made on Long Jawi, an isolated post some distance north of Song. It took two days for news of this to reach the Gurkhas, who immediately closed in on the area. A riverside ambush accounted for twenty-six of the enemy in two boats. Jungle patrols continued for a month, with the difficulties of the terrain increased by bad weather. The Gurkhas lost four killed and five wounded. Seven Border Scouts were captured and never heard of again. It was believed they were cold-bloodedly murdered.

The following month about a hundred and forty raiders, moving in three groups, advanced on Simmanggang. Border Scouts and the 1/10th Gurkhas intercepted them, breaking them up in confusion.

Towards the end of the year there was the first evidence of participation in these raids by members of the regular Indonesian Army. A lieutenant of the Indonesian Marine Commandos was killed on the Malaysia side of the border.

Late in December four bands of Indonesian Border Terrorists crossed into Sabah. One, about thirty-five strong, attacked the town of Kalabakan, surprising the local garrison and inflicting heavy casualties. The 1/10th Gurkhas were brought in to find and destroy the raiders.

They had to operate in most difficult country. Several tidal rivers thrust like fingers through a tangle of dense jungle and mangrove swamp. Where loggers had been at work there were the obstacles of felled trees and stumps. The logging camps were situated at several
points on the two main rivers, the Kalabakan and Umas Umas. There were local shops serving the camps and these naturally attracted raiders whose supplies were running low. In the cleared area there were some twenty-five thousand acres of rubber, hemp, cocoa and oil palm estates, tempting targets for destruction. The background to all this was of jungle-covered hills rising steeply to some fifteen hundred feet, many of them fantastically shaped.

The 1/10th arrived early in January 1964, and patrols were immediately sent out with the object of finding the terrorists and driving them into a cordon of ambushes. One of the patrols was commanded by Lieutenant (Q.G.O.) Indrajit Limbu. Coming upon the tracks of a party of ten terrorists, the patrol followed them for four days through country which made silent movement difficult. Danger was ever present and this called for exemplary qualities of leadership, initiative and resourcefulness on the part of the young Gurkha officer. He had to maintain the alertness of his men at the highest pitch, with never a moment of carelessness.

The tracking was mostly done by Lance-Corporal Nandabahadur Rai, who had a natural ability for it. He was also a man of courage, for he was well aware that being ahead of the others he would be the first target should they run into an ambush. His chances of survival would be slender. He went about his task doggedly under testing physical conditions and it says much for his skill that he never once lost the enemy tracks.

At nightfall on January 6th the patrol bivouacked, deep in jungle, with the sentries listening to all the night sounds in order to pick out any which might be made by human beings. With morning, as the first thin rays of sunlight filtered through the dense overhang of the trees, the lieutenant ordered the patrol to move on again. As before, Nandabahadur went ahead to pick up the enemy tracks. For the next three hours the patrol pressed on grimly in the humid heat. Suddenly firing broke out ahead. Indrajit realised at once that this must mean the terrorists had run into one of the battalion's ambush positions. He rushed his men towards the sound of the firing until they were checked at the base of a hill, where the enemy had taken up defensive cover and could direct heavy fire at the patrol.

The young Gurkha officer knew that the enemy would have a good chance of escaping, hidden by the dense undergrowth. To prevent this, he led his men in a rushing attack. The intensive fire was too great, however. Two Gurkhas were killed and the remainder were forced to take cover. Indrajit was determined not to be pinned
down and so he gave orders for a series of short rushes aimed at bringing the patrol close enough to deal with the hidden enemy. He led all these, showing a fearlessness which inspired his men.

One of the Gurkhas killed in the first burst of enemy fire was the commander of Nandabahadur’s section. The lance-corporal took over, and he was the first to close with the enemy, reaching the crest of the hill through a hail of bullets. He killed two of the raiders, while his section accounted for three more. The remainder of the patrol killed the other five.

It was the speed of this attack which prevented the enemy from escaping, and the success of the operation was largely due to Indrajit’s leadership and the valuable help he received from his lance-corporal.

The 1/10th continued their remorseless hunt for border terrorists, inflicting casualties in ones and twos until the total reached over sixty-five.

Soon afterwards an uneasy truce came into force, bringing to a close a year of operations in Borneo. “A year which”, wrote Major-General Walter Walker, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., Director of Operations, “began with the end of a revolution and ended with the beginning of an undeclared war. No one knows where this exercise in brinkmanship will end. We are sure only of one thing: we have set our faces to the enemy, and until more reasonable counsels prevail, we shall not look back.”
Conclusion

The Gurkhas have served the British Crown for one hundred and fifty years. During this long period the little mountain kingdom of Nepal has poured forth a stream of recruits in staunch support of the British whom they once met in battle on the slopes of their own exquisite hills.

Twelve thousand came to our aid during the Mutiny. Two hundred thousand volunteered during World War I. In World War II no fewer than forty battalions fought in almost every theatre of war. In the two major conflicts the Gurkhas suffered forty-five thousand casualties. They won twelve Victoria Crosses and countless other decorations for gallantry.

Our debt of gratitude for such loyalty can never be repaid. For their part, they continue to give of their best. In the jungles of Malaya and Borneo they have staved off the creeping infiltration of the Commonwealth’s enemies.

Even in the age overshadowed by nuclear weapons there is need for the hardy, brave soldier who will meet the foe face to face. So long as the British require their aid it will be given by these stocky, slant-eyed children of Nepal, whose sturdy bodies are powered by hearts that will endure to the end.
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