

Commanding Officers of the Regiment, 1950, with Brigadier Gupta, M.C.

**HISTORY**  
of the  
**8th GURKHA RIFLES**  
1824-1949

**COMPILED BY**  
**LIEUTENANT-COLONEL H. J. HUXFORD, O.B.E.**  
**8th GURKHA RIFLES**

**ALDRESHOT**  
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**Dedication**

**To all ranks of the  
8th Gurkha Rifles  
fallen in Action**



## FOREWORD

BY FIELD-MARSHAL SIR WILLIAM SLIM  
G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

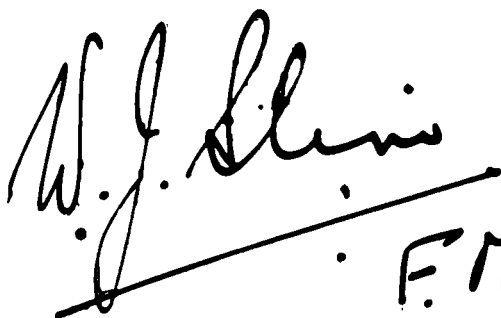
I HAVE been asked to write a foreword to this History. You should be careful before you ask a British Officer of Gurkhas—and I am one—to speak or write about Gurkhas. If you do, you may find you have landed yourself with a crashing bore—that is unless you have served with Gurkhas yourself, when you will be ready to talk of them and listen to others talking about them for hours. I do believe, however, that Lieutenant-Colonel H. J. Huxford has avoided this pitfall and no one will be bored by *his* history.

There is something about a Gurkha that gets into your system. It is not his indomitable courage; it is not his cheerfulness, his faithfulness; it is not even the way he grins at you. It is a combination of all these things.

It was my good fortune for many years to soldier in the sister regiment—the 6th Gurkhas—and I well remember the fury with which, as Adjutant, I was forced to acknowledge, after watching a battalion parade of the 1/8th, that I had at last seen a unit whose ceremonial drill was better than that of my own.

In every theatre in which they were employed the 8th Gurkhas had a magnificent reputation for discipline and battle worthiness. I was lucky enough on several occasions to have them under my command and I could not ask for better infantry.

Now history has brought us to a parting of the ways and the 8th Gurkhas will serve the New India as gallantly and faithfully as, with their British Officers, they served the old.



W. J. Slim  
F.M.



## NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF INDIA

BURMA, 1825-26  
NAGAS, 1839  
NAGAS, 1850-51  
INDIAN MUTINY, 1857-58  
JAINTIA HILLS, 1861-63  
LUSHAIS, 1869-71  
DAPHLAS, 1873  
NAGAS, 1879-80  
AKAS, 1883-84  
CHINS, 1888  
MANIPUR, 1891  
MISHMIS, 1899  
ABORS, 1911-12

# WAR RECORD *of the* 8th GURKHA RIFLES 1824-1949

KHASIAS, 1827-35-36  
KHASIAS, 1847  
LUSHAIS, 1851  
KHASIAS, 1861-62  
BHUTAN, 1864-65  
GARO HILLS, 1873  
NAGAS, 1875  
MISHMIS, 1881-82  
BURMA, 1885-87  
LUSHAIS, 1890  
ABORS, 1893-94  
TIBET, 1903-04  
NAGAS, 1912-13

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### FIRST WORLD WAR

GIVENCHY, 1914  
LA BASSÉE, 1914  
AUBERS, 1915  
FRANCE AND  
FLANDERS, 1914-15  
TIGRIS, 1916  
BAGHDAD, 1916  
MEGIDDO, 1918  
AFGHANISTAN, 1919



FESTUBERT, 1914-15  
NEUVE CHAPELLE, 1915  
LOOS, 1915  
EGYPT, 1915-16  
KUT EL AMARA, 1916  
MESOPOTAMIA, 1916-17  
SHARON, 1918  
PALESTINE, 1918  
IRAQ REBELLION, 1920

### INDIA

MALABAR, 1921-22  
BENGAL, 1931-32

WAZIRISTAN, 1923-24  
N.W. FRONTIER, 1938-39

### SECOND WORLD WAR

N.W. FRONTIER, 1940-42  
IRAQ, 1942  
NORTH AFRICA, 1942  
ITALY, 1944-45  
GOTHIC LINE, 1944-45  
SENOI RIVER, 1945  
BURMA AND ASSAM,  
1943-45

THE ARAKAN, 1943-44  
ADMIN. BOX, 1943  
IMPHAL, 1944  
IRRAWADDY, 1945  
ADVANCE TO RANGOON,  
1945  
THE SITTANG, 1945  
JAVA, 1946



## EVOLUTION OF THE TITLE OF THE REGIMENT

### 1ST BATTALION

1824 16th Sylhet Local Battalion.  
 1826 11th Sylhet Local (Light) Infantry Battalion.

### 2ND BATTALION

1835 The Assam Sebundy Corps.  
 1839 Lower Assam Sebundy Corps.  
 1839 1st Assam Sebundy Corps.  
 1844 2nd Assam Light Infantry.

1861

48th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry.	47th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry.
44th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry.	43rd Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry.

1864

44th (Sylhet) Regiment of Bengal Native (Light) Infantry.	43rd (Assam) Regiment of Bengal Native (Light) Infantry.
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1885

44th (Sylhet) Regiment of Bengal (Light) Infantry.	43rd (Assam) Regiment of Bengal (Light) Infantry.
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1886

44th Regiment Gurkha (Light) Infantry.	43rd Regiment Goorkha (Light) Infantry.
--	---

1889

44th (Gurkha) Regiment of Bengal (Light) Infantry.	43rd (Gurkha) Regiment of Bengal (Light) Infantry.
--	--

1891

44th Gurkha (Rifle) Regiment of Bengal Infantry.	43rd Gurkha (Rifle) Regiment of Bengal Infantry.
--	--

1901

44th Gurkha Rifles.	43rd Gurkha Rifles.
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1903

8th Gurkha Rifles.	7th Gurkha Rifles.
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1907

1st Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles.	2nd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles.
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NOTE.—In 1949 the spelling of the Regimental Title was changed to GORKHA, but in this history the old spelling GURKHA has been adhered to.

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## INTRODUCTION

**THERE** are people who consider delving into the past to be a waste of time. "Think of the present and the future," is their cry. They may be right in their views but are certainly not right when the delving is bringing to light, and setting on record, the doings of a Regiment. As Rudyard Kipling wrote, "The Regiment that claims the lives of all and lives for ever."

The demand for a History of the Regiment was unanimous, if one can judge by the response to requests for requirements. This demand is now, it is hoped, satisfactorily satisfied by the publication of this book.

Further, the writing of the Regiment's History at the present time by a British officer is appropriate; for recently a great change has taken place in that the long and happy association of Gurkha soldiers and British officers has come to an end. The British officers have gone, and others reign in their stead. Old memories remain, however, and it is in this respect that a History, which keeps those memories bright, fulfils an important purpose, and bears out Kipling's inspiring words, while to quote from another "Wise Man": "History maketh a man to be old without wrinkles or grey hairs; privileging him with experience of age without either the infirmities or inconvenience thereof. Yea it not only makes past things present, but enableth one to make a rational conjecture of things to come."

To compress into some 300 pages, with maps and illustrations, the services of a regiment over a period of 125 years is not an easy matter. Not, indeed, one regiment, as for upwards of 70 years the 8th Gurkha Rifles consisted of two separate regiments. This has entailed, of course, a double examination of records, etc., as compared with units with a single origin. The addition, too, of extra battalions in the great World Wars has increased largely the amount of material available for inclusion. It is hoped, therefore, that this explanation will convince those who may be disappointed at the omission of some incident, that such omissions have been governed by the necessity to economize space and to confine accounts to matters of general interest. Perhaps the inclusion of more photographs would have added greatly to the value of this volume, but reproduction of these, and of maps, is expensive in these days, and the cost of production

had to be considered very carefully before deciding on the type of book to be printed.

Writers of Regimental Histories—especially if, as in my case, the writer has belonged to the Regiment—are frequently accused of turning their ducks into swans ! In fact :

Be to his virtues very kind  
And to his faults a little blind

and to “write up” pleasant items while “writing down” unpleasantnesses. Maybe I have been guilty of this to some extent, but I have striven to be impartial; in fact when things did not go according to plan I have recorded this to the best of my ability, and in accordance with the information at my disposal. I can, however, honestly say that my study of Regimental Records gives me the impression that in the History of the 8th Gurkha Rifles the “good” far outweighs the “bad,” and that the “association” I have referred to above has produced the goods nine times out of ten. This, I maintain, is a good omen for the future, which I hope my readers, one and all, will take to heart.

After the toil of investigation and writing comes the putting together of a book, and I would like to say a few words about the plan I have adopted in producing it.

1. The division into periods : Past, Part I ; Medium Past, Part II ; Recent Events, Part III ; with emphasis on Part III.

2. Having to deal with at least two Battalions makes the maintenance of chronological sequence a difficult matter, and has forced me to devote a chapter or chapters to the doings of a Battalion at a time. This breaks the thread of the Regiment’s History as a whole, but cannot be helped. It is hoped that

(a) The précis at the head of each chapter will give the reader a guide as to the doings of the Battalion about to be dealt with in that chapter ;

(b) The chart (facing p. 322) will keep the reader in touch with the contemporary doings of all Battalions during the 1939-45 war.

3. The maps will, I hope, be of assistance to the reader. They are rough-and-ready and not recommended for the use of an officer working for a promotion examination, who demands large-scale accuracy ! They are designed to amplify the letterpress, and, in most cases, contain only the names of places actually mentioned therein. The map or maps required for reference to any chapter will be found noted at the head of that chapter.

4. The appendices are perhaps more numerous and lengthy than usual. To include these in the narrative is impossible, while to exclude

them would rob the book of much interesting and historical matter. These appendices deal not only with those subjects normally found in Appendices, such as Honours and Rewards won, Rolls of Colonels, Commandants, and Subadar-Majors, but matters of general interest such as

- (a) A brief description of Nepal ;
- (b) Establishment, uniform and badges, etc. ;
- (c) The Gurkha Brigade and the Royal Navy.

Finally comes the opportunity to thank those without whose help the History could not have been written.

Unfortunately, lack of space forbids the names of all such helpers being recorded, but those omitted may be assured that their assistance has been greatly appreciated by the author, who owes them a debt of gratitude which can never be repaid.

A few names, however, must be mentioned. Foremost is that of General Sir John F. S. D. Coleridge, G.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Colonel of the 8th Gurkha Rifles for twenty-three years, and an officer of the Regiment for fifty-one years. It is due to him that this History has been written. He conceived the idea, and his help to me has been continuous from first to last. With his knowledge of 8th Gurkha Rifles matters generally, and his wide acquaintance with military history and campaigns, his advice has been invaluable. Sir John has "vetted" every word written in this book, and he has my sincere gratitude for all he has done.

Brigadier G. C. B. Buckland, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., has always been ready to help. His intimate knowledge of the campaigns in France and Mesopotamia in the First World War, in which he served with, or was associated with, battalions of the Regiment, was most valuable in checking the chapters dealing with those campaigns.

Colonel F. H. Willasey-Wilsey, M.C., contributed a very interesting chapter on the Regimental Centre. To him my best thanks are extended.

Major S. G. Skene and Captain P. F. Wickham spent long hours searching through old records, and generally helping on the good work. I should like to give them a special pat on the back.

To our printers, Messrs. Gale and Polden, of Aldershot, and in particular to their representative (Mr. A. L. Kipling), I offer my best thanks. With his wide knowledge of the production of books in general, and regimental histories in particular, Mr. Kipling has invariably solved the vexed questions attending such activities, and brought peace to the mind of one ignorant of such matters.

To the undermentioned, for accounts of operations, letters, photographs, etc., a "Mention" must be awarded: Brigadier A. R.



Barker, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. ; Captain R. J. K. Burgess ; General Sir Philip Christison, Bt., G.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C. ; Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Clarke, O.B.E., M.C. ; Captain P. D. S. Davis ; Colonel D. L. Duncan ; Captain J. Fairhurst ; Captain R. Findlay ; Lieutenant-Colonel D. H. R. Giffard ; Brigadier H. S. Gordon, O.B.E. ; Colonel J. D. Grant, V.C., C.B., D.S.O. ; Major F. C. Harden ; Lieutenant-Colonel N. L. C. Irwin, D.S.O. ; Brigadier E. W. Langlands, O.B.E. ; Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. T. McGill, D.S.O. ; Captain P. O. Myers, M.C. ; Brigadier H. R. Sandilands, C.M.G., D.S.O. ; E. A. Smythies, Esq., C.I.E., Indian Forest Service ; Colonel C. Stansfeld, O.B.E. ; Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Walker, D.S.O. ; Lieutenant-Colonel F. B. Webb ; Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Yeates, D.S.O.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Johanson, 5th Gurkha Rifles, and Lieutenant-Colonel T. C. Barstow, O.B.E., 6th Gurkha Rifles, very kindly lent me copies of their regimental histories, from which much help was derived. Ever since I commenced this work I have been in correspondence with the Officers Commanding The Regimental Centre, Lieutenant-Colonels M. S. Chinwan, N. K. Chatterji, and J. D. Nadirshaw, Vr.C., and I am grateful for their help and advice, and especially for providing me with up-to-date information regarding the Regiment's affairs in India.

The Librarian of the India Office Library must have become very tired of my requests for books. He was always helpful and courteous, and I found the whole staff most willing helpers.

The responsible officials at the Imperial War Museum, and the War Office, too, have courteously met my many requests.

My typists, Mr. C. J. Frey, ex-Battery Sergeant-Major, Royal Artillery, and Mr. G. W. Mayhew, ex-Colour Sergeant, The Suffolk Regiment, have (at times with difficulty) deciphered my handwriting, Gurkha and Burmese names, and, having served alongside "Johnny Gurkha," have been most interested in their important task.

I have been fortunate in tracing a direct descendant of Captain William Simonds, who raised the 2nd Battalion, in the person of his great-grandson, Lieutenant-General G. G. Simonds, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., of the Canadian Regular Army. He provided much interesting information about his great-grandfather, and since gaining touch with the Regiment, has taken a very great interest in its doings. In 1949, when travelling to Canada via India, General Simonds visited the Regimental Centre at Dehra Dun, where he was presented with a Ceremonial Kukri.

The photograph of Captain William Simonds was very kindly lent by Doctor Simonds-Gooding, M.A., M.D., a grandson of Captain W. Simonds.

Particulars regarding the service—and the photograph—of General Sir Horace M. Evans, K.C.B., were provided by his sons, Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Evans and Brigadier W. H. Evans, C.S.I., C.I.E., D.S.O.

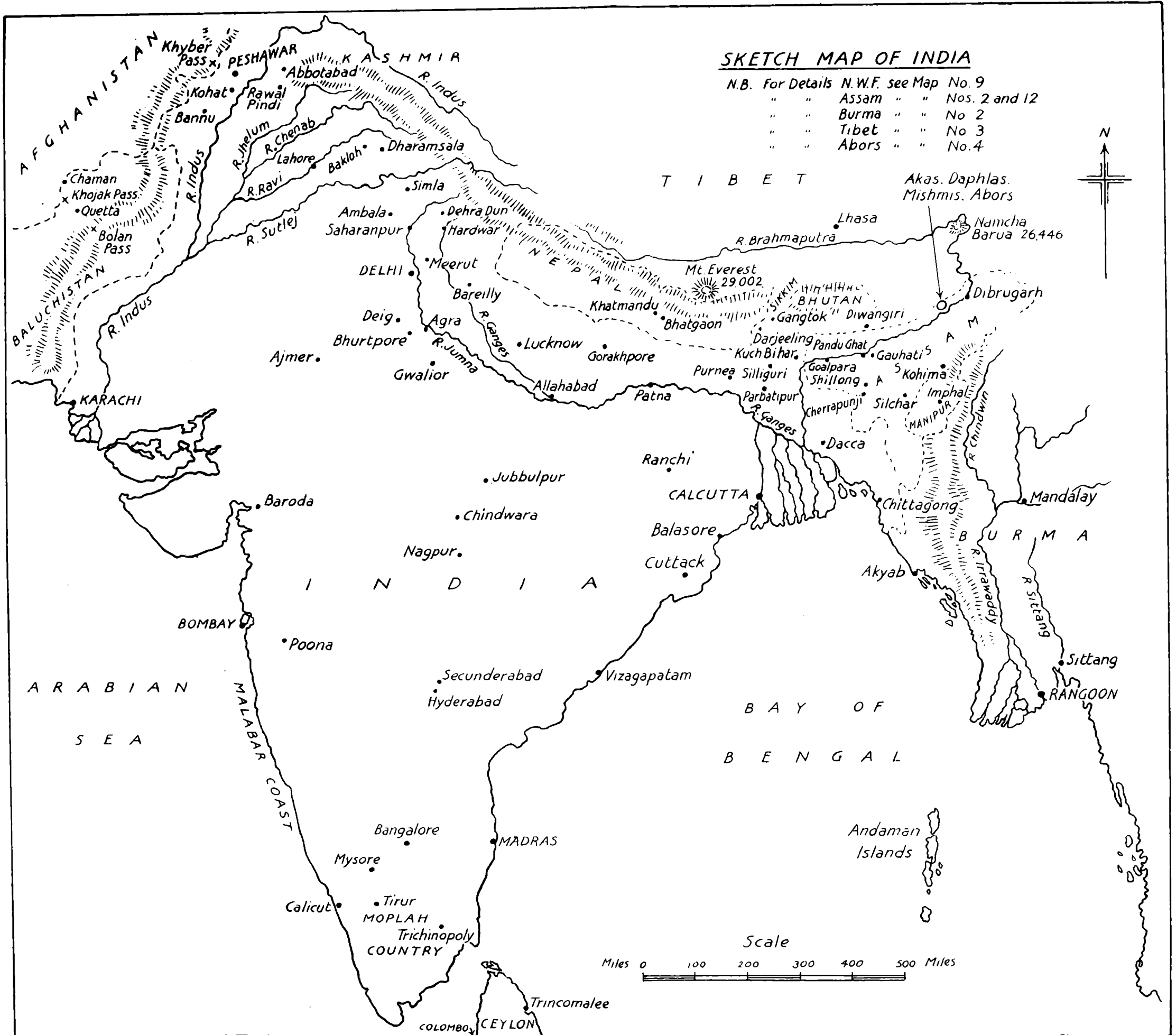
We are very fortunate to be able to include a Foreword by the C.I.G.S., Field-Marshal Sir William Slim, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. He needs no introduction. A world-famed figure under whom three of our battalions served in the Fourteenth Army, we are proud to have him, as an old 6th Gurkha Officer, associated with our History.

In any History ever written omissions and errors may be discovered, and no claim to infallibility is made in the present case. If this Record of our Regiment gives as much pleasure to the reader as it has given to me in compiling it, I shall be well satisfied.

In the course of his very human Foreword Field-Marshal Sir William Slim has expressed the hope that I (the author) will not prove to be a bore. Earlier in these introductory remarks I have admitted that I have left myself open to the charge of being, possibly, a laudator. As to being a bore—this is up to you to decide ; all I can say is that I have done my best not to be one.

Finally, a word of thanks is due to H.H. The Maharaja and Prime Minister of Nepal, and also to the Regiment in India, for their generous donations towards the cost of the History, without which, it is not too much to say, no progress would have been made.

H. J. H.



# PART I

## CHAPTER ONE

(See Map No. 2)

Country of Regiment's origin—Assam—Area covered by Assam—First British connection — Communications (Railways — Roads) — Comparison with North-West Frontier — Brief description of country — Inhabitants—Shillong.

As the Regiment, since the raising of the 1st Battalion in 1824, has been intimately connected with Assam, a few words describing that Province will not be out of place by way of introduction.

The present Province of Assam consists of the valley of the Brahmaputra, from where it enters India in the Abor country to where it reaches Bengal near Dhubri. South of this valley lies a tangled mass of hills. To the east the Patkoi Range forms the divide between the Brahmaputra and Irrawaddy basins. Farther west are the Naga, Khasia, and Jaintia hills. South of these hills lies the Surma valley.

British rule first spread to Assam in 1765, when the East India Company acquired the Diwana of Bengal, in which was included Sylhet. It is interesting to note that the first Collector of Sylhet was a Mr. Thackeray, grandfather of the novelist.

To many people until recently, this Province has been looked upon as a backwater ; in fact, up to the 1939-45 war few of those who had not served in Assam could even give the name of its larger towns, or knew that the mighty Brahmaputra in the north and the lesser (though great) Surma in the south provided the chief means of transportation. Why has the Province the name for backwardness ? Probably owing to the difficulty of its terrain, and the scantiness of its communications. To those readers who have flown the same distance in a few hours, it will be amazing to note that the journey from Calcutta to Sadiya by boat took about sixty-five days in 1850 ; while as late as 1900 it took a young officer, when joining the Regiment, twenty-two days to travel from Bombay to Kohima.

Up to 1902 the only railway to Assam was the small tea-carrying section in the neighbourhood of Dibrugarh. This did not help communications from outside, which relied almost entirely on the Brahmaputra steamers for passenger and goods traffic into and out of the province. In 1902, after years of difficult construction, the Assam-Bengal Railway, linking Chittagong to Lumding and thence to Gauhati, and Pandu ghat, and Dibrugarh, was open. This, together with the line connecting Pandu ghat with Calcutta along the north bank of the Brahmaputra, are the only railway means of communication, and, being metre gauge, do not allow for very great traffic, and are frequently interrupted by floods. During the war of 1939-45 these lines of communication were enormously expanded.

Roads are few, and with possibly one exception (Gauhati-Shillong-Cherrapunji) are or were bad. In the years immediately preceding the 1939-45 war, a new road from Shillong to Sylhet was constructed. Assam does not lend itself to good roads. Those on the plains are generally in the nature of built-up bunds more likely than not to become quite unusable in heavy rains. These bund roads have a history going back to the time of the Mogul invaders. One such road or military causeway extended along the whole northern border from Sadiya to Behar. The value of such a road to a country like Assam must have been great. History relates that one or two of a similar nature existed. These are now lost in jungle, and today no trace remains of these old highways.

For reasons which need not be discussed here, attention in India has always tended to be focused on the North-West Frontier and, until the recent Great (Japan) War burst on us, put that portion of India more in the limelight than Assam, and our North-East Frontier. Bordered as it is by wild, mountainous country, inhabited by courageous hillmen—in close proximity to China, Burma and even Tibet—its importance was overlooked, and little is known of the numerous expeditions undertaken largely by the Assam Gurkhas. Expeditions which demanded endurance, ability to overcome nature's obstacles, and determination of purpose against cunning "jungle expert" foes, were real tests of military efficiency. It is significant to note that when, at long last, the Battalions of the 8th were employed on the North-West Frontier, they did well and proved themselves none the worse for their long sojourn in the north-east.

Assam is a country of infinite variety. From the rather dull, monotonous plainland, jungle-covered and relieved by the occasional sugar-loafed hills through which the great rivers flow, one has ever near the wonderful hills with scenery as varied as you will find anywhere: sheer mountains with rushing torrents, to grass-covered undulating country more like parts of England than would be looked

for in the East. In the same way do temperatures show the varied difference of this land. From the hot humidity of Gauhati one is, after a few hours' journey, enjoying a most equable climate. Shillong at five thousand feet is much cooler in the summer than Simla at seven thousand three hundred feet, and in the cold weather the former compares very favourably with the latter for its mildness. Assam is damp, very damp. It boasts of Cherrapunji, reputedly the wettest place on earth. On one visit to this old cantonment on a particularly rainy day, the clerk in charge of the rain measuring gauge informed the author that it had overflowed! Recorded measurements at Cherra may easily be an underestimate! There are, however, compensations even in the monsoon. It is an experience not to be forgotten to stand at Cherrapunji and see the many waterfalls dashing headlong hundreds of feet to the Sylhet plain below, stretching for miles and looking like a vast lake.

Assam contains a very mixed population. On the plains the Assamese proper is found. They are mainly Hindu, though a large proportion are Mussulmen. Considerable numbers of tribesmen, such as Garos, Cachars, etc., who originally descended from the hills, now live permanently on the plains, and it is now no easy matter to distinguish the pure Assamese amongst them. This distinction is rendered still more obscure by intermarriage.

In the hills dwell those hillmen whose peculiarities and customs will be dealt with in the description of the various expeditions conducted against them.

Mention must be made of Shillong, where both Battalions were so often quartered. Situated in the Khasia-Jaintia hills some sixty-four miles from Gauhati, with which it is connected by the good motor road already mentioned, this charming resort has no superior in India, and few equals, for climate and the amenities of a hill station. The Regiment has indeed been lucky in being able to return to such a station periodically. Its climate makes training possible all the year round. Many will remember with tender feelings the countryside; the pleasant camps such as Barapani and Upper Shillong. Jungle warfare, mountain warfare and ordinary training can be done in close proximity to cantonments, hence, despite the lack of competition with other Army units, it was possible to maintain a high standard of efficiency. The Khasia-Jaintia hills, too, afford opportunity to the shikari and the fisherman. In Assam generally the range of game, large and small, is unequalled. Those interested in this aspect of Assam life cannot do better than read "Sport and Service in Assam and Elsewhere," by Colonel Alban Wilson, D.S.O., an officer of the Regiment.

## CHAPTER TWO

(See Map No. 2)

*[In this chapter the 1st Battalion is referred to as the Sylhet Local Battalion.]*

Evolution of the Army in India since 1824—Indian Infantry Regiments—Local Corps—1st Battalion raised—First Commander, Captain P. Dudgeon, 10th Native Infantry—Establishment and Volunteer Drafts—Attached Cavalry—1st Burma War, 1825-6—Two mountain guns allotted—Events of 1827-8—Recruitment of Gurkhas commenced—Two companies transferred to Assam Light Infantry—Fighting in Khasia-Jaintia hills—Events of 1832-1835—H.Q. Sylhet Local Battalion to Cherrapunji.

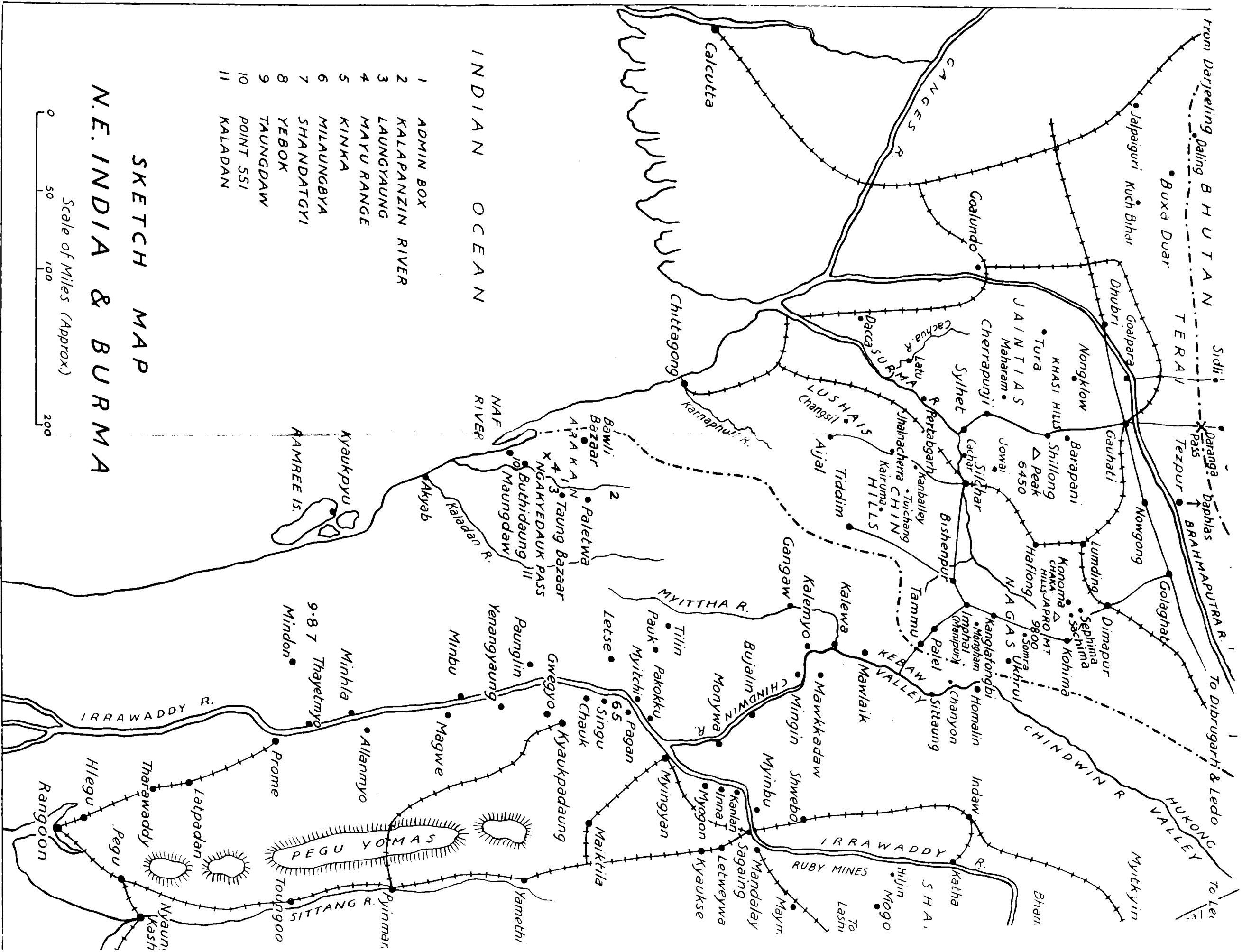
IN 1824 the Army in India consisted of three Presidency Armies—Bengal, Madras and Bombay—serving under the East India Company. European soldiers were designated as Royal or Company's. The British officer serving in the East India Company in those days held his commission from the company. It was not until 1858 that all the land forces in British India came under the British Government. The Company's European troops were then given their place in the British Army, and British officers received their commissions from the sovereign, holding exactly the same position as any officer of the British Army. The Subadars, Jemadars and so on, known as Indian (or Gurkha) officers, were given Viceroy's commission, and therefore were not entitled to command British soldiers.

During the era of the Presidency Armies (lasting to 1896) regiments were numbered in each army according to the date on which they had originally been raised. In 1896 Presidency Armies ceased to exist as such; the whole became the Indian Army.

In 1903 all Infantry units of the Indian Army were numbered in sequence (excluding Gurkha regiments, which were numbered separately). In 1922 a renumbering of Indian battalions, and grouping them in regiments (each of four or five battalions), took place, the Gurkhas being organized into two-battalion regiments.

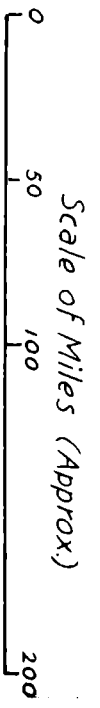
This will explain to readers not conversant with changes of titles in the Indian Army how it occurs that the 1st Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment, for example, is the same battalion that was previously known as the 25th Punjabis and even before that as the 29th Bengal Native Infantry.

The year 1824 was an important one for the Indian Army. In this year, reforms which had been made in 1796 were acknowledged



- 1 ADMIN BOX
- 2 KALAPANZIN RIVER
- 3 LAUNGYAUNG
- 4 MAYU RANGE
- 5 KINKA
- 6 MILAUNGBYA
- 7 SHANDATGYI
- 8 YEBOK
- 9 TAUNGDAW
- 10 POINT SSI
- 11 KALADAN

# SKETCH MAP N.E. INDIA & BURMA





to have been unsatisfactory, and the pre-1796 conditions were restored. This resulted in regiments being restored to a one-battalion basis from the two-battalion organization effected in 1796. In this year we first find *local* units mentioned, and an establishment of the three Presidency Armies shows Bengal as having 68 Regiments (Battalions) “excluding local corps, e.g., Cuttack Legion (now 1/6th Gurkha Rifles).” This is interesting as it is from such a source that both battalions of the 8th Gurkha Rifles sprang. The term “local” is not altogether easy to define. Generally it may be taken to mean “irregular” and probably is the infantry equivalent of the term “irregular” as applied to the many cavalry regiments which were, in those days, incorporated into the Indian Army from the large bodies of native horsemen, partially maintained by rulers of Native States. This contention is borne out by an examination of the wording of the Governor-General’s order in connection with the raising of another Gurkha regiment : “A Local Corps shall be immediately raised, etc. etc.”—the significance of the words “local corps” being that the corps was to be an “irregular” one. Indeed, up to 1921 the whole of the Indian Cavalry excepting three regiments were “silladar” and assimilated to the system employed by the native rulers. This system, in short, was a yeomanry system under which the soldier supplied and maintained his horse, clothing, equipment, etc., for which in return he received a higher rate of pay than the non-silladar soldier.

It was as the 16th or Sylhet Local Battalion that the 1st Battalion was raised. Sylhet on the Surma river is that portion of Assam lying south of the Khasia–Jaintia hills, and being in very close proximity to hill tracts inhabited by such tribes as Garos, Nagas, Chin Lushais, it can be understood that this frontier district was a difficult proposition for a Collector, backed up by local police only.

The Sylhet and Cachar frontiers required to be guarded. These factors, together with the outbreak of war between India and Burma, was the reason for the birth of the 8th Gurkha Rifles.

The Battalion was raised by Captain Patrick Dudgeon, 10th Native Infantry, under the authority of the Governor-General in Council, dated 19th February, 1824. It was recruited from natives of districts surrounding Sylhet, and consisted of ten companies of 80 men each. The establishment was :

*British.* 1 Commandant (Major or Captain), 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Assistant Surgeon, 1 Sergeant-Major, 1 Quartermaster-Sergeant.

*Indian.* 1 Subadar-Major, 10 Subadars, 10 Jemadars, 2 Native Doctors and 1 Sircar or Writer.

Certain staff appointments included, and shown as non-effective, were : 1 Drill Havildar, 1 Bugle Major, 1 Drill Naik, 1 Fife Major, 1 Pay Havildar per company.

As a nucleus, volunteer drafts were received from the following Local battalions already in existence :

The Calcutta Militia (later 18th Infantry and 4/9th Jat Regiment),  
 The Ramghur Battalion,  
 The Hill Rangers,  
 The Dinapore Battalion,  
 The Champaran Battalion,  
 The Rangpur Battalion (now 6th Gurkha Rifles),  
 The Goruckpore Battalion,

each supplying 1 Jemadar, 1 Havildar, 5 Naiks, 25 Sepoys.

The uniform was red with black accoutrements, and the men were armed with muskets.

The rates of pay were :

Subadar	...	...	...	...	Rs30 monthly
Jemadar	...	...	...	...	Rs15 monthly
Havildar	...	...	...	...	Rs10 monthly
Naik	...	...	...	...	Rs8 monthly
Bugler	...	...	...	...	Rs7 monthly
Sepoy	...	...	...	...	Rs5 monthly

probably augmented at times by full or half Batta, under the somewhat intricate pay rules then in force.

In May, 1824, a squadron of Manipuri Cavalry was attached to the Sylhet Local Battalion, but, being found to be of little value, was disbanded two years later.

The Battalion took part in the war against Burma, serving on the Manipur and Burma frontiers. Unfortunately all records of regimental activities in this campaign have been lost, but it has been possible to piece together from various sources a story which gives a reasonable account of the Battalion's activities in this campaign.

For many years before 1825, the eastern frontier of Bengal had again and again been disturbed by Burmese invasions. In 1823 two Burmese armies entered British territory with the object of annexing Chittagong and the adjoining districts. One advanced from Manipur, the other from Assam. It was decided to halt this aggression. The plan of operation was :

- (1) A force (dispatched to Rangoon by sea) to work up the Irrawaddy river to Ava, capital of Burma.
- (2) A force at Sylhet to invade Burma through Manipur.
- (3) A force at Chittagong to march on Ava through Arakan.

In addition, a Column to expel the Burmese from Assam had been operating from Goalpara and Gauhati. We are concerned with (2) above.

This force, under Brigadier Shuldham, consisted of two brigades, each of three regiments, and the 16th Sylhet Local Battalion. The object was to march through Cachar into Manipur, whence an impression might be made on the territory of Ava.

There was no fighting with a human enemy. The struggle was with the country. The early unseasonable rains made the roads impassable for guns and laden cattle. The 16th Sylhet Local Battalion was employed both to cover the pioneers and road-makers, and themselves helped in this work. The road-making necessitated great exertions, accentuated by the nature of the soil and the weather. Even the limited task of getting supplies to the pioneers and advance guard took heavy toll of the transport, and consequently it was decided to abandon the project. Force Headquarters was withdrawn to Dacca and the 16th Sylhet Local Battalion to Sylhet. Battle honours "Ava," "Arakan," and "Assam," to be borne on Regimental Colours of Corps engaged, were granted, but for some reason not known, the 16th Sylhet Local Battalion was excluded. A silver medal was issued for the campaign.

On the death of Captain P. Dudgeon in October, 1825, he was succeeded in command by Captain T. C. Watson, 2nd European Regiment.

Two mountain guns were allotted to the Sylhet Battalion in 1827, and there was always an artillery section belonging to it until 1905.

In the same year, 1827, the colour of the uniform was changed to rifle green, and has remained so ever since.

The recruitment of Gurkhas commenced in 1828, in place of two companies transferred intact to the Assam Light Infantry (now 6th Gurkha Rifles).

These Gurkhas were raised, partly from the Nusseeree and Sirmoor Battalions (later to become 1st Gurkha Rifles and 2nd Gurkha Rifles respectively), and also from recruits enrolled at Pithoragarh.

The first Gurkha officers were Subadars Dalkamba Thapa and Deoraj Ale and Jemadars Ransur Thapa and Biru Thapa.

Generally speaking, the Gurkha element in the Regiment now gradually increased until eventually the composition consisted entirely of Gurkhas.

Captain F. G. Lister, 52nd Native Infantry, was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 14th March, 1828.

In this year the Regiment proceeded to the Khasia-Jaintia hills to avenge the murder of two British officers who were surveying near Nongklao. Fighting followed against Khasias and Garos, who

were defeated at Mamlu, and Nongklao was retaken. The strong position of Mogandi was stormed on 21st May. Finally, Rajah Tirat Singh, the instigator of the attack on the British officers, was captured and brought to justice.

The Rajah of Jaintiapur was the next to be called to account. His people had been raiding in the plains. The Regiment was sent to stop this lawlessness. After some fighting the Rajah was captured and his territory annexed.

The Headquarters of the 16th Sylhet Local Battalion were moved to Cherrapunji, where they remained until 1867. In spite of the dampness of Cherra, one reads that all were glad to get up to the hills, at which they had for so long gazed, from the Sylhet plain.

## CHAPTER THREE

(See Map No. 2)

*[In this chapter the 1st Battalion is referred to as Sylhet Light Infantry and the 2nd Battalion as Assam Sebundy Corps, or 1st Assam Sebundy Corps.]*

Raising of 2nd Battalion in 1835—8th Gurkha Rifles Battalions separate entities for many years—Assam Sebundy Corps—Its Establishment, Dress and Composition—First Commandant, Captain W. Simonds, 21st Native Infantry—Meaning of Sebundy—Changes of designation, 2nd Battalion—Tribes of Assam and neighbourhood—2nd Battalion's first action—1st Battalion in fighting against Khasias—Bravery of Sepoy Naharsing Khattri—Conditions of Service.

WITH the raising of the Assam Sebundy Corps (now 2nd Battalion), the joint history of the Regiment commences. Unlike any other regiment in the Gurkha Brigade, the 8th had, for many years, separate entities. These are set out in the evolution of the name of the Regiment. This, it will be appreciated, makes it difficult to produce a story in strictly chronological order. In other Gurkha regiments the deeds of the 2nd Battalions, formed largely from the 1st Battalions of the same regiment, inheriting exactly the same ideas, make it simple to give such battalions pages of their own. This cannot be done in our case, because the two battalions of the 8th, now so firmly united as one regiment, possessed for many years their own traditions, stations, and peculiarities, hence separate, though connected, accounts of their doings are called for.

In one particular, however, the careers of the two battalions are identical. They both served largely in the same part of India, and under the same conditions, and very often side by side in the many expeditions undertaken.

The Assam Sebundy Corps was raised by Captain W. Simonds, 21st Native Infantry, at Gauhati on 13th April, 1835, under G.G.O. 98 of 1835 in the following terms :

“It having been resolved in the Political Department that the four Companies of Sebundies and other irregular troops, now maintained in Assam, shall be formed into a Corps for Civil purposes, to be denominated the ‘Assam Sebundy Corps,’ the Honourable The Governor General in Council is pleased to direct that the Corps shall consist of 8 Companies, and be of the following strength and establishment :

1 Captain Commanding	STAFF
8 Subadars	1 Adjutant, Effective
8 Jemadars	1 Native Doctor, Effective
40 Havildars	1 Drill Havildar, Non-effective
40 Naiks	1 Drill Naik, Non-effective
8 Drummers	8 Pay Havildars, Non-effective
640 Privates	

The Corps will be armed with fusils, and have black leather accoutrements. Camp equipage and a Quartermaster are not allowed to this Corps."

Two companies were transferred from the Assam Light Infantry (now 6th Gurkha Rifles), and two companies were newly raised. These, together with the existing four companies of Sebundies, completed the Battalion to the establishment authorized.

The uniform was red with dark green facings for a very short while; as in the case of the 1st Battalion, the green uniform with black facings was soon to come.

In its origin, the Battalion was a corps intended entirely for service in Assam, which, excluding Sylhet, was not then considered part of India, and was administered largely through the Political Department for the pacification of the north-east portion of India. A modern equivalent of this status would be the Frontier Militias of the North-West Frontier. For several years the Bengal Army Lists show the Assam Sebundy Corps as Civil.

The men were for the most part Assamese of the Rabhas, Kacharis and similar tribes, with a considerable number of Nepalese from eastern Nepal who had served in the former local Sebundy Company.

The word Sebundy has long gone out of use. It probably came from southern India, where a similar word meaning "foreigners" can be traced. Sebundies were irregular foot soldiers who, in pre-British times, constituted the armed forces which always accompanied the tax gatherers, and were also employed on police duties.

It was not long, however, before several changes in the designation and strength of the Assam Sebundy Corps were made.

In March, 1839, the strength was raised from eight companies each of 80 privates to ten companies each of 100 privates. The same year, in August, the designation was changed to "The Lower Assam Sebundy Corps," and the appointment of a Second-in-Command was sanctioned. Its strength was reduced to the original eight companies of 80 privates each. A further change of designation occurred in October, and the Regiment was named 1st Assam Sebundy Corps.

That the authorities appreciated the value of water communications

in Assam is evident, in that twenty canoes were allotted in September, 1842, as regimental transport.

With our two Battalions now in being, and definitely designed to protect the North-East Frontier, it is interesting to note the tribal peoples against whom this protection was designed. They are Bootyas, Khasias, Nagas, Lushais, Daphlas, Mishmis, Akas, Abors (their location is found on Map No. 2), and to deal with them fully it is necessary to hark back to 1836.

The Assam Sebundy Corps was first engaged in March, 1836. A party of 75 of the Corps proceeded against 600 "Bootyas," who were posted in five groups at Soobunkatta, in Baksa Dooar. Receiving a request to retire from Lieutenant R. W. Mathews, O.C., Sebundy Detachment, the "Bootyah" Rajah defied him and attacked. Lieutenant Mathews at once advanced with his small force, fired a volley, and charged with the bayonet. This was too much for the enemy, who broke, with the loss of 25 killed and 50 wounded. The Rajah succeeded in escaping, thanks to the swiftness of the elephant on which he was mounted. His tent, baggage, robes of state and standards fell into the hands of the victorious Sebundies.

To turn to the 1st Battalion : In 1836 the Sylhet Light Infantry was employed against the Khasias. Following some desultory fighting over a period of one year, the rising spread, and some sharp fighting took place at a village called Maharam, which was held by the Rajah of Cherrapunji. The attack, in which the Gurkhas particularly distinguished themselves, was completely successful, and resulted in most of the Khasia chiefs coming in and giving guarantee for their future good behaviour. Major F. G. Lister, Commandant, was wounded. This was his second wound, the first having been incurred against these same Khasias in 1829. He leaves an interesting account of a reconnaissance carried out by a sepoy of No. 10 Company the evening before the attack on Maharam. This man, Naharsing Khattri, volunteered to go alone with a guide to reconnoitre the enemy position, and ascertain their strength. Disguising himself as a Khasia, Naharsing hid near the stockade. For every score of men who went into the stockade at dusk he dropped a stone into a basket he was carrying. Having ascertained the enemy strength, he continued his reconnaissance and discovered the best route along which to lead the column for its attack on the stockade. The accuracy of his report, and the bravery shown, earned him promotion to Naik.

About this time several innovations in the conditions of service, etc., in the Bengal Army are worthy of note. In former days, part of the soldier's pay, of whatever rank, was included under the term "batta." No small amount of discontent followed the reduction from full to half batta rates for service in certain military cantonments,

though the effect on the regiment is not known. The saving effected was comparatively small, while the hardship inflicted by it, especially on junior officers, was great. Such incidents have not been infrequent in our Army. Perhaps in this case the introduction of good conduct pay in 1837 was an attempt to put matters right. It was a hard-earned reward—Rs1 per mensem after sixteen years' service, Rs2 after twenty years' service. In 1838 wound pensions for commissioned native ranks were authorized. The year 1837 saw the introduction of the Order of British India and the Indian Order of Merit ; the former of two classes, for which only Native officers were eligible, and the latter for conspicuous bravery in action.

In 1827, flogging, except for the crimes of stealing, marauding or gross insubordination, and where the individuals were deemed unworthy to continue in the Native Army, was abolished. Later, in 1837, this was amended, so that soldiers were to be sentenced to dismissal from the Service for any offence which up till then might be punished by flogging. This order was not to be long-lived. In 1845, owing to the large increase in the number of courts-martial the Governor General repealed the previous order.



## CHAPTER FOUR

(See Map No. 2)

[In this chapter the 1st Battalion is generally referred to as Sylhet Light Infantry and the 2nd Battalion as Assam Sebundy Corps or 2nd Assam Light Infantry.]

Nagas—Their country—Appearance—Arms—Forms of defence—Remarks *re* Nagas apply generally to Assam Hill Tribes—Naga raiding—Seven Expeditions from 1839 to 1847—Change of title, 2nd Battalion—Nagas murder Resident and are severely punished—Nagas continue raids into British Territory—Naga Hills District established—Raiding ceases—Lushai Expedition—Lieutenant-Colonel E. G. Lister—Advocates measures for solving Lushai question—Major R. T. V. Byng—Composition of 1st Battalion—The Indian Mutiny—March to Latu—Defeat of 34th Native Infantry—Major Byng killed—Bugler Mahabulla Khan and Pensioned Sepoy Subhan Khattri at Latu—Changes in Equipment.

FOR many years it was the Nagas who were the cause of the many expeditions in which the Regiment took part. As raiders they could compare with the Mahsud or any Pathan tribesman. Their country is mountainous and forms a natural south-eastern boundary to the Assam valley—a most difficult terrain in which to operate. Movement is restricted to foot-paths, which not only climb steep slopes and descend into deep ravines, but are so closely shut in with jungle that troops are compelled to move along them in single file. To quote an official handbook, "Intimate acquaintance with the ground, and with every track used by the wild animals who haunt the forests, enables the almost naked Naga to move at will through a country much of which is a hopeless labyrinth, even to our Gurkhas."

"The Nagas are an athletic and by no means bad-looking race: brave and warlike, but also treacherous and vindictive. Their dress consists of a dark blue or black kilt, ornamented with rows of cowrie shells, and a thick cloth of home manufacture thrown loosely over the shoulders. Their arms are a spear and shield; the former seven feet in length with a long and broad head, thrown usually at twenty-five yards range. They also carry, at all times, the dah, a heavy knife, and, like the kukri, used for many purposes. They possess also a certain number of firearms; bows and arrows, the latter frequently poisoned, are used."

"Forms of defence consist of *panjis*, bamboo stakes sharply pointed and hardened by fire, which are placed in the ground where an enemy is likely to tread on them. If not well shod, an incapacitating

wound is inflicted. *Booby traps*, a collection of rocks placed in a kind of scaffold of bamboos held in position by single canes which can be severed at a blow, are usually placed to command a path ascending a hillside. As the path generally zigzags, the rocks when liberated strike it in several places before reaching the bottom. *Stockades* of double rows of bamboos fixed upright, the space between is filled with earth and stones to a height of four feet. Above that a *chevaux de frise* of pointed bamboos is fixed. These stockades are generally placed on a hill commanding a narrow approach, and so arranged that it is almost impossible to turn them."

To obviate tiresome repetition, it can be taken that the foregoing gives a general idea of the sort of country in which troops had to operate, the type of enemy met with, and the arms and mode of defence used by the various tribes of the North-East Frontier area.

Until 1835 little notice was taken by the East India Company of the Nagas. Then some villages in North Kachar were raided by Angamis, who appeared to have been the most troublesome of the Naga tribes. Raid followed raid, and the Company endeavoured to control the hillmen by occasional expeditions and promenades. This method did not work, and probably the establishment of a permanent Hill District, as was done in the Khasia hills, would have given much better results in a much shorter time. No less than seven expeditions entered the Naga hills between 1839 and 1847—an annual occurrence, it would appear. It is of these early activities against the Nagas that mention will now be made.

Early in 1839, fifty sepoy of the Assam Sebundy Corps formed part of an expedition under Mr. Grange, Assistant Commissioner of Nowgong. A similar expedition, under the same officer, met with much opposition in operations lasting from December, 1839, to March, 1840.

On 22nd September, 1841, Major Thomas Fisher, 48th Native Infantry, succeeded to the command of the Assam Sebundy Corps *vice* Major W. Simonds, who had been invalided. Between 1841 and 1849 several small expeditions against the Nagas were undertaken by the Assam Sebundy Corps whilst this officer was Commandant.

In 1844 the Nagas cut up the guard detached from a stockade post, and to avenge this a party of the Assam Sebundy Corps under Captain L. P. D. Eld (1st Assam Light Infantry) proceeded into the Naga hills, and punished the tribesmen by burning several villages.

In 1844 the title Assam Sebundy Corps was changed to 1st Assam Sebundy Regiment, with the addition of two companies in the establishment. A few months later, however, it was directed that, in future, the Regiment should be considered a Light Infantry Corps, and be, in all respects, armed, clothed, and equipped as an Assam

Light Infantry Battalion, and be designated the 2nd Assam Light Infantry Battalion.

After nine years of existence, therefore, the name Sebundy ceased as part of the designation, and the 2nd Battalion, for seventeen years, was to be associated with a regiment which, having borne the title the Assam Light Infantry Battalion in 1844, subsequently became, in turn, the 1st Assam Light Infantry, 42nd Bengal Native Infantry, and finally, the 6th Gurkha Rifles.

On 18th August, 1847, Major Henry Foquett, 56th Native Infantry, was appointed Commandant of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry.

In 1845, 1846 and 1849 parties of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry were out again. The 1849 expedition followed the murder by the Nagas of the Resident in the hills, one Bogchand. This expedition under Captain R. Campbell carried out "punishment" and remained in the field until January, 1850. Apparently the lesson taught was not sufficiently severe, for in a few months' time 3,000 Nagas were in arms. Something drastic had to be done. Hence a force of 500 men of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry, with three guns and two mortars, under the command of Major H. Foquett, was put in action. Several villages were burnt, and finally the strong village of Kekremah was stormed, with a loss to the Nagas of 300 killed and wounded.

Then followed a period of non-intervention, and by 1857 the troops were withdrawn. The Nagas celebrated this relief by making twenty-two raids into British territory within the year. The raids continued incessantly in succeeding years; the frontier officials being actually instructed not to interfere, although anxious as they were to respond to appeals for intervention in the constant fighting that went on in the hills. At long last, in 1866, the Government of India decided to give the Angami Nagas, the trouble-makers, a settled administration. A Deputy Commissioner was appointed. The effect was immediate. All raiding into Cachar and the plains ceased, and, with rare exceptions, was never resumed. The establishment of the Naga Hills District achieved its primary object, the protection of the peaceful inhabitants of British territory. No progress, however, was made in the civilizing of the Nagas themselves, and later it will be seen that this failure was to result in more expeditions being forced on the Regiment.

Second only to the Nagas, the Lushais or Kukis have been the cause of much trouble on the North-East Frontier. The Lushai hills form part of the eastern frontier of India, and lie south of the Surma valley, Sylhet and Cachar. To the west lies the Chittagong District, in which the Regiment was to be engaged in anti-terrorist duties years later, and to the south, the Arakan District of Burma, the scene of much hard fighting in the 1939-45 war.

For years these hillmen had made themselves a terror to their neighbours outside their own hills, and at one period the Cachar valley was almost depopulated by them. At last, in 1844, it was decided to send a small expedition to avenge an outrage committed on a Sylhet village. Under Captain W. Blackwood, the Sylhet Light Infantry carried out the task with success. The Lushais, however, were not long before recommencing their incursions. Following raids in 1845, 1847, and 1849, stronger action was necessary. Lieutenant-Colonel Lister, Sylhet Light Infantry, with Battalion Headquarters moved down to Silchar, and got busy in earnest. The leading spirit in these recent Lushai raids was a chief named Mulah. His village was destroyed, and some 400 British subjects released. This latter figure gives some indication of the depredations carried out, and one can only speculate as to the total number carried into slavery in the Lushai hills, when considering that 400 of these unfortunates were held in one village. That old warrior, Colonel Lister, was again wounded. He evidently realized the futility of sending out small parties, and gave his opinion that to effect a permanent impression on the Lushais a force of at least 3,000 men would be required. He also advocated the building of roads, and the formation of a Kuki Levy Corps. Both these suggestions were adopted, and brought tranquillity to the neighbourhood for a period of some twelve years. No doubt the Treasury had something to say to the 3,000 expedition. It never came off.

It would be correct to say that Lieutenant-Colonel E. G. Lister was the "Father" of the 1st Battalion. Joining in 1826, he became Commandant in 1828, and remained as such until 1854, when he was succeeded by Captain The Honourable R. P. V. Byng, 62nd Native Infantry. He led his Regiment in four campaigns, and took part in innumerable skirmishes. To have been wounded on three occasions is evidence of his always being well to the fore. He combined the important post of Political Agent, Khasia hills, with his rank as Commandant. There are many instances of long "reigns" as Commandant of Indian Army units in those far-off days, but it is doubtful if a longer one than the 26½ years of Colonel Lister is recorded.

Major The Honourable R. P. V. Byng was appointed Commandant on 18th July, 1854. In his short service with the Sylhet Light Infantry he introduced several innovations. He presented Colours to his Regiment. These had been worked by his wife, and are still in the Officers' Mess. He instituted a Band. Before joining the Sylhet Light Infantry, Major Byng had served with distinction in other parts of India. He took part in the Gwalior Campaign of 1843, being on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Hugh Gough. For this he received the Maharajpore Star. This Star is now in the Officers' Mess, having been presented to the Battalion by Major Byng's widow.

At this time the composition of the Sylhet Light Infantry was half Gurkhas and half Hindustanis, all Manipuris having been transferred to the Manipuri Regiment.

On 4th November, 1854, Major Robert Campbell, 47th Native Infantry, was appointed Commandant of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry.

The Indian Mutiny, so called, though largely confined to the Bengal Army, does not appear to have affected the troops in Assam. Records show no instance of disaffection in either of our two Battalions. The 2nd Assam Light Infantry had no opportunity to show its loyalty, but the Sylhet Light Infantry was to be engaged in operations against the mutineers, bringing much credit to its good name.

The official account of these operations states that as the greater part of the loyal portions of the army had been concentrated for operations at Lucknow, the danger in other parts of India, particularly eastern Bengal, was ever present. Much disturbance was caused by the mutiny of the 34th Native Infantry on 18th November, 1857.

Our own account, amplifying the above, is of particular interest, bringing out as it does personal incidents connected with gallant men taking part.

As stated above, the 34th Native Infantry, stationed at Chittagong, mutinied in November, 1857, looting the Treasury and other Government buildings. They then determined to march on Sylhet, hoping to be joined by the Sylhet Battalion. Major Byng at once marched from Cherrapunji to Pertabgarh to meet the mutineers. The distance, fifty-two miles, was covered in thirty-six hours. Hearing the rebels were at Latu, Major Byng marched by night another twenty-eight miles to attack them at daybreak. This march is acknowledged by military authorities to be one of the finest on record.

On Christmas Day, 1857, the Regiment attacked the mutineers on the Cachua river. During the crossing Major Byng, leading his men under heavy fire, was killed. Seeing him fall, the mutineers called out, "Now we have killed the Sahib, come and join us." Bugler Mahabulla Khan, the Commanding Officer's bugler, replied, "You've only killed our sergeant-major." The Adjutant, Lieutenant Sherer, taking over command, ordered him to sound the charge, and the position was carried.

This bugler, although a Mohammedan, rose to be Subadar-Major, and died in 1899.

During the advance on Latu, an old pensioned sepoy, Subhan Khattri, obtained Major Byng's permission to accompany him as his orderly. When his Commanding Officer was killed, Subhan called out to the rebels, "I will now show you what an old man can do," and, taking his kukri in one hand and his tulwar in the other, rushed into

the enemy's position, where he was soon killed, but not before doing a deal of execution.

The loot taken by the 34th at Chittagong was recaptured by the Regiment.

After this there were several small engagements before the 34th and their followers were entirely broken up and destroyed, after which the Sylhet Battalion returned to quarters.

Eight Orders of Merit were granted to men of the Battalion for gallantry during this campaign, and the Mutiny Medal was issued to all who had been under fire.

Why a battle honour for their work in the Mutiny was not awarded to the Sylhet Battalion is a mystery. By his prompt and resolute action, Major Byng probably prevented the Mutiny spreading over the whole of the North-East Frontier.

In 1858 Major W. Richardson, 73rd Native Infantry, was appointed to command the Sylhet Battalion, then quartered at Cherrapunji.

The Khasias gave the 1st Battalion the nickname of "Ki Lukiar" because it was said that the officers, before they gave any command, always commenced with "Look Here."

The most important change in the equipment of native infantry at this time was the gradual introduction of muzzle-loading "Brunswick" rifles, the first to receive them being one company in each of the Light Infantry Regiments.

Less important, though far from trivial, changes were the substitution of canvas haversacks for the old unwieldy knapsack, and the introduction of a forage-cap for general duty.

## CHAPTER FIVE

(See Map No. 2)

*[In this chapter 1st Battalion is referred to as Sylhet Light Infantry Battalion or 48th Bengal Native Infantry or 44th and the 2nd Battalion as 2nd Assam Light Infantry or 47th Bengal Native Infantry or 43rd.]*

H.M. Queen Victoria assumes Government of India—Conditions of service following this—Reorganization in 1860-1—New Titles—Establishment of Infantry Battalions—Composition of Regiment—Jaintia hills rebellion 1861-3—Sepoy Bankasing, 44th and Khasia warrior—44th Detachment in Manipur outbreak—Bhutan War—Plan of operations—44th march to Bishensingh—43rd at Dewangiri—Muddle and disaster—Action to restore our prestige—Dewangiri recaptured—Heavy losses from fever in the Terai.

ON 1st November, 1858, an event of great importance took place. From this date the Indian Forces were transferred to the Crown, and Her Majesty Queen Victoria assumed the Government of India. So ended the control held for many years by the Honourable East India Company—the old “John Company.” The change, though of great political importance, affected the native army domestically but little.

The armament of native soldiers remained as heretofore, though reforms were introduced elsewhere. The grievance (real or imaginary) over the Enfield rifle cartridge retarded the issue of this effective weapon, and for many years the infantry had nothing better than the old smooth-bore percussion musket, and the few Brunswick rifles mentioned above.

On the credit side, however, the introduction of khaki clothing and the abolition of the leather stocks made much difference to the comfort of the native soldier.

In short, conditions of service and appointment of British officers remained unchanged, though the Queen’s commission superseded that of the Honourable East India Company.

After the Mutiny, the Bengal Army was remodelled and reorganized, and assumed the shape in which, with but small modification, it was to exist for many years. Amongst the irregular and extra infantry under the Commander-in-Chief in August, 1860, were the 2nd Assam Light Infantry Battalion and the Sylhet Light Infantry Battalion. These units were now numbered and designated 47th and 48th Bengal Native Infantry respectively. Within six months,

however, this arrangement was altered. The line regiments of Bengal Native Infantry were finally numbered on 29th October, 1861, and under the latest renumbering the 2nd Assam Light Infantry and Sylhet Light Infantry became the 43rd and 44th Bengal Native Infantry respectively. In each case the Light Infantry distinction was retained. Bengal Army Lists show this. The connection with Assam remained in the case of the 2nd Battalion's new title, the word Assam appearing in brackets after 43rd. The 1st Battalion's new designation, for two years, shows Sylhet omitted from the title.

The establishment of all battalions was, in 1861, laid down as follows: 1 Commandant, 1 Second-in-Command, 1 Adjutant, 2 Doing-Duty Officers, 1 Assistant Surgeon, 8 Subadars, 8 Jemadars, 40 Havildars, 40 Naiks, 600 Sepoys.

The two 6-pounder guns, with an artillery detail of one Tindal and eight Lascars, were retained by the 44th.

The two battalions retained their original black leather appointments, although the majority of Bengal Army units (including Light Infantry) wore brown.

In 1862 the proportion of 1/4th Hindustani Hindus to 3/4th Gurkhas was laid down as the authorized composition of the 43rd Assam Light Infantry and 44th Sylhet Light Infantry.

From December, 1861, to March, 1863, the 44th was employed continuously in the suppression of the Jaintia hills rebellion. For some considerable time the 44th appear to have had the entire responsibility of maintaining order in this district. The rebellion broke out at Jowai, where a post under Jemadar Kharag Sing Rana (44th) had been established. The post was heavily attacked, but, after nine days of siege, the Jemadar managed to get a letter to Regimental Headquarters. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel W. Richardson, at once took action, and the gallant garrison was relieved. The rebellion gathered strength, however, and there were constant fights round stockaded villages, for by this time, 1862, all the Jaintias and a considerable number of Khasias had joined in the trouble. Consequently, Government decided to send a force to commence regular operations in December, 1862. This force consisted of, besides the 44th and two companies of the 43rd, one Eurasian battery, four battalions of Native Infantry, and one battalion of Bengal Military Police (Rattray's Sikhs). This considerable force met with success, and by March, 1863, the rebellion was at an end.

During the operations Lieutenant-Colonel W. Richardson and Captain A. I. Shuldham were both wounded. The former was awarded the C.B., and Jemadar Kharag Sing Rana was promoted Subadar and advanced to 2nd Class I.O.M. for his gallant defence of Jowai stockade.



An incident which occurred in this campaign is worth recording. Whilst some men of the 44th were searching the jungle near a river for hidden enemy, a huge Khasia rushed out and attacked a sepoy, Karbir Lama, who was now a little distance from his comrades, and, picking him up, tried to throw him into the river. Hearing the noise, Sepoy Banka Sing ran to Karbir's assistance, but was cut down by another Khasia. In a few seconds he recovered, seized his musket, and shot his assailant. He then proceeded to hurl himself on the huge Khasia who was attacking Karbir, dragged him into the water, and held him down until he was drowned.

This exploit was remembered for many years in those parts, as the big man was one of their most celebrated warriors.

In 1862 a Subadar and one hundred men, the Silchar detachment of the 44th, were sent to capture two Manipuri princes who had collected a force and were endeavouring to depose the Rajah of Manipur. The detachment, less half its strength, held up by a broken bridge, pushed on under the Subadar, attacked and dispersed the enemy with heavy loss, and reached Manipur without further trouble.

A long-continued series of raids into British territories, culminating in an outrageous insult to a British Mission, forced on a war with the Government of Bhutan in November, 1864. The campaign was the first in which the 1st and 2nd Battalions were engaged alongside troops of all arms, in what may be termed a major operation.

The plan was that four columns, known as the Duar Field Force and named Right, Right Centre, Left Centre, Left Column, should operate, based from east to west on Gauhati, Goalpara, Kuch Behar and Jalpaiguri. These respectively had as their objective Dewangiri, Sidli, Buxa and Daling. The front was some two hundred miles in length. We are concerned with the two Right Columns. The 43rd belonged to the Right, and the 44th to Right Centre. At first all went well, and steps were taken to ensure the annexation of the Bengal Duars and the forts of Dewangiri, Buxa and Daling. After taking Sidli the Right Centre Column marched to Bishensing, which was distant forty-two miles over a very difficult route, through which paths had frequently to be cut through the dense jungle. The Right Column in its advance to the capture of Dewangiri met with but slight opposition.

The annexation being now thought to be complete, orders were prematurely issued for the breaking up of the Duar Field Force.

In the meantime, however, the Bhutanese were making preparations to attack the whole line of hill posts. This they did and, among others, Dewangiri was assaulted. This post was occupied by a portion of the 43rd, some gunners of the Eurasian battery with two 12-pounder howitzers, and a few Sappers.

It was a disastrous and muddled affair. Warnings had been disregarded and no precautions taken. The enemy were allowed to cut off the water supply, and to construct a stockade 600 yards from and commanding our camp, and were also allowed to get possession of the Daranga pass, thus cutting off communications with the base.

Ammunition was nearly exhausted, and a supply was sent up from base, but the escort, failing to get through the Daranga pass, retired.

In these circumstances, with practically no water and with a minimum of ammunition, it was decided to retreat to the base. The guides lost their way, the night was very dark, and, constantly harassed by the enemy, the detachment reached the base in a demoralized condition. The Commanding Officer was relieved of command of the 43rd.

On news of these attacks reaching Calcutta, immediate steps were taken for recovering our prestige and strengthening the posts still held. Reinforcements were sent up. Two Brigades were formed, the right being placed under the command of that old warrior, Brigadier-General Tombs, V.C., C.B. To this Brigade the 44th and 43rd were allotted. On 24th March, 1865, the Right Brigade commenced operations for the recapture of Dewangiri. Detaching a column to patrol a pass some five miles to the west of the Daranga pass, General Tombs completely deceived the Bhutanese, who concentrated their force to defend the western pass. The march through the Daranga pass was accomplished without the loss of a single man. By 3rd April, 1865, Dewangiri had been recaptured after a short engagement. The 44th did good service in this action. Sepoy Bakhat Sing Rai (44th) was one of the first men into the stockade, capturing one of the enemy's standards. For this he was awarded the Indian Order of Merit. On 23rd April, General Tombs made over command of the Right Brigade, Duar Field Force, to Colonel Richardson, C.B. (44th). This latter officer, in February, 1866, issuing from Dewangiri with a small force, defeated an enemy detachment and was handed back the two guns lost previously at Dewangiri.

This ended the Bhutan War, for which the India Medal, with a special clasp, was granted to all troops actively engaged with the enemy. As the Governor-General's Order making this award was not published until 1870, the number of recipients must have dwindled considerably.

During the occupation of the Bhutan Frontier in 1865, the troops suffered terribly from the deadly climate of the Terai. So heavy were losses from fever that both 43rd and 44th were ordered to Gauhati to recuperate. In October, 1865, the 44th again proceeded to Dewangiri, leaving finally for Cherrapunji in March, 1866.

## CHAPTER SIX

(See Map No. 2)

[In this chapter 1st Battalion is referred to as 44th, and the 2nd Battalion as 43rd.]

Recruiting 43rd—Poorbeah Element removed from Assam Regiments—Shillong for Cherrapunji as the H.Q. Station—Lushais, 1869-1872—44th in Cachar Column—Thursday holiday introduced—Assam Batta—Garo and Daphla hills—Naga treachery—Havildar Bakhat Sing Rai killed—Colonel Nuttall, C.B., 44th, exacts punishment—Snider rifles issued—Bands and Colours—Naga hills, 1878-79-80—Siege of Kohima—Operations to punish Nagas—Konoma—Ridgeway's V.C.—Hard, guerilla-like operations—Lack of transport—Three Political Agents killed in five years in Naga hills—Assam troops—Description of—Mishmi, 1881-2—Aka, 1883-4—43rd gets "Bubble" and "Squeak"—Changes of title—General History.

THE 43rd in 1862 consisted chiefly of Gurkhas and Hillmen (Assamese) and a few Brahmans, Hindustanis, Mussulmans and Rajputs in accordance with the following official instructions: "As a general rule this Regiment is to be recruited from the classes of which it is at present composed, care being taken, however, that the Hindustani element shall not exceed one-fourth of its strength." Recruiting was chiefly carried on locally, men of the classes entertained—viz., Gurkhas, Nepalese and Garhwalis—presenting themselves freely for enlistment. In addition, recruiting parties were occasionally sent to Nepal.

On 10th March, 1865, Major R. G. Mayne, Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant of the 43rd. On his death, on 18th September, 1865, he was succeeded by Major J. B. Cookson, Staff Corps.

It is interesting to record that these Commandants are shown as Staff Corps. It had been the custom to appoint officers from Bengal Native Infantry regiments to our two battalions. Such officers are shown in Army Lists, with the number of their Native Infantry regiments following their names.

In 1871 the Government of India ordered that the Poorbeah\* element should be deleted from Assam regiments, and that the vacancies occasioned thereby should be filled up by Gurkhas, Nepalese and Garhwalis.

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\* Poorbeah. The name used in those days for soldiers enlisted from what is now United Provinces—*e.g.*, Brahmans, Rajputs, and Mussulmans, etc.

In 1878 and 1879 recruits were obtained almost entirely from the Darjeeling district, and in 1880 entirely from Gorakhpur.

In 1881 the Government of India notified that, in supersession of all previous orders on the subject, the enlistment of all classes of Gurkhas was restricted to the purely Gurkha battalions, and the 42nd, 43rd, and 44th Regiments of Native Infantry.

After some thirty-one years with Cherrapunji as its Headquarter Station, the 44th moved to Shillong, where it and the 43rd were frequently stationed, up to the Second World War.

Colonel W. J. Hicks, Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant, 44th, on 6th October, 1866.

Shillong in 1867 could not have shown any resemblance to the charming cantonment and civil station known to so many of the 8th. Captain Kalu Thapa, who marched into Shillong with the 44th, when asked what it was like in those days, replied, "There wasn't a rat there."

Once again in November, 1871, the Lushai clans had been guilty of inroads into British territory, and had committed numerous outrages on the inhabitants. It was decided, therefore, in the autumn of 1871 to punish them. Before this, the 44th, in January, 1869, and February, 1871, had taken part in minor operations in the Lushai country. The first started late, and had to be abandoned owing to unusually early rains. The second is of interest owing to the fact that two companies of the 44th marched eighty miles in seventy-two hours to relieve a post at Jhalnacherra. The expedition was a relatively large affair. It consisted of two columns, one under Brigadier-General G. Bouchier, C.B., known as the Cachar Column, the other under Brigadier-General H. Brownlow, C.B., the Chittagong Column.

#### Composition :

Cachar Column: Half Peshawar Mountain Battery. 22nd Bengal Native Infantry. 42nd Assam Light Infantry. 44th Bengal Native Infantry (1st Battalion).\*

Chittagong Column: Half Peshawar Mountain Battery. 27th Native Infantry. 2nd Goorkha Regiment. 4th Gurkha Regiment.

The Cachar Column left Cachar on 21st November, 1871, and advanced without opposition to Tipia Mukh, sixty miles from Cachar. On 25th January, 1872, a wing of the 44th had a sharp engagement with Lalbura, the Lushai chief, and his following, who were holding a difficult pass leading to the chief's village, Champhai. The enemy were badly beaten, leaving a great number

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\* Erroneously described. Title was 44th (Sylhet) Regiment of Native Infantry (Light Infantry).

of dead behind. The village of some five hundred houses was burnt. The final phase produced very slight resistance, the people generally being disinclined for hostilities.

The Chittagong Column was equally successful. The Lushais were ready to treat for terms, and as proof of this gave up the child of an English planter who had been carried off in the previous year.

Peace was concluded and by April, 1872, the 44th were back in Shillong, having lost 43 men during this little campaign, conducted in most difficult country.

The Indian Medal with clasp for Lushai was granted to the Lushai Expeditionary Force.

Jemadar Shamlal Khattri received the 3rd Class Indian Order of Merit, and Naik Bakhatsing Rai, who had received it in Bhutan, was advanced to the 2nd Class, for conspicuous gallantry in action.

On the breaking up of the Field Force, Brigadier-General G. Bouchier, C.B., issued an order from which the following extract is taken :

“From the beginning of November, when the troops were first put in motion, to the present time, every man has been employed on hard work, cheerfully performed, often under most trying circumstances of heat and frost ; always bivouacking on the mountain-side in rude huts of grass and leaves, officers and men sharing the same accommodation ; marching day by day over precipitous mountains, rising at one time to 6,600 feet, having made a road fit for elephants a distance of 103 miles. The spirit of the troops never flagged, and when they met the enemy they drove them from their stockades and strongholds until, finally, they were glad to sue for peace.”

In 1870 the weekly holiday on Thursday was introduced in India. No field days or parades, except musketry, were allowed to take place.

On 29th March, 1872, batta at the rate of Rs2/8 per month was sanctioned for all troops permanently stationed in Assam.

Major C. D. S. Clarke, Bengal Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant, 43rd, on 10th April, 1872.

In December, 1872, the 44th was rearmed with the short pattern of the Enfield rifle.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Nuttall, Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant of the 44th on 21st February, 1873.

Three companies of the 43rd under Major Blunt were engaged in assisting a police expedition on the Garo frontier. After three months the detachment returned, with the thanks of the Government of India for their good services.

In April, 1873, a party of 100 men under Captain H. M. Evans of the 43rd received the thanks of the Commissioner of Assam for good work in the Daphla hills. The North-East Frontier at this time was

in a very disturbed state, and detachments of the 43rd were frequently employed, up to 1878, on punitive duties. The Daphla country is very mountainous, covered with dense jungle. The presence of leeches in unlimited numbers did not make matters any easier in a country where the locals considered a day's march of eight miles a strenuous effort.

In November, 1873, a force which included detachments from the three old Assam Regiments, 42nd, 43rd, and 44th, under the command of Major A. Cory, moved against the Daphla frontier. Operations were limited to a blockade. Movement of troops and location of outposts were controlled by the Political Officer. Major Cory was not allowed, as he wished, to take more active measures. In November, 1874, as the blockade had produced no apparent effect, a force including the detachments of 42nd, 43rd and 44th, under Brigadier-General Stafford, C.B., invaded the Daphla country. The Daphlas did not show fight, and complied with the orders of Government.

In February, 1875, a small detachment of the 44th formed the escort to a survey party in the Naga hills. Lieutenant Holcombe, Deputy Commissioner, accompanied the party, which arrived at Ninu village on 1st February. Next morning several hundred Nagas, ostensibly friendly, were allowed into the camp. The Deputy Commissioner, trusting these savages, took his own sentry's rifle from him, in spite of the man's protest, to hand to a Naga. This unfortunate act cost him his life for, possessed of the rifle, the Naga yelled a signal for a general attack, and Lieutenant Holcombe was immediately cut down. Fortunately, most of the escort were able to get at their arms and defend themselves. A retreat to the plains was the only solution to save the wounded. The Jemadar in command, with gallant Havildar Bakhat Sing Rai, and eight men were killed, and nine wounded in the first attack. Only twenty men of the 44th returned unwounded. Bakhat Sing died bravely, overpowered by numbers whilst endeavouring to protect the coolies, armed with his bayonet only. He had twice previously won the I.O.M., and would have been advanced to the 1st Class of the Order had he lived.

The casualties in this treacherous attack were Lieutenant Holcombe and 80 men killed and 50 wounded, the bulk being defenceless coolies. Had it not been for the courage and skill of Captain Baggaley (Survey), and the discipline of his men, the whole party would have been destroyed, is the official testimony to the gallant behaviour of the detachment.

Colonel J. M. Nuttall, C.B., commanding the 44th, on receiving news of the disaster at Dibrugarh at 9 a.m. on 16th February, marched before noon the same day, with every available man of his regiment, towards the Naga frontier. On 23rd February, detached



**43rd and 44th Stockade Post, Dufia Hills, 1874-5**



**Lieutenant and Adjutant J. A. Wilson, Captain and Subadar-Major Kalu Thapa, Sirdar Bahadur, and Gurkha Officers, 44th Gurkha Rifles, 1894**





parties of the 42nd and 43rd were placed under his orders. The expedition, after a most difficult progress, made worse by rivers swollen by recent rains, was completely successful. All villages implicated in the outrage were destroyed, and nearly all arms and plunder taken from the Survey Party recovered.

The thanks of the Government of India were conveyed to Colonel Nuttall and all who served under him.

Indian Order of Merit, 3rd Class, was awarded to Havildar Hima Chand, Naik Gajbahadur Thapa, Sepoys Jangbir Khattri and Lalbir Rana.

The breech-loading Snider rifle was issued in part to the 43rd and 44th in October, 1874. The complement was completed (880) in July, 1875, in the case of the 43rd, and in March, 1876, in the case of the 44th. At first the sword bayonet was issued, but was soon replaced by the bayonet.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. Pond, Bengal Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant, 43rd, on 12th September, 1875.

In 1877 a band was instituted in the 43rd, Government having sanctioned the maintenance of such to those regiments so desirous.

The circumstances attending the presentation of Colours to the two battalions is shrouded in mystery. These were probably presented some time between 1870 and 1880, and most likely subsequent to 1876, as there is no mention of the 42nd, 43rd or 44th amongst a list of regiments to whom Colours were presented for the first time, during that year.

The Colours have always been treated with great reverence by all ranks, and although on their becoming Rifle regiments the Colours no longer formed part of the ceremonial equipment of our battalions, they were always used to attest recruits on. Escorted by band and Colour escort of one hundred rank and file, the Colours were received by their battalion with the traditional Royal Salute. On the occasion of the Dashera festival, a similar honour was paid them on being brought to the scene of the ceremony. The Colours were kept in the Officers' Mess, being uncased on Guest Nights or other special occasions.

Concurrently with the Second Afghan War of 1878-1881, trouble flared up on the North-East Frontier. Once again the Nagas were the mischief-makers.

In January, 1878, the timely arrival of a party of one hundred men of the 43rd at Mozima in the Naga hills, to reinforce an expedition under Captain Brydon (42nd), saved the latter from a precarious position.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. Tulloch, from 42nd Assam Light Infantry, was appointed Commandant, 43rd, on 6th August, 1879, and vacated

on 11th August, 1881, on reversion to 42nd Assam Light Infantry.

On 13th October, 1879, an escort of one Gurkha officer and twenty Rifles (42nd) left Kohima with the Political Agent to visit certain outlying parts of the Naga Hills District.

The following day at Konoma, the party was attacked by several hundred Nagas. The Political Agent, the Gurkha officer and ten riflemen were killed instantly. Of the residue, five riflemen were wounded, and the remainder got back to Kohima, which the Nagas attacked on 16th October. They besieged the stockade, and cut off the water supply. On 19th October forty men of the 43rd from Woka succeeded in reaching the besieged garrison. The Nagas (6,000 strong) made frequent attacks, trying to set fire to the very inflammable thatched buildings. After many fierce struggles all attacks were beaten off, and attempts at firing the stockade frustrated. On 26th October Kohima was relieved by Colonel Johnston and 2,000 Manipuris.

When the siege began the garrison, under the command of Captain D. G. Reid, consisted of 78 all ranks, 43rd, 40 Frontier Police, and 374 non-combatants (including women and children). The military were rationed to 15th November. For the remainder there was three maunds (240 lb.) of rice only.

The following is an extract from the official history of the Naga Rebellion :

“The defence was a gallant one, and reflects credit on the detachment, 43rd Assam Light Infantry, who formed the backbone of the Garrison, and among whom all the casualties occurred. For fourteen days they lived on a ration of a quarter of seer of flour and a little bad water ; and obtained little or no rest either by day or by night, and were never safe from the bullets of the enemy.”

Major H. M. Evans with 150 men of the 43rd received the approbation of the Brigadier-General in command for the very rapid march made to relieve Kohima, which, however, was reached two days after being relieved by Colonel Johnston.

The above offences spurred Government into action, and a force under Brigadier-General Nation, commanding in Assam, was at once assembled for operations against the Nagas. This consisted of the 43rd and 44th, the latter with their two mountain guns. A small party of the 34th Native Infantry, and later the 42nd, were also included. The 44th had been recalled from Goalundo, *en route* to Afghanistan, and so missed the chance of being the first of the Assam regiments to see service on the North-West Frontier. Early in November, 1879, the villages of Sachima and Sephima were captured by detachments of the 44th and 43rd, under the command of Colonel Nuttall, C.B. (44th), and Major Evans (43rd) respectively, and on the 22nd the village of Konoma was attacked. This village, which bore

the finest fighting reputation throughout the Naga hills, was situated on a sort of rocky island in a valley, and was strongly fortified in terraces, with stone walls and towers. The attack was made by 500 rifles, three-fourths being 44th, with their two 7-pounder guns, and one-fourth 43rd, together with 26 Frontier Police. The stoutness of the defence created surprise. True, it was probable that several thousand men were behind the walls and stockades of Konoma, and that half of them were equipped with firearms, including many Sniders and Enfields, but such preparations, and such stubborn resistance, were a new feature in Naga warfare. The village was first shelled by the two guns, but without effect on the fortifications, so Colonel Nuttall decided to storm the place.

The outlying fortifications were soon taken, but the attackers then found themselves faced by the inner lines, a stone-faced scarp, surmounted by a loopholed stockade, the whole about twelve feet high. The guns were brought up to within seventy yards, and the gateway was more or less shattered. Two assaults on the stockade were made; these were led with the greatest gallantry by Lieutenant R. K. Ridgeway, Adjutant of the 44th, who was severely wounded as he reached the gateway, where he heroically remained until the men were able to force an entrance. For this action Lieutenant Ridgeway was awarded the Victoria Cross. Night was now coming on, and it was decided to hold the ground won, and attack again in the morning. When day dawned, however, it was found that the enemy had abandoned the position, and it later transpired that the Nagas had twice during the previous day tried to break away to the south, but had been prevented by the heavy fire of detachments of the 43rd and 44th, posted to intercept any such move. Through some mistake, however, these detachments were withdrawn at nightfall, so the enemy were able to escape to the precipitous strong cliffs on the Chaka mountains (about 9,000 feet high). This strong position was blockaded, and much fighting of a guerilla nature followed. Detachments were employed in garrisoning posts, protecting convoys, and the usual hard and harassing work connected with operations of this kind. On 27th March, 1880, the Nagas finally submitted.

A great number of men suffered from the effects of this expedition. Fever, dysentery and Naga sores took their toll. As usual in hill campaigns, the greatest difficulties arose from the lack of transport. "Within the hills," communications were of the worst possible description. No doubt owing to the attention of Government being occupied in Afghanistan affairs, the expedition had to "make do" as far as transport was concerned, and by the time a properly organized system was started, the operations had been concluded. History

relates a sad lack of administration throughout this small but strenuous campaign. In consequence, not only did the troops suffer the greatest discomfort, but operations were seriously delayed. After a few scathing remarks on the subject, the following extract from official sources is of interest :

“Much time and money would have been saved if the three Assam Battalions, which were constantly employed on minor wars and expeditions at that time, had been always equipped to take the field at short notice.”

The Indian Medal with clasp “Naga 1879-80” was issued to all ranks. In addition to Lieutenant Ridgeway’s V.C., the 3rd Class Indian Order of Merit was awarded to Subadar Rajman Rai, Havildar Jumansing Thakur (afterwards Subadar), Sepoys Kabiraj Karki (afterwards Subadar-Major), Kubernidi Tewari and Madansing Bhandari.

Major C. R. Cock, 43rd, Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, Eastern Frontier Section, died of wounds, and the Subadar-Major of the 44th, Narbir Sahi, was killed at Konoma.

The Political Agent killed at Konoma in 1879 was the third Naga hills Political Officer in succession to lose his life in the Naga hills, within the space of five years.

It was some years before the Naga hills became quiet, and the Regiment sent out several parties to punish refractory villages between 1880 and 1884, during which time a wing of the 44th remained at Kohima.

Lieutenant-Colonel T. N. Walker, Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant, 44th, on 6th March, 1880.

An official description of the troops in Assam at this period is interesting :

“Three Regiments of Bengal Native Infantry (formerly irregulars) are localized in the North-East Frontier, and known as the Assam Battalions. They are the 42nd Assam Light Infantry, 43rd Assam Light Infantry and 44th Sylhet Light Infantry. The first named has a strong Sikh element and the 43rd is mostly composed of Assamese, but both contain a good many men from Hindustan ; the last named is now practically a Gurkha Corps. The enlistment of Hindustanis, except the relations of men already in the Corps, has been discontinued. All three are dressed in green and have an establishment of 800 Sepoys (912 in all native ranks), being 200 in excess of what has up to the present been the normal strength of native infantry battalions. The headquarters of two battalions are at Shillong. These furnished posts on the North-East Frontier and the Naga hills, Khasia and Garo hills on the south. The third battalion has its headquarters at Dibrugarh, and protects the Daphla, Miri and Mishmi borders,

and the north-western portion of the Province. The three battalions change stations periodically. There are no cavalry or artillery ordinarily stationed on the Assam Frontier.”

A note by the O.C. 43rd at that time is to the effect that there were only about a hundred Assamese in his regiment. This is borne out by recruiting records already noted in this history.

Lieutenant-Colonel W. G. Cubitt, V.C., D.S.O., was appointed Commandant, 43rd, on 12th August, 1881.

Lieutenant-Colonel F. F. Rowcroft, Staff Corps, was appointed Commandant, 44th, on 16th August, 1881.

A detachment of the 43rd, 300 strong, under Major G. W. Beresford carried out an expedition into the Mishmi country in 1881-2. The object was to prevent the Abors crossing the Dibong river. Very valuable work was done, and the thanks of the Government of India were conveyed to the Regiment for the efficient way in which the task had been accomplished.

Lieutenant-Colonel (Brevet Colonel) D. Robertson was appointed Commandant, 44th, on 30th November, 1883.

The 43rd moved from Gauhati in November, 1883, to undertake operations against the Akas. The small column under the command of Brigadier-General R. S. Hill, C.B., consisted of a detachment No. 1 (Kohat) Mountain Battery, No. 2 Company Sappers and Miners, 200 men 12th Native Infantry, and 43rd Assam Light Infantry.

On 23rd December a determined counter-attack by the Akas at Majbhuroli was defeated by the 43rd. Three days later a second brush with the enemy took place. The G.O.C. ordered Major Beresford, 43rd, to make no further advance, and to await reinforcements. On 8th January, reinforcements having arrived, the column attacked, and after four hours' hard fighting carried the stockaded positions. This resulted in the submission of the enemy on 19th January, 1884. The 43rd were congratulated by the Government of India for its services. Three men of the Regiment were awarded the 3rd Class Indian Order of Merit—viz., Cr.-Havildar Birdoz, L./Naik Chaitoo Gurung and Sepoy Jamansing Rai.

On their return to Shillong from the Aka Expedition, the 43rd were issued with two 150 lb. weight 7-pounder guns, thus being equipped as had been the 44th some years previously.

Once more the Naga hills saw the 43rd, who were sent there in February, 1885, with Headquarters at Kohima. This move was in relief of the 44th, whose Headquarters moved to Dibrugarh.

Before passing on to the next active operations in which our two Regiments were engaged, it is interesting to note change of titles about this time.

Under a Government of India Order, the word “Native” was

eliminated from the designations of all regiments of Native Infantry, which from 1st January, 1885, became "Bengal Infantry" and so on. We find therefore that the titles in January, 1885, were 44th Regiment (Sylhet Light Infantry)—(Light Infantry) and 43rd Regiment (Assam Light Infantry). By January, 1886, (Light Infantry) portion of the 44th title was dropped. In June, 1886, the titles were once more changed to 44th Regiment Gurkha (Light) Infantry and 43rd Regiment Goorkha (Light) Infantry, and on the formation of a scheme of reserves (the same year) the two Regiments were linked with the 42nd Gurkha Light Infantry, the present 6th Gurkha Rifles. For some reason unknown, the 43rd continued the spelling "Goorkha" as against the "Gurkha" of the other two regiments.

On 1st January, 1877, a grand parade of all arms was held at Delhi at which Her Majesty Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. This was the first of the proclamation parades held in India in every military station, on 1st January.

The establishment of British officers hereabouts is laid down as a Commandant, two Wing Commanders, an Adjutant, a Quartermaster and a doing-duty Officer. If official Army Lists are anything to go by, this did not appear to be very strictly conformed to. Most units showed a Second-in-Command (not allowed in infantry), and a far larger number than the establishment of six, even allowing for secondment and "on furlough." Medical Officers were considered as belonging to a unit (even if shown as attached), and this remained so in the Indian Army up to the 1914-1918 war.

Although we (8th) were not affected, as were many other regiments of the old Bengal Army, it is interesting to note that in the seventeen or eighteen years ending about 1880 this Bengal Army, which (owing to the mutiny) had to be rebuilt out of a number of raw, untrained corps raised in an emergency, soon became a well-trained, well-trying, and well-equipped army, matured in many campaigns, and improved by careful training and firm discipline during the intervening years of peace. This indeed was a fine achievement, which will for ever rebound to the credit of the British Officer Cadre, who worked unceasingly on this tremendous task.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

(See Maps No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3)

[In this chapter the 1st Battalion is referred to as 44th or 8th Gurkha Rifles and the 2nd Battalion as 43rd or 7th Gurkha Rifles.]

Third Burmese War, 1885-1889—Both Battalions took part—Cholera epidemic in 43rd—Various operations of small columns—Ruby mines—43rd return to Shillong—Lieutenant Cowley's march to Sittaung by unexplored route—44th in Third Burmese War—Good march by 44th—Under two distinguished Generals in Burma—A battle honour—Chin Field Force—Lushai hills—Good march by 43rd—Manipur, 1891—Treacherous murder of Officers—Escort retires to Silchar—Lang Thobal and 43rd Detachment—Retribution—Kukis, 1893—Abors, 1894—Kukis, 1897—42nd Gurkha Rifles and Shillong earthquake—Death of Lieutenant-Colonel A. L. Barrett, D.S.O.—Sikkim—Tibet—Change of titles—Tibet Expedition, 1903-1904—Reasons for composition of force—Mobilization of 8th and warm clothing—Mounted Infantry—Maxim guns—Guru—At Gyantse—Action at Karola—Tibetans attack post at Gyantse—Gurkha post, Tagu and Palla—Operations at Gyantse—Attack of 6th July, 1904—Lieutenant Grant's V.C. and Havildar Karbir Pun's I.O.M.—Advance to Lhasa—End of Tibet War—Return to Shillong—Changes and reforms.

RELATIONS between the British Government and King Thebaw (of Mandalay) had been strained since the latter's accession in 1879. Violation of treaties by the King, acts of aggression on the British frontier, outrages on British subjects, and the insolence with which Thebaw met remonstrances, led to a declaration of war on 30th October, 1885. A force under the command of Major-General H. N. D. Prendergast, V.C., C.B., soon occupied Mandalay. King Thebaw was deported and Upper Burma annexed. This was the prelude to dacoities and outrages, which eventually necessitated the employment of a large number of troops constantly engaged in harassing and arduous duties.

Both battalions of the Regiment were engaged in the Burma operations, but as their activities were widely separated it will be necessary to give very brief accounts of each in turn. The 43rd were the first to move, receiving orders in February, 1886. Great joy followed these orders, as repeated requests had been made to be allowed to take part in operations outside Assam. The long journey to Mandalay provided an unfortunate beginning to a campaign, as owing to bad water being supplied to the troops on the steamer *Panthay* an outbreak of cholera resulted in the death of 55 men out of

102 cases. Disembarking at Mandalay on 30th May, 1886, the Regiment at once took over various posts, with orders to clear their neighbourhood of hostile elements. The 43rd belonged at various times to the 1st and 5th Brigades, and later the 44th belonged to the former. Such was the nature of the operations that brigade movements, as such, were but rarely carried out, very small columns only being used, hence to follow in detail the actions of the two regiments in this guerilla warfare is impossible, and the chief incidents only can be recalled.

In June, 1886, detachments of the 43rd under Lieutenants C. H. Clay and J. N. Fitzgerald took the field. As Chungwa, chief village of certain of the Alompra princes, was considered important, a senior officer, Major C. McD. Skene, was sent to command. During the ensuing operations the area was cleared of the princes and their followers, 200 prisoners were taken, with guns, ponies, carts and bullocks.

In July, 1886, 100 riflemen under Lieutenant H. N. Warde, together with a detachment of the Hampshire Regiment, operated successfully in the Shan country, and during the following months Captain A. L. Barrett, who had proceeded to Lemain *vice* Warde, engaged the dacoits on several occasions with great success.

In October, 1886, a large operation against rebellious Shans, in which the whole of the 43rd was engaged, took place. It was a 5th Brigade affair and included four guns, two companies Sappers and Miners, two companies King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Brigadier-General Stewart commanded. The chief episodes were the fight at the Kodan stream and the forcing of the Kathu and Monguk passes. These passes had been strongly fortified with stockades, and in their capture the 43rd greatly distinguished themselves by skilful work over cliffs and steep hills covered in dense jungle. It was not until March, 1887, that this area was finally cleared.

In view of the prominence given to the same area in the 1939-1945 war, it is interesting to note that the 43rd were ordered in December, 1887, to march to Shillong across a hitherto unexplored part of Burma between Hlijain on the Irrawaddy and Sittaung on the Chindwin. About half-way to Sittaung, owing to quicksands, the movement of the Battalion was greatly slowed down. Rations were limited, and as no information as to how long it would take to cover the remainder of the march was available, the commander, Colonel W. G. Cubitt, V.C., decided to abandon the enterprise. A party of the Regiment under Lieutenant J. W. Cowley did, however, get through the quicksand area, and rejoined Regimental Headquarters at Sittaung in February, 1888. The 43rd eventually reached Shillong



in April, 1888, after a tedious progress by route march and small boats. Here, completed to full strength by the arrival by sea on 24th April of Captain Barrett's company, which had been operating, as already stated, with the Northern Shan Column, we must leave the 43rd, and follow the fortunes of the 44th in the Burma War.

During the summer of 1886 a force which included a detachment of the 44th advanced from Manipur and, after some fighting, occupied Tammu in the Kebaw valley. In October, 1886, the remainder of the Regiment proceeded to the front, and until March, 1887, was engaged in the pacification of the surrounding country, constantly clashing with dacoits. It distinguished itself at the attack on the stockaded village of Chanyon.

As usual, the 44th marched well and during its operations in Burma covered 1,211 miles in 72 days.

The Burma War brought the two Regiments under the command of two distinguished Generals—General Sir George White, V.C. (of Ladysmith fame), and General Sir Frederick Roberts, V.C. (later Field-Marshal Lord Roberts).

Honours were won by both Regiments, who received the approbation of their commanders.

The Indian Medal with clasp "Burma 1885-87" was issued to all troops. In 1891 the battle honour "Burma 1885-87" was authorized. At long last a battle honour was ours, a pleasant experience, for despite nearly sixty years of frontier fighting the Regiment had nothing to show. Why an honour "Assam Frontier" should not have been awarded equally with "Punjab Frontier" is known only to the authorities in Simla and Calcutta.

Lieutenant-Colonel H. M. Evans was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 12th August, 1888.

In November, 1888, the Headquarters Wing, 44th, left Manipur to join the Chin Field Force at Kanballay; several encounters with dacoits, and hard marching ensued. Before handing over, Brigadier General Faunce, commanding Chin Field Force, issued a complimentary order from which the following extracts are taken:

" . . . I feel that you will join me in saying that they [42nd and the 44th Gurkha Light Infantry] have specially distinguished themselves by their admirable flanking over very difficult, indeed at times almost impassable country, while in keenness, in dash, in forwardness, you Norfolks and Gurkhas have vied with each other and the behaviour of all has been exemplary."

In February, 1888, the 43rd lost a distinguished officer in Lieutenant-Colonel C. McD. Skene, D.S.O., who was appointed to command the 42nd Gurkha Light Infantry. He had won the D.S.O. in Burma.

During 1889 to 1891 both 43rd and 44th were employed in the Lushai hills. The right half-battalion, 43rd, formed the reserve to an expedition in that country.

In September, 1890, Lieutenant R. R. Swinton, Adjutant, 44th, led a party to the relief of Changsil. This was effected after a hard march, and was much delayed by difficult river navigation and enemy resistance. Lieutenant Swinton was killed in a most unusual and unfortunate manner. A bullet glanced off the head of Sepoy Gorey Thapa (Lieutenant Swinton's orderly) and killed his officer. A little while later in Manipur the same Gurkha was struck on the head by a bullet, but little damage was reported!

In November, 1890, Headquarters and five companies, 43rd, were detailed to show the flag in the eastern Lushai hills. The remainder of the Regiment moved to Kohima. Subsequently, one company was detached to Manipur as escort to the Resident. There was little fighting, but the 43rd were given the chance to emulate their sister regiment's marching feats, and were not unsuccessful. Carrying two days' reserve rations in addition to ordinary equipment and ammunition, the Regiment marched 320 miles through previously unexplored country in sixteen days. One day's march is given as an indication of the arduous nature of some of the marches: "Tui Chang, 2,100 feet, to Kairuma, 4,200 feet, distance fifteen miles, crossing at seventh mile a ridge 4,600 feet and at tenth mile the Lungbai river, 2,600 feet." The thanks of the Government of India were received, special mention being made of Captain J. W. Cowley, Lieutenants C. H. Clay and C. S. Williams.

Once more changes of titles are to be recorded. In 1889 the units became 43rd and 44th (Gurkha) Regiments of Bengal (Light) Infantry, and in February, 1891, the 43rd and 44th Gurkha (Rifle) Regiment of Bengal Infantry, respectively.

In March, 1890, orders were issued that Colours should no longer be carried on parade.

The 44th started a Pipe Band in this year.

Major R. K. Ridgeway, V.C., was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 1st January, 1891.

It will be remembered that the 43rd had, in December, 1890, sent 100 rifles to Manipur as Resident's escort.

In September, 1890, a revolution had occurred in Manipur. The instigator of this was Tekandrajit Bir Singh, then Senapati (Commander-in-Chief). He was the youngest brother of the Maharajah, whom he deposed, and installed another brother as Maharajah, thus himself becoming the Jubraj (heir apparent) and virtual ruler of the State. The Senapati had long shown himself hostile to British interests, and the Government of India, refusing to recognize his

*coup d'état*, decided that the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. J. H. Quinton, C.S.I., should proceed to Manipur, arrest and deport the Senapati. In March, 1891, therefore, the Chief Commissioner proceeded to Manipur via Kohima with an escort of 400 rifles of the 42nd and 44th, under the command of Colonel C. McD. Skene, D.S.O., Commandant, 42nd. News of this intention reached Manipur before the Chief Commissioner arrived, and the Senapati, collecting about 6,000 Manipuris, prepared to resist, though on arrival our troops were well received. A Durbar was ordered, which the Senapati refused to attend, and it was then decided to arrest him in his own house. This led to fighting which continued fiercely for twelve hours. After dark on 24th March, the Manipuris suggested a truce. This was agreed to on condition that the Senapati would appear in person to discuss matters. Treachery and murder followed. Having proceeded to the gate of the palace unescorted, Mr. Quinton, the Political Officer, Colonel Skene and Lieutenant W. H. Simpson, 43rd, were seized and barbarously put to death under the Senapati's orders. It was now dark, and the escort, located in the Residency grounds, were attacked by overwhelming numbers. Ignorant of the fate of the Chief Commissioner and their own commander, and very short of ammunition, the escort was driven out of the Residency and forced to retire towards Silchar, from which place two companies of the 43rd, under Captain Cowley, had set out as reinforcement. Captain Cowley's party, having beaten off a heavy enemy attack on 25th March, met the refugees on 26th March, and the combined forces retired to Silchar.

Of the Resident's escort of 100 rifles already mentioned, a party of 1 Gurkha officer (Jemadar Birbal Nagarkoti) and 33 Gurkha other ranks were detached at Lang Thobal, four miles away, while the remainder in the Residency, about sixty-six strong, fought gallantly in spite of having lost their officer (Lieutenant Simpson), until practically annihilated.

The doings of the Lang Thobal party must be chronicled. Cut off from the Residency, Jemadar Birbal Nagarkoti, on hearing from refugees what had happened there, and that the rebels were advancing on his post, decided to retire on Tammu, where there was a detachment of Madras Infantry (2nd Burma Battalion). This was effected after some hard fighting. Lieutenant Grant, commanding at Tammu, on hearing the Jemadar's news, decided to see what was happening near Manipur, and marched with the 43rd party and fifty men of his own regiment on 28th March. Fighting their way through, they reached Thobal at dawn on 30th March. Until the evening of 9th April the uneven contest was maintained. Over 2,000 rebels, with two guns brought from Manipur Fort, tried desperately hard to

overcome the small garrison, but on every occasion on which they attacked, the enemy were defeated. Lieutenant Grant himself was wounded, but carried on. On 9th April orders were received from Brigadier-General T. Graham, C.B., for Lieutenant Grant's party to withdraw to Tammu, which operation was successfully accomplished.

Although they had left Tammu with only sixty rounds per man, the extra range and accuracy of the Martini-Henry rifles of the 43rd were most valuable, and probably had a decisive effect in keeping the Manipur gunners from serving the guns with any degree of confidence. The 12th Madras Infantry were armed with the Snider.

For this exploit Lieutenant Grant was awarded the Victoria Cross. Jemadar Birbal Nagarkoti received the Order of British India, and every man of his party received the Order of Merit. All received a gratuity of six months' pay and allowances. Lieutenant Grant's words were: "I recommend every man of the party for the Order of Merit. I think they have all well earned it, not only in attack and defence, but also by their cheerfulness in the Fort for thirteen days on half rations, and every man on guard every night. I never heard a complaint or doubt. They only asked to be allowed to take those guns, and they would have done it with another hundred rounds a man, all to make a 'name' for their Regiment."

The 6th April has been kept by the 2nd Battalion as an annual holiday to commemorate the gallantry of its Thobal detachment.

Little more remains to be said about the Manipur rebellion. Retribution was speedy. Three columns from Kohima, Silchar and Tammu reached Imphal almost simultaneously on 27th April. The 43rd and 44th were divided between the first two, and Jemadar Birbal Nagarkoti's party marched with the Tammu Column. The only fighting was by the Tammu Column, when an advanced detachment met and killed practically to a man a considerable body of Manipuris on 28th April. On the occupation of Imphal, the outbreak came to an end. The Senapati and other prominent persons fled, but all were subsequently apprehended. The Senapati and others concerned in the murder of the officers in the Manipur Palace were executed in due course.

The Indian Medal with clasp "North East Frontier 1891" was granted to the troops of the three columns engaged in the reoccupation of Manipur.

The 43rd were detailed to garrison Manipur, which was occupied on 27th April, 1891, and appear to have been responsible for the rounding up of the Senapati. The 43rd must have grown rather tired of Manipur as the Battalion remained there until 1894, afterwards, on transfer to Kohima, leaving three companies at Manipur

until 1898. The whole Regiment was back again from Kohima in the cold weather in 1898-9 and remained there until February, 1900.

In May, 1893, 100 men of the 43rd were sent from Manipur to punish the Kukis at Mongham (twenty miles east of Imphal), who had made an unprovoked raid on a Naga village, massacring three hundred. The leaders were arrested, and the guilty villages destroyed. No fighting took place, but as an instance of the bloodthirsty habits of the local gentry, and the constant action demanded of the Assam Regiments, it is worth recording.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. L. Barrett, D.S.O., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 1st April, 1894.

In December, 1893, 400 men of the 44th were ordered to Sadiya to take part in an expedition against the Abors. Of these, 100 men with two mountain guns were the only regular troops actively engaged, the force being composed otherwise of military police. At the village of Dambuk serious opposition was met. The Abors held their stockade with great spirit. After a sharp fight the stockade was taken. The 44th detachment had 19 of the 25 casualties suffered on our side, testifying to their forwardness in the affair.

Havildar Gomo Basnet, 44th, was decorated with the Order of Merit for gallantry at Dambuk. He afterwards rose to the rank of Subadar.

As an example of the sort of fighting that might be expected when in conflict with Abors, the following account by an officer of the Regiment is reproduced :

“The first engagement with the Abors began in a somewhat unusual manner. We had marched for some miles through forest in which the undergrowth was so dense that one could not see twenty yards on either side of the narrow path, and so full of thorny canebrake that flanking was almost impossible, yet the enemy made no attempt to molest us ; even in the few places where it was more open owing to bamboos, there was no sign of life.

“In many parts the overhanging branches had to be cleared away to enable the elephants which carried some of the baggage to get along, so the advance was very slow.

“The column then came on some open cultivated ground, where a halt was made to enable everyone to close up. Soon after the next advance, a few Abor scouts were seen and fired upon, and then the point of the advanced guard bumped into a stockade ten or twelve feet high, built of trunks of trees right across the path, in the thickest bit of forest yet encountered.

“It was ‘crowned’ with a frieze of bamboo spikes, and the ground in front was covered with more spikes driven into the earth, which

looked almost like grass, and were so sharp they penetrated the sole of a boot if trodden on.

“There was no sound from inside to show if the place was occupied, so a party was ordered to clear a way to a flank to turn the position. Whilst this was going on, word was sent back to the O.C. to say what had occurred, and he and the Political Officer came up. The latter called out something in the Abor tongue, and instantly a roar of defiance came from inside the stockade, but all that was intelligible to us was the Political Officer’s name. He got in an awful rage and replied so forcibly that fire was opened, and showers of arrows came from inside, wounding him in the leg and killing several of my men.

“The 7-pounder guns were then brought up and fired at a range of twenty yards at what appeared to be the door, absolutely without effect, and then an officer and some men rushed forward in the smoke and gained a footing on the top. We scaled the stockade in several places, and discovered it was a mile long, made of three rows of tree trunks, laced together with cane, and the spaces between the rows filled with boulders.

“On inquiring what the preliminary conversation was about, I learnt that the Political Officer asked if the Abors wanted to fight, to which they responded with an invitation to come inside when they would put him in their pigsties and feed him on filth. His answer was so lurid that it caused an instant explosion.

“As soon as the firing began in front, the enemy, issuing out of the stockade to a flank, charged the baggage with the greatest determination. They broke through the line, slashing about them with their swords, and plugged the elephants so full of arrows that they stampeded, throwing their loads in the jungle and scattering the coolies who were near them. A lot of the kit which was on the elephants was promptly looted, but most of the coolies stuck to theirs very pluckily, each man squatting beneath his load to protect him from the sword cuts, whilst the escort stood on the path to fire or use the bayonet.

“In this rush alone the Abors had fifty men killed, and never again in this little show, nor in the one that followed it sixteen years later, did they ever make so good an effort to come to close quarters.”

Lieutenant-Colonel E. H. Molesworth was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 29th April, 1895.

A similar expedition in 1897 to that narrated above (Kuki, 1893) was undertaken by 150 men of the 44th in the Somra country, in the Manipur district, punishing the inhabitants for raids and murders they had committed.

The 44th, in their turn, were about this time spending a lot of





43rd at Kohima, 1896



time in Manipur, and had the misfortune in 1896 and 1898 to be attacked by cholera.

“Primus in Indis” can be claimed by the 43rd, as in April, 1898, a detachment of two companies under Major J. W. Cowley, Captain S. Clay and Lieutenant A. C. Wall proceeded to Gilgit. One company rejoined Headquarters after two and a half years, the other after just over three years.

Two companies of the 44th and one of the 43rd took part in an expedition to the Mishmi country. The force was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel E. H. Molesworth, 44th. There was no fighting, but there was much hard marching at a high altitude, and a lot of important survey work was done.

Now to leave our own two Battalions for a time during the years 1897 and 1899, and relate events of importance to our linked Regiment and brothers in arms for many years in Assam. The 42nd were stationed in Shillong when the disastrous earthquake occurred on 12th June, 1897. Every building in the place was destroyed, and loss of life was heavy. The 42nd did grand work in rescue and resettlement. In comparatively recent years, eyewitnesses' stories of this disaster could be obtained in Shillong. In 1899 the 42nd were transferred to the Punjab Command, and on 16th September, 1899, marched out of Shillong *en route* for Abbottabad after seventy-seven years' service in Assam, bringing to a close that long association of the three Assam Regiments.

In 1899 the 43rd suffered a great loss in the death of Lieutenant-Colonel A. L. Barrett, D.S.O., from cholera on 7th March whilst on the march to Shillong from Manipur. The Colours had, up to this time, always been carried on the line of march by Jemadars in turn. On this march the Battalion was so short-handed (having detachments away) that the Colours were packed in a box, and accompanied the treasure chest under the charge of the Quarter Guard. There was a strong feeling in the Battalion that the Colours were being treated with disrespect, and when Colonel Barrett died, his death was attributed to that disrespect.

A guard of honour with band had been sent to Gauhati to meet His Excellency The Viceroy, who was on a visit to Assam. Owing to the death of Colonel Barrett, and in respect to his memory, His Excellency desired that the ceremony be dispensed with.

In succession to Lieutenant-Colonel Barrett, Lieutenant-Colonel W. Cook was appointed Commandant of the 43rd. Though only two years with the Regiment, he was responsible for reforms for the welfare of the men, and for the greater efficiency of administration in the Battalion. He started the rifleman's deposit account so that men could get interest on their savings without having to invest

money outside the Battalion. He reorganized the various tradesmen's shops, having the personnel properly trained, and reorganized the office and clerical establishment.

Two companies of the 44th, with Major F. Murray and Lieutenant J. Coleridge, proceeded to Gantok in Sikkim in 1900, later, in 1902, forming part of the Sikkim-Tibet boundary commission.

Lieutenant-Colonel M. A. Kerr was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 31st March, 1902.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Cowley was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 5th June, 1902.

The Subadar-Major, one N.C.O. and one rifleman of the 44th were invited to attend the Delhi Durbar on 1st January, 1903, in remembrance of the good work done by the Regiment during the mutiny of 1857.

In 1903, under the reorganization scheme of the Indian Army, the 43rd and 44th Regiments lost their old numbers which they had held for over forty years, and became respectively the 7th Gurkha Rifles and 8th Gurkha Rifles.

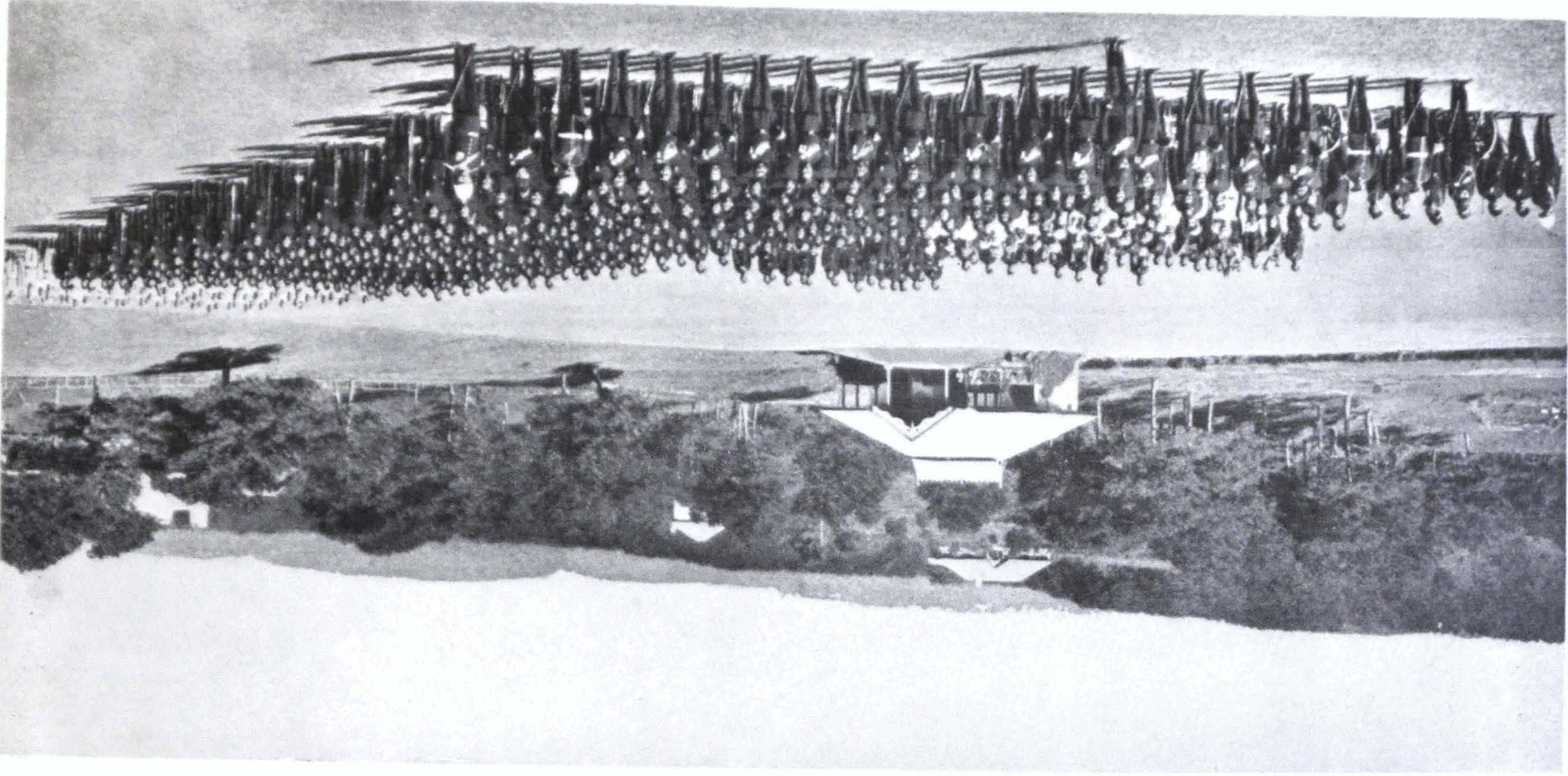
The account which follows merely deals (and that briefly) with the "military" part played by the 8th Gurkhas, but little reference is made to the exploits of the other units participating, and further, no reference is made to the extremely interesting political events which occurred during the negotiations with the Tibetan Government in Lhasa.

This volume is far too small to include anything like a detailed account of Tibet, its people and customs, its geography, etc. It has always been a *terra incognita* to the outside world. Generally one reads of it as a vast country of mountain ranges, wind-swept and snow-bound for a considerable part of the year, but also of considerable areas of well-cultivated fertile plains. In that part of Tibet, towards Gyantse and Lhasa, with which we were concerned, the greater part of the country traversed is quite barren. Supply and transport difficulties were enormous. From Siliguri, the base, to Gyantse is 225 miles, and to Lhasa a further 145 miles. Commencing in the unhealthy Tista valley, the route crossed four passes of from 14,000 to 17,000 feet in height. Finally, before reaching Lhasa the Tsangpo river, very rapid and 150 yards wide, had to be crossed.

The ostensible reasons which led to the "peaceful" mission to Tibet, known as the Younghusband Expedition, and which followed an abortive mission in the summer of 1903, were :

1. Breach of treaty obligations by the Tibetans.
2. Occupation by them of Sikkim territory.
3. The seizure of British subjects.

44th Gurkha Rifles, Shillong, 1896





#### 4. Disregard of Government of India communications.

#### 5. Military preparations by the Tibetan Government.

(The real reason was a counter to Russia's forward policy in the East—war with Japan, intrusion into China and consequently Tibet.)

The Tibetan army at this time consisted of about 16,000, together with the able-bodied monks who occasionally came out to fight. In addition to swords, bows and arrows, and matchlocks, there had been manufactured a rifle of Martini-Henry pattern to the extent of several thousand. As fate decreed, the peaceful part of the mission went wrong, and the 8th was called upon to fight in no uncertain manner.

The force engaged was a fairly large one, but with detachments, etc., it never fought an engagement at complete strength. Even at the most important action, that at Gyantse Jong, the infantry strength was twelve companies only. Detachments at posts on a long line of communications were imperative, and this reduced the numbers available at the front for the actual fighting.

The composition of the force was approximately as under :

- 1 Battery 10-pounder mountain guns.
- 1 Section 10-pounder mountain guns.
- 1 Section 7-pounder 200 lb. guns.
- 2 7-pounder R.M.L. of 8th Gurkha Rifles ("Bubble" and "Squeak.")
- 3 Maxim-gun sections.
- 3 Companies Mounted Infantry.
- 2 Companies Sappers and Miners.
- 5½ Battalions of Infantry and Pioneers.
- 13 Sections, Field Hospital.
- 1 Base Hospital.
- 10,000 Transport drivers.
- 8,000 Supply and Transport coolies.
- 10,500 Mules and ponies.
- 400 Donkeys.
- 9,225 Bullocks and yaks.

The 8th, reinforced by three British officers and two Gurkha officers of 7th Gurkha Rifles, were mobilized for service, and assembled at Siliguri on 20th November, 1903, receiving its tents and warm clothing. The latter issue was a generous and necessary one for what was to be later experienced, but for the time being hardly suitable for Siliguri, so when the men proceeded to don sheepskin overcoats, fur-lined gloves, lambskin vests, quilted overalls, to say nothing of one or two additional garments to make a splash in the local bazaar, their temperatures rose considerably, but cases of heat stroke are

not recorded! The appearance of these warriors is described by one who was there as like nothing on earth.

The Battalion at Siliguri were the victims of a supply and transport experiment—a girthless pack saddle. This, with a thin rope to go round the kits and mules' bellies, was the bright idea. The result—mules, kits and men were flying in all directions—put an end to the inventor's dreams of fame and possible reward.

In due course an advance to Chumbi was ordered. Gantok was reached on 8th December, 1903, and here Number 3 Double Company was ordered to halt while Number 4 Double Company was employed on road-making over the Nathula pass. The road was extremely difficult and steep, and the cold intense. Water in the maxim guns' jackets froze and a mixture of water, rum and kerosene was used. Perhaps the kerosene was added for a specific purpose! All oil had to be removed from locks of rifles and maxims as it froze hard, and arms were used without any lubricant. To give one instance of Tibetan conditions: the village of Phari, at the northern end of the Chumbi valley, is a filthy, comfortless place where fifty degrees of frost were not unusual. The Battalion, less the above detachments, marched on to Chumbi and Phari, occupying the fort at Phari on 20th December, 1903. A garrison of 8th commanded by Major G. R. Row was left here, the remainder returned to Chumbi; hence the four posts of Phari, Chumbi, Gnatong and Gantok were each garrisoned by one double company of the 8th until March, 1904.

Whilst at Chumbi a company of Mounted Infantry was formed. The first company was composed of men of the 23rd and 32nd Pioneers and 8th Gurkhas—certainly a new departure for Gurkhas. An account of their equitation instruction is not available, but in the words of General Macdonald, C.B., commanding the force, they proved invaluable.

A reference has been made to maxim guns. These were received by the Battalion shortly before leaving Shillong. For some unexplained reason, the 9th Gurkha Rifles were told to supply a M.G. officer. By some mistake an officer was sent who had never seen the inside of a maxim. Nothing daunted, he came along, took the Gurkha officer into his confidence, and got him to instruct him, under cover of a section, and carefully removed out of sight of the Fort.

Towards the end of March, 1904, an advance on Gyantse was ordered. Nos. 1 and 2 Double Companies formed part of the column. At Guru a force of some 2,000 Tibetans had taken up a position blocking the road. In keeping with its "peaceful mission" role, strict orders were issued that fire was not to be opened unless our troops were fired on first. The Tibetans were called on to retire or give up their arms. Many did so without any trouble. Incited,

however, by a Lhasa official (Depon), a number of Tibetans resisted, and wounded a British officer, a Press correspondent and ten sepoy. This, of course, broke the no fire order, and the result was a precipitate retreat of the enemy with heavy losses inflicted at point-blank range.

A stand was made by some of them in Guru village, which was shelled and carried by assault by the 8th in fine style. The Tibetans' losses were 625 killed and wounded left on the field, and 222 prisoners. First Mounted Infantry Company continued the pursuit for ten miles.

On 10th April, the 8th, commanded by Major G. R. Row, by a turning movement, outflanked the very strong position at Lamdang (or Red Idol) Gorge. It was the long arduous climb by the 8th which enabled the 32nd Pioneers to be sent into the gorge. The Tibetans fought fanatically at close quarters, and suffered severe casualties, amounting to 500 killed, wounded, and prisoners.

Next day the British force reached Gyantse, and the jong or fort was handed over without opposition. This jong is to figure largely in subsequent operations, so a word or two about it and its neighbourhood is not out of place. It is a strongly built place on a rock 600 feet high, in the middle of a richly cultivated plain. It was not occupied, however, as its water supply was outside, and the perimeter inconveniently large for the occupation force of six companies of Infantry, which included a double company 8th Gurkha Rifles, two 7-pounder guns, 50 Mounted Infantry, and two maxims, the whole under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Brander, 32nd Sikh Pioneers. The entrance gate of the jong was demolished, and the Mission occupied the hamlet of Chunglu, 1,500 yards from the fort. The main body returned to Chumbi and Phari, leaving a double company on the lines of communications.

The double company of the 8th which remained at Gyantse from the beginning had with it Majors G. R. Row and F. Murray, Lieutenant J. Coleridge, Captain Franklin, I.M.S., and Captain Luke, R.A., with "Bubble" and "Squeak." This detachment worthily upheld the high name of the 8th in two months of continuous operations, including actions at Lamdang, Karola, "Gurkha Post," Tagu and Palla villages, and the attack on the Mission escort post on 5th May, 1904.

After three weeks of settling in, peace was disturbed about the end of April, when Colonel Brander decided to attack a strong force of Tibetans established on the Karola, some forty-six miles distant on the main road to Lhasa. Leaving 160 men at Gyantse as Mission escort, he marched with the remainder on 3rd May, 1904. The enemy were strongly entrenched in a sangared position and in

trenches skilfully placed and constructed. The 8th Gurkhas company, again under Major Row and Lieutenant Coleridge, were told off to take the right sangar. This entailed a climb of 2,000 feet in driving snow. Eventually this sangar was carried with great loss to the enemy, and as soon as the flank was turned, the Tibetans vacated the position which, in the centre, they had stubbornly held, and fled. Their losses were about 450 of a total strength estimated at 3,000, a considerable proportion being armed with the breech-loading rifle, effective to 1,100 yards. The company of the 8th, in fighting at an altitude of over 18,000 feet above sea-level, probably hold the record for an action fought at such a height on foot.

At dawn on 5th May the post at Gyantse was attacked by 800 of the enemy. Although a few succeeded in penetrating the enclosure, the issue was never in doubt, and the assault was repulsed with a loss to the Tibetans of some 250 killed and wounded. The conduct of a young 8th Gurkha recruit, Jitbahadur Gurung, of six months' service is worthy of mention. This lad, a gate sentry, was suddenly attacked by twelve men. He defended himself so well that the enemy retreated, leaving three dead on the ground. Our losses were very small, but several Mission servants were brutally murdered that night in Gyantse.

It says much for the Tibetans' intelligence and their rapidity of movement that the force that attacked the Mission post should have arrived by dawn on 5th May from a place some fifty miles away, following presumably a report that practically the whole of the escort had moved out on 3rd May.

Colonel Brander returned on 9th May. The jong had been occupied by a strong force of the enemy, who kept up a constant fire on the post. On 17th May the Tibetans occupied a house about 500 yards from the Mission post, and from here opened a vigorous fire. On 19th May the 8th Double Company and two companies 32nd Pioneers assaulted and carried the house, afterwards known as "Gurkha Post." The capture of Tagu and Palla villages followed, the 8th being again engaged. Palla was important for, in the final assault of the jong, this village, about 800 yards south-east of the jong, was the starting place for the main assault. Covered ways were made from Mission post to Gurkha and Palla posts. (N.B.—Communication trenches, forestalling those of the 1914-1918 war.)

On 26th June General Macdonald reached Gyantse with a column, and the Mission post was relieved. With this column were two double companies of the 8th which had been left behind. A stand by the enemy at a monastery named Niani, about four miles from Gyantse, was the only incident of this march. The monastery was very strong, surrounded by a wall forty feet high and eight feet



thick, with only two entrances. However, it was soon in our hands, assaulted by Pioneers, with a loss of some 200 casualties to the enemy. In this operation the Mission escort co-operated from the east.

Operations to clear the Gyantse valley of the enemy were commenced by General Macdonald on 28th June, 1904. Having been cleared out of several villages adjacent to the jong, the enemy concentrated in Tsechen monastery, a very strong position at the end of an extremely steep hill. At 5 p.m. the 8th Gurkhas, 40th Pathans, 1st Sappers and Miners, admirably supported by two guns of No. 7 Mountain Battery, R.G.A., succeeded with the greatest dash and gallantry in taking the position. The Tibetans fought well, and held their ground until driven out at the point of the bayonet. Our losses were trifling, but Captain Bliss, 8th Gurkha Rifles, was wounded.

The enemy, now concentrated around Gyantse Jong and estimated at 6,000 strong, sent in a flag of truce. Futile negotiations followed but hostilities were suspended until noon on 5th July, 1904, when a feint was made on the north-west portion of the enemy's stronghold. Some houses at the foot of the hill were occupied, held until dark, and left with fires burning.

The main attack on the jong was ordered for the morning of 6th July, 1904, and was carried out in two phases.

Phase 1 : The capture of the houses at the eastern foot of the hill on which the jong was situated. For this operation three columns were used. We deal only with the left column, composed of one double company 8th Gurkhas and one of Pioneers, under Major F. Murray, 8th Gurkha Rifles. Lieutenant J. Coleridge was with this company. At 3.30 a.m. these columns started from Palla village (some 800 yards south-east of the jong). The sky was clear, and moonlight disclosed the attack to the enemy, who opened fire at about 300 yards. The columns pressed on and a lodgment was effected before dawn. As soon as it was light the troops were able to find their way through the intricate mass of houses, and by 8 a.m. that part of the town south-west of the jong was taken.

At daybreak our artillery posted on Gun Hill (700 yards east of the jong) and Palla opened a bombardment of the jong, and by 3.30 p.m. had made a practicable breach.

Phase 2 : Two companies (one double company) of the 8th and one company of the Royal Fusiliers had formed part of the general reserve located behind Palla village, and were detailed to make the final assault. The companies of the 8th were "E" and "C." With "E" Company were Major Baldwin, commanding, Lieutenants Grant and Humphreys. With "C" were Captain G. L. S. Ward and Captain Bliss.

At 2.30 p.m. the assault column moved off from Palla and reached the village without much trouble. One of our two 7-pounders ("Bubble" or "Squeak") moved up, and proceeded to do a little enlarging of the breach already made in the curtain about 200 feet above. At about 3.30 p.m. the assault started. "E" Company, one company Royal Fusiliers, "C" Company, in that order, now began to clamber the precipitous slope. They were met with showers of stones, and a heavy musketry fire, mainly directed from two towers on either side of the breach. Lieutenant Grant and some of the leading men managed to establish themselves at the foot of the breach. The advance had to be made in more or less single file to take advantage of the better footing obtainable on a just perceptible spur, and so avoid the shale and rubble of the shallow entrant. In this moving landslide, a man knocked down or slipping was likely to take his "next-astern" with him. Hurling back more than once by stones, Lieutenant Grant and Havildar Karbir Pun, both wounded, succeeded in forcing an entrance, being followed by more officers and men, when the towers were taken possession of. By 6 p.m. our troops were masters of Gyantse jong.

Several awards for operations around Gyantse were given to the Regiment, and special mention must be made of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant J. D. Grant and the First Class Order of Merit to Havildar Karbir Pun for their most conspicuous gallantry on 6th July.

Following the capture of Gyantse jong, preparations were made for an advance to Lhasa by a column which included six companies of the Regiment. At Karola again resistance was met. It was soon overcome. Both flanks of the position were turned, and for each one double company (two companies) of the 8th were detailed. Once more they had to crawl up to 19,000 feet to complete their tasks. Panting and blowing and stopping every few yards to get their breath, the men of the 8th once more carried out the job successfully.

The force reached Lhasa on 3rd August, 1904, after the passage of the Tsangpo river, made by native boats and ferry barges and Berthon boats, and occupying seven days. Unfortunately, the capsizing of one boat caused the loss of Major G. H. Bretherton, D.S.O., the Chief Supply and Transport Officer, and two men of the 8th.

Lhasa was not defended, and no further military operations took place.

The return journey commenced on 23rd September, 1904, and by 15th November the whole Regiment had reached Shillong.

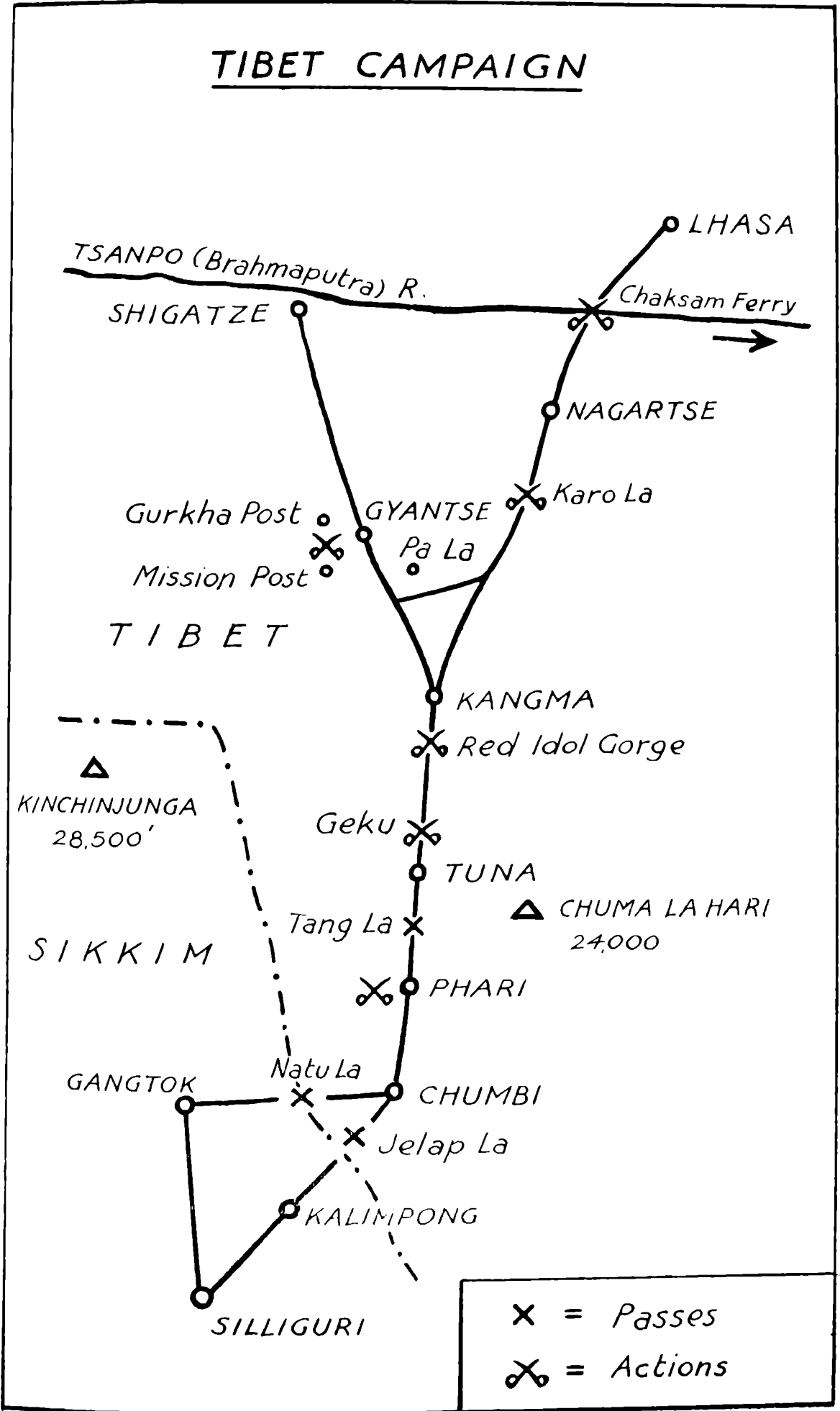
So ended the Tibet War, for which a special medal was awarded.



Photograph of Gyantse Jong taken by Captain D. W. Humphreys the day after the assault, which took place on 6th July, 1904. Dotted line shows line of advance



# TIBET CAMPAIGN



So far no battle honour has been granted, but even now the future may add this to our roll.

The 8th were singled out for special congratulations on the result of the operations, and it can be justly claimed that the Regiment was represented in every action fought, and formed part of every column put in motion from the beginning to the end. On return to Shillong the Battalion had a splendid reception, which remained a happy memory for many a long day.

During the years covered by this chapter changes and reforms took place, making for improvement in conditions of service, in organization and administration.

In 1891 the amalgamation of the staff corps of the three Presidencies under the general designation of "The Indian Staff Corps" was sanctioned. It was a measure which, in practice, affected British officers alone. The conditions of service of other ranks remained unchanged.

As a step towards removing a difficulty which was alleged to be ill affecting the enlistment of good quality recruits to the service, and to facilitate recruiting generally, recruiting centres were established in 1892. That for Gurkhas was at Gorakhpore. Later offshoots to facilitate the recruitment of Gurkhas from Eastern Nepal were established at Purnea and Ghoom (near Darjeeling).

The pay of all non-commissioned ranks in the Indian Infantry was increased by Rs2 monthly and the grant of the annual half-mounting allowance of Rs5 was allowed from the date of enlistment.

Half-mounting was the term given to the provision of kit. In 1877 a grant of Rs30 was authorized to every recruit towards the provision of his kit, and a further annual allowance of Rs4 towards its upkeep.

This half-mounting system continued until 1917, when the Indian Army conformed to the British Army system of supply. Before this, units purchased everything except ordnance supplies of arms and equipment. It was not a satisfactory system, liable to failure in war, and certainly not making for uniformity. Subsequent to 1917, the issue of a complete kit plus an allowance for mufti was made to every recruit, and a clothing allowance for upkeep credited to each man's account. Up to the same time, rations were purchased under unit arrangements, each company (or double company) having its own issuer (Bania). Ration issue was then made free and taken over by the Supply and Transport Corps (Royal Indian Army Service Corps).

In 1895 a new medal was instituted to commemorate wars in India and on the Frontier, in substitution of the India Medal of 1854, which had been introduced, on the suggestion of Lord Dal-

housie, to avoid the multiplication of medals, and which was first issued to commemorate the Burmese War of 1852-3. With the exception of the Mutiny and Afghan War of 1878-1880, for which special medals were issued, this medal was issued for every Indian campaign during a period of forty years, and it had, in 1895, no less than twenty-one clasps, some officers and other ranks possessing as many as nine and ten. The new medal was first granted for the defence and relief of Chitral in 1895.

Since the early days of the rise of the British power in India, Armies had been formed on a Presidency basis. In 1895 this ceased. The Presidency armies became the Army in India, consisting of the Punjab, Bengal, Madras and Bombay Commands. The old Bengal Army included the first two named, and the 43rd and 44th became a portion of the Bengal Command. Each Command had a Lieutenant-General in command, the whole under the direct command of the Commander-in-Chief in India and controlled by the Government of India.

The introduction of this great change in the organization of the Indian Army marks the disappearance of the Bengal Army as a separate entity and brings to an end the remarkable record of its achievement, a record which begins with Plassey, and closes with the consolidation of the British Indian Empire. The unhappy episode of the Mutiny darkens its history, but the long roll of its victories and the fame of its arms and conquests effaces that sad chapter, and it can never be forgotten how great a part the old Bengal Army has played in the extension of the British Empire. For nearly a century and a half it had borne an honourable part in all our campaigns, from the Nile to the Great Wall of China, and had helped to carry our victorious standards to Kabul and Mandalay, to Cairo and Peking.

In 1902 Lord Kitchener became Commander-in-Chief in India, and many reforms were introduced in 1903. The first of these was the abolition of the designation "India Staff Corps," the name "Indian Army" being substituted.

New names and numbers were published for all Indian Army units. Mention has already been made of the new numbers of our Battalions—viz., 7th and 8th Gurkha Rifles. All Gurkha regiments were numbered separately. It is of interest that had the renumbering been based on the dates on which the regiments were raised, the order of regiments in the Gurkha Brigade would have been 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 9th, 8th, 4th, 5th, 10th and 7th. This question of seniority was raised more than once, but with no result.

In November, 1903, the Army in India was grouped into three Army Corps. Under the four-Command system the Army was

distributed in geographical divisions, and not in accordance with war requirements. In the Army Corps system, therefore, war preparation preceded geography.

In 1903 two machine guns were issued to each regiment, together with sixteen pairs of binoculars and three mekometers. The latter was a range-finder worked by two men. Somewhat of a "Heath Robinson" contraption, it was known disrespectfully as the "String and Guessing Box," but accurate and effective in the hands of well-trained operators.



## PART II

### CHAPTER EIGHT

(See Maps No. 1, No. 2 and No. 4)

Delocalization and move from Assam—Simla guards—Manipur—Move to Dharamsala—Earthquake—Acts of gallantry—Decorations—Move to Bakloh—4th Gurkhas' kindness—Kitchener Charitable Fund—Lord Kitchener visits Dharamsala—Move to Rawalpindi—1906-1911—Final change of title—"Bubble" and "Squeak"—The Abor Expedition, 1911-2—Objects of expedition—Composition of force—Phases of operations—1st Battalion in main column—Igar stockade—Subadar Jaichand Thakur—Patrol action—Kekar Monyng—Plan of attack—Right and left flank attacks—Tactics in Abor fighting—Yembang—Phase two, surveying—Return to Shillong—Valedictory—2nd Battalion, 1911-1914—Mishmi, 1912-3—Tautak in Naga country—Walong, 1914.

THE delocalization of the Regiment appears to be a good point at which to start Part II of our History.

For some years representations had been made that Assam as a permanent location should cease, and that the Gurkha regiments in Assam should be moved to India, to see other places and to be alongside other troops. This question had been considered at Army Headquarters, but nothing had come of it until 1899, when the 42nd (6th Gurkha Rifles) were moved to the Punjab Command, and Abbottabad, severing their connection with Assam after seventy-seven years. Apart from the "Primus in Indis" claim of the 43rd, with its Gilgit detachment in 1898, some seven years was to elapse before a battalion of the Regiment was to move from Assam.

Whilst the 1st Battalion was fighting in Tibet, the 2nd, in 1904, found the guards at Simla for the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief. These two companies went from Manipur, where, in the hot weather, the Manipuris threatened trouble. Prompt measures by Colonel Maxwell, the Resident, assisted by a display of preparedness in the shape of guards, patrols, etc., by the 2nd Battalion, brought the Manipuris to their senses and relieved a situation which might well have resulted in repetition of the 1891 trouble.

Early in 1905 the 2nd Battalion received the long-looked-for orders

to move. Most felt that it was time opportunities were to be had to meet other units, and gain experience of conditions and soldiering, other than in Assam, where prolonged residence had tendered to make all ranks somewhat "parochial."

By moving to India, financial losses by all ranks ensued as the Assam allowance ceased. The rank and file especially were better off financially in Assam than the Gurkhas serving in India. Pay was higher, food was cheaper, shikar was good. It was noticeable on reaching Dharamsala that the men of the 1st Gurkhas appeared comparatively poor, and their womenfolk had no gold ornaments. It says much for the *esprit de corps* of the 2nd Battalion that there were no desertions on the move taking place.

The move of the 2nd Battalion was completed by 12th March, 1905. The Battalion was accommodated in spare barracks of the 1st Gurkha Rifles and disused two-storeyed British barracks. The following month, on 4th April, occurred a tragedy which is probably without parallel in the number of casualties suffered by a battalion in its peace station. This was the disastrous earthquake. It cost the Battalion :

Killed : Captain Stanley Clay, Jemadar Gore Pun, 132 other ranks.

Died from injuries : 5 Gurkha other ranks.

Severely injured : Major C. H. Clay, Captain A. C. Wall, Subadar-Major Karnabir Thapa, Subadar Aitadhoj Rai, 50 Gurkha other ranks.

Slightly injured : 4 Gurkha officers, 135 Gurkha other ranks.

The shock took place at 6.15 a.m. Morning parade was at 8 a.m., so that the collapse of the buildings caught everybody indoors. It was all very sudden. Houses did not sway and topple over, but just "sat down." "A" Company and the Band, being in the old British barracks, suffered most. The Band was practically wiped out. All instruments were lost.

Many were the acts of gallantry performed. As one who was present records : "The men were splendid. Many who were extricated from the ruins, and brought round by artificial respiration, went straight in again to get out others." The women, both British and Gurkha, displayed equal heroism. Theirs was the harder task, as many worked on with the knowledge that "their man" had gone, or the gnawing uncertainty of the fate of the missing husband.

Recommendations for decorations were arrived at by getting each company to elect one man. The decorations took the form of silver and bronze medals of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. This was the first occasion on which this medal had been awarded to any but

British troops. The presentation was made at Benares by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (later King George V). The wife of one British officer, and the widow of another received the Royal Red Cross.

One instance of discipline and another of pluck and endurance are worth the telling. The officiating Commanding Officer (Major C. H. Clay), after extricating himself from his house, and being himself injured, rode to the Quarter guard. He found the guard "fallen in" and standing steady in front of the guard-room, which was in ruins. The guard presented arms to the Commanding Officer, and the guard commander reported, "There has been an earthquake ; what are your orders?" A rifleman, "not considered ordinarily a particularly good soldier," jumped from an upper storey window when the shock came, and hurt himself in doing so. He took a message to Major H. St. A. Wake, who was in camp below the barracks, with scouts and families of the Battalion. He returned with this party, worked all day and the next, and then said, "The urgent work seems to be done ; I think I'll go to hospital." He was found to have a broken pelvis. Sounds incredible, but it is an actual fact.

Dharamsala was vacated by the 2nd Battalion for Bakloh, where the 4th Gurkhas showed the greatest kindness. Telegrams and letters of sympathy from the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief, and all Gurkha battalions, 60th Rifles and Rifle Brigade were received, and His Excellency Lord Kitchener started a fund for the relief of injured men and their families. This Kitchener Charitable Fund, subscribed to largely by 60th Rifles and all Gurkha battalions, was later absorbed in the Battalion Fund, and used for cases of hardship in the Battalion.

Lord Kitchener later visited Dharamsala, and congratulated all ranks of the Battalion on the splendid example of discipline and gallantry they had shown after the earthquake.

In November, 1905, what was left of the 2nd Battalion, 6 British officers, 8 Gurkha officers, and 212 Gurkha other ranks, moved to Rawalpindi, where they were employed on guard duties for Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales during their stay in that station. High commendation from the Commander-in-Chief was received for the way in which the duties were performed. No higher praise than in the phrase "In a manner worthy of the Gurkhas" could have been given.

Lieutenant-Colonel F. Murray, D.S.O., was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 5th June, 1909.

Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Clay was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 5th June, 1909.

Until 1911 the two Battalions enjoyed a peaceful spell, the 1st at Shillong, the 2nd at Lansdowne. The latter proceeded to the plains each year to take part in brigade and divisional manœuvres, and in

January, 1907, took part in the Grand Reviews at Agra before the Amir of Afghanistan.

In 1909 the 2nd Battalion, with help from the 2nd/3rd Gurkha Rifles, received high praise for bridging the Ganges with a bridge of boats. The return to Lansdowne was made by a difficult route, the latter part of the march being rendered still more strenuous by much road-making.

In September, 1907, took place the last change of titles of our two regiments.

The 8th Gurkha Rifles (old 44th) became 1st Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles, and the 7th Gurkha Rifles (old 43rd) became 2nd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles. How the 43rd and 7th became 2nd Battalion to the 44th and 8th has always been a matter of conjecture, hence a full explanation is not out of place here. Under Lord Kitchener's scheme for the reorganization of the Gurkha Brigade, there were to be ten Gurkha regiments, each consisting of two battalions ; of these the 7th and 10th Gurkhas were to be recruited from Limbus and Rais.

The 7th (our own 2nd Battalion) had for many years enlisted chiefly Magars and Gurungs, so it was decided to let them have the chance of retaining such a connection, but with the proviso that they became the 2nd Battalion of the 8th. The alternative was to be a Limbu Rai Battalion, retaining their title as 7th Gurkha Rifles. The Magar-Gurung lure won the day, though only after a certain amount of negotiation, not amounting to hostilities. Of course, as already related, the 1st Battalion was the senior. Why the numbers 43rd and 44th, and later 7th and 8th, were so allotted to our two battalions is a mystery. A possible explanation is that, when re-numbering the Bengal Army in 1861, the powers that be, seeing that the 1st Assam Light Infantry (42nd) was the senior Assam regiment, promptly assumed that the 2nd Assam Light Infantry should be the 43rd, not realizing that the Sylhet Light Infantry was the second in seniority of the Assam regiments.

Thus the 43rd became the only 2nd Battalion in the Gurkha Brigade with an identity of its own, all the other 2nd Battalions in the Gurkha Brigade having been originally raised as such by drafts from their 1st Battalions, many years after the 1st Battalions had been formed. As fate would have it, the two battalions of the 8th Gurkha Rifles were not to meet again, as such, for over twenty years.

About this time the two 7-pounder mountain guns were withdrawn and the battalions were no longer responsible for maintaining gun teams. The gun porters who carried them were paid off and discharged. The guns were left with battalions as trophies, those of the 1st Battalion being carried round from station to station. The 2nd Battalion guns were left at Lansdowne when the Battalion moved

from there in 1922. The 6th guns were at their Abbottabad Mess, and presumably have moved with them to Malaya. All three Assam regiments were faithful to the nickname "Bubble" and "Squeak." Although officially withdrawn in 1907, the 7-pounder guns of the 1st Battalion were used again (and for the last time) on active service in the Abor Expedition, 1911-2. The official records of this campaign show that the 1st Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles would supply gun detachments for two 7-pounder (150 lb.) R.M.L. guns, and the Director-General of Ordnance would arrange to supply the two 7-pounder (150 lb.) R.M.L. guns to the Officer Commanding, 1st Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles, together with 200 rounds of ammunition per gun, and the necessary stores. The inclusion of a section of guns in the establishment of an Infantry battalion must be unique in our service, and it will not be without interest to say something of these old friends. For many years they accompanied the Regiment on its many expeditions, doing good service. In latter years, still honoured, their role has been confined to assisting at Dasher and other festivals, and they have added to their long history by being brought into action on numerous Guest Nights, though not for the purpose for which they were intended.

The range of these guns was 1,300 yards. From very close range they could batter down a stockade. The gun team consisted of one sergeant seconded from a British Mountain Battery, one havildar and sixteen riflemen. These men drew Rs1 monthly extra pay, and were the biggest men of the Battalion. The guns, etc., were carried, slung on bamboos, by porters. These were a mixed bag, including Nagas and a few Gurkhas. When they joined they were sworn in on the gun.

On 5th September, 1911, the 1st Battalion received orders to mobilize for active service against the Abors. To complete to strength, two British officers, four Gurkha officers and 140 Gurkha other ranks from the 2nd Battalion were attached. These were formed into two extra companies, "J" and "K." The Battalion thus went on service with ten companies.

The determination of a suitable boundary between India and Chinese possessions had for some time exercised the minds of the Government of India. For practical purposes no control was exercised over the tribes beyond the foothills. Exaction of reparations for outrages on British subjects and for raids into British territory, and the payment of allowances to certain of the tribes, was about as far as our control went. The whole of the territory north of the foothills was *terra incognita*, and it was considered necessary to explore and survey as much of the country as possible. From this it will be seen that the expedition, far from being an isolated expedition against a

frontier tribe, and possessing merely a local significance, was, in reality, an act of Imperial policy owing its importance to the necessity of fixing a definite and sound strategical boundary between ourselves and China. There was another reason, however, which probably brought matters to a head. This was the murder by Abors in March, 1911, of Mr. N. Williamson, A.P.O. at Sadiya, and Dr. J. D. Gregorson. The former, an excellent frontier officer, had already made several journeys into tribal country. His murder was a great loss to Government. Such a crime demanded severe punishment and reparation.

The force was under the command of Major-General H. Bower, C.B., commanding Assam Brigade, and consisted of :

No. 1 Field Company, 1st Sappers and Miners.

32nd Sikh Pioneers.

1/2nd Gurkha Rifles.

1/8th Gurkha Rifles, with two 7-pounder guns.

400 Rifles, Military Police.

Ancillary troops.

The operations may be divided into two phases : (a) Military and (b) Political, Survey, and Exploration. To execute the former it was decided to make the village of Kebang the primary objective, for it was this village which was chiefly responsible for Mr. Williamson's murder.

Two columns were employed—a Main Column under General Bower and a Subsidiary Ledum Column. The Battalion formed part of the Main Column. Kobo, on the right bank of the Brahmaputra, where the Dihang river flows into it, was the base for the operations. This place was a name only, no village and dense jungle. In Assam wet weather, the work entailed in transforming this terrain into a base camp can be imagined. The Dihang valley was the line of advance. So dense was the jungle and so bad the Abor paths that only about an average of one mile a day was made. It is not possible in a history of this length to go fully into the details of march and camp procedure in jungle warfare of this sort, but the official account does this, and is certainly a revelation of the trials endured in jungle warfare. The 8th had done this sort of thing for some ninety years. No doubt young readers had a taste of it in the Burma operations, 1942-1945, but there were no mechanical aids to road making and jungle clearing in 1911—the kukri and dao had to do it unaided.

No sign of hostile Abors was seen until 7th November, and it was not until 19th November that any resistance was met with. "J" Company had proceeded beyond the camp site at the Igar river as escort to the General Officer Commanding when they were fired on,

and found they were under a hidden line of stockades which blocked the steep path. Fire was at once opened on the stockade, and reinforcements ordered up from camp by telephone. A small party under Lieutenants G. C. B. Buckland and M. A. C. Kennedy and Subadar Jaichand Thakur was sent to outflank the enemy's right. Under a hail of arrows, and the discharge of stone chutes, the party succeeded in reaching the top stockade. Charging with kukris drawn, they cleared the stockade, and, enfilading the lower stockade, forced the Abors to retire. In hand-to-hand fighting, Subadar Jaichand, who had displayed great gallantry throughout, closed with one of the Abors, and they rolled down the cliff fighting hard until Lieutenant Kennedy was able to shoot the Abor. The Subadar later received the I.O.M. During this action the General Officer Commanding received a graze on his hand from an arrow. Subsequently, congratulations were sent to the General Staff on the success of the day's work. One delightful telegram from the base, worded hurriedly, ran: "Hearty congratulations on taking of Rotung, but much regret G.O.C.'s narrow escape."

For the next few weeks the column advanced slowly, parties being sent out into the surrounding country. From one of these parties a patrol was detached, and succeeded in surprising and killing four of the enemy in a house. While returning two more were encountered, and met the same fate. It would appear as though the usual practice of sending large parties of some three or four companies to beat up the surrounding country was a mistake. They were unwieldy and precluded all chance of surprise. The use of small patrols would most likely have produced better results.

On 23rd November, 1911, a reconnaissance sighted a large number of Abors at Kekar Monyng (or Black Rock), and subsequently a large stockade was located in this vicinity. This was constructed by the Abors to protect their chief village Kebang, and considered by them to be impregnable. It certainly was a most formidable obstacle, being at a position where the path had been cut out of a great cliff standing some 150 feet sheer above the Dihang river. The path was only one foot wide. At the far side it was blocked by a stockade. Above the path there were a great number of stone chutes.

It was obviously essential to turn the position, for, from the configuration of the ground, a frontal attack would have been too costly.

Before the attack took place, part of the Ledum Column had joined up with the Main Column, bringing its available strength up to nearly 1,300 rifles.

The plan of attack was to send two parties to right and left of the enemy's stockade and so to outflank it; the remainder to march up the bank of the river to attack the position in front.

The right flanking party under Captain J. Coleridge, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles, consisting of one company 2nd Gurkha Rifles, three companies 1/8th Gurkha Rifles and two maxims (one Assam Valley Light Horse, one 2nd Gurkha Rifles), moved on the night of 2nd December, 1911, crossing the Dihang river, which was successfully accomplished by 11 p.m. On 3rd December, 1911, the approach march commenced. The ground was very steep, wooded at first, becoming open later. At about 3 a.m. the Abors laid an ambush on the rear of this column, killing two men of the 2nd Gurkhas. The discovery of a path by Lieutenant G. C. B. Buckland and the scouts was fortunate, as this was followed for about one and a half miles, and of no little value in a night march where it had not been possible to reconnoitre the route. By about 8.30 a.m., when the mist had cleared, Captain Coleridge's party were in position, the stockade below them, and their presence unknown to the enemy.

At 5.30 a.m. the left flanking party of two companies 1/8th Gurkha Rifles, under Captain D. H. R. Giffard, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles, moved through very steep and wooded country to take up their position.

The main body followed Captain Giffard's party for a short way, then halted to reconnoitre a position for the 7-pounders and maxim guns.

At about 10.30 a.m. fire was somewhat prematurely opened from the main body. This resulted in the flight of the Abors from the stockade before the left flanking party could operate with effect. The fire was so heavy both from the main body and the right flanking party that the Abors did not wait for the assault, and failed to discharge their stone chutes. The casualties inflicted are not definitely known, but the Abors had had enough, and never again in the expedition did they put up any organized resistance.

This was the last occasion on which "Bubble" and "Squeak" were fired on active service. Kebang village was now occupied, and several villages in the neighbourhood were visited and dealt with.

It will be of interest to readers with knowledge only of modern warfare, or of jungle warfare gained in Burma, to read how an officer who was present at Kekar Monying sums up the tactics of ourselves and the enemy at the time of the Abor Expedition. It is interesting to compare this account with that given on page 39 *et seq.*

"Their prowess (the Abors), however, lay as a rule not in attacking in force nor in holding a position, but in hiding in small parties behind trees, usually in some depression of the ground, and potting upwards at their enemy with poisoned arrows. When they did make a stand, they began by lying quiet in a carefully prepared stockade to watch the effect of their booby-traps and stone-shoots. These will have been previously erected with immense labour over the route along which



they expected the enemy to come. It should be added that they seemed generally to expect him to make a frontal attack. Therefore if the stone-shoots were circumvented, or let loose upon nothing by our own flanking parties, and so rendered innocuous, it seemed high time for the Abors to decamp, and either take up a position elsewhere or to disperse.

"It is very difficult to deal adequately with this type of enemy. He does not put up a good fight and let you have troops at him, but he sets great store by such 'back-hander' casualties as he may be able to inflict. It is therefore necessary to be very watchful against the traps which he may set, and the small spasmodic pounces which he may make from the jungle. Meanwhile, it is necessary to get at him somehow, in order to make an adequate 'bag.'

"Throughout the expedition the tactics pursued, and the only tactics possible, were rather those of big-game hunting than of human warfare. To avoid a booby-trap by means of a flank attack was, of course, pure tactics of the dignified human sort, but, apart from a few such human details, the main objects in fighting Abors were to take care that your quarry did not round on you unawares, but to stalk him yourself so closely and so cunningly that you got a good shot into him before he slunk away.

"A typical instance was the action of Kekar Monying, in which the fighting culminated some weeks later. The quarry was located in its lair in the stockade. The stalk was prepared for the night, and was to be complete at dawn. One party of stalkers crept through the jungle on the steep slope to the left. Another party, after achieving a crossing on a laboriously constructed raft, approached the position from the other side of the river. The central and main party crawled forwards in a direct line. Bayonets were kept fixed throughout the advance, and such other precautions taken as seemed necessary against sudden isolated assaults from out the blind jungle. These, though very complete, did not prevent a couple of Gurkhas from being cut up stealthily during the advance. Long after dawn had broken, and while the three parties waited in position, the stalker's ever-recurring dilemma confronted our force—'Shall I shoot now and stand a greater chance of missing, or shall I creep nearer and run a greater chance of the quarry getting away before I can fire my shot?'

"Who ever answers this question with confidence? And what big game hunter or other sportsman shall say what was the exact correct moment for opening fire on this occasion—that is to say, the moment conducive to the biggest bag?"

Suffice it to say that the moment chosen resulted in a bag of Abors sufficient for the purposes of punishment and persuasion. For, from this moment, opposition practically ceased, and it was not many

days later that the head-men of the hostile villages began to come in and sue for peace. It was even said that they would have come in sooner had they not required an interval in which to recover from the nervous breakdown resulting from the roar of the maxims on that morning.

No mention has been made of the operations of the other column (Ledum) as the Regiment was not represented in this. It successfully carried out the objects for which detailed, and joined up with the main column as already stated.

A permanent camp was built on the Dihang river at Yembang, where Camp Headquarters remained. Small columns were sent out to punish villages and to explore the country. This brings us to Phase Two of the operations, which included political, survey and exploration activities. It is not proposed to go fully into the work done and results obtained by the exploration. Some 3,500 square miles were mapped on a scale of four miles to one inch, and one could say that many gaps in the world's knowledge were filled. The Regiment was fully occupied and provided escorts for the exploration party, and convoys operating on either bank of the Dihang river. Captain J. Coleridge was the senior military officer, and assumed responsibility for all military matters. It was a difficult march of steep ascents and descents. Like all marches through country which provides nothing to live on, the ration question was always a headache to those in charge, the number of carriers required being large for the force employed, and emphasizing that old bugbear of operating in inhospitable country that your beasts of burden, human or animal, will, after a time, be themselves consuming what they carry.

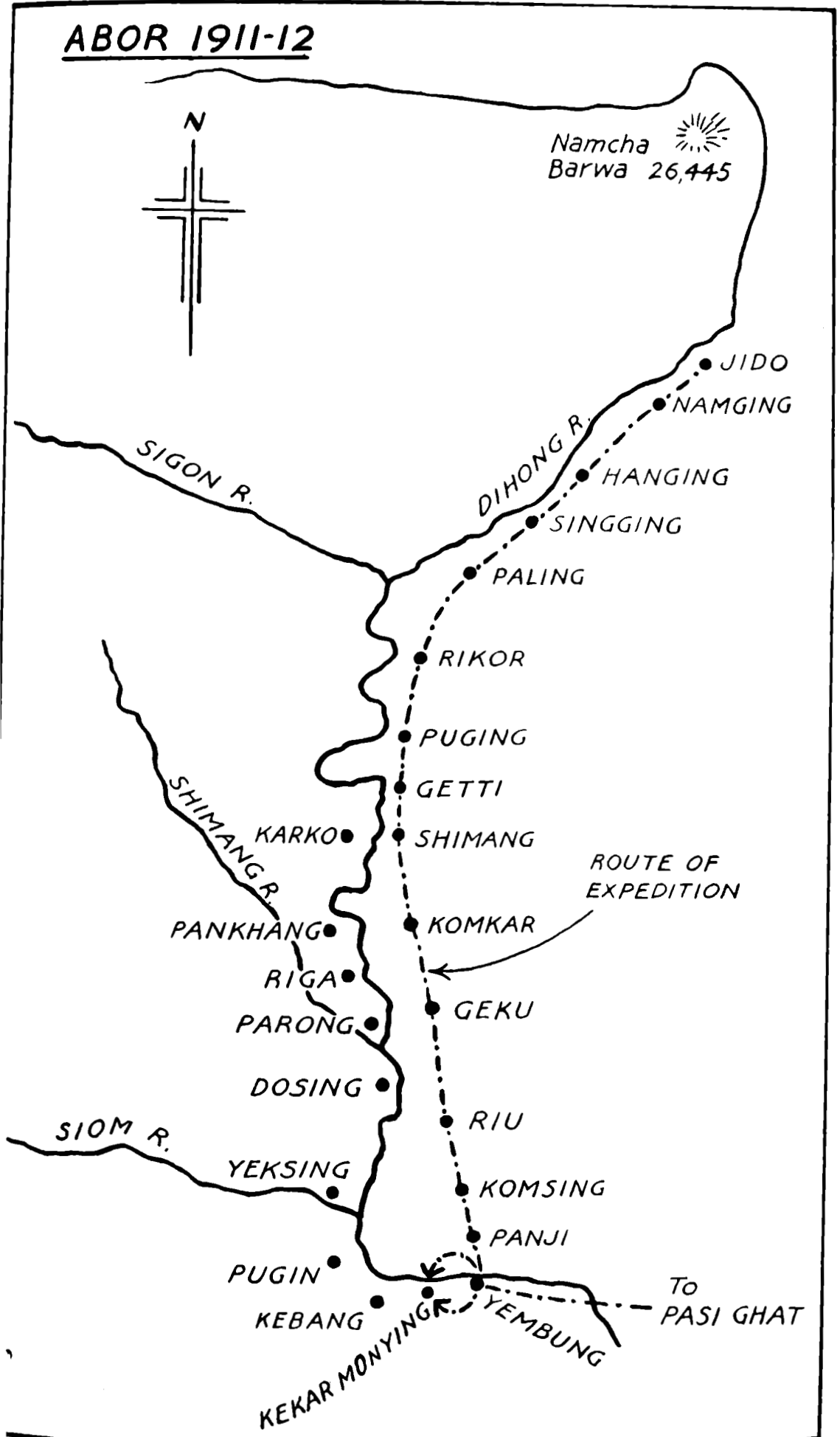
Probably the most interesting thing to the officers of the 1/8th in these explorations was the question as to whether the Tsangpo river, crossed near Lhasa in 1904, did really send its waters into the Dihang in Abor land. Although this expedition did not definitely prove this to be so, it removed most doubts and provided surmises which during the next few years explorers Captain F. M. Bailey and Kingdon Ward proved to be correct. In April, 1912, the expedition broke up and the 1st Battalion returned to Shillong. [N.B.—Throughout this account when the word "Company" has been used it denotes a unit half the size of a modern company.]

An extract from the *Gazette* of India in May, 1912, stated :

#### 1ST BATTALION 8TH GURKHA RIFLES.

"On this Corps devolved most of the fighting and the very hard work involved in escorting exploration parties. I cannot speak too highly of the manner in which it carried out its various

ABOR 1911-12



duties. A better Corps for jungle warfare it would be hard to find. The following officers and men are commended for good work :

- Lieutenant-Colonel F. Murray, D.S.O. Promoted to Brevet Colonel.
- Major J. A. Wilson. Received D.S.O.
- Captain J. D. Coleridge.
- Captain A. L. M. Molesworth.
- Lieutenant M. A. C. Kennedy. Received D.S.O.
- Subadar-Major Nawalsing Rana. Received 1st Class Order of British India.
- Jemadar Makansing Gurung, 'B' Company. Received 2nd Class Order of British India.
- Jemadar Narbahadur Gurung, 'A' Company. Received I.D.S.M.
- Havildar Bhairab Sahi, 'D' Company. Received I.D.S.M.
- Lance-Naik Chitrabir Rana. 'B' Company.
- Rifleman Kalia Pun. 'B' Company."

The Indian General Service Medal was awarded to those who took part in the operations.

Excepting for the detachments sent to the 1st Battalion for the Abor operations, the 2nd Battalion continued at Lansdowne, taking part annually in brigade and divisional training in India. By now, to the great majority of the rank and file of this Battalion, Assam was a place unknown. However, the absence from its old haunts resulted in gaining knowledge of other places, other arms and units and a broadening of outlook.

Between November, 1912, and May, 1913, a party of the 1st Battalion—four Gurkha officers and 144 rank and file, under Captain A. L. M. Molesworth—were employed, as escort to Sappers and Miners and a Pioneer Battalion, on the construction of a mule road from Sadiya towards the Tibet-China border. Owing to the heavy rains (200 inches in February), it was not possible to take the road as far as intended. One small river rose forty feet, completely submerging a large ration camp. The Mishmis were friendly and there was no fighting.

The commendation of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief was received for the difficult and good work done.

The term "web-footed" is often applied to the native of Sylhet. Evidently this might be applied equally to some of the Mishmi folk if this outing is a sample of their annual rainfall.

The ancient enemy, the Naga, comparatively quiet for some years, attacked a Military Police Post in early 1913, and took a number of heads and rifles. Retribution was ordered, and Major J. A. Wilson, D.S.O., with four British officers and 200 Gurkha officers and other ranks, marched to assist the Military Police in operations against the offenders, the Tautak group of Naga villages. The operation was quickly and efficiently done. In twelve days from first crossing the frontier, 134 Nagas had been killed and six of their villages burnt. The column was back in Shillong by 1st April, having left on 20th February, 1913. Not bad going.

The following message was received from the Chief of General Staff :

“The Government of India concur in the opinion of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief that great credit is due to Major J. A. Wilson, D.S.O., and the troops under his command for the success of the operations which were carried out with commendable energy and ability.”

The following awards were made :

Major J. A. Wilson, D.S.O., to be Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel.  
Subadar Mewa Thapa, I.D.S.M., to receive 2nd Class Order of British India.

Lance-Naik Bhawansing Gurung and Lance-Naik Kalia Pun to receive the India Distinguished Service Medal.

Lieutenant-Colonel G. M. Morris was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 1st April, 1914.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. Wilson, D.S.O., was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 5th June, 1914.

Three British officers, four Gurkha officers and 146 rank and file, 1st Battalion, under Major C. Stansfeld, proceeded in 1914 as escort to the Political Officer, North-East Frontier, in the Mishmi country. Nothing untoward occurred, the Mishmis being friendly. This was the last occasion on which either battalion was called upon to furnish any parties for punitive measures or escort duties in the hills of the North-East Frontier. This year, too, may be said to have been the end of that close contact with the tribes and hills which go to make up Assam, a contact extending for ninety years—a phase of the Regimental history of which it may well be proud. No battle honours can be claimed for ninety years of almost unceasing active service in Assam, but, alas, the North-East Frontier, until the Japanese arrived, remained unfashionable.

## CHAPTER NINE

(See Maps No. 1 and No. 5)

[*This chapter records the history of the 2nd Battalion in The First World War 1914-1918.*]

Use of Indian Army outside India—Force “A” Mobilization—Embarkation—Voyage to France—Marseilles—Orleans—At the front—Comparison in arms—La Quinque Rue—Lieutenant-Colonel Morris—Severe casualties—Heavy British Officer losses—Results of the action—Relief—Conditions in and out of the line—A Quarter Guard incident—Le Plantin—Visit of Field-Marshal Earl Roberts—Festubert, 1914—A personal narrative—Captain G. C. B. Buckland—Havildar Hariparsad Thapa—Garhwalis attack—A Gurkha and grenades—Visit of King George V—Trench duty—Givenchy, 1914—Explosions on Sirhind Brigade front—Counter-attack by 2/8th—Mud and water—Reasons for failure—Subadar Shamsheer Gurung decorated with O.B.I.—Back to reserve.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, close contact with the Assam hills ended this year. From now onwards the Regiment was to have a much more varied experience of service, including Europe and Africa and much of Asia, outside the India and Burma it had previously known.

The outbreak of the Great War, 1914-1918, found the 1st Battalion in Shillong and the 2nd Battalion in Lansdowne. The former, not being in the Field Army, were destined for a time to remain in India on Internal Security duties. The latter, forming part of the Meerut Division, was soon to be mobilized for service. As will be shown later from figures of reinforcements, it was the *Regiment* which was to fight in France and elsewhere, not 1st Battalion or 2nd Battalion, although the order of battle will, naturally, give the Battalion number. This point is stressed to bring out what may be termed the first real fusion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles—a fusion cemented by the courage and grievous losses in France, Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Secret discussions had taken place between the Home and Indian Governments regarding the assistance to be given by the Indian Army in Europe. Eventually the Government of India concurred in the employment of three Infantry Divisions and one Cavalry Division. This was subsequently changed to two Infantry and two Cavalry Divisions—to be known as Force “A.”

It was nothing new for the Indian Army to serve outside India.

Egypt, Abyssinia, China and Persia bear testimony to this. Only once, however, had an Indian Military contingent been sent to the west of the Suez Canal, when some 7,000 Indian troops had been brought to Malta nearly thirty years before the outbreak of the 1914-1918 war. It was now to come up against the most powerful military organization in the world, under conditions very different to any previously experienced; the most noticeable differences being in the great severity of modern shell fire, in air warfare, in modern trench warfare, and in the climate and surroundings. Plunged at once into the severity of a northern winter, engulfed in Flanders mud and suffering shattering losses almost from the start, the Indian Army can justly claim to have filled a gap in France in the nick of time, and helped to save the cause both of the Allies and civilization. This was openly acknowledged by His Majesty King George V and Lord French, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force. We shall now follow the fortunes of the 2nd Battalion for a while.

Mobilization proceeded smoothly, a draft of three Gurkha officers and 120 Gurkha other ranks coming from 1/3rd Q.A.O. Gurkha Rifles to bring the Battalion to strength in the absence of the furlough men. On 21st August, 1914, the Battalion marched from Lansdowne, where the Depot remained.

Forming part of the Bareilly Brigade of the Meerut Division (7th), the Battalion embarked at Karachi on the B.I.S.S. *Erinpura*, with two companies, 58th Vaughan's Rifles.

(Having always trained with the Garhwal Brigade, it was unfortunate having to join an entirely new formation on war breaking out.)

The embarkation strength was :

Lieutenant-Colonel G. Morris, Commandant.

Major C. P. Barlow.

Captain E. R. Hayes Saddler.

Captain G. C. B. Buckland.

Captain D. B. Davidson, Adjutant.

Captain E. H. D. Stack.

Lieutenant C. W. Maxwell, Quartermaster.

Lieutenant L. L. MacLean, Machine-gun Officer.

Gurkha officers, 17.

Gurkha other ranks, 735.

On arrival at Port Said on 6th October, Major K. S. Cassels, Major H. St. A. Wake, M.V.O., and Captain B. Hartwell rejoined from furlough.

British officer casualties in the Battalion were to prove exceedingly high even for 1914-1918; by the end of 1914 (after two months) no fewer than nine of the above-mentioned had been killed—a most

grievous blow, especially acute in the Indian Army, where reserves of officers, with knowledge of the men and language, did not exist.

The unique experience of a long sea voyage to men who had not even seen the sea is a subject on which much time might be spent. Sea bathing at Karachi taught that the water really was salt. Ship's routine was soon learnt, interrupted perhaps by sea-sickness. The convoy, some thirty-two ships, escorted by ships of the Royal Navy, Royal Indian Marine, and later by ships of the French Fleet, presented a most imposing sight. The voyage was uneventful and Marseilles was reached, the Battalion disembarking on 13th October, 1914.

The scenes at the docks were remarkable. Not only our own sombre khaki uniforms, but those of French Colonial troops—Algerians, Zouaves and so on—mingled with those of the ready assistants, French seamen and stevedores. Nobody understood the other's language, but it all worked out in the end by good humour and readiness to help, and units were disembarked and marched into camp with all their impedimenta in extraordinarily good time in most cases. The camp was situated about three miles east of Marseilles. The welcome of the French people was warm, and showed gratitude to the troops who had come so far to defend the soil of France against the hated German. This kindness was always evident, on train journeys, and later, in billets. After a few days spent in cleaning up kit and equipment and going for route marches, the Battalion left Marseilles on 18th October, having been rearmed with new H.V. rifles.

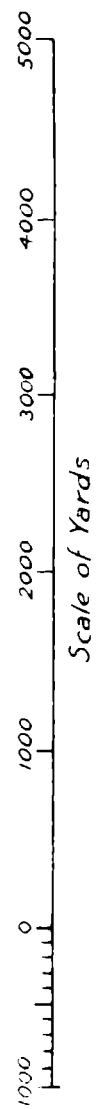
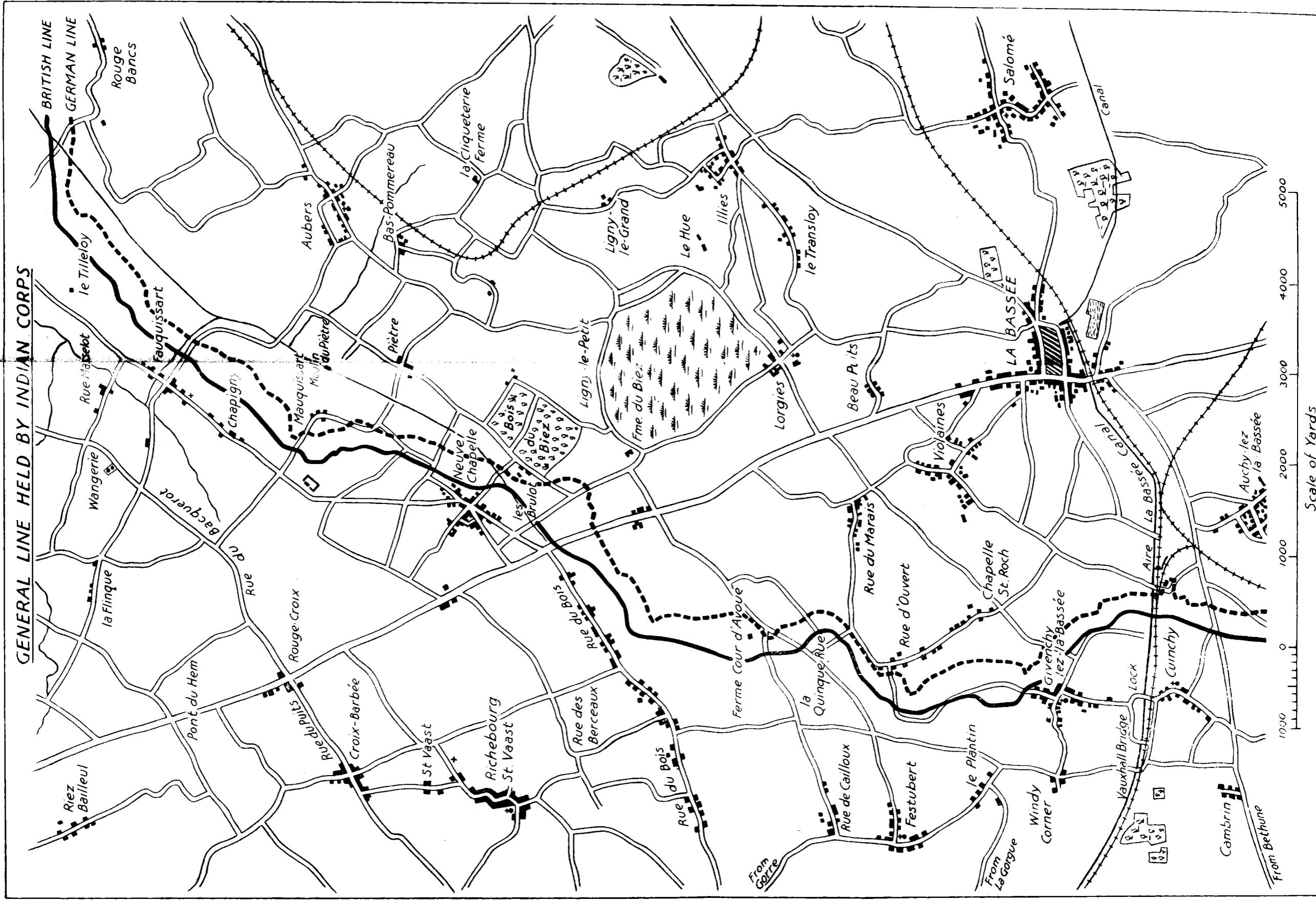
The Gurkha takes things as they come, and amongst the numerous objects, animate and inanimate, seen for the first time at Marseilles, the great size of the French horses would probably have been the reply to a question on what most impressed. Some years later (in 1932) this trait was reproduced in a generation expected to be rather more sophisticated. At Chittagong a large number of men of the 2nd Battalion were shown over one of our latest cruisers. It was not the wonders of modern guns with their electrically controlled ammunition hoists, fire control system, etc., which interested most. "The charpoys without legs," meaning the slung hammocks, took the Gurkha fancy!

The advance base was reached on 21st October. The Battalion remained here for five days, receiving extra equipment and that indispensable person, the French interpreter. Bicycles for the billeting party. No one had ridden a bicycle before, and amusing—"probably not considered so at the time"—memories attend those who had to deal with the mounted billeting party.

On 26th October the Battalion again entrained, and arrived at Lillers, from whence they marched to Gorre. Practically no respite was given for rest or cooking, and it was a tired and hungry battalion that moved up to take over trenches, receiving on the way its baptism



GENERAL LINE HELD BY INDIAN CORPS



of fire in the Great War of 1914-1918—this in the shape of shell fire in the Gorre-Festubert area. The trenches taken over were at La Quinque Rue, in the south of the portion of the line held by the Indian Corps.

As this portion of the front was to be held continuously by the Indian Corps during its stay in France and Flanders, perhaps a very brief description can be put in here. It may be fairly described as one of the least attractive sections either from the picturesque point of view or from that of comfort. Low-lying cultivated land, cut up by innumerable roads and lanes, dotted with small villages and isolated farms, was the prospect from a hasty survey taken from our trenches. During a great part of the year as far as the eye could reach there stretched a dismal sea of mud. The short distance below the surface at which water was found rendered the digging of deep trenches impossible in places, while even a moderate fall of rain reduced the inhabitants of the trenches to a state of extreme discomfort.

In comparison with the enemy, our subsidiary weapons were primitive. While the Germans had bombs, trench mortars, rifle grenades, etc., to use in the close-quarter siege type of warfare which was so prevalent in the 1914-1918 war, we only had the "home-made" jam-tin bomb of doubtful value, plus Hales rifle grenades.

The position taken over by the Battalion on 29th October, 1914, was in the triangle formed by La Quinque Rue and the road from Festubert. The whole Battalion was up in the front line, about half of each double company in a forward dug trench, the remainder in a slightly improved ditch along a road. Trenches were taken over from a British battalion, and it was found that our men were not tall enough to fire over the parapet. Hence, adjustments had to be made, as the trenches had been hastily constructed, and in the face of constant shelling and rifle fire.

The ensuing fighting was confused and very severe, and the cutting of all telephone wires by daylight on the 30th made communication a most hazardous undertaking. The main losses were in Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Double Companies, which were in that order from the right of the sector held by the Battalion. No. 4 Double Company came off lightly and, when the heavy fighting came, afforded a valuable rallying-point for the survivors of the other double companies. Soon after daylight on the 30th the Germans made a determined counter-attack, which was beaten off. Hours of shelling culminated in a four-hour concentration of heavy guns and howitzers on our trenches. Still the 2/8th held on and drove back several attacks and, in their turn, made several counter-attacks in an endeavour to restore the situation. Ammunition began to run low, and reinforcements made

necessary by the increasing number of casualties. From a farmhouse occupied by the Germans, a fire, which enfiladed the right of our trenches, also commanded the ground over which any reinforcements could advance. This had the effect of enabling the enemy to break through the right, and take the remainder of the defenders in the rear. Otherwise, the surviving officers felt convinced that the trenches would have been held. However, weight of metal and numbers were too much. Forced from the forward trenches, the survivors of the Battalion succeeded in reoccupying a section of the support trenches.

Where all performed gallantly in their first engagement, it would be invidious to mention individuals, but the fine example of the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Morris, was an inspiration. With no unwounded British officers on the right, trenches blotted out, the enemy all round in overwhelming numbers, the Commanding Officer, badly wounded, tried to bring up reinforcements. He was unable to keep up, lost his way and was challenged by the Germans. To escape, he threw himself into a ditch, and knew no more till he found himself being put on a stretcher by his own men.

The casualties suffered by the Battalion were very severe, amounting to 9 British officers, 5 Gurkha officers and 206 N.C.Os. and riflemen killed, wounded and missing. Of the latter, many were buried by shell fire. The British officer losses (6 killed) were a sad blow and, coming within twenty-four hours of first going into the line, were a handicap of a crippling nature. Lieutenant-Colonel Merewether, in his book on the Indian Corps in France, says: "The 8th Gurkhas were fortunate in embarking in this war in possession of a particularly fine body of officers, and it was by the cruellest of bad luck that the Regiment at the very outset suffered the loss of no less than nine of their small number."

To a generation spared trench warfare on the scale of 1914-1918, it must appear strange that the why and wherefore of actions such as Quinque Rue are not related with ideas, general and special, and the rest of a battle story. The Western Front was largely a war of attrition. Apart from the ever-present trench warfare, positions within a grenade throw of each other, entailing a daily toll of casualties, constant actions of varying degrees of strength would be engaged in to straighten a bit of the line, obtain some vantage points, probe for weak spots and so on—these being quite apart from large operations aiming at a break-through. One does not know what was behind the German attack at Quinque Rue. If it was to test the newly arrived Indian Corps, then not much benefit accrued, as the enemy succeeded only in retaining possession of a small portion of our obliterated forward trenches. A counter-attack on 31st October, largely composed of 58th Rifles, succeeded in retaking all of the support trenches and

two farmhouses, but three of our advance trenches remained in German hands, and were not recaptured until nearly the end of the war.

The list of British and Gurkha officers killed and British officers wounded during this first action in France is :

Killed : Major H. S. A. Wake, M.V.O.  
Captain E. R. Hayes-Sadler.  
Captain B. Hartwell.  
Captain H. S. N. Wright.  
Captain E. H. B. Stack.  
Captain D. B. Davidson.  
Subadar Tirindhoz Limbu.  
Subadar Jaichand Thakur, I.O.M.  
Subadar Gajbir Rana.

Wounded : Lieutenant-Colonel G. M. Morris, Commandant.  
Major C. P. Barlow.  
Lieutenant L. L. Maclean.

On 31st October, 1914, the Battalion was relieved by the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, and went to Gorre for three days to re-organize.

Now began the long spell of trench warfare. Life in those days on the Western Front consisted of being IN or OUT of the line. It was a peculiar war, reverting as it did to the old days of sapping and mining, the opposing lines moving by these means ever closer to each other. A short "bomb throw" from our trench to the enemy trench was the distance between the forward lines on a large portion of the front. To those not conversant with this type of warfare, it may briefly be described. From existing fire trenches, winding trenches or saps would be pushed out. After progressing, say, a hundred yards, these would be joined up by a new fire trench, parallel to the original trench from which the saps proceeded. And so you carried on.

In those early days it was the German who did nearly all the forward movements of entrenchment. He knew he had the pull in bombs and grenades, and so could inflict more casualties than he received in this way, providing he got close enough. Also, this below-surface approach enabled him to bring up reinforcements, unseen and in comparative safety, for the short run-in when attack was contemplated.

Remember, we are reading of events in the winter 1914-5, when our trained manpower available, our trench weapons and equipment, including ammunition, were far inferior to the enemy's. Two rounds per gun per day were often the gunners' ration in that first winter.

“In the line” meant your tour in the trenches. Circumstances turned night into day for military activities. Machine-gun and rifle fire swept the short “No man’s land” if any movement took place. Day meant what rest was possible. Night meant improvement of existing positions, construction of new trenches, wiring and patrolling enlivened occasionally by that amusing (except to those detailed) pastime of bringing in a German for identification purposes.

“Out of the line” meant the return of weary, dirty troops to billets. Now was the opportunity to get rid of the dirt, organize and furbish up generally. Not too easy when accommodation consisted of barns with straw as the bed. Many, too, were the occasions when the hope of a night in bed was rudely shattered by a call for a working party to carry stores to the line, or from our friends the Sappers to help in constructing works. It was remarkable, however, how a few days of this change restored a good unit to its usual smart bearing. A hot bath (in a brewery often), change of clothes, cleaned equipment, a spot of close order drill, and the effect of the three weeks’ mole-like existence was thrown off.

There are those who scoff at spit and polish and its accompaniments. Once upon a time, in December, 1914, a battalion of the Indian Corps was marching back to billets after three weeks in the line. They were tired, wet, cold and very mud-laden. Approaching a village in the murky dusk, the sound of a rifle-butt tap on the *pavé*, followed by “Guard, turn out,” was heard. The Commanding Officer blew his whistle, the Battalion instantly marched to attention. “Guard, present arms,” came from a dimly outlined Quarter Guard. “By platoons, eyes right,” was the Commanding Officer’s command. The men’s step livened, and they went by as though on a ceremonial parade. The rest of the march was continued in the same revived bearing. This extraordinary and immediate change in the bearing of a unit has always remained a vivid memory—a change wrought by being suddenly brought in contact with the smartness and discipline ingrained in regular soldiers. The Quarter Guard, by the way, was of a battalion of the Brigade of Guards.

To get back to our own Battalion.

On 3rd November, 1914, the Battalion took over front-line trenches at Le Plantin near Festubert. Much work had to be done. The line was not continuous. A few trenches, a few improved ditches. No communication trenches, and no defence in depth. At night, therefore, every effort was made to put this matter right.

There may be some who will remember one communication trench which came out at the corner of a house on the south side of Le Plantin. It was some 700 yards long, mud and water thigh deep, and one relief took from 4 p.m. to 12 midnight to accomplish.

Fantastic as it sounds, men were drowned in that trench. Perhaps not so fantastic when one takes the ingredients into consideration. Pitch darkness, a trench deep to a Gurkha, a heavily laden soldier who slips and falls, and you have the tragedy.

This tour of duty cost the Battalion one British officer (Captain Buchanan, 35th Sikhs attached) killed and 47 N.C.Os. and riflemen killed and wounded.

On 12th November, whilst the Battalion was in the line, the Indian Corps was visited by that grand old soldier and friend of the Indian Army, Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, V.C., the well-loved "Bobs." It was to be his last parade, as three days later he died. The bitterly cold wind no doubt was too much for one of his age.

At this time the line previously held by the Indian Corps was manned by approximately only one-half of II Corps. Probably seeing in this, together with the confusion entailed by the relief of the Meerut Division by the Lahore Division on the nights 22nd/23rd and 24th/25th November, a chance to break through, the Germans on 23rd November launched an attack. Having sapped close up to our lines, their superiority in bombs and grenades gave them the advantage, and sections of our forward trenches east of Festubert fell into their hands.

It was at this time that the 2/8th, having been relieved, were marching back to rest billets. The order came to "Stand to," and a move back to the front began. The battalion was split up, three companies under Major Cassels on the right, and three companies on the left, to execute two counter-attacks. As regards the operation generally, Captain G. C. B. Buckland, who was present, modestly omitting any reference to the gallantry which he and those with him showed on that night of fierce fighting, gives the following account: "The 2/8th were split up. Half-battalion (three companies) with 58th Vaughan's Rifles on our right were put in to attack about 1600 hours east of Festubert. The other half-battalion (three companies) attacked on the left. This attack was held up. The ground was covered in snow, which showed up our men distinctly and made them an easy mark, with the result that the casualties were severe. The right half-battalion under Major Cassels got into the trenches held by the Germans opposite to us, as did the 58th on our right. The 58th in turn linked up with the Black Watch, who had not been driven out of their original positions to the west of La Bassée. We had been in this part of the line before, so knew our way about. The snag was that Germans were still in occupation of trenches to our left. I went down with Havildar Hariparsad Thapa and some of our men to investigate and soon bumped the Germans the other side of a traverse, and cleared them out. We cleaned up a

lot of enemy in this way. I applied to Major Cassels for more men, but he could not spare any, and sent me to Colonel Grant (commanding 2/8th) to report on the situation and get reinforcements. On the way I met the Commanding Officer of an Indian battalion, who was very deaf. On hearing my report his comment was, 'Very quiet night tonight.' Deafness has its advantages ! On my return to the front line I found Major Cassels wounded. A havildar of ours (probably Hariparsad Thapa) was recommended for the V.C. and received the I.O.M. By now I was the only 2/8th officer left in the Battalion, as Maxwell had been killed and Cassels wounded."

To do justice to Captain Buckland and his men, the following extracts from a well-known history are given.

"Much of the success of the 2/8th Gurkhas was due to the determined and skilful leading of Captain Buckland, who headed a party of his regiment which bombed and bayoneted the enemy out of traverse after traverse until the whole of the right trenches had been retaken.

"For his gallantry Captain Buckland received the D.S.O. Havildar Hariparsad Thapa greatly distinguished himself by heading a party which, advancing in single file, rushed traverse after traverse and killed a number of Germans. The Havildar, who was severely wounded during the fight, was awarded the I.O.M., 2nd Class."

An attack by the Garhwal Rifles regained trenches on our left and, the old line being restored, the Festubert action ended.

The Battalion was relieved on 24th November and marched to billets at Gorre.

In this short but fierce engagement the following casualties occurred :

**Killed :** Lieutenant G. W. Maxwell, 2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Major Elliott, 7th Gurkha Rifles, attached  
2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Lieutenant Macpherson, 7th Gurkha Rifles,  
attached 2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Subadar Padamdhaj Rana, I.O.M.  
Jemadar Gambirsing Gurung.  
Jemadar Kulbahadur Gurung.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 14.

**Wounded :** Major K. S. Cassels, 2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Lieutenant Peploe, 6th Gurkha Rifles, attached  
2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 57.

The officer casualties were again unduly heavy, and of the 2/8th British officers who had gone into action not much more than three

weeks earlier, one, Captain G. C. B. Buckland, alone remained. The shortage of British officers was acute and Buckland found himself in the trenches all night, going out at dawn to do Adjutant or Quartermaster by day at Battalion Headquarters.

Whilst in the atmosphere of grenades, here is an account, with its amusing side, of how a stout-hearted bugler stuck to his post, and obeyed orders implicitly until the stock of grenades (of the jam-tin variety) made his ordered retaliation difficult. This bugler (2/8th) was posted in a sap-head into which the Germans could throw grenades. He was given twenty-four and told to throw back two for every one the enemy sent over. Later, when visited, the bugler was found wounded, and when asked what had happened, replied that he had done what had been ordered, and had used up sixteen grenades. Then the Germans had sent over two together. That was all right, but then they had sent over three at once, and hit him. He only had four left, and what was he to do about it ?

On 1st December, 1914, His Majesty the King Emperor, accompanied by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, visited his troops, and inspected detachments from units drawn up lining both sides of the road. To many of the Indian Corps this visit recalled the last occasion on which they had seen the king, which was during the visit to India in 1911.

Until 20th December, 1914, the Battalion was engaged on the normal trench duty varied with spells out of the line, and nothing occurred out of the ordinary—the ordinary entailing plenty of hard work and danger. Losses amounted in this period to 3 men killed and 11 wounded.

About the middle of December, 1914, General Headquarters considered the time was favourable, in order to anticipate a German attack we had intelligence of, for an attack by the Indian Corps, amongst other units, although the troops were tired after seven weeks of incessant fighting under trying conditions. At this time the line held by the Indian Corps extended from just south of Neuve Chapelle in the north to the Bethune—La Bassée road in the south, the point of junction between ourselves and the French. Portions of both Lahore and Meerut Divisions were in the line, with, roughly, one brigade of each division resting.

The orders received from G.H.Q. were finally modified from that of a general attack all along the front to one in which the Indian Corps was to demonstrate along the whole front, and to seize every favourable opportunity which might occur to capture any of the enemy's trenches.

Attacks were made on 19th December, 1914—in some cases successful, but short-lived—and on 20th December the enemy



retaliated, opening a heavy fire with artillery and trench mortars upon the whole front of the Indian Corps. This was followed up by infantry attacks in especial force against Givenchy and the line between Givenchy and La Quinque Rue.

At about 9 a.m. on 20th December a series of heavy explosions took place on the whole front of the Sirhind Brigade at Givenchy. This brigade had been detached from the Lahore Division, and retained for three months in Egypt. It had come into the line on 8th December and had already had a gruelling time before the present attack, which forced it back to the Festubert road. This, then, was the position when the 2/8th moved up to the front. The Battalion was put into a made-up force consisting of 47th Sikhs and the Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade. The object was to get into touch with the Sirhind Brigade, and to counter-attack as circumstances permitted, with a view to retaking our lost trenches.

The ground was pitted with shell holes full of water, into which officers and men were continually falling, and cut up by ditches and the remains of old trenches. Seldom has an assault been launched under more unfavourable circumstances. The attack pushed on and drove the Germans out of some trenches. Patrols were sent to the flanks to ascertain the position of the enemy. Five hundred yards of the trench on our left was unoccupied, and, as reported by Major Edwardes (1/3rd Gurkha Rifles, attached 2/8th), for the very good reason that it was full of water and untenable, two of our men having already been drowned in it!

Colonel Grant, commanding 2nd Battalion, was in command of most of the forward troops taking part in the attack. Enfiladed by machine guns from both flanks, and with day breaking, to remain in his present position would have spelt certain disaster. He decided, therefore—and a very wise decision it was—to order the troops back before dawn to a better line in rear, from their untenable positions. This line was held until the afternoon of 21st December, when a Guards Brigade attacked, and the Battalion was withdrawn.

As a lesson to anyone interested in reasons for failure, it may be mentioned that this particular operation stressed :

- (1) Necessity of ground reconnaissance (only 2/8th had any knowledge of this ground), information about enemy and our troops, and a simple sound plan. All these were lacking.
- (2) That the objective given was most vague, and its extent was far too great for a force of the size taking part. This precluded an attack in depth, with sufficient weight to push the attack home and consolidate.

(3) The extreme difficulty of attacking by night over waterlogged ground cut up by channels and by trenches.

(4) Insufficient artillery support, due to lack of ammunition.

It is easy to be wise after the event, and no doubt desperate efforts were considered necessary to prevent a German break-through. It is very doubtful if the enemy would in any case have succeeded, as he was as much mud-bound and waterlogged as we were. Certainly our piecemeal attacks at Givenchy got us nowhere.

Casualties in this action were :

Killed : Subadar Parmansing Lama.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 22.

Wounded : Major Edwardes, 1/3rd Gurkha Rifles, attached.  
Captain Scott, 87th Punjabs, attached.  
Captain Orchard, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles, attached.  
Lieutenant Shirley, 54th Sikhs, attached.  
Lieutenant Rolfe, 5th Gurkha Rifles, attached.  
Subadar Shamsheer Gurung.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 33.

For gallantry in this action, Subadar Shamsheer Gurung received the Order of British India. He was severely wounded, but succeeded in crawling back to the Allied lines after three days and nights in the open.

Although British officers and other ranks had been received as reinforcements, the strength of the Battalion at the end of December, 1914, was reduced by casualties to about three hundred available for duty. In company with the rest of the Indian Corps, it went into reserve to receive reinforcements and reorganize.

## CHAPTER TEN

(See Maps Nos. 1, 5, 6 and 8)

*[2nd Battalion in the First World War—continued.]*

1915—Reinforcements and reorganization—Volunteers from Assam and Burma Military Police—Change of Commanders in Indian Corps—Short rest period—Territorials—Offensive operations impossible by both sides—Neuve Chapelle—Reasons for our attack—Troops engaged—Artillery bombardment—Barrages—Results of battle—General Anderson compliments 2/8th—Transferred to Garhwal Brigade—Indian Corps take over a new line—Rue du Bois—La Bassée Road—Lieutenant-Colonel Morris resumes command—Second battle of Ypres—Germans use gas—Aubers, 9th May, 1915—Attack fails—Heavy shelling by enemy—Bravery of Rifleman Dhanraj Thapa—Severe casualties, period 9th to 19th May, 1915—Brigade Commander's thanks—Lord Kitchener inspects 2/8th—Indian Corps reinforced by British Division—General Sir James Wilcocks succeeded in command of Indian Corps by General Sir Charles Anderson—Indian Corps front—Loos, 1915—Conferences—Gas to be used—Meerut Division to attack—Garhwal Brigade dispositions—Reconnaissance—Bombardment—Weather changes—Gas attack—Mine exploded—Attack commences—German third line taken—Lieutenant-Colonel Morris mortally wounded—Position at 8.25 a.m. and 10.20 a.m., 25th September, 1915—Garhwalis—German attack—Subadar Sarabjit Gurung's party attack—Gallant machine gunners—The Medical Officer—2nd Battalion decimated and placed in support—End of battle—Honour where honour is due—Casualties of the 2nd Battalion at Loos—Well-earned praise—Some reflections on Loos—Reorganization and composition—Total casualties of 2nd Battalion in France—Leave France—Farewell message from H.M. King George V—Egypt, 1915-16—Return to India.

DURING the months of January and February, 1915, the 2nd Battalion continued in reserve, receiving reinforcements in the shape of drafts from India. Its strength at the end of this period reached 11 British officers, 14 Gurkha officers, and 710 N.C.Os. and riflemen.

A word must here be said about the great assistance given to all Gurkha regiments by the Assam and Burma Military Police Forces. Had this splendid material not volunteered in the large numbers it did, the somewhat inadequate Gurkha Depots would have had a difficult task to maintain the flow of trained men to their battalions on service.

During this period many changes took place in the Commanders and composition of the Indian Corps. In the case of the Bareilly Brigade, to which the 2nd Battalion belonged, Lieutenant-Colonel W. M. Southey succeeded Major-General MacBean in command.

After two months of constant combat with the enemy, human and weather, and its very heavy losses (some 10,000 killed, wounded and missing) in action, plus a heavy sick rate, it was decided to give the Indian Corps a period of rest and training.

A most welcome reinforcement to the Indian Corps arrived at the turn of the year 1914-5, in the shape of one Special Reserve and five Territorial battalions from England. One was permanently posted to each of the six infantry brigades of the Corps. This made good the discrepancy in strength between an infantry brigade on home war establishment (4,000) and one on Indian war establishment (3,000), a handicap from which the Indian Corps had suffered until now in France.

Heavy rain and frequent snow-storms made conditions on the British Expeditionary Force front in January and February, 1915, extremely uncomfortable. The countryside was an expanse of water and mud which tied down both sides, and forbade offensive operations.

During the battle of Neuve Chapelle, though not actively engaged in the assault made on 10th March, 1915, the 2nd Battalion was employed, as Divisional Reserve of the Meerut Division, in carrying up ammunition, etc., to the forward positions. That the duties carried out by the Battalion were favourably recognized is borne out by the words of Lieutenant-General Anderson, commanding the Meerut Division, who recorded that the duty of bringing up stores and ammunition to the firing line was steadily carried out under heavy shell fire, which caused many casualties, and that the behaviour of all ranks reflected much credit on the Battalion, the work being arduous, dangerous and not inspiring.

A very brief account of the reasons for, and course of, the battle of Neuve Chapelle will suffice in view of the fact that the Battalion took no operational part except as indicated above.

The reasons which prompted Field-Marshal Sir John French, commanding the B.E.F., to launch the attack at Neuve Chapelle were, firstly, to hold as many enemy troops in the west and thus assist Russia; and, secondly, "the need of fostering the offensive spirit in the troops under my command, after the trying and possibly enervating experience which they had gone through of a severe winter in the trenches."

The portion of the enemy line chosen for the British offensive was that west of Neuve Chapelle. The Indian Corps attacked from the south-west and IV Corps from the north-west.

Had the attack succeeded, the Aubers Ridge to the east of Neuve Chapelle would have been our second objective.

After severe fighting for three days, the G.O.C., First Army

(General Sir Douglas Haig), ordered further active operations to be suspended.

Our attack had succeeded in straightening out the enemy salient, and inflicted considerable casualties on him, including some 1,700 prisoners.

Neuve Chapelle is interesting as the first instance of intense preliminary bombardment by massed artillery: 480 guns and howitzers were used by us. The barrage, to become well known in its various forms, probably owes its inception to lessons learnt at Neuve Chapelle.

From 13th March, 1915, to 22nd March, 1915, the 2nd Battalion once more was attached to its old brigade (Bareilly), but for a short while only, as on 24th March, 1915, it was transferred to the Garhwal Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General C. G. Blackader, D.S.O. This Brigade now consisted of 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, 3rd London Regiment (T.A.), the Garhwal Rifles (their two battalions being formed into one), 2/3rd Gurkha Rifles, and 2/8th Gurkha Rifles. This transfer was in consequence of a general reorganization of brigades in the Indian Corps.

From 24th March until 11th April, 1915, working parties, parades, and carrying duties occupied the Battalion. During this period casualties sustained in carrying parties were :

Killed : Subadar Birbahadur Rana.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 3.  
Follower, 1.

Wounded : Lieutenant A. N. Rolfe, 5th Gurkha Rifles.  
Jemadar Dhanbir Thapa.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 34.  
Followers, 3.

From 12th April, 1915, to 21st April, 1915, the Battalion held a sector of trenches near the Rue du Bois, casualties being 4 N.C.Os. and riflemen killed and 18 riflemen wounded.

After eight days in rest billets, the 2nd Battalion took over from 2/2nd Gurkha Rifles the front-line trenches held by them on the La Bassée road, south-east of Neuve Chapelle. These were held until 5th May, 1915, with the loss of 1 man killed and 16 wounded. Withdrawn for a short rest in preparation for the attack planned for 9th May, the 2/8th moved up again for the battle always known as Aubers Ridge.

Lieutenant-Colonel Morris resumed command on 29th April, having recovered from wounds received on 30th October, 1914, In the meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion had been commanded by many different officers, the longest reign being that of Lieutenant-Colonel

A. Grant, 4th Gurkha Rifles, from November, 1914, to February, 1915.

On 25th April, 1915, the Lahore Division of the Indian Corps, after a long weary march over the French *pavé* roads, arrived near Ypres for the second battle of that name. Although the Meerut Division, to which the 2nd Battalion belonged, took no part in this battle, it is well to relate that this was the third occasion since its arrival in France that the Indian Corps had to be called upon, under urgent necessity, to fill a breach. First Ypres, then La Bassée, and now again Ypres. This entailed more strenuous trench duty for the Meerut Division in having to look after the whole front of Indian Corps.

It was during the second battle of Ypres that the Germans used gas for the first time. We were not prepared, and the effects of this poisonous onslaught was disastrous to a gallant French Colonial Division on which the main blast fell.

On 9th May, 1915, the operation known as Aubers Ridge began on the 7th (Meerut) Division front.

The Battalion, as support to the Dehra Dun Brigade, which was to carry out the assault on the Aubers Ridge, moved into badly camouflaged slit assembly trenches, immediately behind the attack. The assault failed. The artillery preparation was meagre. Units never had a chance. Battalions were decimated by machine-gun and rifle fire almost before getting through our own wire.

A twelve-hour bombardment of our trenches on 9th May caused many casualties. This continued next day, when the 2nd Battalion was occupying a front sector near the Orchard.

Rifleman Dhanraj Thapa was awarded a Russian decoration for great bravery on 12th May, 1915. In spite of having one hand blown off by shell fire, this man succeeded in bringing in the body of an officer of the Leicestershire Regiment who had been killed in "No man's land." By a curious coincidence, twenty-three years later in Waziristan, another of our men received a decoration for rescuing wounded of the Leicestershire Regiment under fire.

On 15th May the 2nd Battalion was relieved by the Black Watch and went into support, where they were again heavily shelled. On the night of 16th May the Battalion once more took over a sector of front-line trenches along the Rue du Bois, and held this until 19th May, when, being relieved by 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, they went into Brigade reserve at Croix Barbee.

From 9th to 19th May, 1915, casualties had been extremely heavy, practically all from intense shelling.

Killed : Lieutenant G. Angell, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 14.

Wounded : Major K. S. Cassels.  
Captain G. C. B. Buckland.  
Captain J. G. Skene.  
Captain Chesney, 4th Rajputs.  
Captain Molesworth, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Second-Lieutenant Ogilvy, I.A.R.O.  
Jemadar Dhanbir Thapa.  
Jemadar Kirtasing Pun.  
Jemadar Parbir Thapa.  
Jemadar Nainsing Thakur.  
Jemadar Barne Thapa.  
Subadar Assistant Surgeon Bhatnagar (attached  
2/8th Gurkha Rifles).  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 314.

Following this battle, a letter was received by O.C. 2nd Battalion from Brigadier-General Southey, commanding the Bareilly Brigade, thanking him for the excellent work of the Battalion, and expressing his regret for the severe losses suffered, and his admiration for the Battalion's gallantry, especially under a heavy bombardment.

This is a remarkable tribute from the General Officer Commanding another brigade, and one of which the 2/8th are proud.

From May to September, 1915, the Indian Corps was not employed in large operations. Tours in the front-line trenches, which accounted for the loss of 16 men killed and 50 wounded in the Battalion, alternated with periods in rest billets, during which reorganization, training and inspections were carried out. In all this, there was probably the build-up plan, in view of the great offensive to be carried out at Loos.

Lord Kitchener, then Secretary of State for War, inspected the 2/8th at Les Lobes on 8th July and again on 20th September, 1915, near La Gorgue.

For a short while in June, 1915, the Indian Corps was strengthened by the attachment to it of two British divisions, 8th and 49th (West Riding); the 51st Highland Division (T.A.), which had been attached, being transferred to IV Corps. Later, the 51st Division returned to the Indian Corps in place of the 8th Division.

On 8th September, 1915, the command of the Indian Corps changed. General Sir James Wilcocks, who had commanded from the first landing in France in October, 1914, was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Anderson, who had commanded the Meerut Division during the same period.

In early September the front held by the Indian Corps extended from a point north-west of Cour d'Avoué Farm to a point some 9,500 yards to the north.

To assist the French offensive in Champagne, several "holding operations" by the B.E.F. were ordered for the third week of September, 1915. That of the Indian Corps was to take the form of an attack in the Neuve Chapelle area. The special task of the Corps was to gain the high ground south of Haut Pommereau, advance in a south-eastern direction, and turn La Bassée defences from the north.

Conferences held between the 1st and 12th September, 1915, disclosed the fact that the impending attack would be preceded by four days' artillery preparation and forty minutes' gas and smoke. This latter would depend on the wind. As it turned out (see below), the wind on the attack day was tricky, and the gas attack on our Corps front was a failure. It caused no inconvenience to the enemy, and very seriously interfered with the movements of our troops.

The attack was to be made by the Meerut Division (commander, Brigadier-General C. W. Jacob), Garhwal Brigade right, Bareilly Brigade left in the front line, Dehra Dun Brigade being in Divisional reserve. The Garhwal Brigade battalions disposed from right to left in front line were 2/3rd Gurkha Rifles, 2nd Leicestershire Regiment and 2/8th Gurkha Rifles. The Garhwal Rifles were in Brigade reserve. The 3rd London Regiment held a trench on the right of 2/3rd Gurkha Rifles.

For several days before the assault, the battalions of the Garhwal Brigade had carried out gas experiments, had a tour of duty in that portion of the line over which they would be operating, and made a detailed reconnaissance of the battlefield to be.

The artillery bombardment commenced on 21st September and lasted for four days. Observation was difficult, but by the evening of the 24th September it was reported that the enemy's wire had been satisfactorily cut, except in one sector in front of the Garhwal Brigade. This failure was to cost us dear, as it held up the attacks of the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment and 2/3rd Gurkha Rifles, and brought them, when stationary, under a terrible fire.

The weather, which had been good, changed, and from 23rd September onwards heavy rain fell, and by 25th September there was, in places, a foot of water in the trenches, consequently movement was difficult.

At 7 p.m. on 24th September, 1915, the 2nd Battalion moved off, and during the night formed up for the morning attack, which was carried out as follows :

Forward Companies : "C" (Captain G. C. B. Buckland, D.S.O., and Lieutenant C. N. D. Inglis); "B" (Major Kembell and Second-Lieutenant Meldrum); supported by a Detachment Brigade Bombers and the Battalion Bombing Section (Lieutenant J. A. H. Bampton);



Battalion Reserve : H.Q. (Lieutenant-Colonel G. M. Morris  
and Lieutenant H. R. Harington) ;  
"A" Company (Lieutenant A. M. Taylor) ;  
"D" Company (Captain Browning) ;

in that order.

At 5.30 a.m. the gas attack was finally decided on, and commenced at 5.50 a.m. In a few minutes the wind became unfavourable, and the gas had to be turned off, after we had suffered casualties therefrom. Smoke created fog in the damp air. In this chemical connection, it is interesting to note that the explosion of a German bomb in the trench held by 3rd London Regiment blew off the heads of several gas cylinders. This led to an escape of gas which filled the front and support trenches with the vapour. Fortunately, it proved possible to bury the broken cylinders before very serious losses to our men resulted.

On the left of our attack, a large mine was exploded at 5.48 a.m. This was followed by ten minutes' intense artillery bombardment, which lasted until 6 a.m., when the guns lifted.

During the night a wire-cutting party of the Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Moran, had been operating ; casualties, including Lieutenant Moran (killed), were sustained. At 6 a.m. the attack started. The visibility, owing to the fog, was very bad at first and caused confusion, but the first wave, "C" and "B" Companies, dealing with the opposition met with, succeeded in gaining their objective, the enemy's third line. As the 2nd Leicestershire had been held up by uncut wire, however, we were not in touch with that battalion on our right. Nor had the 2/3rd Gurkha Rifles on the Brigade right been able to make headway. During this time, Lieutenant Inglis was killed. The second and third waves swung left in the fog, and Major Kemball was wounded. Lieutenant Meldrum took command and started to dig in astride of a communication trench, after advancing to a point near the Moulin du Pietre. The fourth wave moved forward under severe enfilade fire and shelling. The Commanding Officer was wounded in this advance, as was Lieutenant Harington when trying to carry his Commanding Officer to shelter. Lieutenant-Colonel Morris was eventually rescued under heavy fire by Lance-Corporal S. D. Evans, of the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment. Lieutenant Taylor was also wounded, subsequently dying of his wounds. The survivors pushed forward and joined the first wave. The fifth wave, under Captain Browning, who was also wounded, moved up the communication trench to join their comrades in front. To add to the tale of casualties, both Lieutenant Bampton (Q.M.) and Lieutenant Ryall (M.G. Officer) were wounded.

By this time—8.30 a.m.—Captain Buckland, with 150 men and two machine guns, was holding a position beyond the enemy's third line. Contact had been made with 4th Black Watch (Bareilly Brigade) on the left, but not with the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment on right. A party of 2/8th about sixty strong, under Lieutenant Meldrum, was also on the left. Orders were received from Brigade Headquarters for the senior officer of the 2/8th to return to our original front line, and take command from there. Captain G. C. B. Buckland, now the only surviving officer of the Battalion, did so, and kept the Brigade in touch with his situation.

By this time the Battalion strength had been reduced to 100. Captain Buckland reported this to Brigade with the information that he had closed in to the Black Watch on his left. No touch with 2nd Leicesters on his right. His men were being heavily attacked by bombs, of which he was short. Reinforcements were asked for.

The Garhwalis were ordered to attack, one half-battalion and two bombing parties to come in behind 2/8th, and then work their way to the right. Owing to the late receipt of orders this attack could never be organized. The trenches, deep in mud and water, were congested with wounded and gassed men. The Dehra Dun Brigade began to arrive, adding to the overcrowded state and confusion in the trenches.

Meanwhile the Germans came in from the right, placed machine guns in front of our position, and, from a footing in their own front trench, were able to work round our rear and use bombs.

A party of the Battalion, led by Subadar Sarabjit Gurung, attacked and fought with superb bravery against overwhelming odds, but perished to the last man. (This Gurkha officer was posthumously awarded 2nd Class Order of Merit.)

Lieutenant Meldrum was killed. Jemadar Rimane Thapa, who took over command, held on until all on his right and left had retired.

The fierce fighting and unequal contest continued, with the depleted ranks of the Battalion hanging on grimly, but at 3.30 p.m. the Battalion (strength 1 British officer, 1 Gurkha officer and 30 Gurkha other ranks) with 2nd Leicestershire Regiment were placed in support and local reserve.

So ended the 2/8th share in the battle of Loos. The words of praise in the letters which follow tell their tale of the heroism displayed by all. It is a sad fact in war that the greater the casualties in a unit the fewer honours received; for the very good reason that nobody is left to recommend, and gallant deeds die with their doers. This was certainly the case with the 2/8th at Loos. In the Regiment we remember with pride the deeds of Captain Buckland and Subadar Ransur Rana, who so gallantly held the most forward position gained until overwhelmed.

We remember, too, Riflemen Bahadur Pun and Ratbaran Gurung. The former brought back a damaged machine gun. The latter, though wounded, was found later in a field ambulance still proudly clutching a German machine gun which he had captured.

The splendid work of the 2nd Battalion's Medical Officer, Captain Proctor, during the day must not be overlooked.

The casualties suffered by the 2nd Battalion in the battle of Loos were :

Killed : Lieutenant R. W. Ryall.  
Lieutenant A. M. Taylor, 1st Brahmins,  
attached 2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Lieutenant C. N. D. Inglis, I.A.R.O.  
Second-Lieutenant Meldrum, I.A.R.O.  
Gurkha officers, 4.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 156.

Died of  
wounds : Lieutenant-Colonel G. M. Morris.

Wounded : Major Kemball.  
Captain Browning.  
Lieutenant H. R. Harington, 1/8th Gurkha  
Rifles, attached 2/8th Gurkha Rifles.  
Lieutenant J. A. H. Bampton, I.A.R.O.  
Gurkha officers, 4.  
N.C.Os. and riflemen, 131.

Missing (of whom many were wounded, and subsequently  
died) : N.C.Os. and riflemen, 166.

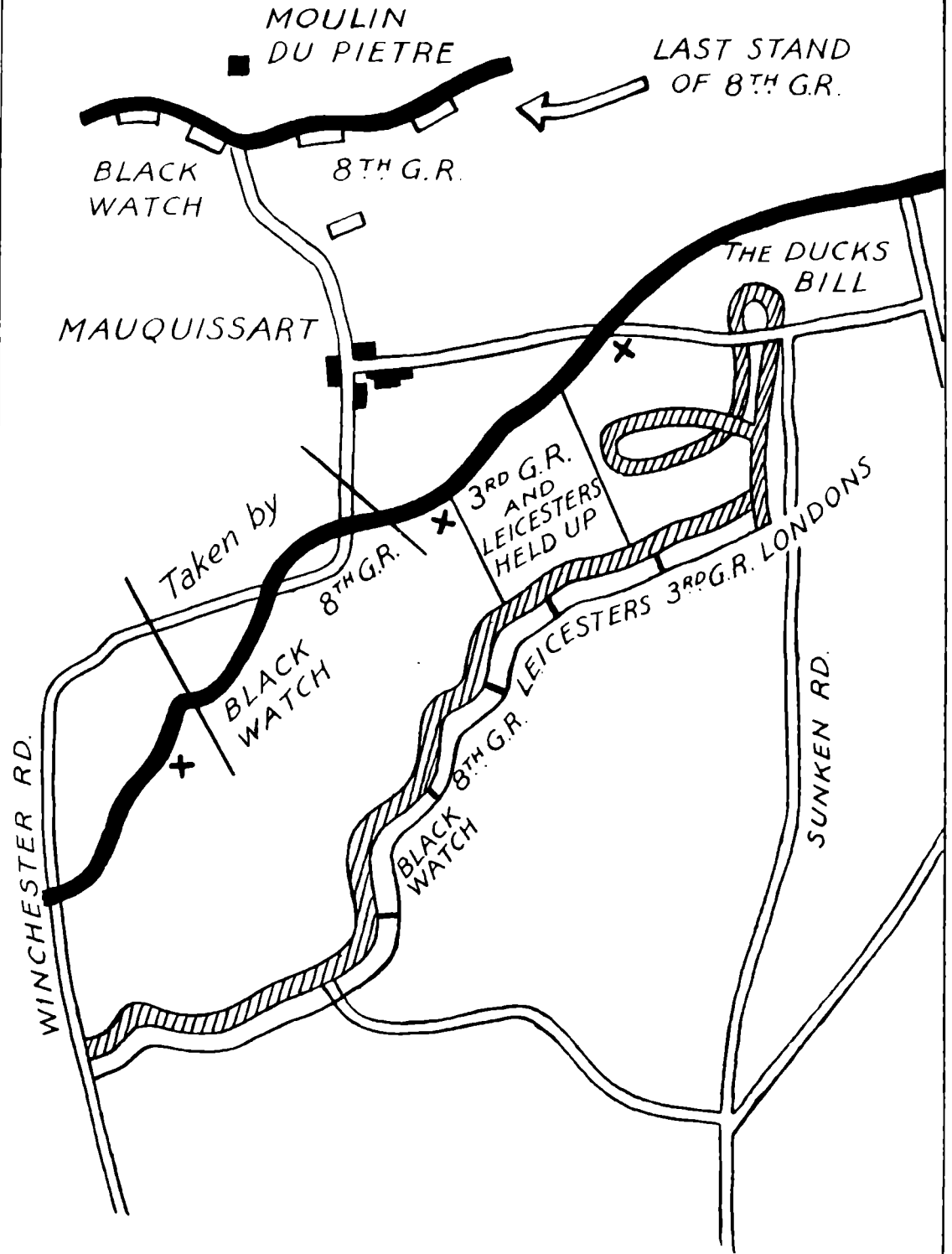
The following extracts from newspapers and private letters bear witness to the Battalion's bravery and determination :

*The Pioneer*, in describing the action of 25th September, stated :  
"Amongst the Indian Troops the account (*i.e.*, the official bulletin)  
makes special mention of the 8th Gurkhas."

Extract from a private letter written by the Brigade Major of the Brigade to which the 2/8th belonged : "Your son's Regiment, the 2/8th Gurkhas, is in our Brigade and covered itself with glory, doing splendidly. One British officer and 49 men were all they could muster on the evening of the 25th out of the 500-odd who went to the attack in the morning."

Extract from another letter written from France at this period :  
"The 2/8th have done splendidly in this show, and their assault on the 25th is the one topic of conversation throughout the Division. The 2/8th with splendid dash went 'bang' through the whole lot of the German trenches and captured their third line, though with

LOOS



GERMAN LINE



BRITISH LINE

appalling loss. . . . The Regiment has acquired a magnificent reputation amongst those who know—at the expense of its existence.”

The General Officer Commanding the Indian Corps wrote as follows of the Battalion, with regard to its service during the Loos battle :

“And what of the 8th Gurkhas who had begun the war on that bleak 30th day of October, 1914, before Festubert ? The old Battalion had practically disappeared, but although no longer the Corps that had suffered so terribly in those early days, it was determined to leave its mark deep cut on the soil of Flanders. Colonel Morris, the Commanding Officer, already severely wounded nearly a year previously, paid with his life. Add to his the names of Lieutenant Ryall of his own Battalion and of the following attached officers—Lieutenant Taylor (1st Brahmans), Inglis and Meldrum of the Indian Army Reserve—all of whom were killed, as well as four others wounded and eight Indian officers and 460 rank and file killed, wounded and missing, and we may well pronounce that the 8th Gurkhas indeed did their duty and found their Valhalla.”

In memory of the deeds of the Battalion on 25th September, 1915, this day is observed as an annual holiday in the 2/8th Gurkha Rifles as the anniversary of the battle of Loos, 1915.

It has been said that had the brigades concerned not made such a rapid advance to the enemy's second line, but consolidated what had been gained before the next advance, the ground won would probably have been held. This may be so, but the operation order issued by Meerut Division on 20th September, 1915, stresses the importance of pushing on, even to capturing the enemy's supporting batteries. Non-success in the face of such directions cannot be ascribed to the troops taking part.

Little remains to be related of the 2nd Battalion's activities in France.

Following the terrible casualties at Loos, a period in rest billets for reinforcements and reorganization was inevitable.

The composition of the Battalion at the middle of October, 1915, strength about 650, was made up roughly as under :

2/8th Gurkha Rifles	...	...	...	...	250
1/8th Gurkha Rifles	...	...	...	...	200
1/3rd Gurkha Rifles	...	...	...	...	100
Assam Rifles	...	...	...	...	50
Burma Military Police	...	...	...	...	30

No 2/8th British officers remained. Lieutenant-Colonel E. H. Sweet, D.S.O., 2nd Gurkha Rifles, assumed command on 2nd October, 1915.

The casualties—killed, wounded and missing in action—of the 2nd Battalion in France amounted to 40 British officers, 27 Gurkha officers, and 1,356 N.C.Os. and riflemen.

Early in November, 1915, it was decided that the Indian Corps would be withdrawn from France, and on 10th November, 1915, the 2nd Battalion embarked at Marseilles for Egypt on S.S. *Chilka*.

The Battalion had seen thirteen months' service in a European war. Amid strange conditions and the fiercest of fighting it stood the test magnificently, and the 8th Gurkhas can always be proud of the gallantry of those who came through this ordeal with a reputation second to none.

That the Indian Corps had well and truly done its duty in France is strikingly recorded in a gracious message from His Majesty King George V to the Indian Corps, which was read out by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales at a parade of representatives of the Corps held in France on 25th November, 1915.

For three months the 2nd Battalion remained in Egypt, allotted to the 10th (Indian) Division, engaged in the defence of the Suez Canal. Composed of units from France and Gallipoli, a good deal of reorganization was necessary. Construction of positions and patrolling occupied the 2nd Battalion, but of fighting there was none with the exception of the repulse of a Turkish raiding party at El Kantara in December, 1915.

In mid-February, 1916, the 2nd Battalion embarked at Suez for India, and on 2nd March reached Lansdowne, where they were given a great welcome by the inhabitants after their eighteen months' absence.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

(See Maps Nos. 1 and 7)

*[The First Battalion in the First World War.]*

1st Battalion on outbreak of 1914-1918 War—Simla Hills—To East Coast of India—Suspected illicit arms running—Mobilization—Reinforcements sent overseas—Mesopotamia, 1916—Join 21st Indian Infantry Brigade—Composition of—Situation in Mesopotamia, April, 1916—General description of country—Sannayat, 21st April, 1916—Floods cause change of plan—Good progress—Mud and water stop further advance—Retirement—Turkish counter-attacks repulsed—Truce—Surrender of Kut el Amara—Inspections—Our policy after fall of Kut—Trench warfare—Changes in Command—Reorganization—Capture of Hai Salient and Dahra Bend—Sannayat, 17th February, 1917—Method of attack—Turkish second line taken—Forced back to Turkish first line—Captain R. P. St. V. Bernard—1st Battalion Casualties—A story in lighter vein—3rd Division cross Tigris—Sannayat, 22nd February, 1917—Success—Defeat and pursuit of Turks—Baghdad taken—Results of capture of Baghdad—Move northwards—Mushaida, 14th March, 1917—Plan of attack—Advance and capture of Bhopal Hill—Railway station taken—Casualties—Captain R. P. St. V. Bernard awarded D.S.O.—Friendly relations with 2nd Black Watch—Enemy retire—Istabulat, 21st/22nd April, 1917—Two enemy lines with prisoners taken—Turkish counter-attacks defeated—Action on 22nd April, 1917—Advance of 7th Division—Samarra railway station taken, 23rd April, 1917—Turkish losses—Second/Lieutenant B. P. T. O'Brien—Samarra town—Hot weather, 1917—Changes of Command—Daur and Tekrit—Death of General Maude—1st Battalion Badge of Gallantry instituted—7th Division leave Mesopotamia.

In order to preserve a consecutive narrative of the 2nd Battalion on active service in France, the story of the activities of our 1st Battalion in India has had to wait until this chapter. Its role was an exacting one, many moves were necessary, and the training of hundreds of young soldiers to fit them to replace war wastage was continuous.

The 1st Battalion was at Shillong when the Great War commenced. Not being in the Field Army, it was not called upon for one of the first Expeditionary Forces to leave India.

In January, 1915, the Battalion left Shillong for Ambala, and was at Solon in the Simla hills for the hot weather of 1915. A detachment proceeded to Simla to furnish the guard for His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief.

In December, 1915, the Battalion was sent to the East Coast of India, where it was suspected a landing of illicit arms was to take place. These apparently were for the use of local agitators. The







Battalion arrived at Balasore. There was no sign of any landing, but a certain amount of hostility was noticeable in the neighbourhood, so a march through the country was ordered to cool the misplaced ardour of the few, and give confidence to the many. Several interesting places were visited, including Jagannath, that famous centre of Hindu pilgrimages.

Back in Ambala at the end of December, 1915, on 22nd January, 1916, the Battalion was ordered to mobilize for service overseas.

During the sixteen months which had elapsed since the outbreak of the Great War, the strength of the Battalion and its efforts in finding men for reinforcements were remarkable. A constant stream went forth, mostly to the 2nd Battalion in France. The total of these reached 13 British officers, 11 Gurkha officers, 517 Gurkha other ranks. Of these 4 British officers, 3 Gurkha officers, 69 Gurkha other ranks were killed; 6 British officers, 7 Gurkha officers, and most of the Gurkha other ranks were wounded—a worthy contribution to the sister Battalion.

On 7th March, 1916, the 1st Battalion left Ambala, and embarked at Bombay on the 10th for Mesopotamia. Its strength had reached a total of 1,680, exclusive of those on service. Men surplus to war establishment were sent to Shillong, where a Depot was formed.

The Battalion arrived at Margill, north of Basra, on 18th March, 1916, where they were attached to the 41st Indian Infantry Brigade.

On 4th April, 1916, the Battalion again embarked, arriving at Sheikh Saad on the 12th, where it received its first experience of gun fire, as part of the Tigris Corps, as the force was called.

On 18th April, 1916, the Battalion joined the 21st Indian Brigade of the 7th Indian Division, which had won such great fame in France, and in which the 2nd Battalion had served for some eighteen months.

The other units in the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade were the "Norsets" (a composite British Battalion formed from drafts of the Norfolk and the Dorsetshire Regiments), 6th Jats, and 9th Bhopal Infantry. Later the composition of this Brigade became 2nd Black Watch, 20th Punjabis and 1/8th Gurkha Rifles.

There had been a considerable change in the composition of the two Indian Divisions (3rd and 7th) since we followed their fortunes in France, though the British battalions (as in the case of the 2nd Black Watch) remained in their original brigades.

Together with other divisions (including the 3rd from France and Egypt), the 7th had come to Mesopotamia to relieve our beleaguered garrison in Kut el Amara. As history relates, such relief was never to be achieved. Many fierce battles had already been fought before the 1st Battalion, who were to be engaged in several as fierce, arrived.

The situation, then, in April, 1916, as regards our Army in Mesopotamia was that strenuous but unavailing efforts had been made to relieve Kut since the first week of January, 1916. The battles of Sheikh Saad, The Wadi, Hanna, Dujaila Redoubt and Sannayat bear testimony to the efforts of the relieving force.

The Turkish defensive position at Sannayat still lay before our troops, and it was in a further attempt to take this last obstacle to the relief of Kut that the 1st Battalion first went into action in Mesopotamia.

A very short description of the theatre of war may not be out of place.

Mesopotamia consists generally of the lowland regions of the basin of the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. They join near Basra, some sixty miles from the mouth, and, as the Shatt al Arab, flow into the Persian Gulf. This is a fine river, about one and a half miles wide at the mouth, narrowing at Basra to about 600 yards.

The rainfall is small, about six inches yearly being the average on the Mesopotamia plains. During the flood season, caused by the melting of the winter snows in the highlands, together with breaks in the river banks, vast tracts of the country are inundated. The effect of water on the soil is to convert it into a thick, tenacious mud, which impedes all military movement. Coming as they do when the climate is most favourable for military operations (March to May), it will be realized how adversely these floods affected military operations.

Communications are bad. There is an almost total absence of stone; consequently, such roads as existed before 1914 were unmetalled and for the greater part without bridges. Tracks across the desert soon cut up, and became heavy under artillery and transport traffic. In short, for generations, as land communication was so unsatisfactory little attention had been paid to roads, especially as the rivers were universally regarded as the best means of travel.

It is a treeless country, a few date palms alone relieving the monotony of the landscape. With practically no cover or physical features, its description by the British soldier is apt, if unparliamentary, "Miles and miles of — all."

Mesopotamia is a hotbed of disease—plague, small-pox, cholera, malaria, dysentery are all prevalent. To these pleasantries could be added heat-stroke when campaigning in temperatures mounting to 120° F. in the shade, and on short water supplies.

This, then, was the inhospitable country and the hard conditions in which the 1st Battalion was to operate for some twenty months. Shortage of equipment, supplies and lack of medical facilities added unnecessarily to the trials of those engaged on what was probably

the most arduous of any major operation carried out during the 1914-1918 war.

At a conference held on 21st April, 1916, it was decided by General Goringe (Corps Commander) that the 7th Division (Commander, Major-General Younghusband) should attack the Sannayat trenches the following morning, with 21st and 19th Indian Infantry Brigades, in that order from the right, to lead the assault.

The opposing trenches were about 100 yards apart, and between them was a strip of "land" about 600 yards wide. This was only partially submerged, but not sufficiently, it was considered, to prevent the advance.

An artillery bombardment would commence at 6 a.m., working up to an intense bombardment from 7 a.m. to 7.9 a.m. At the latter hour the attack would be made, preceded by a barrage. On the right bank of the Tigris, the 3rd and 13th Divisions would maintain pressure on the enemy facing them, and be ready for a further advance.

At 6 a.m. on 27th April, 1916, 21st Indian Infantry Brigade reported that an attack over the front allotted to them was not feasible on account of the water, and requested that the attack should be made on a one-brigade front. This was sanctioned, so the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade attacked, supported by the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade role was now to cover the advance of the 19th. Good progress was made by the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade, which reached the Turkish third line. However, mud and water were too much. The ground was a quagmire, many men sinking up to their armpits. The "Norsets" moved forward to support the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade, followed by the 1/8th. Heavy enfilade fire forced 19th Brigade and "Norsets" to retire, largely owing to the inability of our troops to reply, as their rifles had got clogged with mud.

A Turkish counter-attack was effectively brought to a standstill by artillery fire and enfilade machine-gun fire of 21st Indian Infantry Brigade.

Movement was impossible, and after a couple of Turkish counter-attacks had been defeated, the engagement ended after a ten minutes' heavy bombardment by us of the retiring Turks.

From 11.45 a.m. to 2 p.m. on this day, a truce was observed by both sides to bring in the wounded. The Turks started it by coming out under the Red Crescent.

This truce caused a good deal of discussion at the time. Practically forced on us by the display of the Red Crescent, and continued long after we had fired a few warning shots, to many present it was considered to be a Turkish ruse to obtain a respite so as to reorganize

and bring up reinforcements. That the enemy had had very severe casualties from our artillery and machine-gun fire was obvious to those observers on the right bank of the Tigris. Indeed, to many on that bank, the Sannayat position was ours had more troops, in close support, been pushed through the 19th Brigade. Had the Turk "spoofed" us?

Fortunately, the 1st Battalion did not suffer heavily, only losing 2 men killed and 18 wounded—a lucky day for it in this respect, as an advance had been made across the open, followed by the occupation of our own front-line trenches.

On 29th April, 1916, the surrender at Kut el Amara took place. This course was forced on the commander (General Townsend), mainly owing to lack of food. The garrison was practically starving, and most were, physically, in a pitiable condition. This was a sad ending—and one that all ranks of the Tigris Corps felt most deeply—to their long and weary struggle against adversity in nature and misfortune in combat.

On 1st May, 1916, the 1st Battalion was inspected by General Sir Percy Lake.

After the surrender of Kut, the British and Turkish forces on the Tigris settled into a state of comparative inactivity, which endured till near the end of 1916. Both sides were exhausted by their efforts, hardships and losses, and both had suffered from the atrocious weather and local physical conditions.

We were no longer under the necessity of persisting in hazardous attacks, and the Turks, having achieved their immediate object, were disinclined to assume the offensive. Moreover, a Russian threat to Baghdad, then materializing, drew their attention northwards.

For a time, then, the policy for both sides was defensive, and to hold as forward a line as possible without indulging in serious hostilities.

This was the situation in which the 1st Battalion found itself until February, 1917. Normal trench warfare went on, and there was a good deal of sickness during the summer of 1916. The trenches became very wet and muddy towards the end of summer, and many rats appeared. One can imagine the almost total lack of amenities when out of the line.

Casualties were few, but a failure to obey the order to put out fires and take cover when enemy shelling took place, cost the Battalion 9 men killed and 7 wounded whilst they were sitting, cooking.

On 10th May, 1916, Lieutenant-Colonel A. Wilson, D.S.O., left the Battalion to command the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, and Lieutenant-Colonel C. A. Roosmalecocq assumed command until 27th September, 1916, when Lieutenant-Colonel Wilson returned.

On 28th August, 1916, Lieutenant-General F. S. Maude succeeded Lieutenant-General Sir Percy Lake as Commander-in-Chief of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force (Force "D").

During this spell of comparative inactivity, much had been done to improve matters generally in Mesopotamia. By November, 1916, units were up to establishment, reinforcement depots formed, river and land transport working on an adequate scale, sufficient reserves of supplies and ammunition collected at the front, with an assured means of replenishing them.

The men were well trained and full of confidence. This aspect of the change of conditions which had come about in Mesopotamia is brought into this history because much has been said of the unnecessary hardships and sufferings of our men in that country. These, together with criticisms of the conduct of the operations, formed the subjects of an inquiry by a Commission appointed in August, 1916, by His Majesty's Government.

During December, 1916, operations were carried out on the right bank of the Tigris. These were successful. An advance was made to the Hai, and the Turkish position known as the Dhara Bend was captured.

The Battalion took no part in these operations, but they are noted as the successful occupation of the position mentioned, which was immediately across the river and flanked the Turkish Sannayat defence system, greatly influenced the operations near Kut which were to follow.

On 17th February, 1917, the Battalion was engaged in its most important engagement up to date in Mesopotamia.

In order to press the enemy as vigorously as possible, the Army Commander decided to clear the Turkish troops from the river bend west of Shumran, on the right bank of the Tigris, and to assault and capture Sannayat.

The 7th Division was facing the Sannayat trenches, 28th and 21st Indian Infantry Brigades, in this order from the right, being in the front line, with the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade in the rear, in Division reserve.

The assault on 17th February was to be delivered on a front of 350 yards by the 20th Punjabis on the right, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles on left. The remainder of 21st Indian Infantry Brigade was in reserve. 28th Indian Infantry Brigade was to supplement the attack by fire only, while artillery support was provided by 58 guns and trench mortars. The two foremost lines only of the enemy's trenches were to be captured and consolidated.

Zero hour was to have been 12 noon, but owing to delay in reliefs, etc., due to the muddy and slippery state of the ground, it had to be postponed until 2 p.m.

The Battalion attacked in five waves, a sixth (under Captain Abbott) forming a carrying party.

Helped no doubt by having had four days' practice in the assault against a replica of the Turkish trenches, constructed in rear of our own line, the assault met with immediate success, the Turkish second line being occupied with only slight casualties.

Consolidation was carried out under very heavy fire, and enemy counter-attacks successfully dealt with by our covering fire.

The situation seemed so favourable that at 3.30 p.m. the two remaining battalions of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade were ordered to assault the enemy's third line. Before being able to do so, however, the enemy guns concentrated on 20th Punjabis and 1/8th Gurkha Rifles an intense and accurate bombardment. Following this with a bombing counter-attack, the Turks forced the right portion of our line to give way, thus exposing the 1st Battalion, who were forced to retire to the Turkish front line. A small party of the Battalion under Captain R. P. St. V. Bernard held on in the Turkish second line on the left. This action is recorded in the official history thus: "A small party of Gurkhas on the extreme left held on, however, to their gains with the greatest gallantry and tenacity, but an advance by the reserve battalions was found impossible, and at dusk the Gurkha party remaining in the enemy trench was withdrawn."

The Battalion was ordered back during the evening to the original position by the Brigade Commander.

The 1st Battalion suffered heavily, casualties being :

- Killed : Major D. W. Humphreys, D.S.O.  
Second-Lieutenant Borrett.  
Second-Lieutenant Stables.  
Subadar Bhairab Sahi.  
Jemadar Diwansing Gurung.  
Gurkha other ranks, 26.
- Wounded : Captain A. M. Kennedy.  
Second-Lieutenant F. B. Fisher.  
Second-Lieutenant C. le G. Poingdestre.  
Gurkha officers, 3.  
Gurkha other ranks, 124.
- Missing : Gurkha other ranks, 35.

Among several brought to notice for gallantry were two Assam and one Burma military policemen attached to the Battalion.

It was probably during this battle that the following incident is alleged to have taken place : A certain battalion was moving rear-wards. A very young, very new British officer was trying to induce his men to proceed towards, and not away from, the enemy. His

knowledge of the language was strictly limited, so "Halt" shouted repeatedly was his only injunction. A corpulent Subadar, exhausted by progress over muddy ground, sobbed out, "Koun bewaquf 'Halt' bolta—Yih halt ki waqt nai hai!" In case the Roman-Urdu effort is not up to standard, a very literal translation might be, "What B.F. is saying Halt. This is no time for halting."

For several days, preparations had been made to cross the Tigris near Shumran. These operations, carried out by III Corps on the right bank, were successful. Much careful, secret work was carried out with bridging, handling of pontoons and practice in rowing. As, however, the III Corps crossing of the Tigris affected a portion of the army in which the 1st Battalion was not included, it is not proposed to describe the operation in detail though, of course, it materially influenced the future operations on the Sannayat front.

On 22nd February, the same portion of the enemy line that was attacked on 17th February was again the objective. On this occasion the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade carried out the attack, the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade forming the 7th Divisional reserve. The Battalion therefore was only lightly engaged.

The attack was successful, the enemy trenches captured and consolidated. A series of Turkish counter-attacks were repulsed with no great difficulty.

This attack was succeeded by a further advance later in the afternoon. It looked as though Turkish resistance was weakening. After a few counter-attacks in which severe casualties must have been inflicted by our supporting artillery and machine guns, the enemy made no further effort to dislodge our troops during the ensuing night.

Since the first attack on Sannayat on 6th April, 1916, the 7th Division had been in the trenches opposite Sannayat. The elation of all ranks, therefore, was great at the thought that the moment for which they had been working so long had now arrived, and that an advance was in sight.

Vigorous patrol activity disclosed the fact that the enemy had withdrawn large numbers from the front of the 7th Division, and a general advance was ordered. Decisive results were hoped for and were obtained. Early on the morning of 24th February, 1917, a British airman reported the enemy to be in full retreat towards Baghdad.

Space does not allow of a detailed account of hour-to-hour movements of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade immediately following the victory at Sannayat. Operations generally followed the same line—patrol action to locate enemy, and the occupation of lightly held or empty enemy trenches.



The enemy had lost heavily ; 4,500 prisoners had been taken, besides guns and material of all kinds. The Turk had fought well, as he always has done.

Emerging from the trench warfare stagnation to open warfare was a relief, but a type of warfare in which many young officers, N.C.Os. and men had had no practical experience.

The troops were fit enough, but were not in good marching condition, and were besides encumbered with all the impedimenta necessary for trench warfare. This led to a rather high proportion of marching casualties. Despite this, all were in good heart and enjoyed the change. As the war diary of a British battalion in the 7th Division said, "We bivouacked in the open on luxurious green grass, all ranks, though tired, enjoying the change after so many months of monotonous trench warfare."

The Battalion was not actively engaged with the enemy during the pursuit to Baghdad. Operations were almost entirely confined to III Corps, whose 13th British Division had much hard fighting at the Diala river.

Baghdad was occupied on 11th March, 1917. The 1st Battalion did not see much of this city, as I Corps was ordered to concentrate to the north-west.

The results obtained from the capture of Baghdad were very considerable. Above all British prestige, greatly lowered by the fall of Kut, was raised, and further (i) it deprived the Turks of their best base for operations in Mesopotamia ; (ii) the Arabs, who in many cases had been aggressive, came in in increasing numbers to offer allegiance ; (iii) it relieved us of immediate anxiety in respect to our Indian frontier.

After the capture of Baghdad, the immediate objects of the British were to consolidate their position and to co-operate with the Russians in establishing themselves on the Tigris about Mosul, the head of the projected railway from Asia Minor.

These objects necessitated operations to the north, in which the Battalion were to find themselves very actively engaged.

On 12th March, 1917, a Turkish force was located by our aeroplanes in position about Hassaiwa and Mushahida, on the right bank of the Tigris, about twenty-five miles north of Baghdad.

The Turks, with two divisions (about 5,000) in the front line and a third division somewhere to the east of the Tigris, held a position lying three and a half miles to the south of Mushahida railway station. Their trenches were located among sand hills and lines of mounds, which commanded a very good field of fire across the flat and open plain. Near the river bank, canals and irrigation cuts formed considerable obstacles. On the extreme right of the enemy

position was a conical mound, known subsequently as Bhopal Hill. The railway line running north from Baghdad intersected the enemy position about half a mile east of Bhopal Hill.

The attack was made by 7th Division on a two-brigade front, 28th Indian Infantry Brigade on the right, and 21st Indian Infantry Brigade on the left, of the railway line ; 19th Indian Infantry Brigade (less two battalions) in Divisional reserve. The 21st Brigade was only three battalions strong, and two battalions of the 19th Brigade were detailed to support them.

The advance by 21st Brigade commenced at 3.30 p.m. in two lines, 2nd Black Watch on the right, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles on the left in the front line. 9th Bhopal Infantry were in the second line echeloned to the left rear of the Battalion. 1st Seaforth Highlanders and 28th Punjabis (from 19th Brigade) were in echelon to the left rear of the Bhopal Infantry.

Checked by considerable rifle and machine-gun fire, mainly from Bhopal Hill, arrangements were made for an intensive bombardment of this feature. This took place about 6.30 p.m., and a little later Bhopal Hill was captured by two companies of the Black Watch, 1/8th and Bhopals. At the same time the two right companies of the Black Watch captured the remainder of the enemy main position eastward of Bhopal Hill.

Leaving the Bhopal infantry to hold Bhopal Hill, Colonel Wauchope, commanding the Black Watch, advanced with his own battalion, 1/8th and two companies Seaforths. It was difficult progress, groping through the broken country in the dark. All ranks had had a hard day, and were tired and thirsty. At about 11.30 p.m. the noise of a train leaving Mushahida station was heard. The force deployed and charged, putting the few remaining enemy to flight.

The Corps Commander (General Cobbe) gave high praise to the troops, who had marched and fought practically continuously for over twenty-four hours.

The 1st Battalion losses were :

Killed : Subadar Manbahadur Thapa.  
Gurkha other ranks, 14.

Died of  
wounds : Lieutenant E. V. Nelson.

Wounded : Captain Abbott.  
Gurkha other ranks, 54.

As the Battalion had gone into action with 3 British officers and 400 Gurkha other ranks, one British officer only (Captain R. B. St. V. Bernard, commanding) was left with the Battalion. This officer, who had received the M.C. as an immediate award after the Sannayat

battle of 17th February, was awarded the D.S.O. for conspicuous gallantry and resource—a good effort to win two such decorations within one month. Many will remember this gallant officer, who, though a 6th Gurkha, saw so much hard fighting with the 1st Battalion, in Quetta, 1934-5, when he was G.S.O.1, Baluchistan District.

One incident of the friendly relations existing between the Black Watch and the Battalion took place at Mushahida. One British officer only being left with the Battalion, Colonel Wauchope, commanding the Black Watch, lent Captain Bernard a small detachment to assist him during the battle.

The enemy slipped away in haste, abandoning ammunition and equipment, and, as the G.O.C. (General Maude) decided to rest the troops, no exploitation of the success gained was effected. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, with some guns and sappers, remained to safeguard the river embankments; the remainder of the force returned to Baghdad.

For the next month the Battalion took part in no active operations, which were confined to the left bank of the Tigris, and did not affect the 7th Division.

On the advance continuing, General Cobbe's column, in which the 7th Division was included, came up against the strong Turkish position at Istabulat, some forty miles from Mushahida along the railway.

During the night of 19th/20th April, 1917, the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade moved forward and occupied a line astride the Dujaila Canal, a considerable obstacle, twenty to twenty-five feet wide, with a six-foot depth of water, and with banks rising in places to forty feet. This line, about one mile distant from the Turkish positions, was strengthened by us with a series of strong points.

On 21st April, 1917, at 5.5 a.m. the advance began, the objective of the 21st Brigade being the left of the Turkish position—that portion between the canal and the Tigris.

The 1/8th on the right, and the 2nd Black Watch on the left, led the attack, with 9th Bhopals in support in right rear of the 1/8th. 20th Punjabis were in Brigade reserve.

The Battalion advanced in two lines, "A" Company (Lieutenant B. P. T. O'Brien) and "B" Company (Captain B. R. Mullaly) leading, followed by "C" Company in rear of "A," and "D" Company in rear of "B."

Rapid progress was made. The first two enemy lines were captured with 200 prisoners. Captain Mullaly, leading the foremost line, stormed the main Turkish position, but was immediately killed by a bomb.

Two Turkish redoubts known as A and B proved tough nuts. The official account states: "Redoubt A was captured by the 1/8th Gurkhas; the retreat of the Turkish garrison, who surrendered, being cut off by the 9th Bhopal Infantry, who had got round them from the right. Then swinging half left, the Gurkhas advanced against redoubt B and entered it simultaneously with the Black Watch, both battalions displaying fine gallantry."

The fighting was fierce, the Turks making determined counter-attacks, but Highlanders and Gurkhas fought them back, and at 8 a.m. secured a ridge overlooking further Turkish positions. This was retained under very heavy fire and gradually consolidated.

A further assault by Black Watch and 1/8th to commence at 11 a.m. on 21st April, 1917, was contemplated. A bombardment commencing at 10.45 a.m. had little effect, and the officers commanding the two battalions decided together that they would not be justified in attempting to assault the enemy's trenches, which he was seen to be holding in great strength; more especially as it would, in any case, be very difficult to launch an attack from the redoubt they were in.

By noon the fight had become stationary. 21st Indian Infantry Brigade battalions were in the front line—9th Bhopals in redoubt A, 20th Punjabis in the trench connecting redoubt A with redoubt B, 2nd Black Watch and 1/8th Gurkha Rifles in redoubt B.

During the afternoon and evening of 21st April, 1917, there was no special incident in the fighting except a Turkish counter-attack about 4.40 p.m. near Istabulat station. This was dealt with successfully by the 92nd Punjabis and 56th Rifles.

As soon as it was dark, reorganization and preparations for next morning's attack were taken in hand.

During the early morning of 22nd April, patrols from 19th and 21st Indian Infantry Brigade reported signs of enemy withdrawals.

An advance of 7th Division was ordered. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade (less 20th Punjabis) formed the Divisional reserve, moving behind 19th Indian Infantry Brigade, who, in turn, were in support to the 28th Indian Infantry Brigade in the front line.

The 19th and 28th Brigades had much hard fighting on 22nd April, 1917, but enemy resistance was overcome. The night of 22nd/23rd April was spent in consolidating the captured lines.

The advance was continued until the morning of 23rd April, with the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade leading, and by 10 a.m. Samarra railway station was occupied.

The long, fierce battle of Istabulat-Samarra was over, ending in the complete defeat of the Turk, despite a stubborn resistance.

The 1st Battalion suffered severely, losing :

Killed : Captain B. R. Mullaly,  
Gurkha other ranks, 41;

Wounded : Second-Lieutenant B. P. T. O'Brien,  
Licutenant Stead,  
Jemadar Jasbir Gurung,  
Gurkha other ranks, 144

—a total of 189 out of a strength of 579 with which the battle commenced.

The enemy had suffered heavily in casualties to personnel, and in the loss of a large amount of rolling stock and material.

Several decorations were won by the Battalion, amongst them being the award of the M.C. to Second-Lieutenant B. P. T. O'Brien (2nd, attached 1/8th). This young officer was wounded no less than five times, twice when leading his company to the main position. Here he received three more wounds, and he was at last brought to a standstill.

Inspection of the position attacked by our troops on 21st April, 1917, showed it was very strong, carefully prepared, and obviously constructed for a prolonged stay. Statements from Turkish prisoners confirmed this, and that the Turks intended to hold it as their main Tigris line of defence during the hot weather. The capture of this position, held by some 7,500 to 9,000 rifles, during two days of extreme heat was a very fine performance.

On 24th April, 1917, Samarra was occupied. Hence a few words of historical interest regarding this ancient capital of Mesopotamia will not be out of place.

Though still of some local importance, the town is now much reduced in size from its former greatness. Surrounded by ancient ruins, it is celebrated as the place where the Roman Emperor Julian died of his wounds in A.D. 363, and where the disappearance of the twelfth Imam (Imam Mahdi), whose resurrection is looked for by many Mohammedans, is reported to have occurred.

A period of reorganization now took place at Samarra, where the Battalion remained during the hot weather. A draft of 239 arrived from India in May, and the following month a draft was sent to India from the Battalion to help to form the 3rd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles.

Changes in command of the Battalion are to be recorded. Lieutenant-Colonel A. Wilson, D.S.O., had left in March, 1917, after twenty-eight years' service with the 1/8th. On 31st March, 1917, Lieutenant-Colonel Coningham, 9th Gurkha Rifles, took over command of the Battalion and held it until 1st June, when he was relieved by Major Ransford, 6th Gurkha Rifles. Finally, on 7th

July, Lieutenant-Colonel I. U. Batty, D.S.O., The Guides, assumed command, and held it, in the field, without a break for two years.

In May, 1917, 1st Guides relieved 9th Bhopal Infantry in the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade.

The long hot weather continued, and on 15th July the temperature in an E.P. tent (probably the coolest of all and double fly) was 132° F., and minimum night temperature was 80° F.

A well-known author writes of this summer of 1917: "According to the Baghdadis, it was the hottest season in the memory of man. Most things were too hot to touch. The rim of a tumbler burnt one's hand in a tent. The dust and sand burnt the soles of one's feet through one's boots. Even the hardy Arab and Kurd made such an outcry that we had to water the ground where they worked."

The comfort of the troops was attended to as far as possible under the circumstances obtaining in such a country. Leave to India relieved the monotony for a few. A high standard of discipline and training was maintained. Exercises were carried out in the early morning and evening. Classes were held, one of which (bombing) was under a certain Lieutenant Ritchie, 2nd Black Watch, to become well known in later years as General Sir Neil Ritchie.

In September, 1917, a new gas box respirator, including nose-clip, was issued. This was found to be quite ineffective on the nose of the average Gurkha!

A considerable amount of fighting took place at Ramadi and Jabal Hamrin in July, September, and October, 1917. In these operations the 7th Division played no part, and the Battalion was destined to take no further part in major actions in Mesopotamia.

Towards the end of October, 1917, Turkish troop movements southward from Tekrit were observed. These reached Huwaislat, about ten miles north of Samarra. Plans to attack on 24th October, 1917, were made by General Fane, commanding 7th Indian Infantry Division, but the Turks, anticipating this attention, hastily retired the night before.

On 28th October, 1917, the G.O.C.-in-C. (General Maude) issued orders that the Turkish position at Daur was to be attacked. This was carried out on 2nd November, the main attack being directed against the enemy's position which was on the right bank of the Tigris and opposite to the village of Daur. The 21st Brigade group (under General Leslie), of which the Battalion formed part, were to advance on the left bank of the Tigris. Very little opposition was encountered.

The attack was successful, the enemy falling back on Tekrit. On 5th November, 1917, the Turkish position was attacked. The 21st Brigade group continued its role of protecting our right, by

advancing along the left bank of the Tigris. It was able to give covering fire to our troops fighting on the right bank, but otherwise was not engaged, and the Battalion suffered no casualties in this engagement, which forced the Turks out of Tekrit. The enemy retreated to Fat Ha, about thirty miles north of Tekrit.

On 18th November, 1917, General Maude died of cholera at Baghdad, an event which aroused much sorrow. He had successfully carried out the great task allotted to him. He was an outstanding leader, ever thoughtful of the well-being of all who served under him. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Sir W. R. Marshall, commanding III Corps.

On 1st December, 1917, a Battalion "Badge for Gallantry" was instituted. It was awarded by the Commanding Officer for acts of bravery, and took the form of a gilt rectangular brooch.

Later in the month (in view of the improved situation in Mesopotamia) it was decided to transfer the 7th Indian Division to Egypt. The Battalion accordingly returned to Samarra, and thence to Baghdad, where it embarked on the 12th, and, trans-shipping at Basra, finally left Mesopotamia on 21st December, 1917.

In twenty-one months of hard fighting and arduous campaigning the 1st Battalion had well maintained its high reputation. Sannayat, Tigris, Mushahida are names of which the Regiment may well feel proud.

Battle casualties in Mesopotamia amounted to 167 killed and 428 wounded of all ranks.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

(See Map No. 8)

[*This chapter tells of the 1st Battalion in Palestine and Egypt in the First World War.*]

Egypt, 1918—Moascar Camp—Inspection by H.R.H. The Duke of Connaught—General Allenby assumes command of E.E.F.—Position after capture of Jerusalem—"Westerners" and "Easterners"—General Smuts in Palestine—Supreme War Council decision—Withdrawal of British battalions—1/8th moves up to front—British front—The terrain—Patrolling—Lance-Naik Mansing Rana—Sniping—Patrol actions—Lieutenant Wilsey's raid—1st Battalion's good work recognized—British Divisions converted to Indian model—Sharon and Megiddo—Allenby's plan—Concentration—Enemy outwitted—Preparations for attack—The attack—Artillery barrage—1st Battalion gain all objectives—Captures made—Pursuit—Water and ration difficulties—Beit Lid—R.F.C. bomb Turks in retreat—March to Tripoli begins—Haifa and Mount Carmel—C.-in-C.'s message—Immediate awards—Haifa to Beirut—"C" Company attached to Corps Cavalry—Historical places—A bomb explosion—Beirut—March to Tripoli—Armistice with Turks—Enemy losses—In camp near Tripoli—Move to Egypt—Leave 21st Indian Infantry Brigade—Good-bye to the Black Watch—Riots—Cairo—Two men murdered by rioters—To Beni Suef—Lieutenant-Colonel I. U. Battye—Tanta—Return to India—C.-in-C.'s message—Battle honours for Great War, 1914-1918.

ON 7th January, 1918, the Battalion arrived at Suez and disembarked the following day, with a strength of 13 British officers, 16 Gurkha officers, 972 Gurkha other ranks, and 55 followers.

The Battalion proceeded to Ismailia, where it went into camp at Moascar, near by. From small beginnings, these places had grown to very large, well-equipped military bases, and the Battalion camp proved to be a delightful one, and a very agreeable change from those on the banks of the Tigris.

Owing to reorganization in this Command, and the necessity for training and reorganization, the Battalion was not called upon for active operations for about three months. The time was well spent in training and assimilating new ideas under new conditions, and, not least, a certain amount of relaxation after Mesopotamia.

Short leave was given, and all ranks took this opportunity to visit the surrounding country, Cairo and Alexandria, naturally, being the greatest centres of attraction.

Divisional sports were held.

On 12th March, 1918, the Battalion had the honour of being



inspected by H.R.H. The Duke of Connaught, who was no stranger to the Indian Army, having served in India as Governor of Bombay. His Royal Highness presented many decorations won in France and Mesopotamia.

Before going to the front in Palestine with the Battalion, it is well to recapitulate very briefly the position in that sphere of operations.

During 1916 and early in 1917 there was much indecisive fighting in the southern part of Palestine and in the Sinai Desert. In June, 1917, the command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was given to General Sir Edmund Allenby, until recently the commander of the Third Army in France. He actually took over the command on the 28th of the month. Under him, as will be related, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force was to achieve outstanding successes.

As a prelude during October, November and December, 1917, the third battle of Gaza and the battle of Beersheba were won, Jerusalem was captured, and the British line was established about five miles north of Jaffa. It was here that the 1st Battalion joined the army in the front line at the end of March.

To digress from our purely regimental story. About this time (early 1918) there was acute controversy between the so-called "Westerners" and "Easterners," especially on the question of the future of the Palestine Campaign. Very briefly, the "Westerners" opposed any further adventure in Palestine, arguing that the Western Front was vital and defeat there might mean the loss of the war. They contended that even complete victory in Palestine would not force Turkey out of the war if her German Ally was overrunning France. The "Easterners" contended that, though it was essential to maintain the Western Front unbroken, that Front was wasteful of lives, and it would be folly to take seasoned troops from a theatre where decisive success could still be won and send them to France and Flanders, to be swallowed up in bloody and indecisive fighting.

General Smuts came to Palestine in February, 1918, to discuss the Cabinet's proposals with General Allenby. These proposals envisaged the problems of an advance to Damascus and Aleppo, and the reinforcement of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force with three divisions from Mesopotamia and one, or possibly two, Indian Cavalry divisions from France. A supreme War Council meeting in February, 1918, decided to stand on the defensive in the West and to deal a knock-out blow to Turkey in Palestine. Two divisions only (3rd and 7th Indian) would be sent from Mesopotamia, instead of three.

Later there was a change in plan, necessitating postponement of the British offensive in Palestine, for towards the end of March, 1918, the Germans launched their great offensive in France and achieved

alarming success. General Allenby was warned, therefore, that a defensive attitude must be adopted by him, since all the British troops that could be spared would be required for France to save the situation there ; in fact, the "Westerners' " apprehensions appeared to be justified.

These changes resulted in the withdrawal of some twenty-four British battalions for the Western Front and their replacement by Indian battalions from India, who, with no war experience, and often inadequately trained, needed much preparation. These circumstances, then, explain the reason for the large-scale offensive planned for the Egyptian Expeditionary Force being deferred until September, 1918.

Before resuming our narrative of operations, a few words about Palestine generally are advisable. It is a small country, the area from Dan (now Banias) in the north to Beersheba in the south, and from Jaffa on the Mediterranean to Amman on the Hedjaz railway, being somewhat smaller than Wales. As the Battalion operated almost entirely in the plain country of Sharon, remarks will be confined to that area. This plain of Sharon is historic and has from time immemorial formed the natural route for military enterprises. The coast-line is fringed by a strip of sand dunes that rise in places to a height of 150 feet above sea-level and are up to half a mile in width. Inland from these dunes, the plain stretches from ten to fifteen miles to the Judean range. It is undulating, and intersected by many small nullahs. A low spur jutting from the main range runs north-west, ending in Mount Carmel near Haifa.

Water is a great problem. Flowing streams do not exist and the needs of the local population are met from deep wells.

From April to October never a shower comes to relieve the dust and glare. November to March bring the rains, converting the land into seas of mud and making roads impassable. April to June, the country is under crops.

On 26th March, 1918, the Battalion marched to El Kantara, entrained for Palestine on 29th, and detrained at Ludd. At Surafend it concentrated with old companions of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, which, as in Mesopotamia, consisted of 2nd Black Watch, 1st Guides, 20th Punjabis and 1/8th Gurkha Rifles.

On 2nd April, 1918, front-line trenches north of Jaffa were taken over by 7th Indian Division from the 52nd (Lowland) Division, which was proceeding to the Western Front. The 7th Division formed part of XXI Corps.

The British line extended from north of Jaffa on the west coast to a point about five miles north of Jericho on the River Jordan. The western portion of this line was held by XXI Corps.

During the whole of the summer of 1918, the Battalion was

continually in the front line or immediate support, and many patrol encounters, amounting in some instances to small battles, took place. These arose from the fact that the distance between our own and enemy trenches was from 1,500 to 3,000 yards, thus giving plenty of scope for practice in the art of scouting and display of ingenuity on the part of all ranks. A few only of the more important of the "No man's land" encounters can be described.

On 13th April, 1918, a patrol of one British officer and two Gurkha other ranks went out on a daylight reconnaissance. Unexpectedly attacked by a Turkish patrol some seventeen strong, the British officer (Captain A. M. Kennedy) was dangerously wounded and in great danger of being captured. One Gurkha other rank (Lance-Naik Mansing Rana) ordered his companion to return and report what had happened, and, lying down beside his wounded officer, kept the enemy off by accurate rifle fire. A rescue party under Major R. P. St. V. Bernard brought in Captain Kennedy and Mansing, who received the I.D.S.M. for his gallantry.

On 16th April, 1918, steel helmets were issued, and were worn until the end of the war.

In sniping the Battalion was proficient, witness the statement of a Turkish deserter who said that, in three days during May, 1918, six of the Turkish snipers had been shot through the head in a portion of trench under fire from the Gurkhas.

On 22nd/23rd June, Captain T. E. Furze and Rifleman Dhanbir Gurung surprised a Turkish post of about twelve men, guarded by a double sentry. Killing the two sentries, they got back with valuable information. For this they were awarded the M.C. and I.O.M. (2nd Class) respectively.

On 16th/17th June an incident which might have resulted in serious casualties was averted by the courage of Captain E. M. Ferrers-Nicholson, Lance-Naik Santabir Chettri and Rifleman Narbahadur Gurung. A Turkish Very light set fire to the grass, when a Battalion working party was in the open. The Turks opened heavy fire. The three named, all under close rifle fire, proceeded to put out the fire before any serious losses were sustained.

On the night 5th/6th July, a fighting patrol of one British officer (Lieutenant F. H. W. Wilsey) and eighteen Gurkha other ranks was sent out to raid an enemy strong point. The patrol was detected, and had to fight its way in through a hail of grenades and rifle fire. Desperate hand-to-hand fighting took place. Killing fifteen of the enemy and taking one prisoner, the patrol returned after its most successful mission. Two men were found missing, so back the patrol went without reinforcements, fought its way into the enemy post, found the two missing (one dead and one wounded) men, and

fought its way back again in spite of being attacked by far superior enemy forces.

Five killed and seven wounded was the price paid for this very gallant exploit, for their part in which Lieutenant W. Wilsey was awarded the M.C. and Havildar Birsing the I.D.S.M.

For their general good work, in which dash, courage, and offensive spirit were marked, the Battalion was publicly congratulated by the Corps Commander (Lieutenant-General Sir E. Bulfin) and the Divisional Commander (Major-General Sir V. B. Fane). At this parade ribbons of awards bestowed were presented.

Consequent on the departure of British troops for France, and the arrival of Indian units to replace them, it was found necessary to change the composition of the British divisions. With the exception of the 54th (East Anglian) Division, which retained a purely British composition, the other British divisions remaining in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force were converted into divisions on the Indian model, with three British and nine Indian battalions—an interesting experiment which worked well in practice.

Lieutenant-Colonel C. Stansfield was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 13th August, 1918, but remained seconded.

In September, 1918, coinciding with tremendous and successful Allied attacks in France, began the operations styled "The Battle of Megiddo" which were to have such decisive results—to wit, the destruction of two Turkish armies and the elimination of Turkey from the war, the fruits of a plan, masterly in conception, thorough in preparation, and efficient in execution.

It can fairly be claimed that these operations in Palestine in September and October, 1918, are amongst the most decisive to have been fought in any war, and it is with pride that the Regiment bears on its roll of battle honours the names "Sharon" and "Megiddo."

It is possible, in a History such as this, only to give a very brief description of the plan of operations, in which the role of XXI Corps and the Desert Mounted Corps will be mentioned as affecting the actions in which the Battalion took part.

XXI Corps, reinforced by the 60th Division from XX Corps, was to break the way for the Desert Mounted Corps, which was to concentrate secretly in the rear of XXI Corps near the coast.

In brief the plan\* was for XXI Corps to assault at dawn on 19th September, after a short but intense bombardment, the break-through to be made between the railway and the sea. The Corps was then to swing north-east, pivoting on its right, and to drive the enemy into and through the foothills towards Messudieh, and thence down the

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\* Every detail of the attack was rehearsed in rear of our lines on defences constructed from air photographs.

road to Jenin and Afule, into the arms of the Desert Mounted Corps, which, it was planned, as soon as the infantry had cleared a way for it, would ride north along the coast, turn north-east and occupy Afule and the other places named.

The concentration was carried out successfully, and in complete secrecy. Moving by night, and lying up concealed by day in olive woods, orange groves, and broken ground, this great mass of horsemen and infantry, etc., got into their required positions.

Mule and camel transport was organized, in anticipation of roads being non-existent or impassable for motor and wheeled transport through sand, thus greatly augmenting the enormous number of animals concentrated.

Many most interesting facts relating to the outwitting of the Turk could be told of the preparations for the Megiddo battles, but space forbids. One instance, however, is worth recording. To suggest preparations for an attack on our eastern flank, the camps of the Cavalry in the Jordan valley, from which our mounted troops had been withdrawn westward, were left standing and new ones were pitched. Fifteen thousand dummy horses, of canvas, filled the deserted horse lines. Readers will be reminded of a similar ruse used before El Alamein, when a canvas tank division took the place of the real thing.

The complete mastery obtained by our Air Force in Egypt and Palestine at this time was probably one of the greatest factors in our movements being concealed from the enemy.

That General Allenby had completely outwitted the Turk was proved by a captured enemy intelligence summary. This showed that opposed to our concentration on a fifteen-mile front of 35,000 infantry, 9,000 cavalry and 383 guns, the enemy had only 8,000 infantry with 130 guns. Yet in the remaining 45 miles of front the Turk had 24,000 men with 270 guns to oppose our 22,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry and 157 guns. As a distinguished writer says, "The battle was practically over before a shot was fired."

The Turkish front system of defences in the coastal plain ran along a low sandy ridge, and had a depth of about 3,000 yards. They were well constructed, and formed a continuous line. A rear system of defences near El Tireh was situated three miles behind the front system.

Previous to the battle the 7th Indian Division, which had been on the extreme left of the British line (a Battalion post was actually on the cliffs overlooking the Mediterranean Sea), was closed to its right, the 60th Division coming in on the extreme left.

Hence the 7th Indian Division had the 75th Division on its right, and the 60th Division on its left. The 7th Division attacked with

19th Indian Infantry Brigade (with two battalions of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade) on the right, 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, Commander, Brigadier-General A. G. Kemball (less 1st Guides and 20th Punjabis), on the left. 28th Indian Infantry Brigade was in reserve.

In the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade attack the leading battalion was the Black Watch, followed by the 1/8th. The objective was that portion of the enemy line at Tabsor. The enemy trenches were some 600 yards away. This enabled our troops to form up in "No man's land"; a fortunate thing for the Battalion, as when the Turkish counter-barrage came down, their shells passed over, causing only a few casualties.

Zero hour was 4.30 a.m. No preliminary bombardment took place, but a terrific barrage soon blasted the enemy wire and front trenches almost out of existence. This artillery barrage, moving at the rate of 100 yards per minute, was put down by guns which averaged approximately one to every fifty yards. Advancing close behind this, the Black Watch were quickly in occupation of the enemy front line.

At 5.30 a.m. the Battalion passed through the Black Watch as arranged, and captured trenches and strong points in quick succession. "B" Company, closely followed by "A" Company, were on the right; "C" Company, followed by "D" Company, on the left. "B" Company captured prisoners and several machine guns. "A" Company also got a few. "C" Company captured a strong point, with one German officer, two Turkish officers and numerous Turks.

By 6.30 a.m. the Battalion had gained all its objectives. It sent forward patrols and re-formed.

In the advance the Battalion had captured 340 prisoners, 15 machine guns and 10 automatic rifles, with a loss of two killed and 13 wounded.

Meanwhile, the mounted troops were carrying out their role, and were proceeding to cut off the retreat of the enemy main forces.

The rapidity of the advance had caused a certain amount of confusion in certain areas, a possible contingency in such a country, with units, flushed with success, pushing on at full speed. However, a halt at El Tireh, where the 21st Brigade bivouacked for the night 19th/20th September, enabled stragglers to rejoin, and reorganization to take place.

Hard marching in scorching heat and dust requires water and food to maintain the vigour of man and beast. Of the former there was precious little, and of the latter none, and from 10 p.m., 18th September, to 21st September, the Battalion existed on about four pakhals of water per company, and one filled water-bottle per man.

On 20th September the last serious resistance of the enemy was met with at Beit Lid. The brunt of this action was borne by the

19th Indian Infantry Brigade, and especially by the Seaforth Highlanders of that Brigade. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade (which the 1st Guides and 20th Punjabis had rejoined) helped to clear the enemy out of Beit Lid by making a flanking attack from the east. On the morning of 21st September, the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade had reached its objective, Messudieh Junction, on the Nablus-Tulkaram railway. From here the village of Samaria (modern Sebustie) could be seen. At Messudieh the Battalion first heard of the magnitude of the success obtained by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. All organized resistance on the part of the enemy was now at an end. The greater part of their 8th Army were prisoners, while the 7th were in disorganized flight. It was this Turkish 7th Army which sustained a four hours' bombing attack by our planes in a gorge near Nablus. The following day, following this attack, the Battalion, on their advance to Tulkaram, marched along a road which was a shambles of corpses piled high, overturned guns, lorries and vehicles.

From now on fighting gave place to marching, and hard marching it was. Twelve hours to cover fifteen miles was a common day's march. Winding hill tracks varied with deep loose sand. In the latter the heavily laden troops sank to their ankles.

The Battalion continued its most interesting march to Tripoli. Haifa was reached on 27th September, and a welcome short rest there enabled all ranks to get a bathe, and wash their clothes. Some energetic souls still retained enough energy to climb Mount Carmel.

On 26th September, 1918, the following message was published by the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Edmund Allenby :

"I desire to convey to all ranks and all arms of the forces under my command my admiration and thanks for their great deeds of the past week, and my appreciation of their gallantry and determination which have resulted in the total destruction of 7th and 8th Turkish Armies opposed to us. Such a complete victory has seldom been known in all the history of war."

Similar messages were received from all parts of the Empire, including one from His Majesty the King.

Several immediate awards were granted to N.C.Os. and men of the Battalion, amongst them being the D.C.M. to Sergeant W. Simpson, 2nd Black Watch, attached to 1/8th Gurkha Rifles. Four N.C.Os. of the Black Watch had been attached to the Battalion, and it was therefore a great pleasure that the Black Watch awards included one given to a N.C.O. attached to the Battalion.

On 30th September, 1918, "C" Company of the Battalion left to join the Corps of Cavalry, and eventually had the honour of being the first infantry to reach Beirut.

On 1st October, 1918, the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade received orders to march to Beirut, ninety-four miles away, this distance being covered at an average rate of thirteen and a half miles a day. A convoy of 3,500 camels, which had to be escorted, did not add to the mobility of the Brigade, for owing to a complete absence of march discipline on the part of the camel drivers, there were frequent halts and blocks of a maddening nature.

During the march, the Battalion had the opportunity of seeing many places of very great historical and biblical interest—*e.g.*, Cæsarea, Acre, Tyre and Sidon. Acre has sustained many sieges, the most important being that when Sir Sidney Smith successfully defended the Castle against Napoleon. Of Sir Sidney Smith, the great Napoleon said, "The man who spoilt my Destiny," meaning by his "Destiny" his dreams of conquest after the manner of Alexander.

At the last halt before Beirut, an incident, which might have considerably reduced the British officer strength, occurred. A bomb exploded near to the sentry on beat in front of the British Officers' Mess bivouac. The sentry was very severely wounded, as was Lieutenant F. W. Wilsey. Captain Furze and Lieutenant A. W. Duncan were also wounded slightly. A few minutes earlier all the officers had been seated at the dinner-table, close to the sentry's beat.

At Beirut, reached on 8th October, 1918, a great reception was given to the troops by those of the inhabitants still alive, for no less than 120,000 of them are said to have died of starvation during the Turko-German occupation.

Here a token celebration of the Dasher was organized, and included a full rum issue.

Leaving Beirut on 22nd October, 1918, Ras el Lados camp, three miles north of Tripoli, was reached on the 30th: 287 miles had been covered in twenty-seven days. The Battalion had the proud distinction of having completed this fine performance with a very small percentage of casualties. The strength of the Battalion at the end of this march was 11 British officers, 15 Gurkha officers, and 635 Gurkha other ranks.

On 31st October, 1918, the armistice between the Allies and Turkey was concluded.

Between 19th September, 1918, and 26th October, 1918, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force had captured 75,000 prisoners and taken 360 guns.

For four months the Battalion remained in its camp near Tripoli—a pleasant spot overlooking the Mediterranean—and here all ranks enjoyed comparative rest after nearly three years of active service in regions not noted as health resorts. Keeping open the Tripoli-Homs



road was a task assigned during this period ; made difficult when driving rain swamped everything, and a lack of metalling for road repairs led to improvised patching.

The Battalion left Beirut by ship on 24th March, 1919, *en route* for Alexandria. The Corps Commander (now General A. G. Kemball, temporarily commanding) came on board to thank the Battalion for its good work, and to wish it God-speed.

This move meant finally leaving the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, with whom the Battalion had fought and marched for three years.

The Battalion arrived in Alexandria on 27th March, 1919, and went into a comfortable camp at Mustapha. Here once again they met their old friends of the Black Watch, but their stay was short-lived as orders came to proceed to Cairo on 3rd April, 1919. The pipers of the Black Watch played the Battalion to the station, and this time it really was good-bye to the gallant Highlanders, with whom the Battalion had forged so close a link. In token of this, the 1st Battalion for some time wore (at the express wish of the officers of the 2nd Black Watch) the Black Watch hackle. Later this was discontinued, as official recognition to its adoption by the 1/8th Gurkha Rifles was not given.

Although an advance party had left for India on 1st March, 1919, the departure of the Battalion was to be delayed for many months. This was due to the rioting which broke out in Egypt in violent form, and led to extensive measures for the repression of such lawlessness. This Egyptian behaviour was a curious form of gratitude to the British Army, which had saved their country from the Turk.

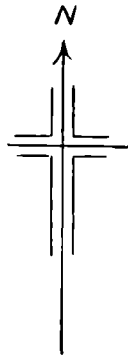
At Cairo the Battalion was encamped at Abbassieh, where the old British Cavalry Barracks were located. Whilst here, a mob of some two hundred Egyptians attacked four men of the Battalion when out walking, killing two and seriously injuring the two others.

During April and May, 1919 the Battalion was employed continuously in quelling disturbances and rounding up rioters. Several rioters were shot and many arrests made.

On 24th May, 1919, the Battalion left Cairo for Beni Suef, in Upper Egypt. The General Officer Commanding, Cairo District (Major-General Watson), saw them off at the station, and expressed his warm thanks for the way in which the Battalion had carried out its unpleasant duties.

About this time several awards to the Battalion for gallantry in the recent campaign in Palestine were announced, together with the award of thirteen Indian Meritorious Service Medals. Amongst the awards was a Brevet Lieutenant-Colonelcy to Major I. U. Battye, D.S.O. This caused great satisfaction in the Battalion, to which Colonel Battye had been attached from the Guides since July, 1917.

THE MIDDLE EAST



MEDITERRANEAN

- 1 Surafend S E A
- 2 Messudieh
- 3 Jenin
- 4 Tabsor
- 5 El Tireh



SINAI

0 50 100

SCALE OF MILES

He had commanded it with distinction in many actions, and left, from Beni Suef, on 1st July, 1919, for leave in the United Kingdom.

From Beni Suef, the Battalion, on 14th September, 1919, went to Tanta in Lower Egypt, where it remained until it embarked for India on 27th January, 1920.

Bombay was reached on 8th February, 1920, and Shillong on 19th February, 1920.

As happens after a big war, many men left on demobilization. It is always sad having to say good-bye to trusty comrades, and it was some consolation to know that many took back to Nepal quite substantial sums of money in accrued pay, to enable them to set up again in civil life.

Shortly after arriving at Shillong, the following message was received from the A.G. in India :

“On your return to India from Field Service overseas, His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief extends to you and all ranks under your command his heartiest welcome, and congratulates all on the gallantry and devotion with which they have maintained the high traditions of the Army.”

It is anticipating somewhat, but with the end of the First World War and the return to India of the 8th Gurkha Rifles it is appropriate to end this chapter by quoting an extract from *Gazette of India*, Nos. 193 and 194, of 20th February, 1920.

“His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve the grant to Regiments of the Indian Army of the following battle honours in recognition of their services in Campaigns during the Great War of 1914-18 :

#### 8TH GURKHA RIFLES

##### *The Great War*

‘LA BASSEE, 1914,’ ‘FESTUBERT, 1914-15,’  
‘GIVENCHY, 1914,’ ‘NEUVE CHAPELLE,’ ‘AUBERS,’  
‘FRANCE and FLANDERS, 1914-15,’ ‘EGYPT, 1915-16,’  
‘MEGIDDO,’ ‘SHARON,’ ‘PALESTINE, 1918,’  
‘TIGRIS, 1916,’ ‘KUT EL AMARA,’ ‘BAGHDAD,’  
‘MESOPOTAMIA, 1916-17.’

Campaign medals granted were: 1914 Star (with clasp), 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal. The 1914-15 Star was not granted to those entitled to 1914 Star (with clasp).

Owing to the very large number involved, no grant of clasps for the 1914-18 war was made, except, as mentioned, for the 1914 Star.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

(See Maps Nos. 1, 7 and 9)

[*This chapter tells of the 3rd Battalion in the First World War.*]

Raising of 3rd Battalion, June, 1917—Early days—Service in 3rd Afghan War—Change in Command—Arab Rebellion, 1920—Euphrates operations—Return to India—Disbanded, August, 1921.

DURING the Great War of 1914-1918 the strength of the Indian Army was greatly increased. This was done by raising entirely new regiments, and by adding extra battalions to existing regiments. The 8th Gurkha Rifles was ordered therefore to form a third battalion.

It is unfortunate that the records of the 3rd Battalion are not available, so it will be possible only to give a very bare outline of its activities in a life extending for four years. It is hoped, therefore, that former members of the 3/8th Gurkha Rifles will not be hurt at this short account of their doings. Battalions of the Regiment formed in times of emergency are 8th Gurkha Rifles just as much as the 1st and 2nd Battalions, and their histories are as valued as those of the parent battalions from which they sprang.

The 3rd Battalion was raised at Lansdowne in June, 1917, from a nucleus of Gurkha officers, N.C.Os. and men from the 1st and 2nd Battalions. These were few in number, so many new recruits had to be enlisted, and were forthcoming in large numbers. The composition of the battalion was four companies of Gurkhas, and one of Jaruas. The Gurkhas were enlisted from the usual sources, chiefly from Gorakhpore, together with a few who had taken service with certain Indian States, *e.g.*, Rajpipla. The Jaruas are to be found in considerable numbers in Assam, and have for many years been enlisted into the Assam Rifles. Many British officers who have served in the Assam Rifles will know these men, who, on joining the 8th Gurkha Rifles, no doubt felt they had a link with an old Assam Regiment which in days gone by had included in their ranks men of this class. These Jaruas, though not the equal of the Gurkha in the hills, are good soldiers, clean and well turned out.

After one month, in July, 1917, Lieutenant-Colonel J. Alban Wilson, D.S.O., lately commanding the 1st Battalion in Mesopotamia, assumed command.

Only those who have experienced it, know the trials and hard

work connected with bringing a newly formed battalion to a "fit for active service" state. Starting from "scratch," everything has to be improvised. Recruits pour in, and the few old hands must cope with these, as well as make N.C.Os. and train specialists from comparative youngsters. Keeness is allied to youth. This, coupled with the whole-hearted endeavours of the nucleus of British officers, Gurkha officers, and Gurkha other ranks, brought a battalion, whose strength at one time amounted to 1,400, to such a pitch of efficiency that within ten months it was considered fit to proceed on service to the North-West Frontier.

Posted to Kohat District, the 3rd Battalion in April, 1918, took over Fort Lockhart, Gulistan and Hangu, in the Samana area. It served in these stations during the Third Afghan War in 1919.

On 31st May, 1918, Lieutenant-Colonel D. H. R. Giffard succeeded to the command of the Battalion in place of Lieutenant-Colonel A. Wilson, who retired.

On the Samana the usual Frontier duties of road protection, holding picquets, and escorting convoys were carried out.

During the siege of Thal, communication was maintained by heliograph and lamp signalling between the beleaguered garrison and Kohat District through the 3rd Battalion post at Fort Lockhart.

The war with Afghanistan increased the scope of duties which the 3rd Battalion carried out on the North-West Frontier during this time.

The Indian General Service Medal, with clasp "Afghanistan 1919," was awarded to those eligible in the 3rd Battalion for service in this campaign.

In August, 1920, the Battalion received orders to proceed to Abbottabad for disbandment. Within a week, however, these orders were cancelled. Trouble had broken out in Mesopotamia, and the Arab rebellion, as it was named, had assumed alarming proportions. The 3rd Battalion, therefore, was ordered to mobilize at Kakul (Abbottabad), for service in Mesopotamia.

The Battalion embarked at Karachi in September, 1920, and disembarked at Basra. It proceeded to Nasiriya on the Euphrates, to join the Brigade Group (under Brigadier-General Cunningham), being formed for the relief of Samawa. This latter place was some seventy miles up-river from Nasiriya, and was besieged by the Arabs.

In a previous chapter a description of Mesopotamia has been given. The same terrain confronted the men of the 3rd Battalion.

A few general remarks as to the Arab rebellion of 1920 will not be out of place here.

Following the conclusion of the First World War, mandates were given in 1920, for the governing of Iraq and Palestine to the British,

and Syria to the French. In the eyes of the Arabs, this decision was not only the denial of independence and unity, but a breach of faith made more hateful as the violation of a compact sealed in blood. Undoubtedly specific promises had been made by the Allies to the Arabs, and it was on the strength of those promises that the Arabs had come into the war and made their contribution and their sacrifice.

Serious outbreaks took place in Syria, Palestine and Iraq in 1920 (the year of catastrophe, as the Arabs named it) as a protest at the denial of the promised independence. In Iraq, the movement was not an anti-British movement, in the sense that it was inspired by mere hostility to Great Britain, but an insurgence against the denial of independence, and the arbitrary imposition of the mandatory system. Instead of enjoying Arab rule with a measure of British assistance, the people found themselves subjected to British rule with nominal Arab assistance. It was encouraged, in particular, by the Iraqi branch of a pre-war secret society of Arab officers in the Ottoman Army. The Committee of this Society issued a proclamation denouncing the mandate, and calling upon the people of Iraq to resist the dictation of the Allied Powers by force.

In June, 1920, the British Government had authorized the calling of a General Elective Assembly for the purpose of drawing up an organic law for Iraq. This came too late to have any pacifying effect.

The rebellion lasted from July to October, 1920, and early success brought religious leaders to its aid, preaching Jihad (Holy war). At one time, except for the cities of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul, the rebels were master everywhere. Gradually, however, the British forces in Iraq, thanks to the opportune arrival of reinforcements—of which 3/8th Gurkhas formed part—from India, asserted themselves, struck the enemy a series of decisive blows, and broke the back of the rebellion.

The appointment of Sir Percy Cox as High Commissioner started developments which, in course of time, led to the abolition of the mandate, and the grant to Iraq of its political independence.

The operations to relieve Samawa took place along the banks of the Euphrates. They were soon successfully accomplished. After the relief of Samawa, the Baghdad railway line was reconstructed, and was guarded by means of small block-houses. Life for their garrisons was dull indeed. A view of the next block-house to right and left, plus the desert horizon, was not calculated to arouse enthusiasm. The sight of numerous sand-grouse which abound in those parts was too much on one occasion for a Gurkha sentry in a block-house. He let fly with his service rifle at a pack of grouse approaching his post. They dipped, as is their wont, and many hit the barbed wire, with the result that fifteen dead birds were picked up by the garrison,

a welcome addition to the daily ration. Fifteen sand-grouse with one rifle bullet. Needless to say, the practice was discouraged, or ammunition expenditure in the 3rd Battalion would have been considerable!

The 3rd Battalion remained in the vicinity of Samawa until February, 1921, when it was moved back to Basra. In addition to the block-house duties, it took part in the rounding-up operations of which this campaign largely consisted.

Orders were given to return to India, and in April, 1921, the Battalion embarked for Karachi.

For these operations the General Service Medal, with clasp "Iraq 1920," was awarded. This medal was a newly authorized one, not to be confused with the Indian General Service Medal. Later, it was earned for service in Palestine in the pre-1939 period.

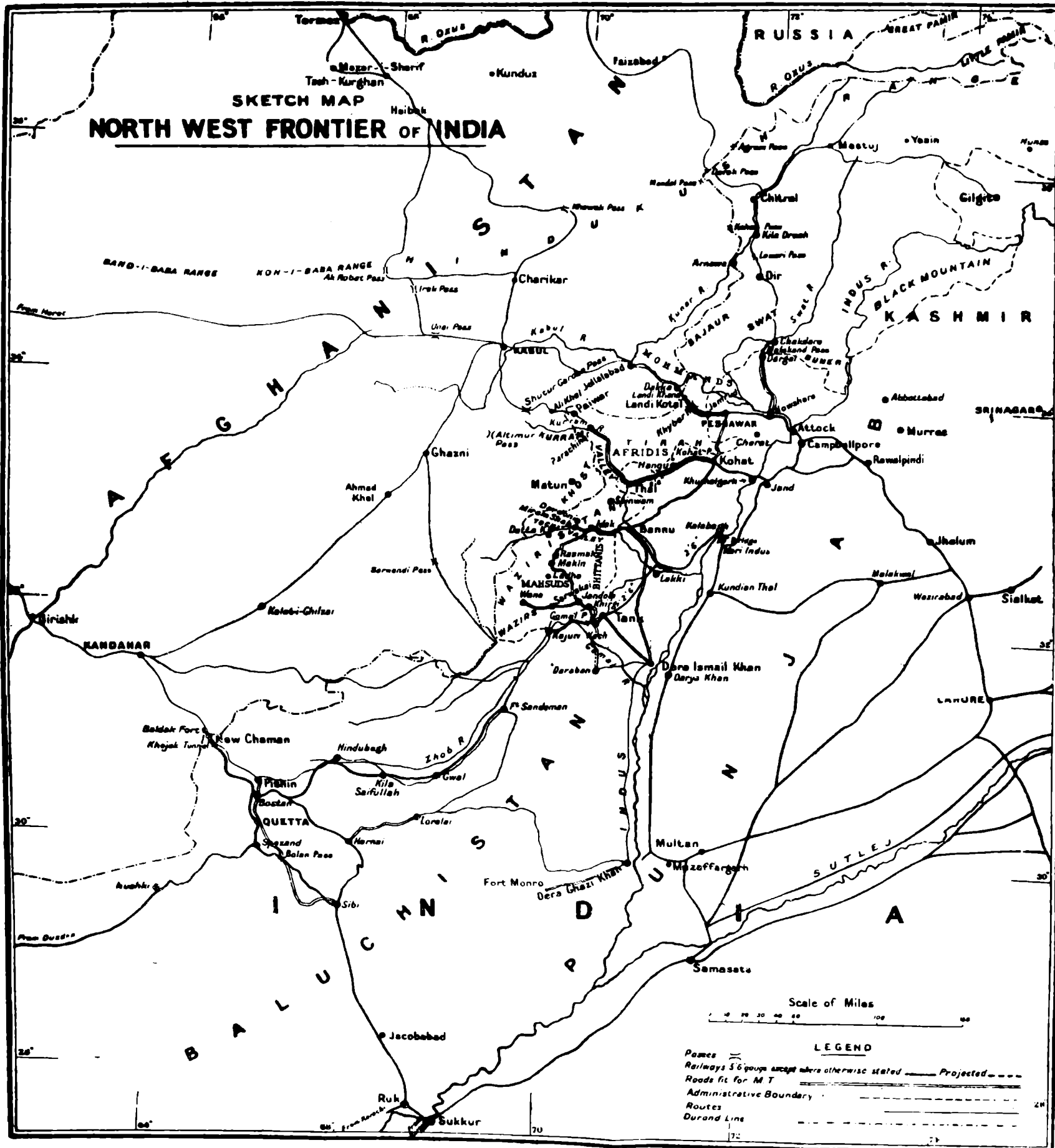
With the 1st Battalion on the Tigris in 1916-17, and the 3rd Battalion on the Euphrates in 1919-20, the 8th Gurkha Rifles joined those units with the distinction of having fought on those two rivers of great historical interest.

Proceeding to Dehra Dun on arrival in India, orders were received for the disbandment of the 3rd Battalion, and this was finally completed in August, 1921.

In its four years of not uneventful life, the 3rd Battalion had worthily maintained the high traditions of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, had helped in the gaining of a new battle honour, "Afghanistan, 1919," and in adding "Iraq Rebellion, 1920" to the Regiment's roll of campaigns.







[Reprinted from "Imperial Military Geography" by Major D. H. Cole, by permission of Messrs. Sefton Praed & Co., Ltd.]

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

(See Maps Nos. 1 and 9)

*[To maintain continuity in the narrative of the 1st Battalion's activities on active service in Mesopotamia and Palestine, the History of the 2nd Battalion was suspended for a period; now a return is made, and the present chapter will be devoted, excepting for one very short paragraph, to the doings of this Battalion only.]*

Lansdowne, 1916-7—Join 16th (Indian) Division—Various moves—One company sent to 51st Sikhs (Frontier Force) in Mesopotamia—Third Afghan War—Move to Ali Masjid—Hot work by rear-guard—Operations from Ali Masjid—Orange Patch Ridge—Lieutenant T. I. Stevenson wins M.C.—Heat and sickness—1st Battalion in Shillong and Malakand—Visit of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales—Moplah Rebellion—Cause of rebellion—Malabar—Communications—Tactics employed—2nd Battalion arrives—First contact with rebels—A sharp skirmish—Concentrated drive by Malabar force—"D" Company at Cheruvadi—Pandikaad—"C" Company thanked by Commander-in-Chief—Company posts—Rebels surrender in large numbers—Civil resume control—2nd Battalion leave Moplah country—Furnishes Guards for H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, January-February, 1922.

FOR some nine months the Battalion remained at Lansdowne, continuing their reorganization ; and training the many young soldiers who had taken the place of the casualties sustained in France.

Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. Firth, D.S.O., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 30th April, 1916.

Early in 1917 the Battalion again left Lansdowne to join the newly formed 16th (Indian) Division, which was being concentrated at Burhan (near Rawalpindi), as a reserve division for the defence of the North-West Frontier.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Wall, O.B.E., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 30th July, 1918.

Up to March, 1919, various moves were made, battalion and brigade training carried out, and valuable instruction in mountain warfare assimilated.

During 1917 one complete company of the Battalion went to Mesopotamia as a reinforcement to the 51st Sikhs (Frontier Force) (now 1st Battalion of 12th Frontier Force Regiment), with which battalion it served with great distinction for six months. This company then proceeded to Palestine to join our own 1st Battalion.

In April, 1919, the Battalion had moved into camp near Murree. On 6th May, orders were received to move at once to Peshawar, owing to the outbreak of hostilities with Afghanistan. By road and

rail the Battalion reached Peshawar. After two days in Peshawar, the Battalion proceeded to Ali Masjid in the Khyber. From Jamrud the march commenced, together with a half-battalion of 2/23rd Sikh Pioneers, and a large supply convoy of camels. From Jamrud, road protection was to be carried out by a Corps of local militia. This Corps, however, mutinied and became hostile ; in consequence, the Battalion had to fight its way to Ali Masjid, two companies and the rear-guard being heavily engaged, and not reaching the Fort until the late evening.

At Ali Masjid the Battalion remained for several months, being joined by Headquarters, 6th Infantry Brigade, a battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment and the 2/33rd Punjabis. Road protection was the main occupation. For several days on first arriving there was considerable fighting in order to occupy the ground commanding the road. The scene of most of this fighting was some high ground near Shagai Post named "Orange Patch Ridge." In one of these affrays Lieutenant T. I. Stevenson, 2/8th Gurkha Rifles, was awarded the M.C. for gallantry in outwitting and destroying tribesmen, who had prepared an ambush.

The heat in the Khyber in the summer of 1919 was intense. Very little rest was possible to weary men in bivouac tents in the rocky gorge of Ali Masjid. Sickness was rife. Malaria, sand-fly fever and heat stroke reduced the number of men available for duty. An epidemic of cholera carried off many of the 6th Brigade, but thanks to good water discipline in the Battalion, the loss amounted to only one private follower. Three riflemen of the Battalion who contracted the disease recovered.

A short spell at Landi Kotal followed during the winter 1919-20, and the Battalion returned to Ali Masjid in March, 1920.

As the situation in the Khyber was now quiet, the Battalion was ordered to Lahore in July, 1920.

The I.G.S.M. Medal with clasp "Afghanistan 1919" was granted, and subsequently, a battle honour "Afghanistan, 1919" was awarded to units engaged.

In August, 1920, the Battalion returned to Lansdowne.

Leaving the 2nd Battalion for a while, after its activities in the Third Afghan War, we return to our 1st Battalion in Shillong.

Less than six months after its return to India, the Battalion was ordered to Malakand on the North-West Frontier. This was its first experience of service on the North-West Frontier as a battalion, though many officers and men had been there, so conditions were known to the majority.

No active operations occurred, but an important event took place in the visit of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII)

to the Battalion on 8th March, 1922. As a memento of the occasion, the Prince presented an autographed photograph of himself in a silver frame to the Battalion. Later in the year, His Royal Highness presented a similar gift to the 2nd Battalion in Delhi. It may not be unique, but is certainly worthy of record that both battalions of a regiment should be so honoured by the heir to the throne.

Lieutenant-Colonel D. W. Maxwell was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 1st February, 1921.

In October, 1921, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to Calicut to join a punitive expedition, for in August, 1921, a rebellion of the Moplahs, a Mohammedan faction, had broken out in Southern India. The Moplahs are a mixed race with much Arab blood in them. They had for years committed outrages, urged on by fanatics promising great rewards to any man killing a *kaffir* ("unbeliever") or the servant of a *kaffir*. Forcible conversion of Hindus, often of the lowest caste, had been fully indulged in. Such a community was fertile ground in which agitators could work, and the outbreak of 1921 is certainly due to the influence of the Khilafat and non-co-operation movements of that time. Much could be written on this subject, but probably enough has been said as to the cause of the rebellion.

The Moplahs inhabit Malabar, a territory on the west coast of south India. It varies from a sandy strip stretching along the coast, then inland it ascends by range after range of low red hills, with paddy flats fringed with coconut gardens intervening. On the eastern boundary the land becomes mountainous, reaching an average height of 5,000 feet. Long spurs, deep ravines and thick jungle mark the rise of these ghats. The Moplahs predominate in this latter type of country which includes the district of Ernad. Rainfall is very heavy and vegetable growth extremely luxuriant. Communications are bad, consisting generally of narrow winding paths with a limited number of cart roads.

Operations in the Moplah rebellion followed no set, up-to-date, military plan. In such a country, and against guerillas, it was found that "drives" to pen the enemy into certain areas by concerted moves did not have the result hoped for. A second method, of trying to surround the enemy leaders with small mobile columns based on posts scattered throughout the disaffected area, was found to be of little use. Information was generally unreliable, and the news of our movements soon reached the insurgents through the many seemingly harmless individuals, secretly in sympathy with the rising.

Finally, definite areas were allotted to different battalions, so as to cover the whole of the affected area. This was probably the most successful of the methods tried, and, apart from the capture and

killing of insurgents, tended to restore confidence in the non-rebel population, though during the course of the rebellion, they did very little to assist in restoring order.

A detailed account of the action of small bodies of troops is impossible, and the history of the operations carried out by the 2nd Battalion will be confined to any large action, and in general terms.

On 16th October, 1921, the Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Wall, O.B.E., arrived at Tirur, after seven days' journey from Lansdowne and Kotdwara (rail-head), and a visit to the seaside enabled the troops to enjoy a sea bath. The sea was a new element to many, and the failure of the animals to appreciate a drink in the briny caused the Transport Havildar much concern.

The Battalion was soon in action. Together with companies of the Dorsetshire Regiment and armoured cars, a drive towards Majeri commenced on 18th October, 1921.

In dense jungle the Moplahs had arranged an ambush for the column. However, this was frustrated by the flankers of the leading company ("D").

Two platoons of "C" Company, storming a hill on which the rebels had posted themselves, got into them with bayonet and kukri, and the Moplahs fled, leaving fifty dead on the hill. Probably many more were accounted for by rapid fire as they fled. It was found that the Moplahs were comparatively well armed with a variety of weapons, viz., .303 rifles, Martinis, double-barrelled shot guns, muzzle-loaders and knives of all kinds.

On 2nd November, 1921, the Battalion (less "C" Company and the two machine guns) were ordered to Tirur to take part in an extensive drive in co-operation with the rest of the Malabar Force.

"C" Company and the machine guns under Captain A. W. Duncan were left at the village of Pandikaad.

The drive through Ernad commenced on 11th November, 1921.

On 12th November, "D" Company, 2/8th, encountered severe opposition from a body of Moplahs holding a mosque at Cheruvadi. The rebels were dealt with, 56 being killed. The fighting was severe, and casualties sustained by the Battalion were: killed, Jemadar Laising Rana; one British officer (Captain L. F. Mercer) and 13 Gurkha other ranks wounded.

The drive continued until 26th November, 1921. A daily advance of about four miles testifies to the difficult nature of the country. Some 233 Moplahs in all were killed, and a number of arms taken.

Meanwhile, at Pandikaad on 14th November, 1921, stirring events took place. Before dawn on that day a force of Moplahs, estimated at 2,000, attacked "C" Company's post. By sheer weight of numbers, some sixty of the rebels succeeded in breaking through the perimeter

defences at one point. Roused from their sleep by this sudden onslaught, the men of "C" Company, with the willing help of bhists and cooks, took on the fanatical Moplahs with kukri and sword-bayonets against the sword and dagger, disposing of those who had gained an entrance. The two machine guns did great execution on the masses of rebels outside the perimeter. The enemy fled, leaving 234 dead on the ground. Many more were reported to have died of wounds during the following few days. Ten guns and 197 swords were picked up inside or near the perimeter walls. Our losses were : Died of wounds, Captain A. E. Averill ; killed, 3 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 2 Gurkha officers, 32 Gurkha other ranks and 2 followers.

Captain A. W. Duncan was awarded the D.S.O. and Naik Das-ratchand Thakur the I.O.M.

The following telegram was received by the G.O.C., Malabar Force, from His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief in India (Lord Rawlinson) :

"Will you please convey to the 2/8th Gurkhas my congratulations and warm thanks for their spirited and successful defence of Pandi-kaad Post. It was well and bravely done."

To this was added by Major-General Burnett-Stuart, commanding Madras District, "And add my own humble but no less sincere congratulations on all their splendid work."

After the concerted "drive" related above was completed the Battalion was divided up into the area "system." This consisted of company posts, distant some ten miles from each other, platoons being sent out to hunt the rebels within each company's area. Several clashes occurred, many casualties being inflicted on the Moplahs. A few casualties were incurred by our Battalion.

Large numbers of the rebels surrendered after each clash, and hundreds of guns and swords were voluntarily handed over to the various company posts, with request for pardon for the owners' participation in the rebellion.

The chief leader of this insurrection gave himself up to "C" Company early in January, 1922.

The back of the rebellion was now broken, and the civil authorities reported that the situation was now sufficiently in hand for them to resume control.

Orders were therefore given for the 2nd Battalion to entrain at Tirur on 20th January, 1922, for Kotdwara.

Thus ended with credit to the Regiment yet another campaign in which the 8th have taken part.

For the Moplah operations the Indian General Service Medal and/or clasp was issued.

On arrival at Kotdwara (railhead for Lansdowne) the 2nd Battalion was ordered to Delhi to furnish guards for H.R.H. The Prince of Wales. A bit of a shock to a battalion in field service clothing. However, the 8th rose to the occasion. In eight days every man was fitted out with new khaki drill, and full-dress equipment brought from Lansdowne. Guards of Honour, sentries on the outer cordon, four kukri sentries in the Royal Pavilion occupied by His Royal Highness kept the Battalion very busy. Two Gurkha officers were decorated by the Prince, and his photograph presented as narrated above.

On 25th February, 1922, the Battalion returned to Lansdowne, moving in mid-October the same year to Bareilly for training with 18th Infantry Brigade.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

(See Maps Nos. 1, 2 and 9)

1st Battalion to Shillong—1st Battalion Centenary Celebrations—Waziristan, 1923-4—2nd Battalion thanked by G.O.C.—On the Samana—Return to Shillong—March through East Bengal and Lower Assam—1st Battalion to Chaman—Gurkha reliefs—Reservists—Major-General Coleridge appointed Colonel of the 8th Gurkha Rifles—Formation of Training Companies—Polo—2nd Battalion to Fort Sandeman—Snowbound in Quetta—Pathan and his country—Chaman visits by the Comander-in-Chief and Viceroy—King Amanullah of Afghanistan—Gurkha War Memorial—1st and 2nd Battalions to Shillong—First meeting as Battalions of same Regiment—Inspection by General Coleridge—Duties in aid of Civil Power, Calcutta—Chittagong—His Highness the Prime Minister of Nepal—H.M.S. *Effingham*—2nd Battalion in Chittagong—Good work of 2nd Battalion—Shillong inspections—1st Battalion at Fort Sandeman—2nd Battalion at Chaman—Both Battalions in Quetta—2nd Battalion Centenary—His Highness the Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Nepal, appointed Honorary Colonel of Gurkha Regiments—Quetta earthquake—1st Battalion to Shillong—2nd Battalion to Loralai—2nd Battalion to Wana—Doings at Wana—1st Battalion to Quetta—H.M.S. *Gurkha*—1st Battalion to Razmak—Razmak operations—Naik Birtasing Gurung—Visits by General Sir John Coleridge—8th Gurkha Rifles campaigns, 1918-1939—Outbreak of the Second World War.

IN Shillong, the 1st Battalion held its centenary celebrations on 18th February, 1924. Many former Gurkha officers of the Regiment were present, chief of whom must be mentioned Captain Kalu Thapa, Sirdar Bahadur, well known to a past generation of the 8th. After a long and honourable career in the 1st Battalion, he settled down on retirement in Shillong. It was certainly a link with the past to talk to this grand old soldier, who had joined the 44th in 1858.

Lieutenant-Colonel D. H. R. Giffard was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 30th July, 1922.

Whilst at Bareilly, the 2nd Battalion received orders to move to Waziristan to join the Razmak Field Force. At Bannu (in January, 1923) the Battalion joined the 5th Infantry Brigade and marched to Thal in Tochi.

Together with the 1/5th Gurkha Rifles, the Battalion, Headquarters at Razani, were engaged in road protection duties. Daily picqueting, and occasional skirmishing with local tribesmen, kept all ranks busy.

In November, 1923, the new road to Razmak being completed, the 2nd Battalion moved to the 9th Brigade to undertake similar duties



on the road under construction from Jandola to Wana. This road was completed to Splitoi (where 2/8th was camped) by end of March, 1924, and the Battalion was withdrawn from Waziristan to the Kohat District. On leaving, the Battalion received a letter from Major-General T. G. Matheson, General Officer Commanding, Waziristan District, in which he complimented the Battalion on its fine spirit, and, quoting his own words, "I wish to congratulate you on the high state of efficiency you have attained, and on the excellent turn-out of all ranks, in which you have set a fine example to all."

During its stay in the Kohat District, the 2nd Battalion was stationed at Thal in Kurram, Parachinar on the Samana, and Hangu, relieving the 1/5th Gurkha Rifles in the latter places.

Moves in the Kohat District included the crossing of twenty-four rivers by ford or ferry.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. L. M. Molesworth, C.I.E., was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 1st February, 1925.

An annual occurrence which affected the Regiment was the camp at Jullundur for the training of all reservists of the Gurkha Brigade. This was a very sound move. It enabled men to be brought up to date in their training, and gave the opportunity for weeding out where necessary. British officers, Gurkha officers, and Gurkha other ranks from all Gurkha regiments formed the training staff. This, too, was of importance in bringing the various regiments together, and gave a chance of seeing "how the other fellow did things."

On 18th January, 1926, the 2nd Battalion left the North-West Frontier for Shillong. Not by the usual route, though: this time the flag was to be shown in Eastern Bengal and Lower Assam. The march, covering 418 miles, commenced at Katihar in Eastern Bengal. Shillong was reached on 21st March after an absence of twenty-one years. Quite unused to the presence of any troops in their midst, the locals, at first, were extremely shy of appearing. Possibly guilty consciences were at work. Soon they realized our peaceful intentions and became very friendly. Admiring audiences would sit round until dark watching camp activities. The larger villages arranged public welcomes and provided entertainment.

Whilst the 2nd Battalion was marching along the Assam trunk road, the 1st had moved to the Frontier, to Chaman in Baluchistan, arriving there on 21st February, 1926.

About this time a rearrangement of Gurkha reliefs had been decided upon. This had the effect of bringing the 8th into a cycle with the 7th and 10th Gurkha Rifles, which included the stations of Shillong, Quetta, Chaman, Loralai, Fort Sandeman, and for some twelve years it was these places in which the Regiment found itself doing duty.

On 27th February, 1926, Major-General J. F. S. D. Coleridge, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., was appointed Colonel of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, an appointment which he held until April, 1949.

On 1st June, 1926, an important innovation took place, in the formation of a training company in each Gurkha battalion. In Indian battalions a system was started in 1920, in which training of recruits was carried out by one battalion of a regiment, known as the Training Battalion. Each active battalion had one affiliated company in the training battalion. Thus the active battalions were relieved of the responsibility of reception and early training of recruits, a rather similar procedure to that obtaining in the United Kingdom, where regimental depots performed this function.

Until 1st June, 1926, in the Gurkha Brigade the reception and training of recruits was done by the active battalion. It was the adjutant's job—not a satisfactory arrangement. The adjutant, with his ordinary duties to perform, plus absences at training camps, etc., could not devote the time necessary to the efficient carrying out of this most important task. Under the new scheme a company (known as "T" Company) was responsible for recruit reception and training. The ideal station for our "T" Companies was, of course, Shillong, where training was possible throughout the day in all seasons. This location at Shillong was maintained as far as possible up to, and even after, the outbreak of the 1939-1945 war, but unavoidable changes did take place, and the "T" Companies of 1st and 2nd Battalions were located occasionally in Quetta, Chaman and Dehra Dun.

On 13th January, 1928, the Gurkha War Memorial was unveiled with great ceremony at Gorakhpore by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief (Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood). Major-General Coleridge and Lieutenant-Colonel Scoones were in attendance on His Excellency. This very beautifully executed statue stands at a spot in the Recruiting Depot, where it has been seen by thousands of Gurkhas, and will be seen by many more, a fitting testimony to the gallant soldiers of the Gurkha Brigade who fell in many lands.

At the unveiling the Regiment was represented by a party of 1 British officer, 1 Gurkha officer, and 10 Gurkha other ranks from each battalion, together with the pipes and bugles of the 1st Battalion. Some five years later, when the 2nd Battalion was *en route* to Chaman, arrangements were made for a halt at Gorakhpore. An impressive ceremony, followed by a march past, was held. Possibly this is the only occasion on which a complete battalion of the Gurkha Brigade had the opportunity to do honour to its fallen comrades.

During the stay of the 2nd Battalion in Shillong in 1927, Lieutenant-Colonel D. H. R. Giffard, commanding, took two polo teams to compete in an Assam tournament. Eight British officers, of a total

of eleven present, playing from one battalion must have been a rare occurrence in an Indian Army infantry unit.

Lieutenant-Colonel C. D. Roe, D.S.O., O.B.E., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion on 29th April, 1927.

The 2nd Battalion remained at Shillong until February, 1928, when it followed the 1st Battalion to Baluchistan, to Fort Sandeman in the Zhob.

On arriving on 8th March, 1928, at the detraining station, Khanai, two stations from Quetta on the Harnai section, the countryside was deep in snow. Telegrams flew around, and finally the Battalion was ordered into Quetta, where it remained for nine days waiting for the snows to melt on the passes at Spera Ragha.

Some North-West Frontier districts are distinctly grim, but one or two days' marches between Quetta and Loralai were through the most god-forsaken regions possible to imagine. However, love of country is strong, and one day a Pathan was met striding along. He spoke Urdu, and said he knew Calcutta and Bombay well; then, with a sweep of his arm embracing the abomination of desolation (to us), said: "Bombay, Calcutta Kya Hai? Yih Hamara Kashmir." ("What are Bombay and Calcutta—this is my Paradise.")

Visits to the 1st Battalion station at Chaman by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief (Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood) and His Excellency the Viceroy (Lord Irwin) in April, 1927, were followed in December of the same year by the arrival there from Kabul of King Amanullah of Afghanistan. He passed through at the outset of his European tour, which at the time caused much newspaper comment, as a precedent for an Afghan ruler.

On 17th February, 1928, the 1st Battalion left Chaman, arriving at Shillong on 2nd March, having marched from Gauhati by jungle paths.

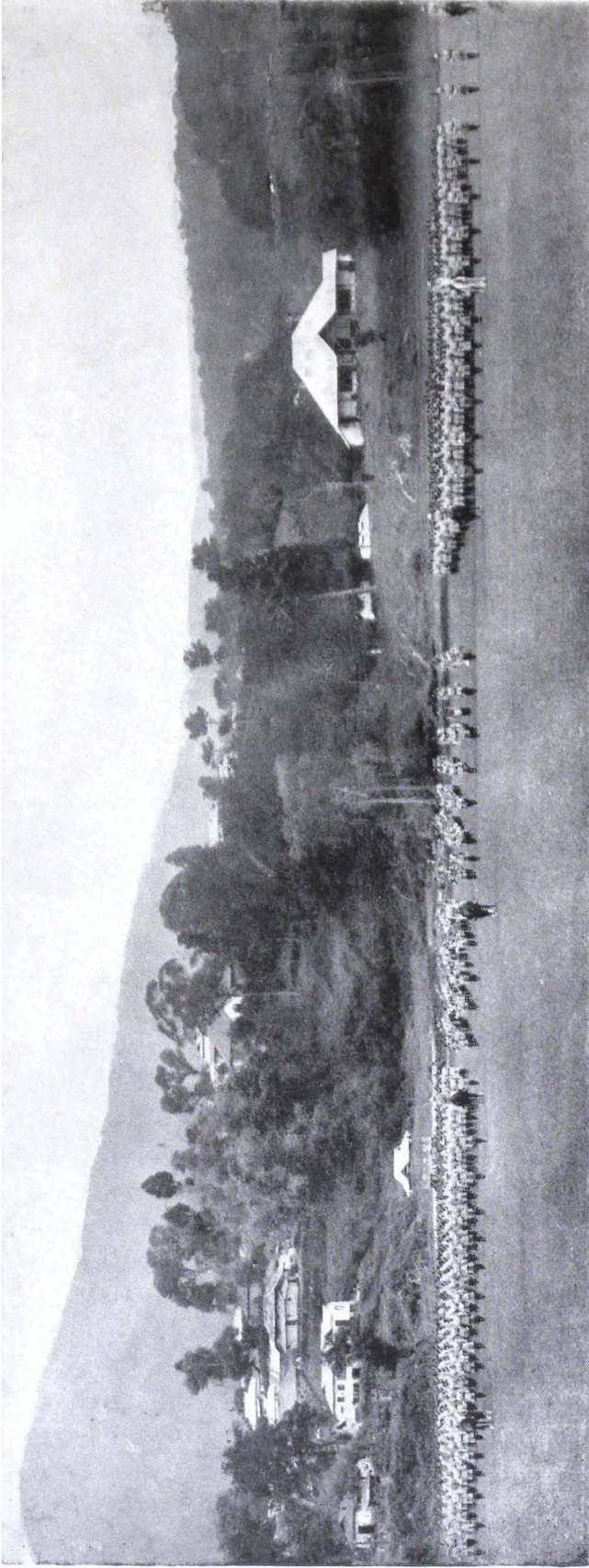
Lieutenant-Colonel G. C. B. Buckland, D.S.O., M.C., was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 1st February, 1929.

The 2nd Battalion left Fort Sandeman in April, 1929, for Shillong. The stay in the Zhob had been uneventful. Protection of road convoys, garrisoning of the outposts, and a couple of mobile columns against small lashkars varied the ordinary training.

An event took place during the stay of the 2nd Battalion which was to make for the comfort of the Fort Sandeman garrison. This was the completion of the narrow-gauge railway along the Upper Zhob from Hindubagh. It put an end to the long absences of men on road convoy duty, and the unreliable system of transportation by civilian-run lorries of furlough parties and details travelling on courses, etc.

The arrival in Shillong on 20th April, 1929, of the 2nd Battalion is an important event in the history of the Regiment, as being the first





**8th Gurkha Rifles, Shillong, 1929**

meeting of 1/8th and 2/8th as Battalions of the same Regiment. Heavy rain, unfortunately, interfered. The 1st Battalion, spick and span as usual, in review order, awaited the 2nd Battalion marching up in field service order. Salutes were exchanged, and British officers and Gurkha officers were introduced to each other. Very wet indeed, all ranks were soon dismissed to drink each other's health in a little something to keep out the cold.

On 13th June, 1929, the 8th Gurkha Rifles were inspected by their Colonel. This was the first time the two Battalions had ever paraded together as a Regiment. The event was made an occasion for mustering as many pensioned Gurkha officers as possible, and a fairly good assembly of old 8th veterans gathered to see the parade and afterwards partake of refreshments. Many happy memories were aroused.

Duties in aid of civil power were to keep both Battalions occupied at intervals for some two and a half years from May, 1930. In that month the 1st Battalion received orders to proceed immediately to Calcutta. Having to arrange for lorries for the Shillong-Pandu ghat section, ferries across the river, and to make up a special train at Amingaon from whatever rolling stock was available, it says much for the efficient extemporizing by all concerned that the Battalion arrived in Calcutta only ten hours after the "mail" which left Shillong at the same time.

Accommodated in Fort William, Calcutta, the 1st Battalion was held in readiness for any trouble, one company being sent to Budge Budge to guard the oil tanks. The Battalion returned to Shillong after fourteen days.

During its stay in Calcutta, the 1st Battalion had the pleasure of visiting H.M.S. *Effingham*, and playing football against the ship's team. This friendly connection was repeated later in Chittagong, when the 2nd Battalion had similar opportunities of meeting this most efficient cruiser of the Royal Navy. No doubt a young officer of *Effingham*, whose father was in the 4th Gurkha Rifles, was able to regale his mess-mates with tales of the "little men."

On the subject of football, it may here be mentioned that both our battalions maintained a very high standard, and "8th Gurkha Rifles" figures as winners on both the Gurkha Brigade and Nepal Cups.

Inspections of both Battalions in Shillong by the G.O.C., Presidency and Assam District, about this time are worthy of mention. "No route march with a N.A.A.F.I. at every halt," was how the General put it. All were at about one hour's notice and were carried out A to Z, wet or fine; everyone slept in field service order! Cooks cooked one meal in advance to ensure the haversack ration was there, in case of emergency, and "surprises" were successfully dealt with.

A "mobile column" test was chosen by the same General later. A

similar procedure was followed as before—one hour's notice. This time, however, continuous operations, and the covering of over thirty miles in twenty-four hours by the 2nd Battalion, earned a very generous tribute. This tribute was repeated, in a pleasing manner, by the receipt of a telegram from the General Officer Commanding at the railway station where the 2nd Battalion left his district on their way to Chaman, to join the 5th Infantry Brigade.

Both Battalions were employed on duties in connection with the visit to Shillong of His Excellency The Viceroy in January, 1931.

Lieutenant-Colonel H. J. Huxford, O.B.E., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 29th April, 1931.

In April, 1931, the 1st Battalion, less two companies, proceeded to Chittagong, which was the centre of the trouble that was to overtake Eastern Bengal for the next two or three years. Remaining for three weeks, the Battalion earned the thanks of the Government of Bengal for its good work.

In November, 1931, the 1st Battalion once again moved to Calcutta to relieve the 1/5th Mahratta Light Infantry, ordered to Chittagong. Here in Calcutta it was stationed until March, 1932, when it moved to Fort Sandeman.

Visits to Calcutta by His Excellency the Viceroy (Lord Willingdon), His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief (Field-Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode), and His Highness the Prime Minister of Nepal meant much ceremonial, guards of honour, etc. Meeting with His Highness Sir Bhim Shumshere Jung, Prime Minister of Nepal, was a great occasion for a Gurkha battalion, and the opportunity was taken to make the most of it. His Highness entertained the British officers and Gurkha officers, and the Battalion gave an entertainment in his honour on 2nd January, 1932. At the end of their entertainment His Highness made a very generous gift for the benefit of the men of the Battalion.

To continue on the subject of Chittagong. A force known as "Chitforce" was formed in November, 1931, for the suppression of revolutionary activity in the Chittagong area, and the apprehension of certain leaders of the anarchist movement believed to be at large there. "A" and "C" Companies, 2nd Battalion, went from Shillong to join Chitforce in November, 1931, and were followed, in March, 1932, by the remainder of the Battalion.

A period of real hard work followed. Duties in aid of civil power are not popular with soldiers. Long marches in great heat, followed by searches, were the almost daily lot of all ranks. Mostly these were barren in their results. Information that could be depended upon was rarely forthcoming. It is difficult to keep secret the approach to a village area, studded with trees and sizeable ponds, the only paths

being probably along bunds. To surround completely some of these areas would have taken a brigade. However, the 2nd Battalion kept "the enemy" on the run, and drove the absconders into less secure hiding places. Several arrests of minor leaders were made. In June a small search party of the 2nd Battalion made contact with a party of the revolutionaries hiding in an isolated house. Captain E. Cameron of the 2nd Battalion, who was in command of our party, while trying to gain entrance to the upper storey of the house by an outside stairway, was shot at and, sad to relate, killed, on which Havildar Tilbir Rana took charge of the party and succeeded in killing the revolutionaries, who included one Nirmal Sen, the leader of the Bengal anarchist "army," for whose apprehension a reward of Rs5,000 had been offered by the Government of India. The Havildar received a bar to his Indian Order of Merit, and two riflemen received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

During this time in the Chittagong area, on an average, one hundred raids or searches would be carried out during a month. On one occasion "A" Company, to complete the surrounding of a suspected village, crossed the Kanarfuli river on the "open" railway bridge in the dark, a hair-raising experience.

In December, 1932, the 2nd Battalion left Chittagong to return to Shillong to prepare for their move to Chaman, in Baluchistan.

On leaving Chittagong the 2nd Battalion received the following from the Brigadier, Eastern Bengal Brigade: "I have held (and shall continue to hold) your Battalion up to the other battalions in the Brigade as an example of how a really good battalion can continue to carry out an arduous, and in many respects disagreeable, duty day after day and night after night cheerfully and energetically. The Battalion has done wonderful work in Bengal."

Life at Fort Sandeman for the 1st Battalion, and for the 2nd Battalion at Chaman, followed the usual Frontier pattern. A mobile column sortie from Fort Sandeman took the 1st Battalion out shortly after its arrival there.

Lieutenant-Colonel H. R. Harington was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 23rd October, 1932.

In Chaman, the usual training, and inter-brigade manœuvres with the Quetta garrison, occupied the 2nd Battalion. The one-company detachment at Shelabagh, at the Quetta end of the famous Khojak tunnel, was very popular. It was shared one month at a time with the 5/11th Sikhs, our Chaman neighbours, and furnished a change to a cool climate, appreciated by the men, and the families of the company lucky to be sent there.

The Gurkha as "savage" enemy was one activity experienced near Pishin. The 2nd Battalion "lashkar" in improvised fancy dress was a



sight. When the Subadar-Major wished to disguise the Commanding Officer with a beard, however, the kind thought was negated, as the "beard" was the hairy portion of a very dead goat ! It was not all amusing though. Plenty of hard marching and hard living was the lot of the "savages" in their "war" with a brigade of all arms, with aircraft to help. The year 1934 found both Battalions in Quetta, the 1st being in the 5th and the 2nd in the 4th Infantry Brigades.

On 9th March, 1934, His Highness Honorary Lieutenant-General Sir Joodha Shumshere Jung, Bahadur Rana, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal, was appointed Honorary Colonel of all regiments in the Gurkha Brigade. This afforded very great satisfaction to all ranks of our Gurkha battalions.

A year later His Highness visited Delhi as the guest of His Majesty's Government of India. To meet him, one senior British officer and one senior Gurkha officer from each Gurkha regiment were invited to Delhi. Receptions were held, including one at which our Honorary Colonel met the British officers and Gurkha officers of his regiments. His Highness made personal gifts to each officer, and presented trophies to each regiment for competition amongst the men.

At one reception, the British officers had the honour of being present when His Excellency Field-Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, Commander-in-Chief in India, presented to His Highness a Sword of Honour, a gift from His Majesty King George V. During this very interesting ceremony, all present had the opportunity of seeing at very close quarters the famous crown (or head-dress) worn by His Highness and depicted in the Nepal coat of arms. Exclamations of admiration (and possibly envy) from the ladies present followed, when His Highness handed round for their inspection this symbol of his high office.

Since the above-mentioned appointment, succeeding Prime Ministers of Nepal have been gazetted as Honorary Colonels of all Gurkha regiments.

On 13th April, 1935, the 2nd Battalion completed one century of existence. This event was celebrated in fitting fashion at Quetta. This station is a long way from Nepal, Shillong, and other places in India to which our pensioners retire, so unfortunately not many were able to attend. Those who did received a warm welcome. Included in the celebrations was a ceremonial parade at which the Silver Drums, subscribed for by all ranks of the Battalion, were presented by General Sir Torquhil Matheson, K.C.B., C.M.G., G.O.C.-in-C., Western Command.

Entertainments extended over a period of three days for all ranks of

both Battalions, together with a considerable number of members of the Gurkha Brigade who were serving in, or near, Quetta.

About this time the Band, Pipers and Drums, and Buglers of the Regiment were probably at their peak. Their playing was much appreciated at Quetta, and the performance of the massed Buglers, Pipers and Drums of both Battalions was noteworthy. It is probable that had not the Quetta earthquake upset plans, the British public would have heard and seen the Regimental Band at the Aldershot Tattoo in 1935.

Lieutenant-Colonel G. A. P. Scoones, D.S.O., M.C., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 29th April, 1935.

During the night of 30th/31st May, 1935, occurred the disastrous earthquake in Quetta. The scene of devastation was confined to the civil station and the city. The R.A.F., whose lines were in this area, suffered severely. The Army portion of the Cantonment came off lightly, and casualties were very few. Amongst these, however, were a few men of the 1st Battalion who were on guard at the residence of the Agent to the Governor-General in Baluchistan.

For days, under the energetic control of their Commanding Officers, Lieutenant-Colonels H. R. Harington and G. A. P. Scoones, the Regiment were employed on salvage, rescue of injured, care of refugees, etc. Ceaseless toil, under most unpleasant conditions, was carried out with devotion and disregard of personal safety. At last the city had to be sealed up, and left with its dead. The story of the good work done by all ranks in the Quetta earthquake would be too long to relate in detail. A number of awards for gallantry were received, and special certificates were awarded by Their Excellencies the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief for outstanding work.

To ease the accommodation question in Quetta, it was decided to reduce the garrison before the cold weather arrived. This decision affected the Regiment; the 1st Battalion proceeded to Shillong, and the 2nd Battalion to Loralai, in the Zhob, where it continued to remain under 5th Infantry Brigade (Quetta) for training, though under Zhob Independent Brigade area for administration.

Excepting for the journeys by lorry (in a privately owned concern) between Shillong and Pandu ghat, the move of the 2nd Battalion from Quetta to Loralai by M.T. is the first instance of the 8th being conveyed by Army M.T., now so commonplace, then a rarity.

During the remainder of 1935 and in 1936, strenuous training was undertaken by both Battalions to make up for the six months' work on reconstruction in Quetta following the earthquake, and everybody did their best.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. B. Scott, M.C., was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 2nd November, 1937.

During 1937 Waziristan and the Zhob area were in a disturbed state, and the 2nd Battalion at Loralai were frequently called upon to find escorts for lorry convoys, and for some weeks were ready, at a few hours' notice, to deal with raiders.

In February, 1938, the 2nd Battalion moved by M.T. convoy to Wana, in South Waziristan. Slow progress was made owing to rain and snow. On the first day the convoy reached its halting-place, Fort Sandeman, at midnight, after man-handling its lorries for two miles through snow.

Wana was reached on 8th February, 1938. Training in Wana was, in the early months, a difficult business, for when not engaged on operations or road construction, the 2nd Battalion was kept busy helping to build New Wana. A move into barracks from Wana huts was a welcome change in October of this year.

The months of April, June, August, September, October and December saw the 2nd Battalion out on operations chiefly in the Splitoi, Inzar, the Derajat and Kotkai areas. The two last named, undertaken in conjunction with the Razmak Column, were the largest in extent. During the sixteen days on this operation, the 2nd Battalion marched 150 miles.

During this period the 2nd Battalion received the congratulations of the Brigade Commander for their good work.

Lieutenant-Colonel H. S. Gordon, O.B.E., was appointed Commandant, 2nd Battalion, on 29th April, 1938.

In July, 1938, the 2nd Battalion won the Wana Brigade Football Cup, and in September, 1938, the Heath Cup for rifle shooting. These successes were followed up in 1939 by winning the Khud Race Trophy, and again the Brigade Football Cup. The British officers were not behindhand in the realm of sport, winning in 1938 and 1939 the Wana Reconstruction Trophy, which included golf, tennis, squash racquets and point-to-point riding.

During this year the 2nd Battalion decided to disband its Brass Band.

The Battalion was engaged in minor operations during 1939, entailing plenty of hard work, but not of sufficient importance for a detailed narrative.

During the time they were in Wana, the 2nd Battalion saw a great change in the accommodation at this station. Work had continued on the building project, and by the end of 1939 Wana had been completely rebuilt as a modern cantonment, including electric lights in all barracks.

We must now follow the fortunes of the 1st Battalion, who had moved from Shillong to Quetta in March, 1938.

The usual hard training, inspections, and exercises, varied with the





**Gifts presented to H.M.S. "Gurkha" by the Gurkha Brigade**

full social life of Quetta, occupied the 1st Battalion for the year 1938.

It was at this time, in 1938, that the Gurkha Brigade made a present of trophies, books, etc., to H.M.S. *Gurkha*, a newly commissioned destroyer, to mark their pride in this association with the Royal Navy. This association will be more fully touched on in an Appendix to this history.

On 2nd March, 1939, the 1st Battalion left Quetta for Razmak, taking over from 2/4th Gurkhas.

Duties in Razmak at this time were heavy as the garrison consisted of two battalions only instead of the normal six.

Until July, 1939, the 1st Battalion were employed in the normal Frontier duties. In July, a couple of smart skirmishes took place. A Jemadar (Lal Sing Thapa) was killed by a sniper, and Jemadar Debaraj Mal was badly wounded—a wound which eventually led to his being invalided from the service. In August, 1939, night operations led to the killing, wounding and capturing of some 75 enemy.

Again in August, 1939, the 1st Battalion had the opportunity to show its worth. The Razmak Brigade was out on a scheme, the 1st Battalion being left in the station as a reserve. As the withdrawal started, the enemy began to work through the steep and thickly wooded country which lies just north-west of Razmak, and threatened trouble to the Leicestershire Regiment, whose patrols had not located the tribesmen. The 1/8th were sent out to cover the withdrawal of the Leicesters, and protect the right flank of the Brigade. This they did successfully. A letter of thanks was received from the O.C., 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, for the help the 1st Battalion had given—a source of satisfaction to the 8th Gurkha Rifles to be able to give a hand, in time of need, to their gallant erstwhile comrades of France and Mesopotamia.

A story of a stout-hearted N.C.O. of the 1st Battalion who had gained the I.O.M. and I.D.S.M. before he left Razmak in 1940 is worth the telling. This N.C.O., Naik Birtasing Gurung, was a section commander, and was seen to be firing the light machine gun himself in the action just related. Next day he was asked why he, as commander, fired the gun instead of giving orders. Birtasing stammered badly, and replied that as it took him so long to stammer out his orders, he preferred to fire the gun himself as the situation demanded prompt action.

During this tour of duty on the North-West Frontier both Battalions had the pleasure of visits from the Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir John Coleridge, who filled the appointment of G.O.C.-in-C., Northern Command, 1936-1940, and so had both Battalions of his Regiment under his command in his last appointment.

For the operations on the North-West Frontier covered by this

chapter, a new Indian General Service Medal was awarded, to which both Battalions became entitled.

It is interesting to record that in the period between the two World Wars the 8th Gurkha Rifles became entitled to medals and/or clasps for no less than five campaigns—viz. :

Third Afghan War, 1919.	Waziristan, 1923-1924.
Iraq Rebellion, 1920.	Waziristan, 1938-1939.
Moplah Rebellion, 1921.	

After taking part in practically every North-East Frontier operation in the pre-1914 days, the 8th Gurkha Rifles had changed its role and can rightly claim to have had its full share in the guarding of the North-West Frontier in later years.

Lieutenant-Colonel E. W. Langlands was appointed Commandant, 1st Battalion, on 3rd September, 1939.

On 3rd September, 1939, the Second World War broke out, Great Britain declaring war on Germany on this date.

As the scope of the Second World War was so great, the services of each of our Battalions will, in Part 3, be related in separate chapters. Before proceeding with our history, therefore, a very short summary of the causes leading to the Second World War will not be out of place.

Following their defeat in the 1914-1918 war, the German nation very quickly set about building up its strength in men and equipment for another attempt to obtain world domination. "The invincible German Army had not been defeated, but betrayed by the civilians," was the creed instilled into every youthful mind. It is regrettable that in 1919 the Allies had not marched into Berlin as conquerors, instead of allowing German units to goose-step along the Unter den Linden, as a returning victorious army.

The rapid rise to power of one Adolf Hitler and his National Socialists (Nazis) was succeeded by a series of German aggressive incursions. Austria, Sudetenland (Czecho-Slovakia), the march into the Ruhr, all proclaimed an intention to increase productivity, and to strengthen the frontiers of the Reich. Hitler got away with his bluff time and again, thanks to Allied weakness.

Emboldened by success, Germany fixed on Poland as the next victim, the Danzig Corridor being the excuse on this occasion. A treaty with Russia (never meant to be kept by Hitler) ensured Germany's eastern frontier against attack.

At last, alarmed by the fate of Poland, the Allies presented an ultimatum to Germany. War, as she had always intended, broke out and Germany, as in 1914, plunged Europe into its second terrible struggle.

## PART III

### CHAPTER SIXTEEN

(See Maps Nos. 1, 2, 9 and 10)

*[As already stated, separate chapters will be devoted to each of our Battalions, Regimental Centre and 38th Gurkha Rifles to cover the period of the Second World War, and subsequent operations, such as Java, etc. This chapter deals with the 1st Battalion.]*

Battalion mobilizes—Reserve specialists trained—Athletics successes—Changes in Command—Razcol "Training" March—Actions of 14th November, 1939, and 11th March, 1940—Leave Razmak—Storm breaks in Western Europe—Dehra Dun—Back to North-West Frontier—Abbottabad—To join Eastern Army—Situation in Burma—Battalion to Rawalpindi—Shillong—Join 16th Indian Infantry Brigade at Ledo—December, 1942, to October, 1943—Join 36th Indian Infantry Brigade of 26th Indian Division—The "Tiger's Head" Division—To Arakan—First weeks of service—Party join 154th Gurkha Parachute Battalion—Winter, 1943-4—Battalion "Armada"—Position in Arakan, early 1944—Operations to relieve 7th Indian Division—Burmese place names—Mayu Range—8th Gurkha Rifles find defence platoon for 36th British Division—General Christison's plan—Contact 7th Indian Division—Meet 4/8th Gurkha Rifles—Buthidaung—To "Okey Doke" Pass—End of Arakan battle—Point 551—Thanks of Divisional Commander—Withdraw to monsoon line—Cox's Bazar—Bawli and Taung—"Colabar"—Visit of Supreme Commander, S.E.A.C.—General situation, December, 1944—Ramree—Battalion establishment—Two typical encounters—Lieutenant-Colonel De Burgh Morris awarded D.S.O.—The bungalow caretaker—26th Indian Division to attack Rangoon from the sea—To Rangoon—A bloodless victory—Presentation to R.N. Commander—Return to India—Honours and rewards—Casualties.

THE outbreak of the Second World War was the signal for general mobilization. This in India, despite the fact that the expansion of the Army generally was not as rapid as one would have expected, did not present the same problems as in the United Kingdom. Battalions were already up to war establishment, and did not have to await the influx of reservists, often two-thirds of the war establishment of British battalions serving in their home country. Still there was plenty to do, as anyone knows who has had occasion to be conversant with mobilization regulations.

As a measure for future efficiency, and a very sound one, the Battalion trained understudies in all duties requiring knowledge



outside the ordinary, and by 1940 there were 100 per cent. reserves of all specialists. In this, the Battalion were fortunate in possessing a large number of senior N.C.Os. and old soldiers.

In September, 1939, the 1st Battalion achieved a notable success in the Razmak Brigade sports. Seven out of eight events were won, and each win a record for these sports. As the events were open to British, Indian and Gurkha troops, the results to the 1st Battalion were particularly meritorious.

On 27th October, 1939, Lieutenant-Colonel J. Bruce Scott, M.C., O.C., who had been officiating in command of the Razmak Brigade, was appointed to command a new brigade in Upper Burma. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel E. W. Langlands.

About this time the Battalion was engaged with the tribesmen while employed on a "Training" Column. This "training" turned out to be most realistic, for it produced war over most difficult country, costing the Razmak Brigade (Razcol) 11 killed and 24 wounded in six days.

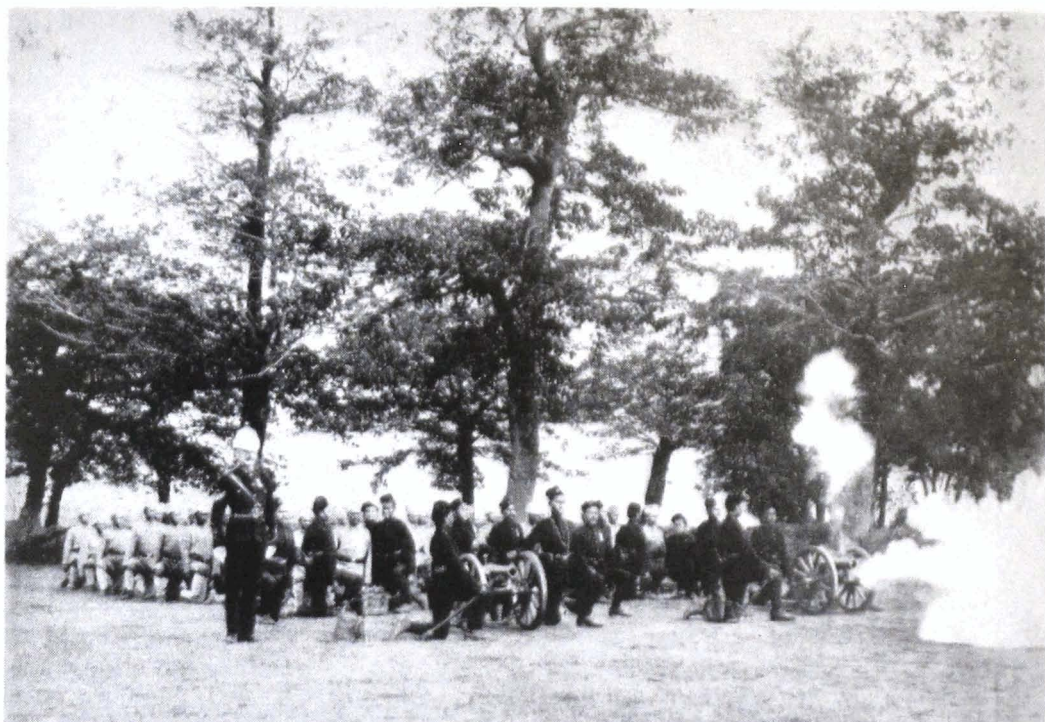
On 14th November, 1939, the Battalion had a sharp engagement with the enemy, once again going to the assistance of the 1st Leicestershire Regiment. Following heavy casualties to a picquet of the British battalion, the 1st Battalion covered the evacuation of casualties, and the withdrawal to camp. In this engagement Lieutenant M. E. Ovans, 1/8th, was given the immediate award of the M.C. for skill and courage in carrying out a most difficult operation. Havildar Dalbahadur Gurung received the I.D.S.M. for bringing in wounded of the Leicesters under heavy fire. Unfortunately, in this action a very fine Gurkha officer, Subadar Ranbir Thapa, was mortally wounded when commanding "D" Company.

Strangely enough, on 11th March, 1940, a similar action to that just narrated was fought over the same ground by the 1st Battalion, in company with the 2nd Suffolk Regiment, who had relieved the Leicesters in the Razmak Brigade. On this occasion the 1st Battalion won an I.O.M. for Birtasing Gurung (already referred to in the preceding chapter) and an I.D.S.M.

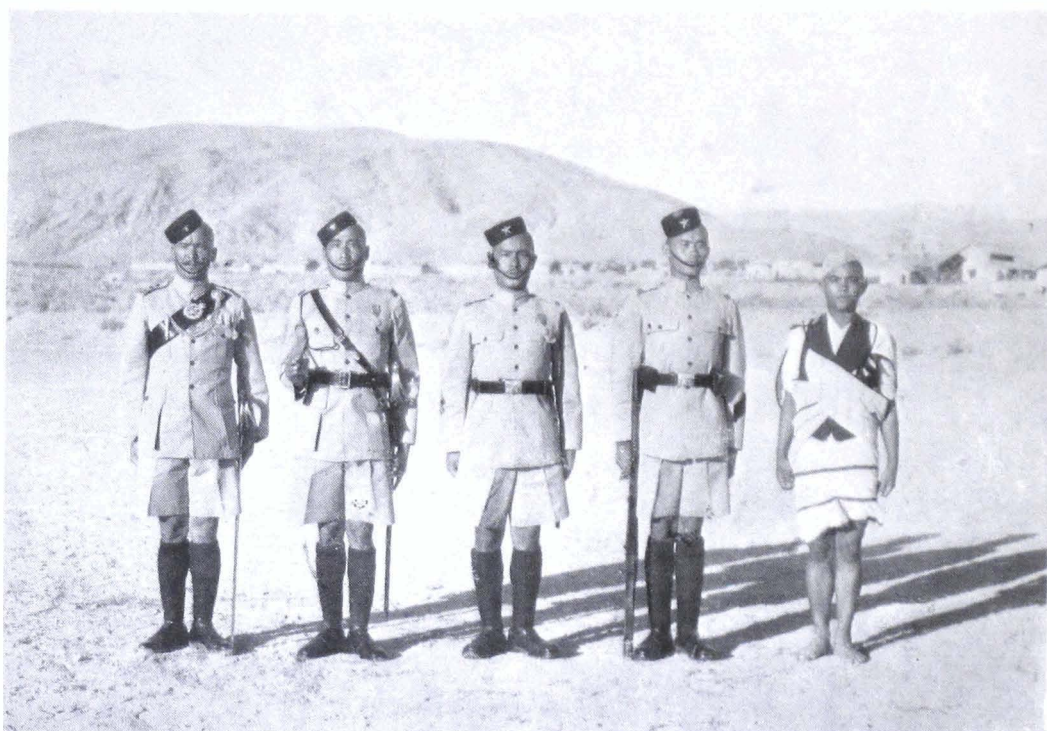
In June, 1940, the Battalion was ordered to relieve a British battalion in Bengal. This order was changed, however, and the Battalion was sent to Dehra Dun.

Thus ended a stay in Razmak in which the 1st Battalion had made a good name for itself in the field and in cantonments. It had been in many actions, and gained several decorations. As stated in the previous chapter, the "Eastern" Gurkhas had shown themselves adaptable to North-West Frontier conditions.

In May, 1940, however, the storm broke in Western Europe. By an unexpected and devastating use of aircraft and armour, the Germans



**“Bubble” and “Squeak,” 1896**



**From Recruit to Subadar, 1939**

speedily overcame all resistance. The subjugation of Holland and Belgium, the occupation of half of France, following the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force, presented, in a few days, an appalling state of affairs. From now on, and for some considerable time, the British Empire and Commonwealth, "fighting alone," were faced by dangers necessitating tremendous efforts to build up their strength, and at the same time hold in check the enemy, now reinforced by the entry of Italy into the war. However, as this is not a history of the Second World War, we must return to the 1st Battalion.

At Dehra Dun training was continued, emphasis being placed on those items not possible on the North-West Frontier. It was a pleasant change, made most agreeable by the hospitality of the 2nd Goorkhas, in whose lines the Battalion lived.

Emergency commissioned officers now began to join. Without the service of these officers, like their predecessors, the old Indian Army Reserve of Officers in the First World War, the Indian Army could not have carried on. It is a remarkable tribute to the character and determination to learn of these officers that in so short a time they were filling responsible posts in regiments, and overcoming many difficulties, including that of the language, with notable success.

The stay at Dehra Dun was not a long one, for in October, 1940, the Battalion returned to the North-West Frontier at Thal in Kurram.

Training, work on the Kurram defences, and Brigade columns kept everyone fully occupied during 1941 and until June, 1942, when the long-hoped-for order to move came. This was in the shape of instructions to proceed to join a war division then training for jungle warfare in the Abbottabad hills. Whilst *en route* to Abbottabad, a signal was received appointing Lieutenant-Colonel E. Langlands, the Commanding Officer of the 1st Battalion, to command the Nowshera Brigade.

In early September, 1942, orders came to proceed to Rawalpindi to be reorganized as a battalion to form part of a Light Division in the Eastern Army.

At Rawalpindi, in September, 1942, the command of the Battalion was assumed by Lieutenant-Colonel C. B. Lewis, O.B.E. (1st Gurkha Rifles).

At this stage it is well to give a very brief statement of the situation as it existed on India's eastern borders, when the 1st Battalion was sent to help meet the threatened Japanese invasion of India.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbour in December, 1941, the Japanese successes in the Malay and Indonesian areas had been startling in their rapidity. Within two months of invading Malaya, Singapore had fallen. The invasion of Burma followed. The

Japanese thrusts came from the south towards Moulmein, where the 17th Indian Division was located. Apart from this Division, there was in Burma the newly formed 1st Burma Division (Major-General Bruce Scott commanding), together with L. of C. troops. Eventually the 7th Armoured Brigade had arrived in Rangoon, but too late to help in the first decisive action—the defence of the Sittang river, the retention of which for a time was of vital importance to the establishment of a defence line north of Rangoon.

Attacked by three Japanese divisions and two tank brigades, cutting through the country in a series of encircling moves, the British forces were forced to retreat. Hampered by thousands of refugees, and having to contend with the hostile activities of guerillas and dacoits, the survivors of the army reached India after much fighting, and having suffered great hardships.

The defence of India then was in the hands of a very few divisions, incompletely trained and equipped.

The 70th British Division (less one brigade detailed to Ceylon) and XV Corps (14th and 26th Indian Divisions) were responsible for the defence of Bengal and the Arakan, under Lieutenant-General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse.

The IV Corps, consisting of the remnants of the Burma Army, 1st Indian Infantry Brigade, and one battalion 49th Indian Infantry Brigade (Commander, Lieutenant-General N. M. S. Irwin), was responsible for the defence of Assam.

After a couple of weeks, the Battalion moved eastwards, and by 28th September, 1942, was concentrated at Happy Valley, Shillong, after marching from Gauhati by the road so well known to the Regiment.

For some six weeks in October and November, 1942, the Battalion carried out jungle warfare training. This was interfered with by large parties proceeding to Gauhati and elsewhere, on internal security duties. However, the provision of M.T. and instruction in 3-inch mortars began to bring all ranks into touch with modern methods of movement and fighting.

On 7th November, 1942, orders were received to join the 16th Indian Infantry Brigade and to proceed to Ledo, which was reached on 13th November, 1942.

For nearly twelve months the activities of the Battalion were limited to training, guards, and moves. Much hard work was put in, but space does not permit us following their fortunes from camp to camp.

On 6th October, 1943, Major A. de B. Morris succeeded to the command of the Battalion.

On 4th November, 1943, the Battalion embarked at Calcutta, and

arrived at Chittagong on the 7th to join the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 26th Indian Division, with which formation they served throughout the Burma operations.

Previous to the Battalion joining the 26th Indian Division under Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, this Division (the "Tiger's Head" Division) had been engaged in operations in the Arakan for many months. After holding our monsoon line in 1943, and helping in the withdrawal of the 14th Indian Division, the 26th Indian Division had stabilized the Arakan front. Their position was roughly in the Goppe, Taung Bazar areas, west of the Mayu range, and the country to the north of the Naf river estuary.

The geography of the Arakan consists of a series of hill ranges, valleys and rivers, running parallel to the coast. There are half a dozen or more. The Mayu range is the first and most adjacent to the coast. Beyond it lies the Kalapanzin river which runs into the Mayu river. Between these valleys lateral communications are few. There are only three passes between the coastal strip and the Mayu valley. They are the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road through the tunnels, the Ngakyedauk pass (named "Okey Doke" by the troops), and the Goppe pass to the village of Bawli Bazar.

The tunnels referred to were originally built some time in the last century for the purpose of laying a railway line.

The Arakan, as a theatre of war, had always exhibited features of uncompromising difficulty. It is composed of steep little hills covered with jungle, paddy fields, scrub and swamp. In such country advancing troops can walk over an enemy, lying doggo, and never be aware of him until they get a grenade or a burst of machine-gun fire in their backs. Communications were practically non-existent, and in those early days the situation was at its primitive worst. Mule tracks over mountains made the shortest journeys a severe hardship to man and beast in the monsoon.

The first few weeks of service with the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade consisted of guarding vulnerable points, and moves to Hathazari and Rangamatti.

During November a party of 33 N.C.Os. and Gurkha other ranks proceeded to join 154 Gurkha Parachute Battalion for training—the first instance of 1st Battalion men becoming paratroopers.

In late November, 1943, the Battalion was ordered to move out to prevent a suspected Japanese attempt to infiltrate down the Karnaphuli river into the Chittagong area. The move was by country sampan, the "armada" consisting of some 250 boats. No Japs were seen and, after a stay at Rangamatti, the Battalion was ordered back to Chittagong. This experience is recorded as showing the sort of unusual duty a battalion in the Arakan was called on to carry out.

The winter of 1943-4 was, for the 26th Indian Division, a period of rest and training, though still with an operational commitment. This respite was made possible by their relief by the 7th Indian Division, fresh from the jungle training school in India.

In December, 1943, a 3-inch mortar platoon was formed in the Battalion. Until early February, 1944, training was continued, and then came suddenly the call to go to the relief of the 7th Indian Division.

A short review of the position in the Arakan at this time will help the reader to follow subsequent events.

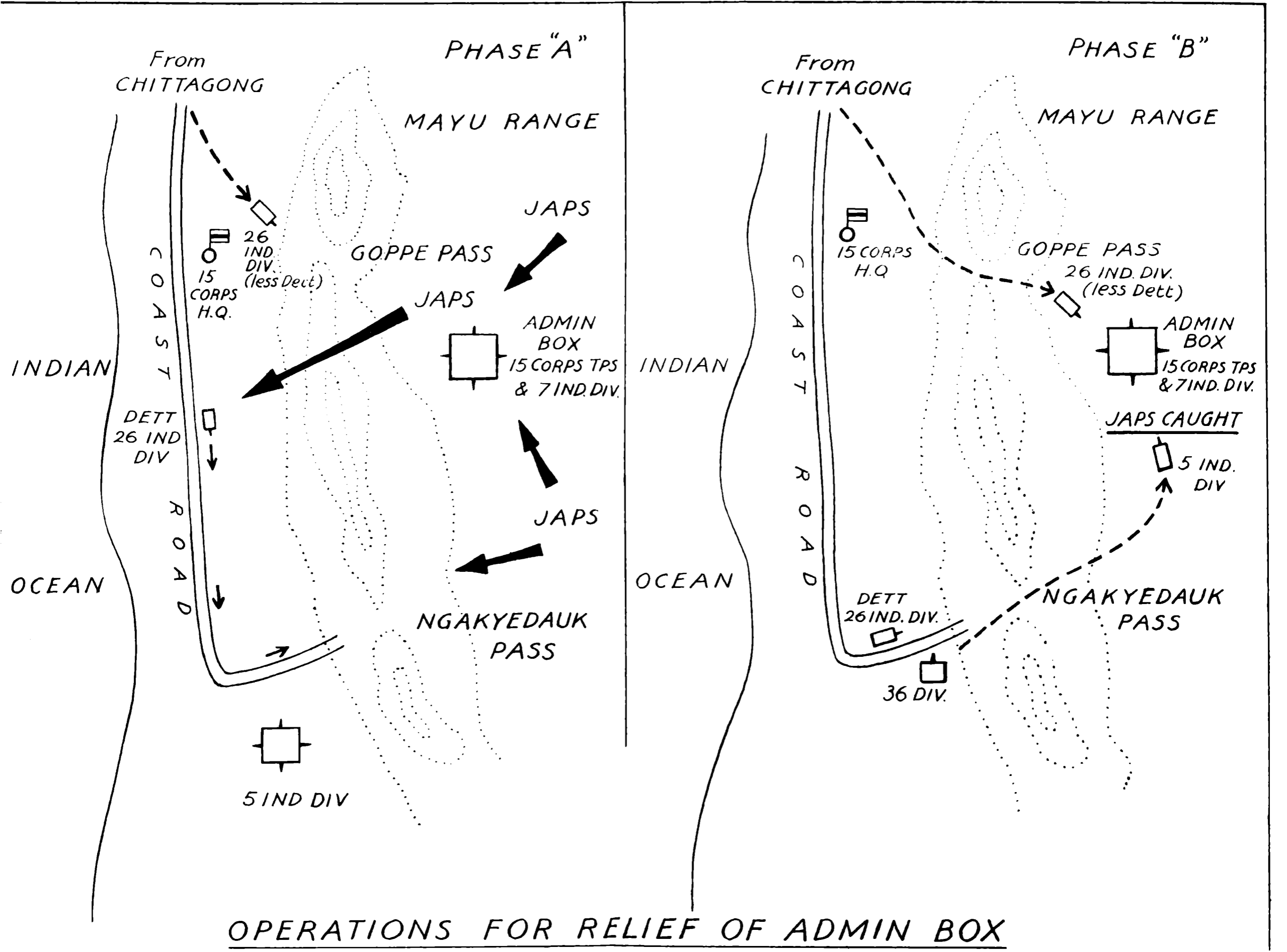
Early in February the 5th Indian Division, having captured Maungdaw, and built the Ngakyedauk pass road in co-operation with the 7th Indian Division, operating east of the Mayu range, opened a new phase, an advance on a two-division front, directed on Akyab. Unfortunately, this move was anticipated by the Japanese, who opened almost simultaneously their long-planned advance to India, which project dominated the entire Burma battle-front from February to the end of June, 1944. The opening moves of the advance were crowned with success; Taung Bazar was taken, the Ngakyedauk pass cut, and our advance promptly halted; in fact, as will appear later, the 7th Division was dangerously involved.

At midnight on 6th February, 1944, Commanding Officers of 36th Indian Infantry Brigade were urgently summoned to Brigade Headquarters.

We are fortunate in having available an account of what happened from the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel A. De Burgh Morris. To tell his story briefly: At Brigade Headquarters it was learnt that the 7th Division had been cut off, and that the Japs were making for Bawli. The Division (26th) was ordered to go to the relief of the 7th Division. The Battalion arrived at Bawli at 0500 hours on 8th February and was ordered to take up a position on high ground outside Bawli, their role being a "swinger battalion," ready to counter-attack when the Jap attacked the Bawli "firm base," which contained a great many stores and administrative units. The remainder of the 36th Brigade defended the "firm base." The 4th and 71st Indian Infantry Brigades of the 26th Division had been sent, one east and one west of the Mayu range, to gain touch with the 7th Division. On 10th February, 1944, it was evident that the enemy were trying to cut the Bawli-Maungdaw road about twelve miles south of Bawli.

A British infantry division (the 36th, commanded by Major-General Festing) was operating in this area. Their divisional commander wanted some mountaineers to go up on to the Mayu range, from where the Japanese had come. In consequence, the Battalion was





OPERATIONS FOR RELIEF OF ADMIN BOX



lent to the 36th Division for this operation. It had been said that this range was impassable for troops.

The Battalion moved off, and established a "firm base" at the foot of the Mayu range about twelve miles south of Bawli. Though not shown on any map, the name as *pronounced* of this spot is "Peta-wang-a-wang-a-what-a-tit." It would be interesting to have a gramophone record of pronunciations of Arakan place-names as interpreted by the troops, British, Indian and Gurkha. No wonder the Ngakyedauk pass became familiarly known as "Okey Doke" pass.

On meeting the G.O.C., 36th Division, it was discovered that their defence platoon was provided by the 8th Gurkha Rifles Regimental Centre. The platoon commander, Jemadar Birta Sing Gurung, I.O.M., I.D.S.M., was with General Festing.

After collecting porters, guides, rations, etc., the advance began. The guides were most unreliable, and were dispensed with. Companies moved on compass bearings, and finally the whole Battalion was firmly established on top of the range. The porters were not warlike, and fled at the first shot exchanged with a Jap patrol at a point known as Jap Pass.

On 26th February, 1944, the flank of a strong enemy position was located. In this affair "A" Company became engaged, and lost their commander, Captain W. F. C. Ashmore, killed, and Jemadar Tekbahadur wounded.

During the period 20th to 26th February, 1944, several successful attacks were made and ambushes laid, in which all companies of the Battalion were engaged. In one attack on the lower slopes of the range, "C" Company co-operated with the East Lancashire Regiment in the assault. Some thirty-five to forty Japs were killed; much material, arms, files and diaries containing valuable information, were captured. The enemy had been thrown out of his defensive position, and his L. of C. continuously harried. The Battalion losses in this week of strenuous activity amounted to: Killed, 1 British officer, 10 Gurkha other ranks; wounded, 1 British officer, 1 Gurkha officer and 13 Gurkha other ranks. One I.O.M. and one I.D.S.M. and two M.Ms. were won by the Battalion.

During a personal visit the Divisional Commander congratulated the Battalion, which, on 27th February, 1944, returned to its own brigade.

It will be well at this point to give a brief description of the plan framed by General Sir P. Christison, commanding XV Corps, for the relief of the 7th Indian Division, and the defeat of the invading Japanese.

With these objects in view, the pith of his plan was to crush the Japanese between the 26th Indian Division (left pincer) and the

5th Indian Division (right pincer), using as the anvil the Administrative Box manned by H.Q., XV Corps, and later augmented by details of the 7th Division.

As a preliminary it was necessary to reopen the coast road which was the main British L. of C. This done, the crushing of the Japanese striking force, as detailed below, would follow. This would automatically clear the Ngakyedauk pass.

To put this plan into effect, the 26th Indian Division, to which the Battalion belonged, was brought forward from the Chittagong area. Its task was to provide a detachment charged with, firstly, clearing the L. of C. road, which was cut in several places by the Japanese,\* and, secondly, holding the western approaches to the Ngakyedauk pass until relieved by the 36th British Division; the 26th Indian Division, less this detachment, to concentrate on the eastern side of the Mayu range, via the Goppe pass, and act as the left pincer.

The 5th Indian Division, relieved from its rather precarious position on the Naf river side of the Mayu range, would then sweep over the Ngakyedauk pass, acting as the right pincer, and join forces with the 7th Indian Division.

In this operation the following, taken from an official account, will show that the Battalion well and truly performed its share, on the Mayu range, of the task allotted to the Division: "Meanwhile the 8th Gurkhas and a battalion of the 16th Punjabis steadily swept the spine of the range clean of Japanese, killing scores and herding the remainder down into the valley for despatch there by troops defending the box."

On 1st March, 1944, the Battalion moved by M.T. to the foot of Goppe pass, and thence by march route over the pass to Goppe Bazar. It remained here for six days protecting 26th Division L. of C. "A" and "C" Companies were sent forward to protect Brigade and Divisional Headquarters, which were situated about fifteen miles to the south.

On 7th March, 1944, leaving "D" Company to protect Goppe Bazar, the Battalion moved forward (picking up "A" and "C" Companies), made contact with the 7th Indian Division, and came temporarily under command of 89th Indian Infantry Brigade, to which our 4th Battalion belonged.

It was a pleasure to meet old comrades in the 4th Battalion.

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\* This Japanese detachment, consisting of a battalion group, some mountain artillery, and a number of the Indian National Army, was overwhelmed by the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade in a series of brilliantly conducted operations. The Corps Commander places it on record that the 1/8th played a conspicuous part in this most successful affair.

From 8th to 15th March, 1944, the Battalion was in close contact with the enemy at a place named Mont Blanc, near Goppe, where positions were taken over from 7/2nd Punjab Regiment. During this period the Battalion had its first experience of hostile shelling, which caused some casualties to personnel and mules.

On 11th March, Major P. G. B. McNalty (attached from 2nd Lancers) was killed whilst reconnoitring.

On 15th March the Battalion moved forward to Buthidaung to relieve 4/8th Gurkha Rifles. This place had been taken a day previously by the 89th Infantry Brigade.

For the next five weeks the Battalion was engaged in constant fighting. Facing a very strong Japanese position, it was found that our forces here were not sufficient to eject the enemy. This probably formed part of the plan—viz., to contain the enemy hard at all points whilst counter-offensives at Razabil and the Tunnels area (east of Razabil) were under preparation.

Several company attacks were made on Japanese positions, and in their turn the enemy responded, including three heavy night attacks on the Battalion position. All were repulsed.

This history is too short to allow of the story of the five weeks at Buthidaung to be told in detail. Company and patrol actions predominated. Conditions were hard and fighting fierce.

The Buthidaung operations cost the Battalion upwards of 100 casualties.

On 22nd April, 1944, the Battalion moved north to the Ngakyedauk pass, in order to cover the move of the 26th Division to its monsoon quarters. This move was to start on 15th May, 1944.

The 1/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles relieved the 1st Battalion at Buthidaung; a week later it was surrounded, and suffered heavy casualties fighting its way out. The place remained in Japanese hands until 1945.

Although further fighting took place, including the clearing of Point 551 as recounted below, the battle of Arakan was virtually over, and the Fourteenth Army stood triumphant on its first great battlefield.\*

It had smashed No. 1 Japanese invasion of India, had scored the first major British-Indian victory over the enemy, and had inflicted losses of some 7,000 on the Japanese. It had established the superiority of the British and Indian soldier over the Japanese in man-to-man fighting—a vital fact, as it must be confessed that the

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\* During this period, the 7th Division was fighting its memorable battle of the Admin. Box. However, as this, together with the Japanese plan of encirclement, more closely affects another of our Battalions (4th), they will be dealt with more fully in the chapters devoted to that Battalion.

idea that the Jap was a super-being as a soldier had been somewhat too prevalent amongst some of our troops in Arakan before 1944.

To continue our narrative. On 27th April, 1944, the Battalion was placed under 4th Indian Infantry Brigade, ordered to stand by to assist in clearing Point 551, a very important position on the Mayu ridge which had been captured by the enemy. This feature, south of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road, is in what was generally described as the "Tunnels" area. It was vital to the control of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road.

Point 551 juts out of the tangle of foothills on the eastern side of the Mayu ridge. Its steep slopes were formidable, the approaches to them difficult. A determined Jap garrison could, from this peak, defy artillery concentrations and dislodgment.

For three weeks various gallant attempts on Point 551 were made, but it held out. Not to be denied, however, the Divisional Commander decided to have one more attempt made to recapture this position before the monsoon broke, and paid the Battalion the compliment of selecting it to take part in this "forlorn hope."

After reconnaissances and patrol activities, the attack was launched on 3rd May, 1944. The fighting was severe, and in a brief account, such as this, it is not possible to go into details of the various platoon (and even section) actions which eventually resulted in the successful eviction of the Japanese. In this operation, the 2/7th Rajputs played a gallant part alongside our Battalion.

The Commanding Officer of the Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel de Burgh Morris) has left it on record that the capture of Point 551 was a feat redounding to the credit of the Battalion, and due to the "outstanding" deeds of bravery performed.

It may be noted here that Lieutenant-Colonel de Burgh Morris later received the D.S.O. for his work at Point 551. A message sent from his Observation Post to his Headquarters by the O.C. of the Artillery Regiment supporting the Battalion attack is worth relating: "I am just witnessing one of the most glorious sights of the war, the Gurkhas attacking."

The following copy of a letter dated 4th May, 1944, received by the O.C., Lieutenant-Colonel de Burgh Morris, from Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, commanding 26th Indian Division, is a tribute to the fine work of the Battalion:

"MY DEAR MORRIS,

"This note brings to you and your Battalion the congratulations of the whole of the Division—and, of course, my own—on the grand job which you have just completed.

"The drive and determination which you have all displayed

against the severe physical conditions as well as against the Jap fills all with great admiration.

"The climax of your very successful operations has come today in the capture of Almond and Nut, now to be known as Gurkha Ridge.

"Please pass on to your men the congratulations of everyone in the Division on a grand job of work splendidly carried out.

"For yourself—well done.

"Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) "CYRIL LOMAX."

After clearing up the Point 551 battlefield, the Battalion for several days—until 11th May, 1944—was employed in covering the withdrawal of the forward brigades (4th and 71st) of the 26th Division. It had become hot in the Arakan, the monsoon was approaching, and the time had come to withdraw to the planned monsoon line. So the 26th with its companion, the 25th Indian Division, prepared to spend its second and last monsoon in the Arakan. The 26th assumed responsibility for the old bastions at Taung and Goppe, held a force in reserve on the coastal plain, whilst one brigade went for rest to Cox's Bazar.

On its withdrawal the Battalion had a glimpse of the famous Admin. Box area (Sinzweya), a deserted land surrounded by great tangles of wire.

Then over the "Okey Doke" pass to Bawli, where a welcome halt until 30th May, 1944, was made.

From Bawli, the Battalion moved to Cox's Bazar, where it remained until 10th October, 1944. Patrolling, training, and general reorganization was carried out. A large number of men were granted leave to Nepal.

On 11th October, 1944, the Battalion, as part of the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade, moved to Bawli Bazar to relieve a forward brigade (71st) which came to the Cox's Bazar area for rest. From Bawli the Battalion moved to Long Ridge, a feature near Taung.

Constant patrolling, laying ambushes and instant readiness to outwit the enemy were the lot of the Battalion in this neighbourhood.

"D" Company had a successful brush with a Japanese party on 29th October, 1944, killing eight and wounding six according to our V Force intelligence report. Our casualties were nil. The Gurkha was scoring off the Jap.

During the period of October and November, 1944, some very successful and arduous patrolling was done, mostly from "Tam" Force, which consisted of "A" and "D" Companies with a small tactical headquarters under Major T. A. Massie. It was found that

the Jap was much more amenable than he had been when the Battalion met him last in Buthidaung.

Supply was one of the major problems. However, the Quartermaster, by cajoling all and sundry, managed to deliver the goods—usually by sampan.

On 14th November, 1944, the Battalion arrived at “Colabar” on the seashore near Bawli for rest and training.

For about ten weeks the Battalion was engaged in training and in learning the secrets of combined operations. Everyone enjoyed the new seaside life. The men soon learnt a lot about the sea and boats.

On 19th December, 1944, a representative detachment of the Battalion paraded for the visit of the Supreme Commander, South-East Asia Command (Admiral Lord Mountbatten). At this parade the M.M. was presented to No. 3178 Lance-Naik Lalbahadur Gurung, who had won the decoration for gallantry in a patrol action near Taung in October, 1944.

Before proceeding further, it will be advisable to make a short review of the position in December, 1944, as it affected subsequent operations in which the Battalion took part.

After the defeat of the Japanese in the Imphal–Kohima operations, and their retreat during August, 1944, the Fourteenth Army, leaving Assam, advanced into Burma, and by the beginning of 1945 it had begun to fan out across central Burma. To facilitate air supply, Chittagong and Akyab were necessary as bases; for as our troops approached Rangoon, so these places became infinitely nearer to them than the old bases in India and Assam.

The clearing of the Arakan therefore became a condition affecting the Fourteenth Army's advance. It was carried out by XV Corps (Lieutenant-General Sir A. P. F. Christison), consisting of 81st West African Division (Major-General F. J. Loftus-Tottenham), 82nd West African Division (Major-General G. McI. S. Bruce), 25th Indian Division (Major-General G. Wood), 26th Indian Division (Major-General C. E. N. Lomax), and 3rd Commando Brigade.

By December, 1944, the 81st Division had cleared the Kaladan valley, and the remainder of XV Corps were disposed—25th Indian Division around Maungdaw, 82nd Division between Maungdaw and Buthidaung with one brigade at Taung Bazar, the 26th Indian Division and 3rd Commando Brigade in reserve.

The immediate XV Corps plan was for the 25th Indian Division to clear the Mayu range, whilst the 82nd Division captured Buthidaung and linked up with 81st Division in the Kaladan.

Subsequently the 25th Indian Division and the 3rd Commando Brigade captured Akyab without opposition.

The 26th Indian Division was detailed for the landing on Ramree island, to continue the successive coastal landings to the south.

On 25th January, 1945, the Battalion embarked at Chittagong, and arrived off Ramree island the following day.

Being in a follow-up convoy—what little fighting there had been in the initial landing was over—the Battalion landing was unopposed.

It is interesting at this point to note the strength and weapons of an infantry battalion in 1944-5 :

#### STRENGTH

H.Q. Company ... ..	169	All ranks.
Admin. Company ... ..	79	All ranks.
Four Rifle Companies, each ...	112	All ranks.

The weapons included 3-inch mortars, 2-inch mortars, Piat gun, Bren and Sten guns, apart from the pistols, rifles, swords and kukris. Weapon training was no easy task.

To return to Ramree.

The operations on Ramree in which the Battalion was engaged consisted almost entirely of patrolling, and “mopping up” of Japanese who had taken refuge in the maze of mangrove swamps and backwaters which abound on this island. This meant much hard work in difficult conditions, but the net result was satisfactory.

To attempt to tell the story of Ramree operations in detail would not be possible. However, to provide instances of the sort of fighting which took place, the following accounts of chaung-blocking operations—a chaung is a backwater—are given. They are précis of actual reports of operations carried out on 17th/18th February, 1945.

(1) “Embarked on L.C.A. Composition on board 1 G.O., 5 G.O.Rs. (1/8 G.R.), 4 O.Rs. (Frontier Force Rifles), 6 ratings Royal Indian Navy, 1 Fd. Ambulance. At 2030 hours (17th) small craft appeared and engaged. At 2330 hours enemy approximately 50-60 strong engaged attempting to swim river, each man clinging to pieces of bamboo. Area lit up by searchlight. Opened fire with Brens, 2-inch mortar and M.G. Few enemy seen to reach far bank, few swim back, and numbers observed floating in water downstream. M.L. arrived and continued to shell both banks of chaung where enemy were known to be. Early morning 18th carried out recce on chaung banks. Saw Japanese bodies on banks.” Then followed a list of arms, documents, badges of rank, maps, etc., captured.

(2) “At 0545 hours 18th when on recce in L.C.A. heard sound of motor engine. One Jap M.L. and two sampans seen. Engaged M.L. with M.G. and L.M.G. fire, enemy M.L. replying with gun fire at range of 15-20 yards. In action which ensued for 15 minutes, five enemy seen to fall into the water. Japanese M.L. stopped, and

enemy seen fleeing into mangrove. L.C.A. advanced and was heavily fired on, and again engaged enemy with M.G. and L.M.G. fire. Enemy casualties claimed 6 killed, 11 wounded. Our casualties 2 killed, 6 wounded.”

Until 28th April, 1945, operations of the nature outlined above continued on Ramree island.

Towards the end of February, 1945, information was received that the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel de Burgh Morris, had been awarded the D.S.O. for his services at Point 551 in May, 1944.

In March, 1945, the commander of the 26th Indian Division, Major-General C. E. N. Lomax, who had so ably commanded the division for two years, relinquished his command, and was succeeded by Major-General H. M. Chambers.

On 1st April, 1945, the command of the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade was assumed by Brigadier K. S. Thimayya, D.S.O., *vice* Brigadier L. G. Thomas, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C. Brigadier Thimayya was succeeded on 23rd April, 1945, by Brigadier I. C. A. Lauder.

During the same month the Battalion lost its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel de Burgh Morris, D.S.O., who had commanded it with conspicuous success during the whole of its service in the Arakan. Lieutenant-Colonel Morris was posted to the pool of Brigade Seconds-in-Command. He was succeeded by Major T. A. Massie.

On 18th April, 1945, a representative detachment of the Battalion was once again inspected by the Supreme Commander, S.E.A.C. (Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten).

The Arakan operations were almost at an end for the 26th Indian Division. One brigade which had reached Taungup—a hundred miles or so farther south than any other troops in Burma at that time—was now ordered not to drive the enemy any farther, but to hand over to the 82nd West African Rifles and return with all speed to Ramree island.

At Taungup occurred one of those incidents, amusing and yet illustrative of simple attention to duty. On arrival at Taungup, a patrol of our troops found the sole inhabitant of the town was the caretaker of the Government bungalow. He answered the patrol's knock at his door, and brought his Guests' Register to be signed! He had kept this in hiding since February, 1942.

The 26th Division were now being concentrated for their next task, a task which might prove the greatest of their career. They were to invade Rangoon from the sea—the expedition the world had so long been waiting for.

The Arakan campaign was one of alternating victory and reverse, replete with countless stories of heroism and hardships gallantly



borne. It can briefly be summed up in the words of an Indian observer: "For the Arakan veterans of the 26th Indian Division this was the end of a long road—a road along which they have foot-slogged through monsoon mud and cruel jungle for two weary gruelling years."

To turn to the approaching operation, there was not much time for planning, but the 26th Indian Division by this time was expert in extemporizing "combined ops."

The projected expedition was an enterprise fraught with many perils. Because of the shallow waters of the Irrawaddy estuary, not only would the support of big naval guns be denied to the assault craft, but the run-in would be the longest ever attempted in operations of this kind—nearly thirty miles.

The Battalion embarked on 28th April, 1945, sailing the following morning.

On 1st May, 1945, the 2nd Gurkha Parachute Battalion was dropped on Elephant Point to secure safe entry for Assault Force into the Rangoon river.

The 2nd May, 1945, was D-Day for operation "Dracula," as it was named.

The 36th Indian Infantry Brigade landed on the west bank and 71st Indian Infantry Brigade on the east bank of Rangoon river.

It was just getting light as the Battalion entered the Rangoon river. All were keyed up waiting for mines to explode and enemy guns to open up. Not a sound. It was uncanny. Tough fighting and heavy casualties were expected. The first wave had gone in. Still no sound of shelling or small-arms fire. To make a long story short, there was no enemy opposition. Plenty of discomfort though. Rain poured down, and the Battalion, laden with full packs, normal weapons, 3-inch mortars and the rest of the paraphernalia, staggered for six miles, through mud up to the knees, to their objective.

On 3rd May, 1945, the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade was detailed as assault brigade, and the Battalion as assault battalion, for the capture of Rangoon.

Re-embarking, the Battalion sailed at 1330 hours, with M.Ls. as escort. As the craft approached Rangoon, the riverside was seen to be crowded with cheering citizens, and flags were being hoisted on main buildings. So to Rangoon came our 1st Battalion, helped ashore by its delighted inhabitants. No fighting as the enemy had evacuated the city three days before.

Little remains to be recorded of the seventeen days' stay in Rangoon. The Battalion was engaged in patrolling the streets to stop looting, and guarding warehouses; and during the stay 800 members of the Indian National Army surrendered to the Battalion, which had

the great pleasure of releasing 600 of our own prisoners of war from the Central Jail.

On 10th May, 1945, General Sir Oliver Leese, commander, 11th Army Group (to which XV Corps belonged), visited the Battalion.

Two incidents connected with the occupation of Rangoon, in which the Battalion came to the fore, were : Firstly, the piping of the leading landing craft by Rifleman Jangu Bahadur, a piper of the Battalion, who had managed to borrow a set of pipes from the Royal Navy for the occasion. After landing, Jangu, with his borrowed pipes, played his comrades through the mass of cheering Burmans, Indians and Chinese. Secondly, a kukri presented by the commander of the 26th Indian Division to Rear-Admiral B. C. S. Martin, commander of the Naval Assault Forces which sailed up the Rangoon river, belonged to a man of the Battalion, with which he was reported to have decapitated two Japanese. This presentation marked the gratitude that all felt to the Naval Forces for their help on the Arakan coast and in the capture of Rangoon.

Amongst divisions withdrawn from Corps in Burma to return to India, to form a new force for the assault on Malaya, was the 26th Indian Division ; so on 21st May, 1945, the Battalion embarked.

The Burma war was over for the Battalion. Right well had it maintained its high reputation. The names Arakan, Point 551, Mayu range, Taung, Ramree, etc., will be for ever honoured in the history of the Regiment.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

(See Maps Nos. 1 and 11)

[*This chapter continues the history of the 1st Battalion from June, 1945.*]

In Bangalore—Visits by Commanders—Holiday Camp—His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief inspects—Warning order—Embarkation—H.M.S. *Sansovino*—The voyage—Destination, Java—Batavia—Leave 26th Indian Division and join 23rd Indian Division—Situation in Java—Indonesian “Order of Battle”—Buitenzorg—Indonesian “Belsen”—Leave Buitenzorg—Disarm Japanese—Batavia—Major Hutton assumes command—Dutch Division arrives—Java Highlands—The Batavia-Bandoeng road—Bandoeng—Fires and explosions—Action at Pangkalan Bridge—Lance-Naik Bahadur Pun and Rifleman Padme Pun—Divisional Commander’s praise—Road protection—In lighter vein—36th Brigade relieved—Sail for Madras—Good-bye to old comrades in arms—To Kohat.

As related in the preceding chapter, the Battalion had sailed from Rangoon for India. Its destination was Bangalore, where it arrived on 29th May, 1945. For reorganization and training for what was to come, Bangalore was an ideal station.

The next few weeks were a nightmare of leave parties going off to Nepal or the Nilgiris, new drafts coming in, and many good-byes as stalwarts of the Arakan days left on well-deserved release or repatriation. But despite everything, hard training went on, and it was obvious to all that Malaya was the next step, especially as the Battalion was now allotted to XXXIV Corps (General O. L. Roberts), which was to provide the assault troops for the beach landings (23rd, 25th, and 26th Indian Divisions). At last the problems of re-equipping became a Quartermaster’s dream instead of a nightmare—top priority in a land flowing with milk and honey, or so it seemed by contrast with old days; fleets of jeeps and 15-cwt. trucks, instead of a throat-slitting fight for a seat in the one and only derelict vehicle.

Our old Corps Commander of Arakan days, Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Christison, visited the Battalion on 8th June, 1945, and on the same evening the officers took leave of Brigadier I. C. A. Lauder, on his relinquishing command of the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade.

A Gurkha Holiday Camp was established at Wellington, in the Nilgiri hills. A large number of all ranks of the Battalion spent leave in this delightful hill station.

On 9th August, 1945, the XXXIV Corps Commander inspected

the Battalion, and three weeks later His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief in India, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, inspected the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade, of which the Battalion formed part, and presented decorations for gallantry to eleven Gurkha officers and Gurkha other ranks of the Battalion.

Until 11th November, 1945, the routine already outlined was followed. Then came the order for a move ex India, and the Battalion left Bangalore on 25th November, 1945, for embarkation at Madras. Arrived at Madras Docks and detrained, the Battalion again entrained and went to Trivellore, where it remained for nineteen days. Oft repeated orders and counter-orders for embarkation kept the Battalion staff busy, if somewhat peeved. However, on 15th December, 1945, a ship was available (H.M.S. *Sansovino*) and the Battalion embarked. To embark a very strong Battalion, with its stores, ammunition, etc., in just under three hours was good work.

The voyage was uneventful—just as well as life-belts had not been put aboard for the troops !

Sailing on a ship of the Royal Navy was a pleasant change. Naval routine, seeing gun firing, and ship's crew at action stations was a novelty.

On 20th December, 1945, the *Sansovino* crossed the line, an event rarely experienced by Gurkhas. The circumstances attending the voyage did not allow of the time-honoured ceremonies being carried out.

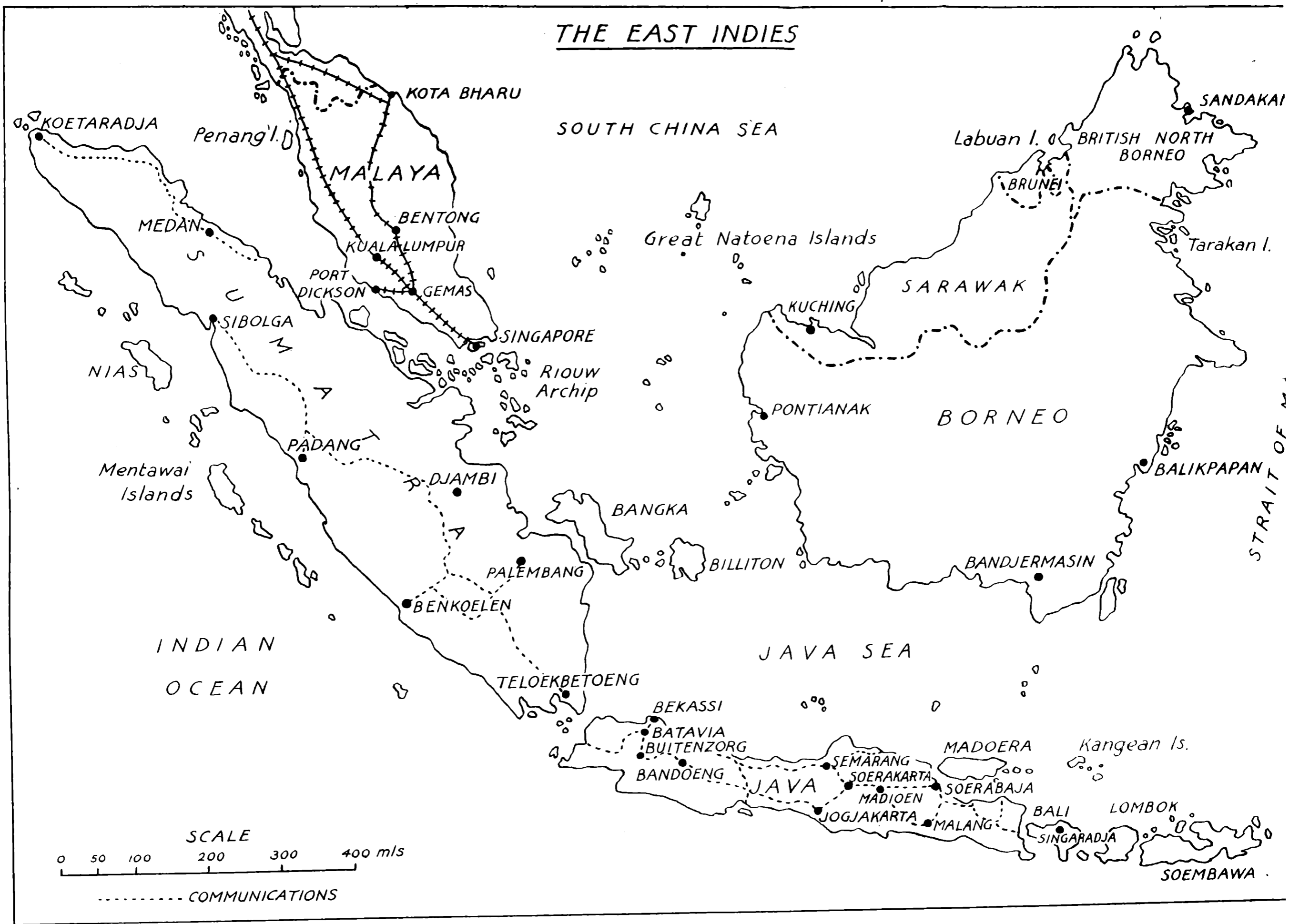
On 23rd December, 1945, the day before disembarkation at Batavia, the Subadar-Major presented four kukris to the four senior officers of H.M.S. *Sansovino* in recognition of the excellent co-operation which had existed on the voyage.

On disembarking the men were amazed to see hundreds of Japanese prisoners of war working in the docks. Here were the enemy they had been fighting for two long years, and now nobody bothered to shoot them.

The move to Java meant severing the long connection with the 26th Indian Division, as the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade was now detailed to reinforce the 23rd Indian Infantry Division, commander Major-General D. C. Hawthorn, C.B., D.S.O.

Why had British troops been sent to Java ? The situation was most confused. With the exception of two or three seaports and the inland towns of Buitenzorg and Bandoeng, the interior was in the hands of Indonesians whose mode of anarchical government did not commend itself to the Allied Governments. Dutch and Eurasian women and children accommodated in Jap concentration camps, whose homes were now in Indonesian hands, had to be rescued. Lawless gangs who made organized government impossible had to be dealt with,

# THE EAST INDIES





and bands of Japanese soldiers, who had not surrendered, had to be rounded up.

These gangs, over which the self-styled Indonesian Republican Government had no control once they were a dozen miles or so from an Indonesian Government centre, were practically private armies of some small political district group. No less than 150 of these gangs were enumerated in the "Indonesian Order of Battle" which was handed to the Battalion on its arrival.

At the time of the Battalion's arrival in Java, the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade was commanded by Brigadier J. A. Mellsop, who had succeeded Brigadier G. B. Roberts. The concentration of the Brigade was not completed until 28th December, 1945, when the 8/13th Frontier Force Rifles landed. The third infantry battalion was the 5th Jat Regiment.

The first task allotted to the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade was to restore law and order, to protect some 8,000 R.A.P.W.I. (Released Allied Prisoners of War and Internees), and to concentrate and disarm all Japanese in the Buitenzorg area.

Buitenzorg lies some thirty miles to the south of Batavia in the foothills of the central mountain range.

Buitenzorg was nominally in "allied" hands, but its streets were far from healthy, and not popular as a quiet promenade especially after nightfall.

The Battalion, at this period, had an operational role, and was saved from the thankless task of guarding camps of women and children.

Several Battalion operations were carried out—searches for "wanted" Indonesians, the discovery of a local arms factory which turned iron piping into primitive grenades, the recapture and defence of the waterworks which supplied Batavia. After an arduous operation a tea factory was located in the hills which had been utilized as an Indonesian "Belsen" for their own suspects; 59 emaciated creatures were released, but several died before they could be got to hospital.

In Buitenzorg itself law and order was gradually restored. The Battalion came to like the place, and did not welcome the news that the 36th Brigade was to move to Batavia to exchange roles with the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade of the 23rd Indian Division.

Before leaving Buitenzorg the Battalion had the experience of disarming a Jap garrison—a climax to their campaigns. None the less, by one of those strange paradoxes of this Gilbertian war, it was among the Japanese that the only reliable allies in Java were found, and on one occasion the O.C. "A" Company found himself with a Japanese platoon under his command! (Hence he must have disarmed with mixed feelings.)

On 5th February, 1946, the Battalion moved down to Batavia, and relieved the 1st Battalion Seaforth Highlanders in the pre-war Dutch Artillery Barracks.

Batavia was a city of filth, squalor and desolation. Originally it had been well planned on the Dutch style, with wide streets, fine buildings and a network of canals, but the war had transformed it into a city of chaos and sudden death, a sad contrast.

To venture far from the main streets alone was to invite trouble. Temptations of the worst kind lay in wait everywhere.

It was in this atmosphere that the Battalion carried out its patrolling, guarding camps, combing out of suspected areas, etc.—the sort of job a soldier heartily dislikes.

During the Battalion's stay in Batavia, Major R. H. B. Hutton assumed command in place of Lieutenant-Colonel T. A. Massie, proceeded on leave.

However, a move up-country changed the scene, and it was in a beautiful lush green country, the highlands of Java being particularly so, that the Battalion campaigned in a climate of eternal spring.

The operation in which the Battalion was involved in March, 1946, was the protection of communications between Batavia and Bandoeng. Situated some 130 miles from Batavia, a portion of it was occupied by an Allied detachment.

The convoyed route used for four months for the maintenance of this detachment was the main road (known as the southern route). Convoys had been frequently attacked, and movement on this route was usually attended by fierce fighting. This road possessed the further disadvantage of passing through a hotbed of Indonesian terrorists.

Early in March, 1946, the enemy delivered an assault, more prolonged and determined than usual, on two convoys, and it was only with extreme difficulty, and after suffering heavy casualties, that the remnants reached Bandoeng. The enemy, in addition, cut this route by destroying several bridges.

It was decided, therefore, to open a shorter but more difficult route (known as the northern route), and troops of the 23rd Indian Division were deployed for its protection. The 36th Indian Infantry Brigade (to which the Battalion belonged), made up to a Brigade Group, was made responsible for safeguarding a sector, and by the evening of 16th March, 1946, had completed its dispositions to effect this.

On 20th March, 1946, it was decided to occupy the whole of Bandoeng with the 23rd Indian Infantry Division, and on 22nd March, 1946, the Brigade started its move to that town.

The Brigade was concentrated on 24th March, 1946, at a point



five miles west of Bandoeng. The position at Bandoeng was that the northern half of the town was occupied by troops of the 23rd Indian Division, and the southern half by Indonesians.

On 25th March, 1946, the Battalion (less "D" Company left to guard an important bridge on the Bandoeng-Batavia road) moved into the south-west portion of the town. There was no fighting. The enemy had fled, but not before they, with the help of the Japanese deserters, had blown up all official or Dutch-owned buildings, and put into effect an obviously well-planned campaign of arson.

The Battalion was scattered in detachments over a wide area, dismantling unexploded charges, putting out fires and checking looting; no pleasant task with the flames of burning buildings, the pall of smoke, and streams of wretched Chinese, either fleeing from the inferno or, later, returning in the hope of salvaging a few possessions from the ruins of their homes.

On 29th March, 1946, its task in Bandoeng completed, the 36th Brigade moved back to its road protection work, and received from the G.O.C., 23rd Indian Division, a personal message of congratulations on the work carried out.

It has been noted that "D" Company had been left to guard an important bridge. This bridge was about twenty miles from Bandoeng, and named Pangkalan. "D" Company had been in action almost daily, and on 30th March, 1946, made a sortie to open the road towards Bandoeng, and along which the 36th Brigade was now moving towards Pangkalan. "D" Company met with opposition.

The Battalion was advanced guard to the Brigade. Nearing Pangkalan and the scene of "D" Company's fighting, two companies were deployed, "C" Company leading. This company bore the brunt of the ensuing action. It was fortunate for the Battalion that the fighting necessitated deployment, as, had the troops remained embussed, serious losses might have followed in a country made for ambushes.

Fierce fighting ensued. The Indonesians were the fanatical "Black Buffalo" irregulars. They hurled themselves on our men, slashing with dahs. However, the kukri and bayonet were more than equal to the task. In the end, seventeen of the enemy were killed and two captured. Lance-Naik Bahadur Pun and Rifleman Padme Pun were both awarded the M.M. Bahadur kept his section together, and accounted for no less than ten enemy with a Bren gun. Padme accounted for three, in spite of seven severe sword wounds, of which two were on the head.

It was a small-scale but vicious action, noteworthy for the sheer fanaticism of the enemy, who preferred to engage in suicidal hand-to-hand fighting, rather than to their more usual hit-and-run ambush.

For their dash and determination in this day's fighting, the Battalion was highly commended in a special order issued by the Divisional Commander.

From now onwards road protection was the Battalion's lot. This was carried out by a series of picquets and patrols in the North-West Frontier manner, with a close escort company with each convoy. The country was an ambusher's dream. The strain on the troops was considerable. Hostile action, varying from sniping to attempted ambushes, were experienced daily, and all units suffered casualties.

Even in Java the lighter side of daily routine was relieved by episodes such as the following : Early in the road protecting phase, Signals decided to make use of the Batavia-Bandoeng civil telephone line. The Bandoeng exchange was then in Indonesian hands, and the first efforts resulted in contact being made, not with Brigade Headquarters, but with a golden-voiced operator in Bandoeng who in her turn passed the message on to Brigade. Subsequent efforts by lonely souls to induce her to return to the telephone were not successful !

Again : As wireless communication after dark was hopeless, Brigade Headquarters one night decided to use French to send an urgent message in clear. Easy enough for the Brigade, with time to make a copy of their message. Not so for harassed Adjutants, no great French scholars at that. The resulting babel was broken into eventually by a voice from Bandoeng Civil Exchange (Indonesian). "Why not speak English ; your French really is atrocious."

To turn from the frivolous and to close in more serious vein.

The campaign in Java was over as far as the Battalion was concerned—a campaign notable for its all-embracing nature on a dwarf scale. Dwarf, because there were no major battles, few major engagements. It was a little war of skirmishes. All-embracing because there were no "safe" areas in Java. There was no front line because everywhere was the front line, and never a day passed without some shots being heard somewhere. Posts were eternally on the *qui vive*, and no sympathy was felt with the B.B.C. saying, "It is now six months since the end of the war," as bullets smacked against the wall. It was not a campaign which attracted world-wide interest, especially at the end of a world war.

It was a campaign in which everything made sense, as soon as one realized that in Java nothing ever made sense ; that half the principles of war were shelved, and the other half distorted beyond recognition. The only thing to do was to accept each crazy situation as it arose without asking too many questions ; in short, to accept the unorthodox as the normal. The Battalion carried out what was asked of it—the wider issues at stake have not been resolved even yet. And over-

shadowing all was the regret that war and its miseries had cast a blight on this, the loveliest of islands, upon which Nature had lavished all her stores of everything that is beautiful. Once again, "only man is vile."

Fresh Dutch troops had landed in April, 1946, and it was decided to relieve the 36th Indian Infantry Brigade, for return to India and disbandment.

After a farewell parade at Batavia on 4th May, 1946, at which the Divisional Commander took the salute, and thanked the Brigade for its excellent work, the whole Brigade embarked and sailed for Madras on 6th May, 1946.

Thus ended, in the Netherlands East Indies, the Battalion's part in the Second World War. It had maintained, in the difficult, arduous operations of the little-known Java campaign, the high reputation already won in the Arakan and Burma.

At Madras the Battalion said good-bye to the 8/13th Frontier Force Rifles and 5th Jats, their comrades in arms since Arakan days, moved to Kohat and relieved the 6th Royal Garhwal Rifles. The life of the Cantonment returned.

The following awards were won by the Battalion in the Second World War : D.S.O., 2 ; bar to D.S.O., 1 ; I.O.M., 1 ; M.C., 4 ; I.D.S.M., 9 ; M.M., 9 ; O.B.E., 1 ; M.B.E., 2.

Casualties sustained in action by the Battalion in the Second World War :

Killed : Captain W. F. C. Ashmore.  
Major P. G. B. McNalty.  
Gurkha other ranks, 34.

Died of  
wounds : Gurkha other ranks, 11.

Wounded : Lieutenant J. H. Irving.  
Jemadar Tekbahadur Pun.  
Subadar Bhawansing Thapa.  
Jemadar Manbahadur Gurung.  
Gurkha other ranks, 175.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

(See Maps Nos. 1, 7, 9 and 12)

*[This chapter is devoted to the history of the 2nd Battalion in the Second World War.]*

Wana, 1939-1940—Nepalese contingent—A French officer attached—Shillong—Quetta—Mechanization—Draft to 3/8th—8th Gurkha Rifles Training Centre—Mobilization—To Karachi—Change in command—Embarkation—Destination, Iraq—Voyage—Gurkhas man lifeboats—Unopposed landing—Situation in Iraq—Basra, Shaiba, Baghdad—In North Iraq—A Battalion guard—Drive to Libya—Situation in Western Desert—In Libya—Moves and counter-moves—Gambut—A lucky escape—Sollum—Mersa Matruh—Return of L.O.B. party—Two companies detached—21st Indian Infantry Brigade line on 28th June, 1942—Transport trouble—Enemy attack—Major Yeates wins D.S.O.—Good work by anti-tank gunners—Summing up—Retreat to El Alamein—More transport trouble—Casualties—A further summing up—Escapes—Alamein “Box”—Aerodrome defence—Army troops—New Zealand Division—El Alamein—Summing up—Back to Egypt—Join 3rd Indian Motor Brigade—Paiforce, 1943-4—Change in command.

THE outbreak of the Second World War found the Battalion on the North-West Frontier at Wana. The normal activities connected with that frontier were its lot. Success in the Brigade sporting events was attained.

During the early part of the Second World War many British and Gurkha officers and N.C.Os. were attached to the Nepalese Contingent from our 1st and 2nd Battalions to advise and assist in training. As in the First World War, Nepal had sent a strong contingent for service with her old ally.

For a period of four weeks in August and September, 1939, a French officer of the 23rd Colonial Infantry Regiment of the French Army was attached to the Battalion for training.

In March, 1940, the Battalion left Wana for Shillong after an absence from the “home” station of seven years. The Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir John Coleridge, met the Battalion at Lalamusa railway station and said farewell. He left India on retirement in June.

The stay was for six months, as on 27th September, 1940, the Battalion left for Quetta to join the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade of the new 9th Indian Division in that station.

We now hear of the Battalion becoming mechanized for the first time. Early in 1940 mechanization had started. This process was intensified on arrival in Quetta, the Battalion coming on to "Higher Scale M.T."

On 1st October, 1940, 5 Gurkha officers and 195 Gurkha other ranks left the Battalion to form part of the nucleus for the newly raised 3/8th Gurkha Rifles. In March, 1941, the Battalion furnished a similar contingent to help raise our 4th Battalion. To replace these and allow for further expansion, 425 recruits were enrolled by means of eighty special recruiters sent to Nepal early in September, 1940.

On 15th November, 1940, the training companies of 1st and 2nd Battalions were absorbed into the new 8th Gurkha Rifles Regimental Centre, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel (now Colonel) F. Willasey-Wilsey, M.C.

Training continued until 5th February, 1941, when the order to mobilize was received.

The departure of the Battalion from Quetta to Karachi on 7th April, 1941, was preceded by the move of all M.T. vehicles on 20th March, 1941.

On 22nd March, 1941, Lieutenant-Colonel H. S. Gordon, O.B.E., vacated command and proceeded to Lansdowne to raise the 4th Battalion. He was succeeded in command by Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Clarke, M.C.

When the Battalion embarked in H.T. *Lancashire* at Karachi on 9th April, 1941, as part of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, the movement was to have been a reinforcement for our forces in Malaya. As events turned out, it was fortunate for the Battalion that Rashid Ali started trouble of an anti-Allied nature in Iraq. A very sudden change of plans was made. The 20th Brigade was diverted to Iraq. Had this change not taken place, the Battalion would probably have suffered the fate of being captured in Singapore.

The voyage, though uneventful, was a strenuous one in many respects. The heavy equipment and machine guns had been packed in grease, and loaded at the bottom of the holds for the "peace" move to Malaya—the Battalion M.T. had already sailed in another ship for this latter place. The entire ship had to be unloaded to get at the equipment and machine guns, as an opposed landing was anticipated.

The ship's lifeboats were the only craft available for the landing. The men were instructed in the propelling and manœuvring of these boats during the run up the Gulf. That they learnt quickly, and well, was proved in the transfer of "A" and "B" Companies to an escort vessel (H.M.S. *Falmouth*), over a large expanse of sea, without any unfortunate incident.

As it turned out, the landing was unopposed. From the banks of

the river, crowds of Iraqis waved welcome, so evidently Rashid Ali's coup was not too popular, Basra way. Did the arrival of our troops cause a change of heart ?

The situation in Iraq, which caused the dispatch of the 10th Indian Division to that country, may here be briefly narrated.

Mention has been made of Rashid Ali. Convinced of a German victory, and with promises of German help, this individual had suddenly seized power in Baghdad. His "reign" was short-lived. In fact, his attempt to obtain complete control did not meet with much success, and, apart from the siege of the R.A.F. station and aerodrome at Habbanya, he made but little ground.

The 10th Indian Division, in conjunction with a motorized column which had marched across the desert from Egypt (including Household Cavalry and Arab Legion), soon cleared up the situation, and after the capture of Baghdad it was not long before an armistice was agreed to.

To return to the Battalion : guard duties at Basra and Shaiba, with patrolling in those areas, continued to the end of May, 1941, when a move northwards was ordered.

Baghdad was reached after a laborious march owing to floods, and the same round of guard duties was the Battalion's lot. Local thieves found that thefts from our installations had to be purchased dearly, as some eight were killed and six wounded and captured in these attempts.

For the next ten months (1941 and 1942) the Battalion, forming part of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 10th Indian Division, remained on garrison duty in northern Iraq, and consequently missed, firstly, the campaign in Syria, and secondly, that in Persia. The Brigade was very much scattered, and no doubt units' concentration and relief would have caused delay. All the same, it was galling to see troops, newly landed, pass through the first arrivals into action.

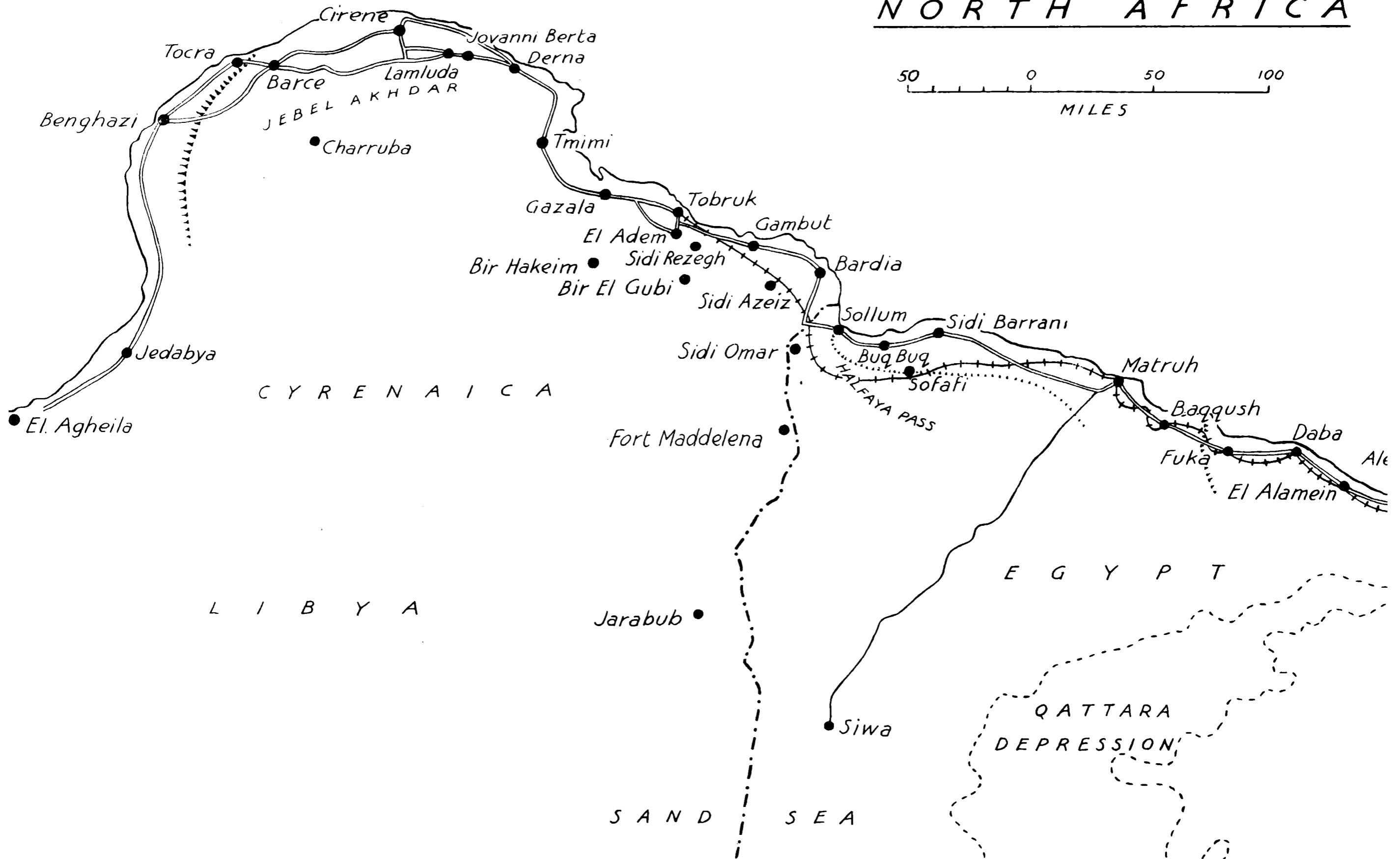
Apart from garrison duties, these months were employed in training in Brigade M.T. movement, and in larger operational exercises.

During the Battalion's stay in Iraq a photograph (strangely enough, it got past the censor) appeared in a well-known English illustrated paper of a Gurkha guard, with Union Jack flying over an 80-pounder tent ; the caption read, "The most northerly British Post in the Middle East" (or words to that effect). The red pompon of the 2nd Battalion was clearly seen. A very smart guard it looked too.

At last came the long-awaited orders to move. These entailed the Battalion joining a brigade in Egypt, due to proceed at once to the Western Desert (Libya). This move entailed a non-stop run from



# NORTH AFRICA





Baghdad to Tobruk. Three-ton, four-wheel-drive lorries were suddenly issued, and the Battalion was told to drive them across themselves. Only two or three men had had any experience of driving such heavy vehicles, and it says a great deal for the way in which the Gurkha took to mechanization that the long, tiring journey was completed without a single accident, on a by no means easy track.

By the time the Battalion reached Egypt, the Gazala battle had started, and it was promptly ordered forward.

From the British point of view, the situation in the Western Desert at the end of May, 1942, had become unsatisfactory.

After the practical elimination of the Italian Army by Lord Wavell, there followed operations in which victory had fluctuated between our forces and the enemy. These do not affect the history of the Battalion. Suffice to say that in May, 1942, the Axis forces, under Rommel, commenced an all-out attack against our forces in the Gazala area, where they had retired from Al Agheila (south of Benghazi). Both sides had been preparing for the offensive, but by the beginning of May, 1942, it was evident that the Axis forces had gained the initiative.

The Battalion, on arrival in Libya, formed part of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade of the 10th Indian Division (commander, Major-General T. W. Rees). Its first location was at Gambut, some thirty miles east of Tobruk.

Various moves to El Adem and Sidi Rezegh were carried out during the first week of June, 1942, and eventually a section of the outer defences of Tobruk was occupied. This, however, was a short-lived move, as the 21st Brigade was soon withdrawn, the Battalion being relieved by 2/7th Gurkha Rifles, who were to share the fate of the Tobruk garrison, after a very gallant defence.

The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade now found itself under command of the 5th Indian Division.

From this point onwards the general situation became most confused. It was apparent that a systematic breaking-up of our organization and the overrunning of pockets of resistance was in progress. Fighting as a brigade was non-existent.

It is proposed, therefore, to follow as far as possible the fortunes of the Battalion from accounts of those who were present.

From Tobruk the Battalion moved to Sidi Rezegh. As its artillery regiment and British battalion had already been withdrawn, the depleted remnant of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade was not sufficient to hold the Sidi Rezegh "Box," which was handed over to the Battalion's original brigade (20th), newly arrived from Iraq. The Battalion moved once more to Gambut.

By this time the Battalion had received four 2-pounder anti-tank guns. The crews had had only three days' instruction, and had fired very few rounds, so a lull of three days at Gambut was a godsend, enabling more practice to be done. This was to stand the Battalion in good stead later.

Whilst at Gambut, the O.C. had been summoned to Sidi Rezegh to take over from a battalion of the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, as that brigade was clamouring for its return. The Divisional Commander, however, decided, in view of the situation, that a change-over was not advisable at that moment, and the relief did not take place—a fortunate escape for our Battalion as the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade was overrun the very next night, and very few escaped.

With plenty of heavy and light anti-aircraft guns on the Gambut aerodromes, which, if necessary, could be used in an anti-tank role, the Battalion, now employed on aerodrome protection duties, was confident of giving a warm reception to any Panzer division that came its way. Dispositions to this effect were taken up. This was not to be, however, as on 17th June, 1942, the Battalion was ordered back to Sollum and Halfayah without delay; in fact, permission to wait for the return of patrols, and a company column, operating some ten miles away, was denied. However, by sending out truck patrols to order the withdrawal of these forward bodies (W/T had failed) their retirement was safely effected. It was indeed a close call, for as they left one side of the aerodrome, the enemy entered the other.

The fog of war was rapidly increasing, and very meagre information was forthcoming as to the general situation. Despite this, morale was high and hopes were entertained of a real stand at Sollum. Strong positions were held in readiness, but again it was not to be. A further withdrawal was ordered—this time to Mersa Matruh, which was reached on 24th June, 1942. Here, again, the Battalion took over a section of the defences, and prepared for a stand-up fight.

After forty-eight hours another move was ordered, this time to the escarpment, with orders to dig in as fast as possible.

Here occurred a number of complicated movements which, though most probably well thought out by higher authority, were inexplicable to the regimental officer. Without warning, the "left out of battle" (L.O.B.) party under Major C. W. Yeates re-joined. This party had been carefully chosen with a proportion of specialists—a party (found so necessary in the First World War) on which the Battalion could be rebuilt in the event of heavy casualties. Back they came with main Battalion Office, bringing with them mess and other equipment considered better well away from the battlefield. Then the Commanding Officer was told to send a complete company

("B" Company) back in place of the L.O.B. party. A second company ("A" Company, commander Major R. C. Wall) was ordered (under command Divisional Headquarters) into Mersa Matruh. This company was not seen again. During the night, the L.O.B. party had to be organized into a company, and dispositions altered to suit the Battalion's depleted strength. All this was not a good beginning of what was to follow.

On the morning of 28th June, 1942, the Battalion was ordered to move back again, and occupy a position south of Qassaba, about eighteen miles to the east of Mersa Matruh. For this move the Battalion joined up with two other battalions of the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade—the 4/13th Frontier Force Rifles and the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles. In strength these two battalions were the equivalent of one and one-quarter battalions only, owing to very serious losses at Sidi Rezegh.

The defensive line held by 21st Indian Infantry Brigade faced south-west across the escarpment, and dispositions were :

Right—1/6th Rajputana Rifles, echeloned back with  
Brigade Headquarters.

Centre—2/8th Gurkha Rifles (less two companies detached).

Left—4/13th Frontier Force Rifles.

The Brigade was in touch with the 50th (Northumbrian) Division which was attacking enemy forces holding blocks on the main road five miles to the east.

At about 4 p.m., whilst the Battalion was digging in, a stampede of transport vehicles ("B" Echelon) came through the Battalion's position from the front. Driving very fast and wildly, it was possible to stop only a few vehicles. Apparently the battalion to which this transport was attached had been attacked suddenly when taking up its position, and one company, with Battalion Headquarters, had been overrun, and lost many men. This necessitated fresh dispositions by the 2/8th Gurkha Rifles. It says much for the discipline and high morale of the Battalion, that the shattering experience of about one hundred lorries dashing through its position, with panic-stricken drivers shouting, had no effect on our men, who continued carrying out their jobs of digging in, etc.

These transport stampedes, though frequent, were not universal, and were not due by any means to "permanent" panic on the part of Indian drivers, who for the most part carried out their duties most creditably. Our own Gurkha drivers played their part satisfactorily, as is witnessed by the fact that the fighting echelon was present to withdraw the Battalion on the night of 28th/29th June, 1942.

It was practically a half-battalion only that was available for the

defence. In addition to four 2-pounder anti-tank guns of its own, the Battalion had six 6-pounder anti-tank guns under command. These were distributed along its front.

At about 5.15 p.m. the action commenced by an enemy attack on our forward carriers and infantry. Second-Lieutenant Ridley was severely wounded when sent forward to report on the position. He subsequently died of his wounds.

The enemy's attack on the main position commenced by shelling, directed chiefly at the transport, sending his tanks round the eastern flank, and endeavouring to pin the Brigade to its ground by a frontal attack with infantry.

The enemy fire was heavy and largely tracer, which was somewhat disconcerting to troops who had never experienced the like before.

More transport trouble had the effect of leaving the Battalion with its fighting echelon only.

In the course of the fighting, which was now general, Major C. W. Yeates went forward under very heavy fire, rallied the sections in front, stayed with them, and encouraged them to hit back hard. His action undoubtedly saved what might have been a nasty situation. His gallantry and leadership won for him the D.S.O.

For two hours the enemy attacked continuously. The newly trained anti-tank gunners of the Battalion did good service. Three enemy tanks for certain, and two probables, were accounted for by these crews, who, prior to this action, had never even seen tanks in battle. At nightfall the enemy withdrew, evidently having had enough. Not an inch of ground had he gained, nor had he succeeded in inflicting any great damage on the Battalion.

So ended the first action in which the Battalion was engaged in the Second World War. There had been disquieting moments, such as the transport panic, but when it is remembered that the situation contained the following factors :

- (i) Tanks in the ascendancy (this a regular rumour-spreading "bogy") ;
- (ii) Infantry being overrun almost daily ;
- (iii) Six weeks' constant movement, with no time for rest and reorganization ;
- (iv) Meeting enemy tanks for the first time ; and
- (v) With anti-tank gun crews who had had no opportunity for thorough training

—it can be claimed that the Battalion had carried out its duties in a way which did credit to the O.C., Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Clarke, M.C., and all concerned.

Attempts to communicate with Brigade Headquarters by signal

failed. Then, fortunately, the Brigade Signal Officer arrived, with orders for the Battalion to withdraw by a route given generally as first south, then east and finally back on to the main road near Fuqa, some twenty-five miles to the east, a Divisional rendezvous.

Prospects did not look too bright for the Battalion's get-away. The road-block to the east was still held by the enemy, and the only hope was to go south, up on to the escarpment, and endeavour to slip through the enemy cordon by night. As already noted, the "B" Echelon transport had gone. What remained was made to serve, and all present were packed in or on the vehicles. At 9 p.m. the eventful journey started. Eventful it certainly proved to be. For a couple of hours all went well, when suddenly from out of the darkness came a mass of transport from behind. Who these were mattered not, but they were not fighting units. This *sauve qui peut* had the effect of completely upsetting and splitting the Battalion column. The Commanding Officer succeeded in keeping a party together, and, finding a gap in the enemy's cordon, got through without any major incident. Not far from Fuqa, the Divisional Commander was met. From him it was learnt that this place was in enemy hands, so a change of direction was imperative. This was done and by 2 p.m. on 29th June, 1942, the remnants of the Battalion arrived in the El Alamein position. It had left the scene of the previous day's battle with 8 British officers and some 300 Gurkha ranks, and when collected at a spot ten miles south-east of El Alamein it totalled 5 British officers and 220 Gurkha ranks.

Including those sustained by the two detached companies, the Battalion losses amounted to :

- British officer wounded (subsequently died of wounds) :  
Acting Captain R. F. Ridley.
- Missing : Major R. R. C. Wall.  
Second-Lieutenant A. McKenzie.  
Captain S. C. Ghosh (attached Medical Officer).
- Killed : Gurkha other ranks, 2.
- Wounded : Gurkha other ranks, 4.
- Missing : Gurkha officers, 11.  
Gurkha other ranks, 419.  
Followers, 41.

So far as the Battalion was concerned, the campaign which had completely changed the situation in North Africa had ended. A brief summary of the extent of the disorganization to which our forces in that theatre, and at that time, were reduced can perhaps best be given in the following paragraphs, taken from an official source :

"From this point, 27th May, 1942, onwards no record will be

given of the multiplicity of formations in which the Indian and British units of the Indian Divisions found themselves. The 5th Indian Division, for instance, never functioned as a whole. Sometimes it had two brigades, sometimes one, on occasions none at all. Brigades of the 4th and 10th Indian Divisions also came under command only to disappear again, while the gunners were for ever changing.

“Innumerable instances there were of good discipline, courage and devotion to duty, but it must be confessed, owing largely to absence of good leadership, the morale of the whole Army deteriorated very quickly.”

That war is often a case of touch and go may be instanced from extracts from General Rommel's papers. In these it is noted that he was very near to surrender with his force (end of May, 1942) owing to lack of water and petrol. A lucky break, in the capture by him of sufficient of these vital necessities, enabled him to continue his operations with unexpected success.

To resume our narrative. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade were detailed to hold a “box” in the El Alamein position, but as casualties had been so heavy (higher in the other units than in the Battalion) it was withdrawn. A brigade (18th Indian Infantry), newly arrived from Iraq, was put in. Once again it was a fortunate escape, as very shortly afterwards that particular “box” was overrun.

The depleted Battalion was now employed on aerodrome defence duties. The 10th Indian Division (less 21st Indian Infantry Brigade), a shadow of its former self, was sent back to Cairo for refitting. The 21st Indian Infantry Brigade remained as army troops.

During the retreat from the Battalion position to El Alamein, there were some remarkable escapes. Of these, that of Major C. W. Yeates, D.S.O., deserves mention. He actually drove into an enemy laager, but was fortunate enough to find a somnolent body of Huns, with their light artillery trained off the road. This gave him breathing space, which he made every use of. That of Captain K. M. M. Ross and Captain H. N. Mackenzie must also be recorded. The truck in which these two officers, together with two Gurkha officers and ten Gurkha other ranks, were riding crashed in taking action to avoid the German laager already mentioned. There was nothing for it but to take to their feet, so the party started off. Two drinks of water, one from a six-gallon tin supplied by Arabs at a cost of thirty shillings, and another from a derelict vehicle whose radiator was full, cheered the party up, as did the sight of a R.A.F. raid on an enemy laager, which was laid on good and hearty for an hour.

After some progress it was decided to split up into small groups, as it would have been hopeless to get through with such a large party. Ross and Mackenzie went together.

To relate the day-by-day adventures in this lonely trek of one hundred miles would take too much space. Briefly, the pair dodged the enemy, from tanks to individuals, by changing direction almost hourly, and existed on a diet of all too insufficient water collected somehow or the other *en route*. Finally, on 4th July, 1944, the two officers arrived in the British lines. Their reception, before crawling through our wire, was a warm one, and very nearly ended their plucky effort. Fortune favoured the brave on this occasion and into the position of a South African unit (Imperial Light Horse) the weary travellers stumbled unscathed. A most wonderful cup of tea, Maconochie ration, and pineapples (the first food eaten for six days excepting a few biscuits found the previous day) more than made up for the fact that the Light Horse had an hour previously been taking pot shots at a supposed enemy!

A few notes made of this remarkable effort by the officers themselves are of interest. (1) It was found that movement by day was far less tiring than by night, as the way between enemy groups could be picked out a long way ahead, and saved the inevitable long detour made necessary by encountering enemy at night. For the same reason, a day reconnaissance of the first part of a night march saved a lot of toil and trouble. (2) The Arabs proved friendly, and twice provided water.

During August, 1942, drafts arrived; these, with the return of about 120 N.C.Os. and men who had escaped or had been released, brought the Battalion up to strength once again.

Until October, 1942, the Battalion, as Army troops, was occupied in aerodrome defence, constructing defence positions—in fact, any jobs which happened to turn up. Not very satisfactory from the point of view of reorganization and training. Nobody's child for long, and, during this period, the Battalion came under command of every formation in the M.E.F., except the Fighting French.

One formation with which the Battalion spent a most enjoyable time was the New Zealand Division. These grand fighters took the Gurkhas to their hearts. Their attention to the Battalion's welfare, and their help in every possible way, will not be forgotten by the 2/8th. Later, in Italy, the Battalion was again to come into close contact with the New Zealanders.

The days went by in the preparation by the Eighth Army for the grand offensive commenced at El Alamein on 23rd October, 1942, and which was to culminate in the overthrow of the enemy in North Africa, for, by May, 1943, the Allies had compelled the German General Von Arnim to surrender with the whole of the Axis forces.

At the time of the El Alamein battle, the Battalion did not form part of a formation which took part in the operations. It was again

engaged in aerodrome defence, but was fortunate in being chosen to go forward with the fighter squadrons, and consequently saw much of the pursuit westward, as far as Derna. All hoped to go farther and be absorbed into a formation, but it was not to be. At Martuba on 25th November, 1942, the Battalion was suddenly withdrawn, and its time with the Eighth Army was at an end.

It cannot be said that the months spent in North Africa were a satisfactory period for the Battalion—plenty of hard work, and much incomprehensible movement of the kind then prevailing. It joined a force in the midst of a retreat, and no opportunity ever arose for fighting with its division as such. In its one engagement the Battalion had shown that its discipline and ability to fight back, and hold up an armoured and victorious enemy, was not impaired by the very unstable state of affairs into which it had been plunged.

After travelling 750 miles in six days, the Battalion arrived back in Egypt, where on 30th November, 1942, it received reinforcements from India amounting to 7 British officers, 4 Gurkha officers, 233 Gurkha other ranks and 34 followers.

After six weeks the order to move came—a long move, too, of some 975 miles to Baghdad. It was on 16th January, 1943, that the order came to join the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade of the 31st Indian Armoured Division. The other battalions of the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade were 2/6th Gurkha Rifles and 2/10th Gurkha Rifles. A new role, and one which appealed greatly, and all ranks very quickly got down to learning the new technique. It was this brigade, with the same Gurkha battalions, which was to win renown later on as a Gurkha Lorried Brigade in Italy.

At Shaiba, in Iraq, the reorganization commenced at the end of January, 1943, and on 26th February, 1943, the designation of the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade was changed to 43rd Indian Infantry Brigade (Lorried).

For eighteen months the Battalion served in Paiforce, its original formation. There was no fighting, but plenty of training and exercises to fit the Brigade for what was to come.

Space does not allow, nor will it be of sufficient interest, to tell of the many places visited, and camps occupied. Under command of the Ninth Army, the Battalion carried out schemes, which on occasions were executed in conjunction with Free French, Greek, Polish and Transjordan troops. This gives the impression that communication must have been a headache to many a Signals unit, especially as each of these nations possess an entirely different form of script.

On 18th December, 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Yeates, D.S.O., arrived back again from 4/8th Gurkha Rifles to assume command *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Clarke, M.C.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

(See Map No. 13)

*[This chapter tells of the 2nd Battalion in Italy, 1944-5.]*

To Italy—General Sir Oliver Leese—Gothic Line—The terrain—1st Armoured Division—Passano—Coriano Ridge—Plans for attack—Attack commences—Good work by Sappers—All objectives won—Consolidation—Enemy counter-attacks—Prime Minister's message—Second phase—Mulazzano—Battalion attack—"B" Company and 10th Hussars—Medical Officer and stretcher-bearers—Results of battle—Casualties—Awards—The Prime Minister's message—The terrain—First assault on San Arcangelo by two Divisions and one Armoured Brigade—43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade ordered forward—Plans for attacking San Arcangelo—The attack—River crossed—Advance to the ridge—Position at daybreak, 23rd September, 1944—Tanks and vehicles held up—"B" Company advance—Monastery occupied—Ridge untenable—Withdrawal—Evening attack—Success—The Medical Officer again—Goanese mess butler's stout work—"C" Company—Casualties—Rest and reorganization—1st Armoured Division broken up—56th (London) Division—10th Indian Division—The country—Monte Chicco ridge—The ridge attacked—Assault on Monte Chicco—2/6th Gurkha Rifles reach Monte Chicco—2/8th move forward—Monte Chicco won—Cesena captured by 46th Division—Casualties—Commanding Officers given a rest—10th Indian Division attack—Battalion in support to 20th Indian Infantry Brigade—The Ronco—Jemadar Judhbir Gurung's platoon—43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade tribute—Across the Ronco—Rest billets—Casualties.

By mid-summer, 1944, it was realized that the very difficult terrain in which our Eighth Army was operating in Italy made the infantry soldier of more immediate value than tanks, and that the armoured divisions were in need of support by more foot soldiers. Consequently the Gurkha Lorried Brigade, then serving in Northern Syria as part of 31st Indian Armoured Division, was called upon. The Battalion embarked at Alexandria on 28th July, 1944, disembarked at Taranto on 1st August, 1944, and joined the 1st British Armoured Division.

With the 43rd Lorried Brigade (commander, Brigadier A. R. Barker, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.) came the 23rd Field Regiment, R.A. Although described as "Lorried," the Brigade saw little enough of their lorries in the forthcoming campaign, and it is interesting to note that throughout its Italian service the Brigade remained an independent unit, destined to serve many masters as occasion demanded.

Until 18th August, 1944, the Battalion spent a very busy time drawing vehicles, equipment and weapons of all kinds. It sent a

party of British officers, Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers up to the 2/4th Gurkha Rifles (10th Armoured Division), who were in the line, to get an idea of front-line conditions.

The 1st British Armoured Division was concentrated very secretly in vineyards, farmyards, and in a thick belt of jungle near Recanati, and it was here the Battalion arrived on 20th August, 1944, to hear that General Sir Oliver Leese (commanding Eighth Army) had that day disclosed to the officers, 1st Armoured Division, the Eighth Army plan for breaking the formidable Gothic Line.

No attempt will be made to describe in detail the Gothic Line, but a general outline is necessary to give an idea of the task which was ahead of our troops.

There can be few positions of such great natural strength as the Gothic Line. The man-made portion of it was constructed (largely by forced Italian labour) on the 100-miles barrier of the High Apennines which run from the Gulf of Genoa to within a few miles of Rimini, on the Adriatic Coast.

Before describing the Battalion's first Italian battle, a general picture of the terrain in which it operated, taken from the histories of the Indian Divisions in Italy ("The Tiger Triumphs") and the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade, is necessary.

The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade found itself in a countryside of fields and vineyards. It was a rolling land, so that normally one saw little except the gentle slopes of the ridges before and behind ; to the north-west, however, there arose a great mountain, which bore three castles on its crest, and which commanded the country for many miles around. This was San Marino, with its city republic built in tiers upon the slopes of the mountain. On all sides of San Marino the ground fell away in ridges slashed by deep eroded ravines, the feeders of the rivers, which twisted and turned, now north, now south, now directly east on their way to the Adriatic. There was no constant grain to the ground, and, particularly to the north-west of San Marino, the ridges tended to be high, tortuous saddlebacks. The rounded contours along the Adriatic coast gave fruitful ground, so that cultivation and farmhouses showed everywhere ; but farther inland, in the north, the hills were sharp and bare, to which sparse crops clung. Thus in the south, the Germans possessed cover and dead ground for the siting of their defences, while in the north the lean, precipitous ridges afforded neither protection nor tracks to those who must climb and seize them. Truly a countryside stiff with menaces to the attacking soldier.

The famous 1st Armoured Division, to which the Gurkha Lorried Brigade was now attached, consisted of the 2nd Armoured Brigade (Queen's Bays, 9th Lancers and 10th Hussars) and the 18th Lorried

Infantry Brigade. The month before the battle which commenced on 12th September, 1944, was sufficient to consolidate the spirit of good comradeship which, from the beginning, animated both British and Gurkha elements of this fine division.

To go into a detailed account of the disposition of the great armies facing each other at the commencement of this battle would be impossible in a history of this kind; suffice to say that the 1st Armoured Division moved into the line on the left of the Canadian Corps, having on their left the 46th and 56th British Divisions. Opposing the 1st Armoured Division were the German 26th Panzer Grenadier and 98th Infantry Divisions. Of these two latter, the 26th Panzer were in front of the Gurkha Lorried Brigade.

The plan, as it affected our 1st Armoured Division, was the storming of the Passano–Coriano ridge. The Gurkha Brigade, with 18th Lorried Infantry Brigade, would strike at the left flank of the ridge, and then exploit northward towards Coriano, the north-westerly objective of the Canadian Corps. Farther to the west the 56th London Division and 46th Division would join in assaults on Croce and Gemmano.

The 26th Panzer Grenadier Division held a long low ridge above the River Conca, on the crests of which were the hamlets of San Savino, Passano and Coriano. They had already beaten off heavy attacks, and until they were thrust from this position, the Eighth Army was at a standstill.

As the spearhead of this attack, the 1st Armoured Division allotted the post of honour to the Gurkhas.

The orders were concise and clear. The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade to attack and secure the ridge Passano–San Savino.

Right	...	...	...	10th Gurkha Rifles.
Left	...	...	...	8th Gurkha Rifles.
Reserve	...	...	...	6th Gurkha Rifles.

In support of 8th Gurkha Rifles was one squadron Queen's Bays in Sherman tanks, one troop 310 S.P. Battery, 60th Anti-tank Regiment, one troop 17-pounders, and one troop 2nd Field Squadron, R.E.

After a couple of postponements, due to unfavourable weather, the attack commenced at 2300 hours on 12th September, 1944, preceded by an artillery concentration by no less than 29 regiments.

The Battalion attacked as follows: Forward companies—Right, "C"; centre, "A"; and left, "D." Reserve Company—"B."

Following two artillery concentrations (box barrages) at 1800 and 1945 hours, each of about twenty-five minutes' duration, the final

concentration began at 2306 hours, when 504 guns crashed into action against Passano Ridge in support of the 1st Armoured Division, and the Canadian Corps attacking Coriano.

Meanwhile the Battalion had been getting into position—not an easy task in pitch darkness, and in such difficult country. With the advance party of “B” Company, Signal line party, and Intelligence section went the Field Troop, R.E., which did splendid work, coolly and methodically preparing crossings and taping routes, despite the fact that the Troop Commander and 30 per cent. of his troop became casualties owing to heavy artillery and mortar fire.

Parachute flares, dropped by an aircraft, lit up the very naked forward slope of the hill down which the Battalion was moving.

A sudden and heavy burst of enemy artillery fire followed, which fell on the first nullah to be crossed by the Battalion. Fortunately, only one or two men were wounded.

Energetic action by officers and non-commissioned officers sorted things out, and, though somewhat behind the barrage, the resolution and skill of the troops made up for this.

Moving at the rate of 100 yards in six minutes, the Battalion advanced steadily, and by 0300 hours on 13th September reported all objectives taken. Many enemy had been killed, and 27 prisoners taken. In spite of heavy machine-gun fire, the Battalion successfully got to close quarters for the hand-to-hand fighting at which the Gurkha excels.

It is on record that one Gurkha officer killed six Germans, and another five, in clearing farmhouses. Their names and regiments are unfortunately unknown. We do not claim that both these Gurkha officers belonged to the Battalion, but as the 2/10th Gurkha Rifles was the only other Gurkha Battalion in the attack, the chances are that one belonged to the 2/8th.

Three German tanks were pounced upon, and their crews accounted for.

One non-commissioned officer, Lance-Naik Tekansing Rana of “B” Company, was ambushed and captured by the enemy when sitting his Bren gun to cover the start line. He was taken away and confined for forty-eight hours without food or water. Later he succeeded in killing the guard with his kukri, dressed himself in Italian clothes, and rejoined the Battalion on 19th September, 1944, bringing in some very useful information about enemy positions.

When dawn broke on 13th September the 43rd Lorried Brigade had made satisfactory progress in consolidation, but much remained to be done in this respect.

Of this battle, as of nearly every battle in Italy, the story is of two phases—the storming of the high ground by the infantry, and

the equally grim fight against time by the Sappers and armour to get support weapons forward, before the enemy could throw his reserves at the newly won positions. On this occasion, in spite of strenuous enemy resistance, the task was accomplished with the greatest gallantry, but at the cost of serious casualties to the troops, guns and tanks.

The Battalion's consolidation group, led by Lieutenant Burton (Carrier Platoon), consisted of one squadron Sherman tanks (9th Lancers), one troop S.P. anti-tank guns, the Battalion's 6-pounders towed by carriers, reserve ammunition on carriers and Honey tanks, the 3-inch mortars, and all the jeeps. Not much space can be devoted to the action of this group. Equally with the others engaged in this perilous undertaking which entailed overcoming darkness, smoke and dust, blown bridges, obliterated tracks and heavy enemy bombardment, the ridge was consolidated, thanks largely to the skill and the determination of the drivers.

Counter-attacks by the enemy were made, but not on the Battalion front, which experienced heavy shelling only. "C" and "D" Companies, in the mopping-up operations on the morning, succeeded in wiping out two enemy nests, accounting for about fifteen killed and captured.

The vital ridge was won, and the Eighth Army had elbow room to continue the battle.

Far away in Whitehall, the Prime Minister (The Right Honourable Winston Churchill) had followed the course of the fighting. His congratulations on "this brilliant feat of arms" was a proud tribute to all, and to the Gurkha Lorried Brigade in their first battle.

From their positions around Passano, the Gurkhas looked northwards into the valley of the Marano, with Ripabianca ridge between them and the river, and the higher Mulazzano ridge dominating the further bank.

18th Lorried Infantry Brigade, supported by 2nd Armoured Brigade, cleared Ripabianca after bitter fighting on 14th September, 1944.

On 15th September, 1944, the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade attacked Mulazzano ridge with 2/6th Gurkha Rifles on right and the 2/8th on left, in the front line. On the left of the Battalion, the 56th (London) Division were, later in the night, to capture the village of Mulazzano, which dominated the whole ridge.

The attack was in two phases :

Phase 1. "D" Company right, "A" Company left.

Phase 2. "C" Company pass through "D," and "B" Company through "A."

“H” hour was 1900 hours on 15th September, 1944. A hammering of the ridge by the R.A.F. was followed by an artillery concentration by the whole of divisional artillery, plus one medium regiment, R.A.

Phase 1 was carried out in daylight. Crossing from the start line, the forward companies advanced with great determination, and by about 1945 hours reported their objectives captured. Many casualties had been inflicted on the enemy while clearing them out of farm buildings with bomb and bayonet. This advance of 1,400 yards was made in forty-five minutes, in the face of heavy fire.

At 2030 hours “C” Company passed through “D” Company, and “B” Company passed through “A” Company. It was now dark, though the whole area was lit up by burning farm buildings and haystacks. These two companies made good their objectives (against light opposition), on which they were established by about 2145 hours.

The consolidation group moved up, and this time, thanks to a shrewd selection by the Commanding Officer of the crossing place over the Marano river to be used, without the losses sustained at the Passano–Coriano ridge battle.

There were still many enemy not accounted for in the Battalion area. This fact led to incidents of which one is typical. An enemy patrol, led by an officer, surprised a crew of a 6-pounder busily digging in. “Hands up,” said the officer, but before he could fire, Havildar Deobahadur Punj felled him with a shovel. The gun crew seized their arms, and killed three of the Germans: the remainder fled into the darkness.

Next morning, 16th September, “B” Company, with some tanks of the 10th Hussars, had a lively brush, mopping up enemy remnants entrenched in a nullah; these had been overrun and unnoticed in the previous evening’s advance.

In both these actions the Medical Officer, Captain T. C. Hopkins-Husson, I.A.M.C., and the stretcher-bearers of the Battalion performed outstanding service.

All day on 16th September casualties were sustained owing to heavy enemy shelling and mortar fire, but there was no counter-attack. As regards the battle generally, the situation was satisfactory, and good progress had been made towards ejecting the enemy from the mountainous country guarding the plains to the north.

The Battalion had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy; 125 prisoners, and a considerable number of arms, equipment and vehicles were taken.

The Battalion casualties had amounted to :

12th/13th September : All ranks, killed and wounded, 48.

15th/16th September : All ranks, killed and wounded, 68.

Three M.Cs. and two M.Ms. were won by the Battalion in these two actions.

This first successful encounter of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade with the enemy, in which the Battalion took a leading part, gave great confidence for the future.

Once again the Prime Minister, in a message to the Army Commander, showed his appreciation. To quote his message : "Many congratulations upon the storming of the Coriano ridge, and the passage of the Marano. I can see that this has been a grand feat of arms upon the part of the troops involved."

The following six days from 16th September, 1944, were spent in obtaining what rest was possible. Incessant rain had transformed the countryside into practically a vast lake ; fields were flooded, and tracks became useless. Tanks and vehicles were bogged down. With only gas capes as protection, the advice to make themselves as comfortable as possible was not easily carried out.

A short description of the terrain ahead of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade is necessary. To the north-west, from the crest of Mulazzano, a river (the Marecchia) and a ridge confronted the Brigade. This ridge, on which the fortress of San Arcangelo stood, was situated five miles distant across a wide valley. To the west, between the Mulazzano ridge and the Marecchia river, lay a low valley through which a metalled road led up to San Marino. Beyond this road, three miles of broken land intervened. Then came the stony bed of the Marecchia, 1,000 yards wide, the river being split into a number of small streams feeling their way through the gravel. Twelve hundred yards beyond this river was a railway line, with embankment running south-west from San Arcangelo. Beyond the railway, San Arcangelo sat on its ridge, with the main Rimini-Bologna highway skirting its southern walls.

A converging attack on 21st September, 1944, by two divisions, with one armoured brigade, across the front of the Gurkhas, over difficult ground, against an enemy very strong in anti-tank and self-propelled guns, was not successful, and once more the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade was ordered forward.

At 1915 hours on 22nd September, 1944, the Brigade was warned to be prepared to establish a bridgehead over the Marecchia that night. The situation was confused. Time for reconnaissance was not possible, nor were detailed maps available. However, the warning was confirmed, and orders were issued about 2330 hours.

The 43rd Brigade plan was for the 2/8th and 2/10th Gurkha Rifles to pass through 2/6th (with elements on the south bank of the Marecchia) and to attack, 2/8th right, and 2/10th left.

The Battalion plan was in two phases :

Phase 1. Forward Companies : "B" Company right and "C" Company left. To secure the line of the railway embankment about 1,200 yards beyond the river.

Phase 2. "A" Company right and "D" Company left. To pass through "B" and "C" Companies, and occupy the monastery at San Arcangelo, and a farmhouse respectively.

The attack was to be a silent one. The Battalion arrived on the start line at 0115 hours on 23rd September, 1944—a creditable feat seeing that warning had been so very short, orders had to be issued, tired men to be roused, and an approach march over difficult ground to be accomplished.

At 0300 hours the advance commenced. In silence and well closed up to clear the river-bed (an obvious artillery defensive fire task), the Battalion succeeded in passing this obstacle before any sign was made by the enemy.

At about 0400 hours the railway embankment was reached, but in doing so a canal about eight feet wide and six feet deep had to be negotiated. The Battalion surmounted this formidable obstacle, and about 0430 hours "A" and "D" Companies moved forward to their objectives. It was now that heavy enemy fire from all directions was encountered, but fine leadership and the stout hearts of the men met with reward, and at 0500 hours the two forward companies had gained the ridge. To gain the monastery was another matter. Heavily defended, there was a ten-foot brick wall which had no opening.

When dawn broke, the outlook was not promising. The two forward companies were clinging obstinately to the bare slopes overlooked by the monastery, and by a castle, with thick walls twenty feet high, only some 300 yards farther east.

Owing to heavy bombardment by enemy guns on the river crossing, tanks and vehicles could not cross, so the hoped-for consolidation group did not appear.

An attempt to get tanks up to the Battalion succeeded, in that two crossed the canal; the third, however, fell into it, owing to the collapse of a bridge which had been found, and which it was using.

As "A" Company had suffered severe casualties, "B" Company (less one platoon) was sent forward to reinforce. They had to fight their way through, clearing three houses in the process; a number of Germans were killed, and 31 prisoners taken. At 0830 hours the ridge was reached. The two tanks mentioned did noble work and helped "A" Company to establish two sections in the Monastery, by cleaning up the Spandaus in the vicinity, and shooting a hole in the wall. Heavily fired on from all sides, and with our own artillery unable to help much owing to the ground configuration, and with



enemy tanks shooting up the forward companies from the flank, it was obvious that the position of the forward companies was untenable. "A" Company of the 2/10th on the 2/8th's left had suffered heavy casualties.

The remnants of the forward companies withdrew to the embankment under cover of a smoke screen. Here "C" Company remained as rear-guard.

The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade was not defeated though. The Brigade Commander (Brigadier A. R. Barker, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.) ordered the 2/6th Gurkha Rifles forward to assist in the attack, and protect the right flank. The ridge must be taken, and taken it was. Supported by a squadron of tanks (10th Hussars), which had managed to make their way across the Marecchia, and with artillery moved up to bring the ridge within range, the three battalions surged forward that evening (23rd September, 1944). The ridge was cleared, the town was won. The castle garrison was mopped up, and partisans, led by the local barber, joined the victors.

The morning of 24th September, 1944, revealed that the enemy had accepted his beating and was gone. Patrols pushed on, and the next river, the historic Rubicon, was found to be undefended.

So ended the battle for the San Arcangelo ridge. For eleven days the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade had been continuously in action, during which the men had borne themselves like veterans though, in most cases, under fire for the first time.

To return to the Battalion, once again mention must be made of the devoted work of the Medical Officer, Captain Hopkins-Husson, I.A.M.C., who was subsequently awarded the M.C. He managed to get all casualties away from his R.A.P., and, though a small man, he succeeded in carrying the last casualty, a husky Gurkha, on his back under heavy shell fire to the newly formed R.A.P. During this feat a fragment of shell struck him, but he brought his man in.

Another of our heroes in evacuation of wounded was none other than the mess butler, Victor de Lima, a Goanese of unusual size who carried many of our wounded, through heavy shelling, to safety at the crossing of the Marano. Being a non-combatant follower, he was apparently not entitled to an award, but he received a "Mention" for his courage.

It was no easy task to collect wounded men on that stricken hill-side. With no stretchers or means of carrying them, a few wounded had to be left on the objective. Subsequently these casualties were evacuated by "C" Company when the reoccupation of the ridge was made. "C" Company's action in regaining what was lost was a fine feat, in which the Company Commander (Major J. M. Turnbull) and Subadar Baliram Thapa are singled out for special mention.

Casualties\* sustained by the Battalion at San Arcangelo were :

Wounded : British officers, 2.

Gurkha officers, 5.

Killed, wounded and missing :

Gurkha other ranks, 120.

The Battalion remained in reserve on the south bank of the Marecchia until 27th September, 1944, when it was withdrawn to rest. Whilst at rest the Battalion was reorganized into three rifle companies. This was necessitated by casualties, and effected by transferring men from "D" Company to "A," "B" and "C" Companies, leaving the first-named with a cadre only.

To the great regret of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade, its happy association with the 1st British Armoured Division now came to an end, owing to the break-up of the Division.

On 1st October, 1944, the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade came under the command of the 56th (London) Division, but for a week only, as on 7th October, 1944, it was absorbed into the 10th (Indian) Division, which had been battling its way forward along the eastern foothills of the Apennines.

From 7th October, 1944, to 13th October, 1944, the Battalion, which had received fifty reinforcements, took part in operations destined to effect the capture of Cesena, an important road junction.

Owing to the autumnal rains, the coastal plain roads became impassable for large movements, and the attack therefore moved inland on to firmer ground. It is of this new terrain that a short description must be given. Beyond Strigara near the source of the River Fiumicino a series of high razor-backed ridges ran northwards. These covered the approaches to Cesena. Along the left flank of this high ground flows the Savio, a big stream, whose deep valley lay between the ridge systems covering Cesena. Similarly, ridges to the west of the Savio covered the town of Forli, where the principal road from Florence emerged from the Apennines.

Converging attacks were now planned to loosen the enemy's hold on these last bastions of high ground. The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade was ordered to concentrate on the left flank of the 10th

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\* A summary of the Battalion's casualties from 5th September, 1944, to the end of the San Arcangelo ridge battle (24th September, 1944) :

	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Total</i>
British officers ...	—	3	3
Gurkha officers ...	—	7	7
Gurkha other ranks ...	68	156	224
	—	—	—
	68	166	234
	—	—	—

For names of British officers and Gurkha officers see summary of casualties at end of 2nd Battalion 1939-1945 History (page 199).

Indian Division, and to devote itself to the assault on the western ridge system.

The first feature confronting the Gurkha Brigade was Monte Codruzzo, an abrupt buttress rising 1,300 feet above the plain, with steep and trackless slopes. It stood at the heel and on the crest of a long ridge running towards the north, on which four features provided natural defences of deep ravines on either side, with the only approach along a narrow hog's back. These features were named Monte Codruzzo, Monte del Erta, Monte Guzzo and Monte Chicco.

In such terrain and with incessant rain rendering the country roads impossible for track or wheeled vehicles, the 43rd Brigade was placed on a pack basis. Even for those sturdy friends of the Indian Army soldier, the pack mules, the negotiation of the greasy, rain-soaked slopes became impossible, and for the nonce our "Lorried Infantry" became their own transport.

On the night of 11th October, 1944, the attack by 43rd Brigade on Monte Codruzzo commenced. Two companies of 2/6th Gurkha Rifles silently clambered the cliff sides, achieved complete surprise, and seized this feature. On the afternoon of 12th October, the 2/10th Gurkha Rifles relieved the 2/6th companies at Monte Codruzzo, and before midnight the same day began the assault on Monte Del Erta, being in their turn relieved at Monte Codruzzo by the 2/8th. Bitter fighting followed, but the 2/10th established themselves in the village, in spite of successive counter-attacks, in which elements of two German divisions were identified.

The stage was now set for the assault on Monte Chicco, the last high knoll and dominating feature.

Farther to the east, a brigade of the 10th Indian Division was preparing to attack another series of connected ridges. The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade assault was synchronized with this attack.

At 2200 hours on 13th October, 1944, the leading battalion of the 43rd Brigade, the 2/6th Gurkha Rifles, passed their start line. By dawn it had reached Monte Chicco, to be held up by furious assaults from three sides. During this time the 2/8th was frequently called upon for large carrying parties to take grenades and small-arms ammunition to the forward companies of the 2/6th.

Later in the day the 2/8th came into the fight, sending "B" and "C" Companies to reinforce the 2/6th. The struggle mounted in bitterness throughout the day. In the evening "C" Company was ordered to attack over the crest, and dislodge the enemy therefrom. This was gallantly effected in spite of a hail of machine-gun fire from 300 yards range, a platoon under Jemadar Asbahadur Gurung leading the charge.

When night fell a sudden barrage of Spandau and mortar fire

seemed to presage fresh enemy attempts to recapture this vital feature, but under its cover the Germans withdrew. So ended some of the bitterest fighting of the campaign.

Two days later, on 16th October, 1944, Cesena fell to the 46th British Division.

Considering the intensity of the fighting in the Monte Chicco area, the Battalion casualties were light :

Killed :     Gurkha officer, 1.  
              Gurkha other ranks, 11.

Wounded : British officer, 1.  
              Gurkha officer, 1.  
              Gurkha other ranks, 15.

For the next phase of the operations, the Brigade Commander decided that Commanding Officers should be relieved temporarily by Seconds-in-Command, so the operational command of the Battalion devolved on Major K. M. M. Ross.

This phase was the capture of a large horseshoe feature called Monte Cavallo, west of the Savio, by the 10th Indian Division, with the ultimate objective the important communication centre of Forli.

For a few days the 2/8th was in support to the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 10th Division, but reverted to its own brigade on 23rd October, 1944, following the capture of Monte Cavallo.

Hard marching under most difficult conditions was the Battalion's lot for several days. The trials of the "Q" staff were many, and even if meals were not always forthcoming when expected, they deserved a pat on the back for what was accomplished.

The occupation, with little opposition, of several important points in conjunction with the 2/10th Gurkha Rifles took the 2/8th up to the Ronco river, a formidable obstacle some ten miles to the west of the Savio river. The river was in spate, a turbulent torrent twelve feet deep. To this river line the enemy had retreated.

It was here that a most creditable action was performed by a platoon of "B" Company. Fighting patrols on the night of 25th/26th October, 1944, reported the river line strongly held, and crossings denied. One patrol, however, found an aqueduct intact, but in trying to cross were heavily engaged by machine-gun fire. Two men actually crossed the bridge, but had to swim back across the river lower down.

At first light on 26th October Jemadar Judhbir Gurung and his platoon were ordered to establish a small bridgehead. Across the aqueduct went the leading section. The enemy fired heavily on the aqueduct, evidently with the intention of isolating and trapping this section. A vain hope, for instead of being trapped the section at

once attacked the machine-gun post forty yards away, the remainder of the platoon dashing across in support. After a brief grenade battle, the enemy fled, leaving their gun and three dead behind.

Jemadar Judhbir again pushed forward 300 yards, and the enemy made another attempt to deal with this troublesome platoon by a counter-attack round the loop in the river, directed at its left flank. Far from remaining on the defensive, however, the platoon attacked, and once more the enemy fled.

The capture of this aqueduct, and establishment of a bridgehead, had an exceedingly important bearing on the future operations, for it opened the way of Eighth Army to Forli.

For his part in this action Jemadar Judhbir Gurung was awarded the M.C., and his leading section commander, Lance-Naik Chure Thapa, the M.M. A further M.M. was won by Havildar Lalbahadur Gurung of the Pioneer Platoon, for extensive mine clearing during these operations.

In this heavily mined area it is pleasant to record that Italian partisans had located many mines, marking their positions with improvised red flags. This was not done without loss to themselves.

To quote a 43rd Brigade account :

“On October 27th, with splendid dash and initiative, the 8th Gurkhas passed a company across the Ronco on an undamaged aqueduct. This shallow bridgehead needed enlargement before forces of any size could be committed to battle. On the night of the 29th, 6th and 10th Gurkhas also crossed the river, overcame determined opposition, and after a day’s hard fighting, broke into the enemy’s main defensive position. The way to Forli was now open.”

In the fighting of the 29th/30th October, the Battalion was in reserve, and “A” Company, sent forward under command of 10th Gurkha Rifles, took an important point. The bridgehead was enlarged by 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade to a depth of some 3,000 yards and a width of 2,000 yards, and had turned the enemy defences on the Ronco. The 25th Indian Infantry Brigade passed through 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade on 30th October, allowing the Gurkhas a well-earned rest, though the Battalion remained under command of 25th Indian Infantry Brigade until 1st November, 1944, supplying one company to support 3/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles. On that date it returned from the front to rest billets in a pleasant little village high up in the mountains and far away from the war.

From 22nd October to 1st November, 1944, casualties had again been light :

Killed : Gurkha other rank, 1.

Wounded : Gurkha officer, 1.

Gurkha other ranks, 11.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

(See Maps Nos. 13, 7 and 1)

[2nd Battalion—(continued.)]

“Mae Wests”—Return to the front—43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade under V Corps—The terrain—43rd Brigade under 2nd New Zealand Division—Faenza—Battle for—Enemy withdraw—Advance—43rd Brigade prepare for final offensive—Change of Commanding Officer—43rd Brigade again under 56th Division—On the Senio—River bank defences—“Softening up” period—Attack on the Senio—Plans—Ten days of hard fighting—The bastion held by Subadar Jitbahadur Gurung’s platoon—End of Senio battle—Casualties and awards—Tributes from Commanding Officer and 56th Division—At Forli—Under 2nd Polish Corps—Spring offensive—To Medicina—Capture of the Gaiana—Again under 2nd New Zealand Division—Attack—Plans—Artillery and flame-throwers—Progress of battle—Success—German resistance cracked—Across the Po—The end—Visits by General Officers—To Trieste—Embarkation—Tributes to 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade—Haifa—Tripoli—Return to India—Honours and awards—Casualties.

DURING its stay in rest billets, the Battalion was able to send most officers and men on leave to Rome or Florence. Training was carried out in assault bridging and the assault crossing of water obstacles. This latter entailed swimming the Ronco wearing “Mae Wests,” a highly unpopular pastime, as the river in November was bitterly cold.

“D” Company, which had been temporarily disbanded, was now re-formed.

On 18th November, 1944, the Battalion left its pleasant retreat, and returned to the front. By now the Eighth Army had reached the River Montone, along which positions were taken up by 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade (under command of the 10th Indian Division) in mid-November.

Clearing the Montone, the Gurkhas advanced to the next river line, the Lamone. Here the Brigade came directly under V Corps, and had under its command 12th Royal Lancers, 4th and 44th Recce. Regiments.

With the great change in the nature of the country in which future operations would take place it is advisable to present a picture of what now confronted our troops. Gone were the mountains from which the enemy had been expelled. The country is flat and enclosed. Observation was limited. Farmhouses abounded and formed the basis of defended localities. The rivers (whose names are given as we

go along) formed natural and formidable defence lines. North of Route 9—the road running from Rimini through Cesena, Forli, Faenza to the north-west—the rivers in winter are not fordable. They vary in width from 30 to 100 feet, guarded by flood banks up to 35 feet above the general level of the surrounding country, while the drop to the water is as much as 50 feet.

On 2nd December, 1944, the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade moved up and took over from 20th Indian Infantry Brigade. The front was twelve miles, and orders were to feint and distract the enemy, so as to draw as many troops to the brigade front as possible to assist attacks planned elsewhere on the Lamone. Though for the period 2nd/13th December, 1944, the Battalion was not engaged in any large-scale attacks, it was a period of constant activity. Shelling and mortaring continued on a heavy scale and Battalion casualties amounted to :

Killed : Gurkha officer, 1.  
Gurkha other ranks, 5.

Wounded : British officer, 1.  
Gurkha other ranks, 26.

The Gurkha officer killed was Jemadar Partabsing Chettri, M.C., a very gallant officer.

On 15th December the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade came under command of the 2nd New Zealand Division as a component of Faenza Task Force, with instructions to clear the enemy from that important centre. For the first time the Gurkhas were schooled in the particular technique of street fighting.

At 1100 hours on 17th December the Battalion left its debussing area, and began to move through Faenza. The enemy had been reported as withdrawing. He must have changed his mind, as most stubborn resistance was met with along the railway line, and Route 9, which was first reported as being in our hands.

The Battalion was ordered to attack. This operation was planned in four phases. Phase 1—Forward companies : Right "D," Left "A." Right flank protection, one platoon "C" Company. Reserve, "B" and "C" Companies (less one platoon). Objective points in Faenza marked by map references.

From the moment the forward companies got on to their start line they were subjected to shell and mortar fire.

"A" Company succeeded in capturing their first objective after a heavy fight, but were unable to cross a canal. "D" Company took their first objective with five enemy prisoners, and subsequently captured their second objective in the face of heavy mortar and artillery fire.

The situation now was that "D" Company had pushed a long thin salient into the enemy lines. On its right was an open flank, as the flank guard platoon of "C" Company had been unable to make any progress. Taking advantage of this, the enemy, supported by tanks, attacked the company's right and front, and forced it to withdraw to the station area to prevent being cut off.

Our own tanks (one troop to each company), despite strenuous efforts, could not find a way across the railway lines, which were a maze of craters from our bombing.

The withdrawal of "D" Company left "A" Company "in the blue." Later on, during the night, the 2/10th Gurkha Rifles closed up on our left flank, relieving "A" Company, who came into Battalion reserve.

During the night "C" Company and a platoon of "B" Company made gallant but ineffectual attempts to occupy houses near a road junction by the canal. Heavy machine-gun fire and anti-personnel mines prevented the achievement of their objective. The enemy were holding the canal firmly, and it became apparent that only a full-scale attack would clear them out. This was ordered for the night 19th/20th December. Meanwhile, during the night of 17th/18th December the enemy kept up a heavy and constant artillery, mortar and machine-gun fire. Towards morning this rose to a crescendo, presaging an enemy counter-attack. With our own heavy defensive fire coming down the din was tremendous. No enemy counter-attack eventuated, and soon after dawn the firing died down.

Once again, however, the enemy had had enough, for on the night of 18th/19th December reconnaissances were carried out unmolested, and it was decided to push on during daylight (19th December). The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade, with 6th New Zealand Brigade on its left, advanced with little opposition. In this advance the 2/8th was again in the front line, with 2/10th Gurkha Rifles on its left.

So ended the battle for Faenza. Tough fighting this clearing of houses and streets in a mine-infested area. The work of the Brigade earned the praise of General Sir Bernard Freyberg, the well-known commander of the 2nd New Zealand Division of whom we shall hear more.

The casualties suffered by the Battalion in December, 1944, were :

**Killed :** Gurkha officers, 3.  
Gurkha other ranks, 14.

**Wounded :** British officers, 3  
Gurkha officer, 1  
Gurkha other ranks, 65.



Decorations awarded were 2 M.Cs., 1 I.D.S.M., and 1 M.M.

The ground was now clear for the final offensive of the war in Italy, and the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade withdrew to rest and to train for their part in that great operation.

The Germans had fallen back to prepared positions on the line of the Senio.

Until 9th February, 1945, the Battalion was, with the other two battalions of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade, engaged in reconnoitring, preparing and digging a brigade defensive position between the Lamone and Montone rivers. This was to foil a possible German attempt to cut the Eighth Army lines of communication east of Faenza.

On 12th January, 1945, Major R. P. T. McGill took over command of the Battalion from Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Yeates, D.S.O., who proceeded to the United Kingdom on leave. Colonel Yeates, excepting for a spell in Burma with another battalion of the Regiment, had been with the 2nd Battalion from the commencement of the war. In North Africa he had won the D.S.O., as already narrated, and as Commanding Officer of the Battalion in Italy, he had led the Battalion well and gallantly in its successful operations, up to and including Faenza.

On 10th February, 1945, the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade was placed under command of the 56th (London) Division. This Division was holding a sector opposite the River Senio, of which the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade occupied a position near the town of Bognacavello, and astride Route 16, the main Adriatic highway. The Brigade held a front of 5,000 yards confronting intricate and elaborate defences. This necessitated all three battalions being forward. The frontage of the battalion on the 43rd Brigade right was some 2,300 yards and was occupied :

Forward Right	“A” Company.
Centre	“B” Company.
Left	“C” Company.
Reserve	“D” Company.

On the Battalion's left were 2/6th Gurkha Rifles.

To right and left of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade were the 1st Canadian Division, and 167th Brigade of 56th Division respectively.

A few words have already been written describing the rivers and their flood banks of this area. In this history it is impossible to give a detailed description of the defensive system, and the devices contrived by the enemy. This description (see Chapter 17 of “The Tiger Triumphs”) is available to readers so interested. To make our own story complete, it will be sufficient to record that these river

banks in winter commanded the flat bare fields, over which our attack must approach, for at least a mile. A deep apron of mines and booby traps was sown along their front, and each of the four slopes of the river banks—two inner, two outer—had been fortified with wire and weapon pits, and cunningly contrived strong points. Tunnels ran through the banks for communication and protection, and they (the banks) had been broken in places in order that, if necessary, the approaches might be flooded.

To overcome this very strong obstacle, new methods were devised by us. Flame-throwing vehicles and life-buoys (manual flame-throwing equipment) were brought forward. Artillery (23rd Field Regiment, R.A.) was skilfully deployed so as to enfilade the inner side of a bank, whilst our men held the outer bank.

From 11th to 22nd February, 1945, was a period of "softening up" enemy positions. Activity by our artillery, battalion mortars and the Brigade machine-gun support group kept the Germans busy. The Brigade was supported by a squadron of tanks, firstly from 11th Canadian Armoured Regiment (Calgary Regiment), and latterly from 2nd Royal Tank Regiment.

Battalion patrolling was determined, and it says much for these patrols that no fewer than forty-eight Spandau posts were located by 20th February, although only five such had been located when the sector was taken over. In some cases, even, patrols succeeded in reaching the top of the river bank in spite of wire, mines and squelching mud.

The enemy responded. With perfect observation posts on the bank, his artillery and mortar fire was accurate. The Battalion suffered casualties, noticeably in "A" Company. On two successive days No. 7 Platoon lost a complete section from heavy and accurate shelling.

The date for the assault was drawing near, and "B" and "C" Companies were relieved, and brought back to the River Lamone for a rehearsal. This was made more realistic, as the enemy shelled the area with long-range artillery.

The intention was to attack on the night 22nd/23rd February, and to establish posts along the eastern bank of the River Senio, thus dominating the river, and preventing the enemy reinforcing his garrisons on the western bank.

The plan was for 56th (London) Division with 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade (under command) to capture the east bank south of the railway, with forward troops right to left—2/8th, 2/6th, 2/10th and 167th Infantry Brigade.

North of the railway line the Canadian Division would support the attack by fire only.

The Battalion plan was : Forward companies, "B" Company right, "C" Company left. "A" Company and Carrier Platoon held the right flank from railway line to "B" Company's right. Reserve : "D" Company.

Surprise was essential, therefore until "H" hour only normal harassing fire was maintained. From "H" hour onwards fire was to be greatly increased by certain 25-pounder guns brought into "silent" positions the day before, and enfilading the river line. The Battalion's 3-inch mortars under Lieutenant Baldwin played an important part in this fire plan, and were in action continuously from "H" minus one to "H" plus four hours, and then, more or less continuously, for the following ten days.

At 2100 hours on 22nd February, 1945, the attack commenced. For the rest of the night it was a race against time to get the forward platoons well consolidated, well supplied with ammunition, and well established with good communications. All dug furiously, roofing their scanty niches so that bombs, rolled over the top of the bank, might trundle by. Manual flame-throwers were rushed up and emplaced, and individual cover enlarged into weapon pits, and supplies were got up under heavy shell fire. Grenade expenditure was enormous (2,000 expended before dawn), and each section required (and got) about twenty-eight boxes. The signallers did splendid work, as they always did.

First light on 23rd February found the forward platoons well dug in. It was a fine achievement, and successful beyond all expectations. At 1000 hours on 23rd February the enemy attack began. The first assault was thrown against the Battalion.

Until 3rd March the battle continued. A single day's account of the Battalion's doings would almost fill a chapter. The précis which follows comes largely from an official account.

Saps were driven up to the tip of the bank ; tunnelling and counter-tunnelling went on. In this work, with its attendant raids, the Gurkha seldom came off second best. One party of "C" Company digging through the bank ran into a German party, similarly engaged. Six enemy prisoners were taken belonging to the 98th Fusilier Battalion. Prisoners from this battalion stated that in three weeks on the Senio, 80 per cent. of their fighting personnel had become casualties.

On 26th February a particularly determined attack was made by the enemy on a point known as the Bastion on the Battalion's sector. An intense mortar and artillery shoot crashed on the troops holding the position ; adjacent earthworks collapsed, burying part of the garrison. Stroke and counter-stroke followed for the possession of this strong point. The gallantry of Subadar Jitbahadur Gurung

(later awarded the I.O.M.) and his platoon (No. 13) deserve special mention. From the night 23rd-24th February, for about one week, this platoon broke up attack after attack in the Bastion area. Often out of touch, short of ammunition, food and sleep, they put up a magnificent performance, and remained "in possession," and aggressive until relieved.

Until 3rd March the fight went on, and then the Battalion was relieved, actually dealing with two enemy attacks on "D" Company sector whilst relief was in progress.

So ended the battle of the Senio river. After nineteen days of continuous and nerve-racking fighting the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade handed over three miles of secure flood bank.

Casualties sustained during February, 1945 :

Killed : Gurkha other ranks, 30.

Wounded : British officers, 2.

Gurkha officers, 2.

Gurkha other ranks, 94.

Missing : Gurkha other ranks, 3.

Total : 131.

Decorations awarded for the Senio river operations were : I.O.M., 1 ; I.D.S.M., 1 ; M.M., 4.

The Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. T. McGill) sums up the conduct of the Battalion :

"The nineteen days during which we were in this sector will always be remembered by all ranks of the Battalion. For sheer dogged determination, individual initiative and cheerful enthusiasm it would be hard to better."

This fighting on the flood banks was unique in many ways, quite unlike anything we had encountered in the past. No more fitting tribute can be paid to the men than was expressed in a letter from the Commander, 56th (London) Division, to the Commander, 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade.

The letter referred to is as follows :

"The reputation of the Gurkha was well known to me in peace time, but it had not been my privilege previous to the Gothic Line actions to fight side by side with them. From the time I learned to know them at San Arcangelo and near Savignano I have always had the greatest confidence in any task they may be called upon to do. It was with great pleasure therefore that I learned that your Brigade was coming to serve under my command on the Senio in the early part of this year.

"The task we had facing the enemy on the line of the Senio was fraught with difficulties and problems, but no troops could look

back on that phase of operations with greater pride and satisfaction than your Brigade. As you know, it was necessary to show a proper sense of aggression towards the Boche and to drive him out of the bund on our side of the river and to get ourselves in position there. This involved a number of bitter hand-to-hand engagements and the holding of the position in very close proximity to the enemy. The continuous grenade and small-arms fighting threw a great strain on all ranks, but the Gurkha day by day proved his fighting qualities and his superiority over the Boche. The loyalty and determination which everyone showed on the bund in accordance with my express intention was a source of great pride and satisfaction to me personally, and I shall not easily forget the smiling faces and cheerful hearts I always found whenever I visited the battalions of your Brigade. I am sure that the cleaning up of the bund by your Brigade made the subsequent assault crossing by other formations possible, and your efforts were therefore a great contribution to the start of the great offensive."

On the night 3rd/4th March, 1945, the Battalion arrived at Forli for rest and reorganization. Owing to the heavy casualties in N.C.O. ranks, no fewer than sixty-six promotions had to be made, and there were not sufficient lance-naiks to fill the naik vacancies.

On relief after the Senio battle, the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade came under command of the 2nd Polish Corps—their sixth masters in six months of almost continuous fighting. Their role was to be a new one. The Brigade was given two armoured regiments (one of which was their old friends the 14th/20th Hussars), two Field Regiments, Kangaroos (Armoured Troops Carriers), and designated as the pursuit group of the 2nd Polish Corps.

Up to 12th April, 1945, the Battalion was engaged in occupying areas in relief of a battalion (5th) of the 2nd Carpathian Brigade, and in intensive training to fit them to carry out their new role. Patrol activity took place, but no operations of any note occurred.

It was now decided that during the spring offensive the Brigade was to be lorry borne, and had under command one Field Battery, R.A., one Troop Anti-tank, R.A., and two squadrons of tanks.

Following the clearing of the Senio on 11th April, the Polish Corps drove on to Bologna. The right flank was open, and the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade hurried on to seize Medicina, an important cross-roads, through which a counter-attack from the north might be launched. The Battalion led the way, and swept on to within three miles of the Sillaro river, encountering *en route* a network of canals and many river crossings which were impassable to wheels and tracks without previous bridging, while the infantry required boats except in a few isolated cases.

Delays and setbacks there were, but the 43rd Brigade drove on. Each battalion in turn did good work, and Medicina was captured after very heavy fighting in cellars, in lofts and even on the roof tops. German paratroopers formed the opposition, and these tough fighters put up a desperate resistance. When dawn broke on 16th April six guns, two tanks captured, 100 shaken prisoners and dead Germans everywhere, were all that remained of the war in Medicina. In clearing the town "D" Company, 2/8th, assisted the 2/6th Gurkha Rifles, the battalion largely responsible for the capture.

The tide of battle swept on to Gaiana, the next river obstacle.

Here the Germans stood in strength, having brought from Bologna the 4th Paratroop Division. The 2/6th Gurkha Rifles, in a gallant attempt to sustain the momentum of the pursuit, threw themselves at the river. The opposition was too strong, and a prepared full-scale assault was necessary.

The 2/8th gave much needed help to the 2/6th on 17th and 18th April, and "A" Company actually succeeded in getting on the river bank at 0100 hours on 18th April. However, as this company was "in the air," it was withdrawn, fortunately without a single casualty, thanks to our artillery, mortar and air support programme, laid on to get them off.

On the afternoon of 18th April, the New Zealanders came up on the right flank of the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade, and, to the joy of all ranks, the Brigade once again came under the command of the 2nd New Zealand Division.

On the night 18th/19th April was launched the great attack which was to provide the final blow to the enemy. The plan, shortly, was to cross the Gaiana, two tributaries and a canal, with 9th New Zealand Brigade on the right, and 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade on the left, as assaulting formations. This involved, in addition to the crossings, an advance of 4,000 yards across unknown country in the pitch dark—a formidable undertaking, especially as the Battalion had been continuously in action for six days and nights.

Confronting our troops were the 1st and 4th Paratroop Divisions, the cream of what remained of the German Army in Italy.

The 43rd Brigade attacked with :

Forward	Right	...	2/8th Gurkha Rifles.
	Left	...	2/10th Gurkha Rifles.
Reserve	...	...	2/6th Gurkha Rifles.

Battalion attack :

Phase 1.—Forward Companies : "D" right, "B" left.

Support Companies : "C" right, "A" left.

To assault the Gaiana, and the first tributary (Quaderna).

Phase 2.—Forward Companies : “C” right, “A” left.

Support Companies : “D” right, “B” left.

To establish a bridgehead over the River Quaderna, and consolidate prior to a further advance to the second tributary (Idice).

One squadron 2nd Royal Tank Regiment was in support of the Battalion.

A tremendous barrage from the artillery (seventeen regiments), all available tanks and mortars, opened up at 2130 hours on 18th April, 1945, a heartening sound to the assaulting troops. At 2150 hours “B” and “D” Companies crossed the start line, and advanced to within 200 yards of the river bank. Then our Wasp flame-throwers opened up, and an awe-inspiring sight it was to see huge tongues of flame licking over the enemy’s positions.

“B” and “D” Companies charged the bank, and for some ten minutes there were sharp hand-to-hand struggles. These companies were not to be denied, however, and, having captured thirty paratroopers, crossed the Gaiana and reached the next river (Quaderna) behind the barrage, thus bringing Phase 1 to a successful conclusion.

At about 0100 hours on 19th April, “C” and “A” Companies passed through. They quickly met opposition, and Lieutenant John Williams, who was leading “C” Company, was mortally wounded—a sad blow, and a great loss to the Battalion. Despite this, the opposition was quickly overcome, and first light saw the 9th New Zealand Brigade and the Battalion dug in on the Quaderna. Incidentally, the Battalion had succeeded in capturing one bridge intact, and consequently, shortly after first light, the supporting tank squadron came up to the forward companies.

On the left flank of the Battalion, which was open, the enemy kept up a heavy fire, and two small counter-attacks were repulsed by “A” Company. Eventually a platoon of “B” Company dislodged the enemy from some houses from which much of the firing had come.

On the evening of 19th April the Battalion was relieved by a battalion of the 5th New Zealand Brigade, and moved to an area east of Medicina for much needed rest, after seven days of continuous action. Here a batch of reinforcements joined.

This battle of the Gaiana fulfilled our hopes, and was practically the end for the enemy in Italy. A hole had been punched for pursuit. The enemy never stood again.

The Battalion casualties in the 18th-19th April fighting were light, amounting to :

Killed : British officer, 1.  
Gurkha other ranks, 9.  
Wounded : Gurkha other ranks, 25.  
Total : 35.

Forty-nine prisoners, of the 1st and 4th Parachute Divisions, were taken by the Battalion.

The rest period lasted for two days only and on 22nd April the Battalion moved forward again, and on 25th-26th April crossed the River Po. This was a long and trying business, there being only one pontoon bridge and much traffic. Rain made things worse by turning all the tracks into mud.

From the Po, the New Zealanders and 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade drove on. It was rumoured that the enemy had withdrawn the bulk of his forces to the Venetian line just north of Este. Turning off from the main road to seize Este, the 43rd Brigade then raced for Padua. The New Zealanders were well on the road to Trieste and Austria. The Brigade had every hope of seeing the end from a front-line view, but it was not to be. Padua, reached on 29th April, was in a very lawless state. Fascists fought partisans. The town required a garrison, and the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade took charge, and so restored law and order.

On 2nd May the surrender of the German army in Italy was announced.

During the period 13th April to 8th May the Battalion suffered the following casualties, which are inclusive of those given for the fighting on 18th/19th April :

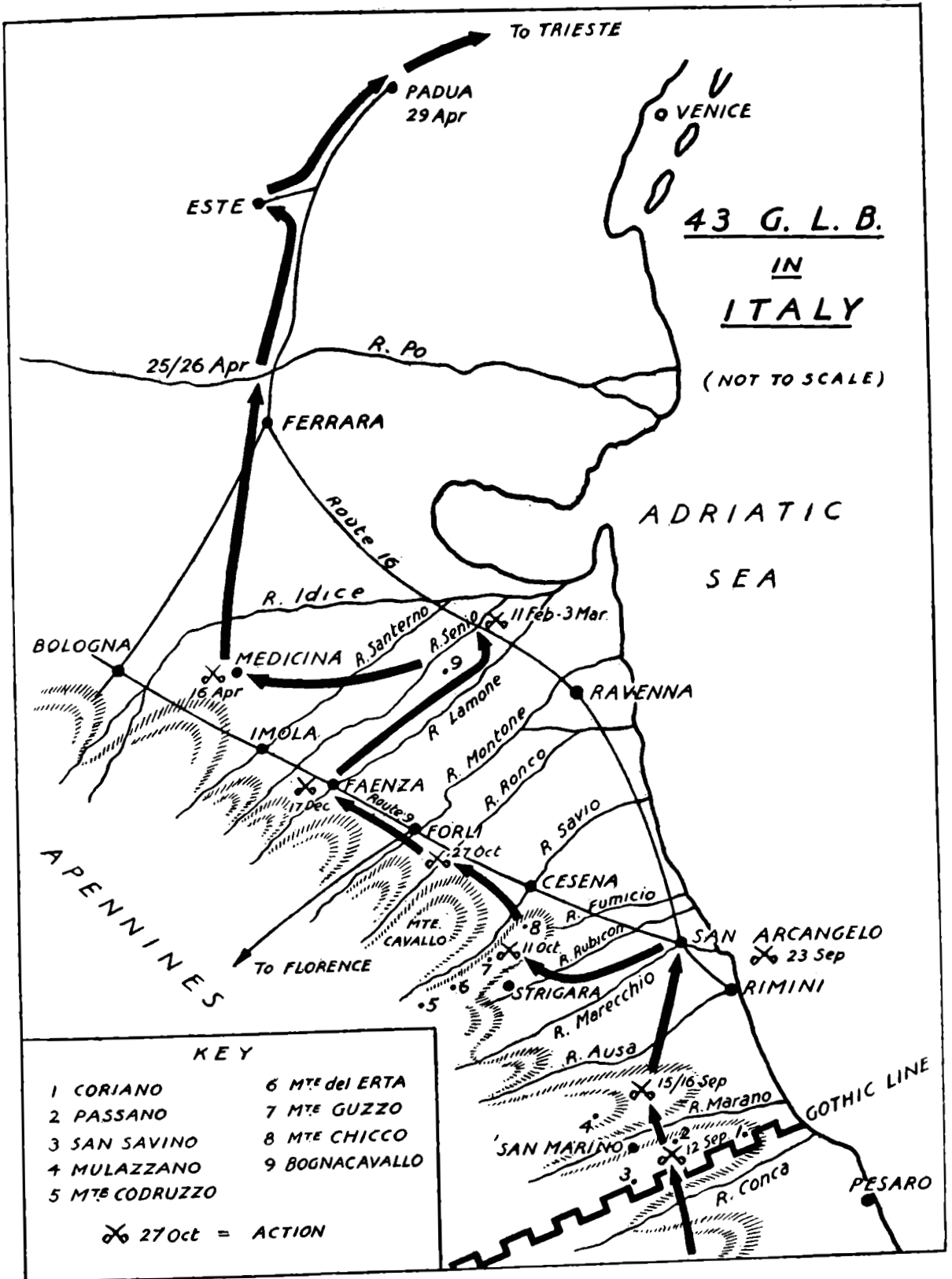
Killed : British officer, 1.  
Gurkha other ranks, 30.  
Wounded : British officer, 1.  
Gurkha officers, 2.  
Gurkha other ranks, 66.  
Total : 100.

Decorations gained in the same period were : D.S.O., 1 ; M.C., 2 ; M.B.E., 1 ; I.D.S.M., 1 ; M.M., 1.

From the end of the war to the date of its embarkation, the Battalion was visited by the C.-in-C., India (General Sir Claude Auchinleck), the G.O.C., Eighth Army (Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Creery), the G.O.C., XIII Corps (Lieutenant-General Sir John Harding), and the G.O.C., 2nd New Zealand Division (Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg, V.C.).

The 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade's associations in the campaign had been happy, but they may be pardoned for regarding the first and last of these associations with the 1st British Armoured Division





**KEY**

- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1 CORIANO      | 6 MTE del ERTA  |
| 2 PASSANO      | 7 MTE GUZZO     |
| 3 SAN SAVINO   | 8 MTE CHICCO    |
| 4 MULAZZANO    | 9 BOGNACAVALLLO |
| 5 MTE CODRUZZO |                 |

X 27 Oct = ACTION

and with the 2nd New Zealand Division as something especially close, especially memorable. To the Brigade the 1st Armoured Division were always "our tanks," and Sir Bernard Freyberg was "our General."

Tension in Trieste took the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade back to the side of the New Zealanders for the last time. It was therefore a happy circumstance that the Brigade should be seen off by their old comrades on embarking. The bands of the New Zealand Division played off each battalion in turn, and General Freyberg took the salute.

So ended active operations for the 2nd Battalion in the Second World War—a chapter in its history of which it may well be proud. The battles of the Coriano, Passano, San Arcangelo, Monte Chicco, the Savio, Faenza, Medicina, and the Gaiana will rank high amongst our Regimental Honours. The following letters are a sufficient tribute.

General Sir Claude Auchinleck, G.C.B., G.C.I.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., Commander-in-Chief in India, at the close of his inspection of the Brigade Group, issued the following message through the Brigade Commander :

"I am delighted to have had this opportunity of seeing you all. I have never seen troops look fitter, or in better fettle. You have done magnificently. You are all obviously proud of yourselves, and with good reason. I wish you all Good Luck and God Speed."

The following is a copy of a letter dated 22nd May, 1945, received by the Brigade Commander from the Commander, 2nd New Zealand Division :

"I should like to take this opportunity to put on record my gratitude to you, and all under your command, for the distinguished part which you played in our recent successful operations. Of all battles which we have fought, there is none that gives greater satisfaction to New Zealanders than that of the Gaiana river. We had many old scores to settle with the "Para boys" and the battle which you fought against them, side by side with our own 9th Brigade, gave them a crack which their survivors will not easily forget. New Zealanders will always remember with gratitude their association in that battle with the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Infantry Brigade.

"On behalf of the N.Z.E.F. I send to you, and to all ranks of your Brigade, our sincere thanks for all that you have done. Good Luck and God Speed in the times which lie ahead."

On 8th July, 1945, the Battalion embarked at Trieste on H.M.T. *Captourane*, and disembarked at Haifa on 15th July, where they joined the 31st Indian Armoured Division (Commander, Major-General C. Pert, D.S.O.).

On 2nd August, 1945, the Battalion arrived at Tripoli. Here they were visited by General Sir Bernard Paget, G.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., who before leaving congratulated the Battalion on its work in Italy, its turn-out, and the state of the lines.

Until January, 1946, the Battalion remained at Tripoli. Leave was granted to as many as could be spared. During this period, escort duties and training kept all ranks occupied. In the Divisional Boxing Tournament the prowess of the Regiment in this sport was upheld by the winning of five weights.

At the end of January orders to return to India were received, and the Battalion moved to Suez for embarkation. The advance party moved overland in M.T. from Syria, through Iraq, Persia, and West Baluchistan to Quetta, where the Battalion concentrated for reorganization and leave.

At the end of April the Battalion moved to Secunderabad, where, with the 2/6th and 2/10th Gurkha Rifles, the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Brigade was re-formed.

With the return of the Battalion to India, the total of awards won and casualties incurred during its active operations can be given :

*Awards.*—D.S.O., 2 ; bar to D.S.O., 1 ; I.O.M., 1 ; M.C., 8 ; I.D.S.M., 3 ; M.M., 13 ; O.B.E., 2 ; M.B.E., 2 ; American Bronze Star, 2.

*Casualties.*—Note : Those missing in North Africa in the operations 28th–29th June, 1942, are not included, as, with the exception of those noted below as having died in enemy hands, all eventually rejoined.

Killed : Jemadar Kamansing Thapa.  
Jemadar Bahadur Gurung.  
Jemadar Partabsing Chmetri.  
Gurkha other ranks, 133.

Died of wounds :  
Lieutenant J. D. F. Williams.  
Jemadar Manbir Thapa.  
Gurkha other ranks, 41.

Died in enemy hands :  
British officer, 1 (Captain R. F. Redley).  
Gurkha officer, 1.  
Gurkha other ranks, 12.

Missing, presumed dead :  
Gurkha other ranks, 10.  
Non-Combatants, 1.

**Wounded : British officers, 13**

Lieutenant-Colonel N. L. C. Irwin.  
Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. T. McGill.  
Major W. C. Rogers.  
Major W. M. Turnbull.  
Captain A. C. Maclaren.  
Lieutenant J. A. Footit.  
Lieutenant R. V. Lewis.  
Lieutenant N. R. W. Niven.  
Lieutenant P. T. J. Tidman.  
Lieutenant C. A. Longhurst.  
Lieutenant R. B. McLachan.  
Lieutenant C. F. Collins.  
Lieutenant W. A. Godwin.

**Gurkha officers, 18**

Subadar-Major Tikaram Thapa.  
Subadar Gangaparsad Pun.  
Subadar Shamsheer Rana.  
Subadar Gopal Rana.  
Subadar Badalsing Gurung.  
Subadar Purandhog Gurung.  
Jemadar Perembahadur Thapa.  
Jemadar Sherbahadur Thapa.  
Jemadar Judhbir Gurung.  
Jemadar Sambahadur Gurung.  
Jemadar Birsing Baru.  
Jemadar Lachhindra Rana.  
Jemadar Lalpati Pun.  
Jemadar Asbahadur Gurung.  
Jemadar Birbahadur Rawat.  
Jemadar Gagansing Thapa.  
Jemadar Tikaram Ale.  
Jemadar Karna Bahadur Rana.

**Gurkha other ranks, 439.**

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

(See Maps Nos. 1, 2 and 14)

*[This chapter is devoted entirely to the 3rd Battalion in the Second World War.]*

Raising—Completes training—To Chaman—Mobilization—Visits by Commanders—Visit by His Excellency the Governor of Madras—To Ceylon—Training in jungle warfare—Change in command—East African troops—To India—Visit to 1/8th Gurkha Rifles—Visit by General Officer Commanding, Eastern Army—Volunteers to Gurkha Parachute Battalion—Situation in Burma, 1943—Ranchi—To Assam—To the front—IV Corps dispositions—Patrols—Lance-Naik Dhanraj Thapa—Action at Kyaukchaw—Patrol work—Brigade Commander's thanks—"B" Company on 10th February, 1944—Stretcher-bearers praised—Ambushes—Subadar Durbahadur Gurung and No. 10 Platoon—Prelude to Japanese offensive—Disposition of opposing forces on the central front—General Slim's plan—Imphal, its importance—Change in command—Withdrawal to Palel—In 32nd Brigade "Box"—Valuable reports by Subadar Premsing Gurung—To Moreh—Errand of mercy—Leave Moreh—20th Indian Division "Box"—Palel—Allied Air Forces' good work—Guarding Palel aerodrome—To Tiddim Road—Wireless Hill—"B" Company attack—Tanks—Infantry action called off—20th Indian Division story—Good shoot by R.A.—Three British officers wounded—Enemy attack repulsed—Relief and ration difficulties—1/4th Gurkha Rifles—Wooded Hill, its capture changed enemy plans—Patrols—"C" Company assist 1/4th Gurkha Rifles—"A" Company's ambush—Wireless Hill—Major M. O. Seymour-Taylor's gallant action—His death—Events to 31st May, 1944—A Royal Signals incident—Wooded and Wireless Hills again—Attack on 14th June, 1944—Major R. D. S. Bulkeley killed—A successful ambush—No. 12 Platoon—Kohima—To 48th Indian Infantry Brigade—Vital help by Allied Air Forces—Siege of Imphal ended—Rest billets—Visits by commanders, His Excellency The Viceroy and Supreme Commander, S.E.A.C.

THE Battalion was raised at La Bassée Lines, Shillong, on 1st October, 1940, by Lieutenant-Colonel D. L. Duncan. It was a real "chip of the old block," as from Commanding Officer to recruit its original nucleus came from the parent battalions of the Regiment.

After the usual teething period which all newly raised units go through, training up to and including company training was carried out, together with the specialist training necessary in a modern infantry battalion—viz., signals, mortar, M.T., intelligence, etc.

By June, 1941, the Battalion was ready to take its place as an active battalion, and in October it moved to the Chaman area.

For the next six months the usual Frontier routine was carried out, without any particular incident to report, and on 14th-15th April,

1942, the Battalion left Chaman for Trichinopoly (southern India) to join the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade of the 20th Indian Division, the Division then being concentrated under its commander, Major-General D. D. Gracey, M.C. (now General Sir Douglas Gracey, K.C.B., K.C.I.E., C.B.E., M.C., Commander-in-Chief, Pakistan).

On arrival, orders to mobilize were received. On 23rd April, 1942, the Divisional Commander visited the Battalion. This General Officer was himself a Gurkha (1st Gurkha Rifles) and remained with the 20th Indian Division throughout its training and its active campaigning, from late summer, 1943, to the successful termination of the Burma War.

On 11th May, 1942, General Sir Brodie Haig, K.C.B., M.C., Army Commander, visited the Battalion.

On 19th June the Battalion was visited by His Excellency the Governor of Madras (Captain The Honourable Sir Arthur Hope, G.C.I.E., M.C.).

On 29th June the Battalion left Trichinopoly, and crossed over to Ceylon the following day, where it took over an area near Galle, from the 2/5th Australian Infantry Battalion.

On 15th July the Battalion moved to Horana, a place some seventy-five miles from Galle.

Until the end of July, 1943, the Battalion remained in Ceylon, and carried out intensive training in jungle warfare. In this connection, it may be noted that the 20th Indian Division was one of the few Indian divisions of the Fourteenth Army which was trained solely for the war in Burma. It was schooled to beat the Japanese at his own game, in his own kind of country.

On 15th December, 1942, Lieutenant-Colonel V. L. Misselbrook, M.B.E. (1st Gurkha Rifles), assumed command of the Battalion *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel D. L. Duncan, who was appointed Admin. Commandant, Abbottabad.

Space forbids a more detailed account of the stay in Ceylon. Time was, however, well spent in fitting the Battalion for what lay ahead. It is interesting to note that while the Battalion was there, East African troops, who distinguished themselves in Burma later, began to arrive.

On 3rd August, 1943, the return to India began, and by 16th August the whole Battalion was concentrated at Ranchi.

On 11th September a party of 7 British officers and 40 Gurkha officers and Gurkha other ranks visited the 1st Battalion, who were located near by.

On 19th September the Battalion was inspected by General Sir G. J. Giffard, G.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Army.

On 13th October a party of 18 Gurkha other rank volunteers proceeded to join the 154th Gurkha Parachute Battalion.

The situation in Burma towards the end of 1943 has already been told in the chapters devoted to the 1st Battalion in the Second World War, and will not, therefore, be repeated here.

Training continued at Ranchi with the additional advantage of instruction by men who had had experience of Burma campaigning and Japanese methods. One such training school (4th Corps Tactical School) was located at Shillong.

On 1st December, 1943, the Battalion advanced party began its move from Ranchi towards the operational area. Imphal was its destination. Passing through many places well known to the 8th Gurkha Rifles, the Battalion arrived at Imphal on 12th December.

After a period of three weeks during which the Battalion was "put in the picture," it moved up to the front, the dispositions of IV Corps (to which corps the 20th Indian Division belonged) being as under.

The IV Corps (Commander, Lieutenant-General G. A. P. Scoones, now General Sir Geoffrey Scoones, K.C.B., K.B.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C.) held the central front. It consisted of the 17th, 20th and 23rd Indian Divisions and one tank brigade (254th) and were dispersed over the whole Imphal area as follows: To the north, to the 23rd (Major-General O. L. Roberts, now Lieutenant-General Sir Ouvry Roberts, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.) was assigned the defence of Imphal and the Imphal-Kohima road. In the centre the 20th (Major-General D. Gracey) ranged down the Kabaw valley from Tamu. To the south the 17th, consisting of two brigades only (Major-General D. T. Cowan, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.), was based on Tiddim in the Chin hills, and as a L. of C. had the 163-mile stretch back to Imphal. These three divisions covered an area of some 25,000 square miles of hill and valley, thickly covered with jungle for the most part.

Vigorous patrol work towards the Chindwin river, usually in co-operation with the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment, was the Battalion role, in which on 18th January, 1944, it sustained its first battle casualty in the death of a havildar.

On 17th and 20th January, 1944, No. 10169 Lance-Naik Dhanraj Thapa swam across the Yu river with rations for the 9/14th Punjab Regiment G(R)\* Platoon. Seeing this feat was performed in enemy territory it was a very creditable performance. On 21st January a portion of the Battalion took part with the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment in an attack on enemy bunkered positions at Kyaukchaw. The Battalion contribution was its G(R) Platoon under Jemadar

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\* G(R) Platoon was the platoon trained in guerilla tactics.

Singbahadur Gurung. It was a minor affair, made noticeable by the gallantry of all concerned, especially that of Lieutenant A. G. Horwood, D.C.M., of the Northamptonshires, who fell mortally wounded, and was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. This gallant officer led the left attack with one section of his own battalion, and two sections of the 3/8th Gurkha Rifles.

As an instance of the courage shown by our men in this, their first, action in Burma may be quoted that of No. 86206 Rifleman Jainaran Rana, who was killed on the enemy wire, and by whose dead body were found seventy-five empty cases of rounds fired by him face to face with the enemy. Similar instances could be quoted. Morale was high, and a British officer had to be sent forward to order withdrawal, an order reluctantly obeyed, the Jemadar (Singbahadur) being the last to leave. For their part in this sharp little action Jemadar Singbahadur Gurung was awarded the I.O.M., and Lance-Naik Parte Pun the I.D.S.M. Casualties sustained by this platoon were : Killed, 2 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 6 Gurkha other ranks.

For some time the Battalion was engaged in patrol activity in the Kabaw valley, and minor clashes with enemy patrols took place.

On 28th January, 1944, a "Porter" company known as "E" Company was formed from existing rifle companies to simplify supply of rations, etc., to forward companies and detachments.

That the Battalion had made a good impression during its "baptism of fire," is borne out by the following message received from the commander of 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier D. A. L. Mackenzie, C.B.E., D.S.O.), dated 27th January, 1944 :

"Personal to Colonel Misselbrook. Please convey to all ranks of your battalion my very keen appreciation of the hard work they have put in, work which has contributed so much towards the successful conclusion of the Brigade's first operation. In particular your guerilla platoon, your 'stops' patrols, and company attached to Northampton have shown a fighting spirit which bodes ill for the Jap when the battalion gets its turn to go after him as a complete unit. Thank you all very much."

On 10th February, 1944, "B" Company (Commander, Captain J. B. Clements) was placed temporarily under the command of 9/14th Punjab Regiment to assist in an attack on an enemy bunkered position. In this action "B" Company, 3/8th Gurkha Rifles (right), and "D" Company, 9/14th, (left) took the leading part in this attack. It was a successful affair, many casualties being inflicted on the Japanese. All behaved gallantly in the face of heavy fire. In this action awards were won by Subadar Durbahadur Gurung (commanding No. 10 Platoon), the I.O.M., and No. 2492 Lance-Naik



Gajbahadur Gurung, the M.M. This latter N.C.O. subsequently won the I.D.S.M. Particular mention must be made of the courage of 86600 Rifleman Punaram Pun. Unfortunately, he was killed.

“B” Company casualties were :

Killed : Gurkha other ranks, 4.

Wounded : Gurkha other ranks, 11.

Following the operations of 10th February, 1944, the Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel Misselbrook) received the following from the O.C., 9/14th Punjab Regiment, dated 11th February, 1944 :

“I should like to thank you very much for sending your stretcher-bearers to help us out on 10th February. They worked unceasingly, the help they gave was quite invaluable, and was very much appreciated by everyone here.”

No apology is made for the inclusion of this tribute. The stretcher-bearer is often overlooked when a “Shabash” is being bestowed. Their work is carried out under fire, mostly in the open without cover, and without the excitement and satisfaction of being able to return to the enemy what he is giving. A pat on the back from another unit is indeed gratifying.

During this stage of the operations, the laying of ambushes was largely practised, and the following account of one laid by “B” Company of the Battalion is typical, and worthy of record.

Subadar Durbahadur Gurung (commanding No. 10 Platoon) was ordered by his company commander to lay an ambush for the night 7th/8th February, 1944, near Kyaukchaw in rear of enemy bunker positions (which at the time were being attacked by our troops) in order to prevent enemy parties from getting in and out of their positions. The Subadar arranged his platoon (after a reconnaissance) at about 1200 hours on 7th February, as follows. The position was on a small ridge above a bend in the track leading to enemy position. No. 1 Section was located to the south of the bend ; No. 2 Section was placed about sixty yards to the north of No. 1 ; No. 3 Section in reserve covering the track and the west of the platoon. Platoon Headquarters was situated close to No. 2 Section. Communication between Platoon Headquarters and No. 1 Section was by means of a rope, and a tug on this rope from Platoon Headquarters would be the signal to open fire.

Visibility in this close country was about twenty-five yards, even with a clear sky and full moon.

At 1930 hours along came three armed Japs carrying rations. They were allowed to pass. Ten minutes later a party of six appeared. This number was considered a fair target, so fire was opened and casualties inflicted. At 2000 hours another party of some twenty-five

to thirty enemy with three mules appeared. This target was engaged with rifle and light machine-gun fire and grenades. Severe casualties were inflicted, only a few survivors getting away. An enemy counter-attack was now inevitable, and the platoon was in danger of being cut off. Subadar Durbahadur, however, confident in the discipline of his men, and knowing it would be difficult to locate his position in the dark, decided to stay on and meet what was coming. At 2200 hours three parties, each twenty to twenty-five strong, arrived from three directions. Shouting, firing, and screaming, the Japanese tried to entice our men to fire, and disclose their whereabouts. No. 10 Platoon remained silent until the enemy charged headlong into the leading sections. The attackers were wiped out, only one or two reaching our position. The Japanese had had enough, and made no further effort. In trying to remove his dead and wounded the enemy suffered further casualties from our snipers.

The Subadar maintained his position until 0100 hours on 8th February, 1944, when he withdrew, as enemy movement to the rear of his position was heard.

The success of the ambush was entirely due to the tactical sense shown by Subadar Durbahadur. His control of his platoon, initiative and calmness throughout the action against an enemy of unknown strength, and his final withdrawal without loss, showed powers of leadership of the highest order. This affair, coupled with his gallantry on 10th February, earned the I.O.M. for Subadar Durbahadur.

Patrol actions continued, and the days went on until it was obvious that the great Japanese offensive, already initiated in the Arakan, was to begin on the Manipur front—an offensive which, according to the enemy, was to see the Rising Sun flag planted over the fort at Delhi.

The position at this point on the Burma-Assam front may roughly be given as :

*British and Allies.*—(1) General Stilwell (U.S.A.) with his Americans and Chinese was operating in the north in the direction of Myitkyina. (2) General Wingate's Second Chindit Expedition was about to be launched in support of Stilwell. (3) Covering Imphal in the central front was the IV Corps, located as already stated.

*Japanese.*—15th Army. A force of 100,000 crack troops for this invasion of India had been concentrated. These were mainly composed of three divisions, which were given the following tasks :

31st Division : To cross the Chindwin about Homalin, pass through the Naga hills, seize Kohima, Dimapur and the Assam railway.

15th Division : To advance up the Kabaw valley, cut off and wipe out 20th Indian Division.

33rd Division : To infiltrate into the Chin hills, and annihilate 17th Indian Division.

Discarding the courses of (1) attacking the enemy beyond the Chindwin, or (2) holding him on the Chindwin, General Sir W. Slim, Commander, Fourteenth Army, decided to withdraw to the neighbourhood of Imphal, so saddling the enemy with a precarious line of communication through mountainous country, and in the approaching monsoon. Further, the Japanese Air Forces being limited, supply by air would present great difficulties. The Imphal plain therefore was to be the scene of what was the practical destruction of the Japanese invading army, followed by our advance, and the liberation of Burma.

A glance at the map will make clear the great strategic importance of Imphal.

Its capture by the Japanese would

- (1) Give them a base for operations against Assam, and eventually India.
- (2) Isolate Stilwell and Wingate, and place them in a hazardous position.
- (3) Threaten our maintenance of communications along the Brahmaputra valley, and incidentally the air route to China.

Its loss by us would

- (1) Spell disaster for the reasons given above.
- (2) Deprive us of our advanced base containing, as it did, large depots, store and ammunition dumps, administrative establishments (including several hospitals), together with R.A.F. aerodromes and other installations.

On 14th March, 1944, Major E. V. Whitehead, 8th Gurkha Rifles, succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel V. L. Misselbrook, M.B.E., in command, the latter officer being appointed to 164 Sub-Area.

The withdrawal of the 20th Indian Division to cover Imphal was along the Tammu-Palel road, a road long contemplated but actually only built to extricate our army from Burma in 1942. It was to be a fighting withdrawal, to harass the Japanese as much as possible in their advance, and at the same time to avoid being pinned down.

It would be impossible to give accounts of platoon and section activities in the withdrawal without large-scale maps (with "local" names), so these must be omitted, and merely a general statement resorted to.

On the night 22nd/23rd March, 1944, the Battalion, together with 9/14th Punjab Regiment, supported by tanks of 3rd Dragoon Guards, Field and Medium Artillery, anti-tank guns, battalion 3-inch mortars, repulsed a determined enemy attack on the 32nd Brigade "Box," known as Charing Cross, and located near Tammu. At least 170 casualties were inflicted on the Japanese, and three enemy tanks accounted for. The Battalion lost one man very slightly wounded.

The above estimate of enemy losses was made from a most valuable report brought in by Subadar Premsing Gurung, who, with his platoon, was sent to reconnoitre on 22nd March. Owing to a large body of enemy in the area, he was unable to return to the Battalion on the 23rd, but kept touch, and eventually witnessed the collection and burning of their dead, and the removal of their wounded by the Japanese. There can be no doubt, therefore, that these were the casualties sustained in their night attack of the 22nd/23rd March, 1944.

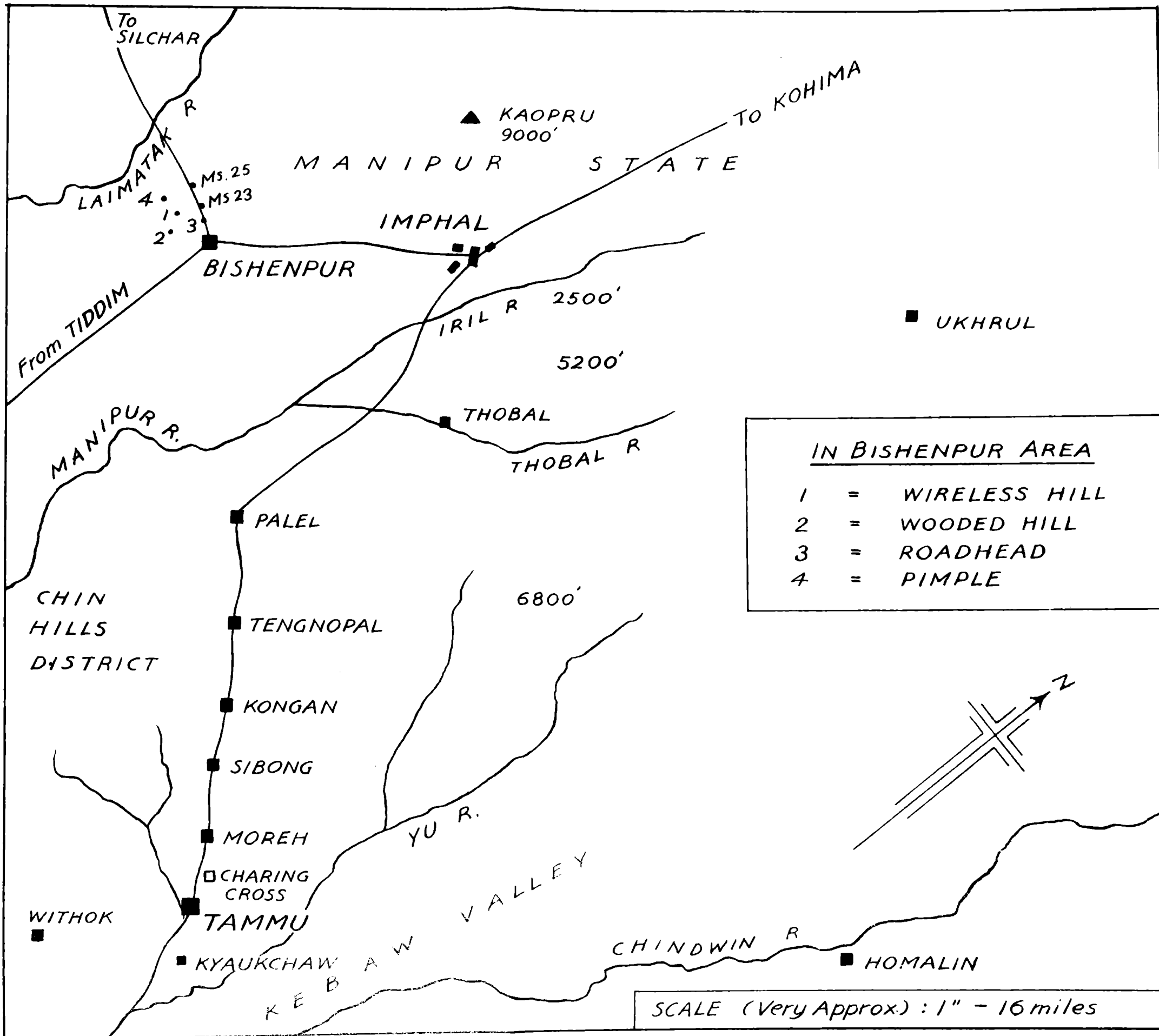
On 24th March, 1944, the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade withdrew to Moreh, about four miles north-west of Tamu, the Battalion acting as rear-guard. After the rough handling he had received during the night, the enemy did not hinder this withdrawal.

Patrol activity and considerable shelling on both sides marked the stay at Moreh, together with bombing from enemy aircraft. In one such raid on 28th March the Battalion suffered casualties amounting to 1 Gurkha other rank and 1 Indian other rank (the armourer) killed and 7 Gurkha other ranks wounded.

On 26th March, a patrol of twenty men from "C" Company, under Havildar Dhansankar Pun, left Moreh to bring back a wounded British officer who had been left with food and water where he had fallen. Travelling through the night, the patrol picked up the wounded officer and carried him into the Battalion lines, arriving at 0700 hours on 27th March. In view of the fact that the country through which the patrol moved was known to be occupied by the enemy in some strength, it was a very creditable performance, reflecting very highly on the havildar.

On 31st March, the Battalion evacuated Moreh, and proceeded towards Imphal. Enemy shelling continued and Major J. Milne of the Battalion set a fine example by going to the aid of a wounded British soldier during a bombardment, regardless of his own safety. During 1st April, the Battalion covered the withdrawal of the troops from Moreh, and by 0900 hours on that day all troops were clear of that place.

On 2nd April, 1944, orders were received for the Battalion to proceed to Mile 22 on the Palel-Imphal road to occupy a position in the 20th Indian Division "Box." This move was short-lived, as on 6th April the Battalion left the "Box" area and proceeded to



Palel, where, with 1st Battery 23rd Medium Regiment, R.A., and one troop anti-tank 6-pounders from 55th Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A., its task was to defend the southern approaches to Palel air strip.

The siege of Imphal was now on. The "way back" had not been an easy one. The conditions of the roads was such that, at times, elephants had to be used to haul motor transport out of the mud.

It may here be stated that one of the enemy objectives in this sector was the Palel airfield, and they fought hard for it. Palel, which was the second of our all-weather airstrips (Imphal was the other), never fell, though both came under the fire of enemy guns. Whilst discussing airfields, the grand work of the Allied Air Forces must be mentioned. By air, mails and newspapers came daily, and, on the day following that on which they arrived at Imphal, casualties were flown to base hospitals in India. The effect of these arrangements on the morale of the troops was profound. The feat of flying the 5th Indian Division from the Arakan to reinforce the Imphal front must also not be forgotten. Carried out by planes of American Transport Command, it may be considered as one of the main achievements of the war in Burma.

On 10th April, 1944, the Battalion took up a position on the ridge west of Palel aerodrome, its task being to deny to the enemy observation of the aerodrome.

This task was of two days' duration only, as on 12th April, the Battalion was ordered suddenly to move to area Milestone 28 on Tiddim road to take over from a battalion of the 49th Indian Infantry Brigade. About 1830 hours on the same day, this relief (of the 3/3rd Gurkha Rifles) was completed. This position, which was subjected to occasional enemy shelling, was handed over next day to 2/19th Hyderabad Regiment, and the Battalion left by march route for Bishenpur on the Imphal-Tiddim road, where it formed part of the "Box" formed by 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade and attached troops to cover the withdrawal of the 49th Indian Infantry Brigade, and deny the Imphal road to the enemy.

At 0700 hours on 16th April, 1944, the Battalion, supported by one troop 3rd Dragoon Guards, and one troop 20th Battery, 9th Field Regiment, R.A., left Bishenpur on the Bishenpur-Silchar track with the object of establishing a company of the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment in a village to the south. At Milestone 23 on Bishenpur-Silchar track, where the Battalion halted, a patrol located the enemy on a bare hill (known as Wireless Hill), some 800 yards to the south of the track. Strength believed to be small, but events proved this to be an underestimate.

At 1200 hours on 16th April, in very bad weather, "A"

Company 3/8th launched a most successful attack on the hill, which was strongly held, gained the ridge, drove off the enemy, and occupied their positions. The Company Commander (Captain J. F. Crace), Jemadar Manbahadur Thapa and 4 Gurkha other ranks were killed. Jemadar Bhimbahadur Thapa and 15 Gurkha other ranks were wounded—of these the Jemadar and 2 Gurkha other ranks subsequently died of their wounds. At 1700 hours on this day, the 3/8th (less "C" Company) and No. 1 Company, 1st Northhamptons (under command 3/8th), were ordered by the Brigade Commander to take up a defensive position on a feature known as Wooded Hill, south of Milestone 23 Bishenpur-Silchar track, with "A" Company still holding the captured position at Wireless Hill. From this position, untenable now that the enemy was in force in a strong position overlooking them, "A" Company was withdrawn by the Commanding Officer before dawn on 17th April. All ranks had a most uncomfortable night—very cold and wet, a blinding gale of sleet, no blankets or ground sheets, harassed by artillery fire and subject to heavy grenade attacks. Conditions for the wounded were particularly unpleasant.

Several abortive attacks were later made to retake Wireless Hill, amongst them one by "B" Company (Commander, Major J. B. Clements) at 1300 hours on 17th April, 1944. In this, the names of No. 2433 Lance-Naik Balande Rana and No. 85602 Rifleman Gangamani Thapa were particularly recorded for outstanding gallantry. The latter gained an immediate award of the M.M. The former was killed, and so missed an honour richly deserved.

A full-scale attack, closely supported by tanks, was arranged for 19th April, 1944, but owing to the steepness of the slope the tanks were unable to gain the ridge, so the infantry attack was called off. One tank, when within five yards of the crest, slipped sideways, rolled over three times, and came to rest at the bottom of the hill on its tracks. The tank commander was killed, but for some marvellous reason the remainder of the crew were unhurt.

A short account of the Wooded Hill operations is recorded thus in the 20th Indian Division story :

"5,000 feet up on the Silchar track, on what was christened Wooded Hill, the Northhamptons and 8th Gurkhas guarded the precious route which led to the plains of India.

"Here a company of the British battalion with the 8th Gurkhas fought an incredible action at night in which tanks which had climbed 2,000 feet to the peak up a twisting cork-screw track, the last part of which was hewn out of solid bamboo jungle by Sappers, turned on their headlights to assist the defending infantry. The Japanese suicidal attacks were beaten off, and the track safeguarded."

On 21st April, 1944, the enemy, strength about one and a half companies, seen east of Wireless Hill were successfully engaged by guns of the 9th Field Regiment, R.A. Jemadar Babursing Thapa, commanding a platoon of "D" Company, "observed this shoot" with most satisfactory results, as subsequently 26 enemy bodies were discovered by a patrol which collected many documents, equipment and much valuable information. On this occasion certainly the Jap did not waste any time in clearing out.

On 24th April, while directing the fire of his 3-inch mortars, supporting a platoon of "C" Company, Lieutenant D. D. Menzies was wounded, having his leg shattered. Major J. Milne (second-in-command) was slightly wounded in the same action.

At Milestone 22½ on Bishenpur–Silchar track a "Box" had been formed. This was known as Roadhead. It was garrisoned largely by administrative details, and was responsible for forwarding supplies from Bishenpur. In an enemy attack on Roadhead on 25th April the Quartermaster, Captain F. J. Chapman, was wounded.

During the night 25th/26th April, 1944, heavy enemy attacks were made on the Battalion. "D" Company (with one section "C" Company) bore the brunt, and won the highest praise for their steadiness and fire discipline. The spirit of this company was exemplified in their volunteering to stay in their position when a relief was proposed, being confident in their ability to beat off any further attacks. The Battalion casualties were light, considering the intensity of enemy shelling, grenade and small-arms fire, amounting to 1 British officer wounded; 3 Gurkha other ranks killed, 15 wounded.

On 26th April, 1944, orders were received that the Battalion would be relieved by 1/4th Gurkha Rifles on 27th and 28th April, 1944.

Owing to enemy actions on the Silchar road, the relief programme was not carried out as ordered, but by 1400 hours on 30th April, one platoon 1/4th Gurkha Rifles arrived at Roadhead.

For a few days, owing to further enemy action, the passage of convoys from the base was held up, and the Battalion was on short commons. This was partly made good by the collection of vegetables, etc., and on 1st May, 1944, four days' rations and a large reserve of ammunition arrived at Roadhead. The reopening of the road was due to the efforts of the 1/4th Gurkha Rifles during three days of magnificent fighting, in which heavy casualties had been inflicted on the enemy.

The road operations narrated had the effect of cancelling any prospects of immediate relief, and on 1st May, the Battalion was distributed as follows :



- (a) Battalion (less "B" Echelon and Admin. party) holding defensive position on Wooded Hill, south of Milestone 23 on Bishenpur–Silchar track.
- (b) Admin. party, consisting of Q.M. staff, one section carrier platoon, one section pioneer platoon, and 40 reinforcements, with one company 1st Northhamptons, at Roadhead.
- (c) "B" Echelon was with 17th Indian Divisional Headquarters in "Box" just north of Imphal.

On 2nd May, 1944, "C" Company proceeded to Bishenpur to relieve one company 1/4th Gurkha Rifles, required for operations on the L. of C. from Bishenpur to Roadhead.

That the Battalion in holding Wooded Hill had done an inestimable service was disclosed in papers taken from a dead Japanese battalion commander (killed by 1/4th Gurkha Rifles). In these, the enemy intentions were disclosed to seize and hold Wooded Hill and then advance on Bishenpur. Being frustrated, the enemy intentions were changed and were directed against that portion of the L. of C. from Bishenpur to 3/8th Gurkha Rifles, and the Northhamptons' positions.

Patrols, sorties from "Boxes," reconnoitring and clashes with the enemy were the daily round. On one occasion, on 6th May, 1944, a platoon of "C" Company (from Roadhead) encountered a Japanese party, killed 11 and wounded others, its own casualties being only two Gurkha other ranks slightly wounded.

From 12th May, 1944, the Battalion arranged a system of changing over two platoons at Bishenpur with two platoons at Battalion Headquarters to allow for a clean up and change of clothes—a very necessary consideration, as all troops on Wooded Hill had been unable even to wash for a month. (Note: As the result of welfare development in England, British units were provided with mobile baths. In India welfare was not so developed.)

On 14th May, 1944, "C" Company was sent to assist 1/4th Gurkha Rifles in keeping the L. of C. open. On 18th/19th May, "A" Company took part in operations, in conjunction with 1st Northhamptons, of a harassing nature, and in one ambush "A" Company succeeded in killing twenty Japanese and wounding others of a party which beat a hasty retreat. Our company sustained no casualties.

On 20th May, the Battalion carried out an attack on Wireless Hill. In this operation "B" Company (commander, Major J. B. Clements) took the leading part. Fighting with splendid spirit, the company charged up Wireless Hill, supported by artillery (20th Battery, 9th Field Regiment, R.A.) and the Battalion's 3-inch and 2-inch mortars. During this successful operation, enemy casualties

counted were 23 dead and many wounded. It was difficult to assess complete enemy losses, as our artillery fire had caused enemy defences to collapse, and many must have been buried therein. Our own casualties amounted to : Wounded, Major J. B. Clements ; killed, 2 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 9 Gurkha other ranks. Observers of the Northhamptons on a near-by point said it was a magnificent sight to see "B" Company men charging across the hill with fixed bayonets, and the enemy running away to the south as hard as they could go.

On the night 22nd/23rd May, 1944, the Battalion suffered a severe loss in the death of Major M. O. Seymour-Taylor. This gallant officer with four sections of "A" Company had been sent to occupy a small feature known as "The Pimple" to the north of Wireless Hill to facilitate the operations of the 63rd Indian Infantry Brigade (17th Indian Division) planned for 23rd May.

It now transpired that the feature occupied was not "The Pimple." Appreciating the hazards attendant on a withdrawal, Major Seymour-Taylor, on his own initiative, however, decided to remain. Attacked by overwhelming forces (with ammunition almost exhausted, and after fierce hand-to-hand fighting), he was eventually obliged to withdraw. It was whilst organizing a counter-attack that he fell wounded, shot through the chest, being almost immediately afterwards killed by a grenade. Despite this, the withdrawal was carried out in perfect order, and only after Subadar Jitbahadur Gurung, who had taken over command, was quite certain that no wounded had been left behind. Our casualties were : Killed, 1 British officer and 9 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 3 Gurkha other ranks. The detachment claimed to have killed (known) 22, and probably many more, and to have wounded 9.

Until 31st May, 1944, the Battalion was occupied (1) in patrolling, (2) in destroying bunkers, (3) building new ones on Wooded and Wireless Hills to allow for new dispositions, (4) in moving to Road-head and working on new defensive positions there. All this work was connected with a plan whereby the 1/4th Gurkha Rifles should drive the Japanese from the ridge from which they had launched the attack on Major Seymour-Taylor's detachment on 22nd/23rd May.

On 30th May, 1944, an escort and reconnaissance party of the Battalion under Lieutenant G. D. Grant accompanied Royal Signals in laying a line to Milestone 26, Silchar track. Beyond Milestone 25 the party were fired on by the enemy, losing : Royal Signals, 2 British officers killed, 1 British officer wounded ; 3/8th Gurkha Rifles, 1 British officer (Lieutenant G. D. Grant) and 4 Gurkha other ranks wounded.

On 8th June, 1944, the Battalion moved back to their old positions

at Wooded and Wireless Hills, relieved at Roadhead by 1st Northhamptons.

An attack on the Japanese to the west of the Battalion's position took place on 14th June. No success attended this difficult operation in the dark, misty night. Major R. D. S. Bulkeley (commanding "C" Company) was killed leading his foremost section, and in addition the Battalion losses were : Killed, 10 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 38 Gurkha other ranks.

A platoon of "D" Company successfully ambushed a party of Japs on 19th June, 1944, killing 13 and wounded others.

So the defence of Imphal went on, no rest, constant vigilance, incessant fighting with a cunning, brave and fanatical enemy. It is impossible to mention all such encounters, but the following account of a typical hand-to-hand patrol action of that time will be of interest.

On 28th June, 1944, No. 12 Platoon of "D" Company (under Jemadar Shamsher Gurung) was sent to see if there were any enemy in a certain nullah. If so, to destroy them. Finding none, the Jemadar proceeded to another "draw." One section was left at the top of the nullah to cover the advance of the other two. Suddenly the rear section was charged from behind by Japs carrying grenades and clubs, covered from farther back by more Japs with rifles and light machine guns. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting followed. One lance-naik was knocked down by a Jap, who seized his cross braces. The lance-naik thought fast, unclipped his belt and with a heave was out of his equipment, and prepared to deal adequately with his assailant. One man of the rear section was hit over the head, and taken away. Later he hit his guard over the head and escaped. A third man was hit over the head, hips and knee. Resenting this treatment, he stuck his rifle in a Jap's belly and fired, killing not only this particular Jap, but a second one behind.

Although none of our battalions were present at Kohima, a few words about its heroic defence will be of interest to many of the Regiment who served there or in the vicinity. Little did those serving in the Kohima district at the end of the nineteenth century imagine that fifty years hence it would be the scene of desperate fighting in a World War. Fate ordained otherwise, and for three weeks troops of the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade of the 5th Indian Division (just arrived from the Arakan in time), Burma and Assam Regiments, and the Assam Rifles defied constant Japanese attacks, and maintained a gallant resistance until relieved on 16th April, 1944, by the 2nd British Division from Dimapur. Hence Kohima made history, and the names Jail Hill, Garrison Hill, District Commissioner's Bungalow will always be connected with a noteworthy feat of arms which did much to maintain our positions in Assam, and helped to

prevent a dangerous situation developing, especially in and about Imphal and on the Chinese front.

On 28th June, 1944, the Battalion received orders to hand over its position to 1st Northhamptons and to come under command 48th Indian Infantry Brigade, of the 17th Indian Division.

On 2nd July, the Commanding officer, (Lieutenant-Colonel E. V. Whitehead) and the Subadar-Major, Raghbir Thapa, left for Imphal to meet the Supreme Commander S.E.A.C., Lord Louis Mountbatten. Both the Supreme Commander and Commander, Fourteenth Army (General Sir William Slim) complimented the Battalion on its achievements.

On 6th July, the Battalion once again found itself at Roadhead

It was now becoming evident that the Japanese 15th Army had shot its bolt, all their attacks on Imphal and Kohima having failed. On 22nd June, 1944, the road from Kohima to Imphal was cleared. At this stage it is well to remember what the troops in Assam owed to the 3rd Tactical Air Force. For it is not too much to say that owing to their efforts, especially by dropping supplies, they ensured the maintenance of operations. Had they failed, the results of the campaign might have resulted in a resounding triumph for Japan.

On 17th July, 1944, the Battalion left its position on relief by 1/1st Punjab Regiment, and proceeded to rest billets at a place named Wangjing to the north, in the Imphal plain.

This at long last gave a chance to clean up and reorganize. Leave to Nepal and India was opened.

Between 18th and 31st July, the Battalion made several moves, and was engaged in collecting "air drops," as L. of C. roads were still generally unusable. Visits were made by the Commander, IV Indian Corps (Lieutenant-General G. A. P. Scoones) and Commander 20th Indian Division (Major-General D. D. Gracey), each of whom gave the Battalion a "Sha Bash" for its part in the destruction of the Japs on the Imphal front.

On 5th August, 1944, a party of no less than 349 Gurkha all ranks proceeded on 61 days' leave to Nepal.

On 7th August the Battalion found a guard of honour of 1 British officer, 2 Gurkha officers, and 100 rank and file for the visit of His Excellency the Viceroy, who expressed himself very satisfied. His Excellency, who was accompanied by the Commander 33rd Indian Corps (Lieutenant-General M. N. Stopford, now General Sir Montagu Stopford, G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O.), presented decorations to Jemadar Singbahadur Gurung and Rifleman Ramparshad Gurung.

During September, 1944, training was continued, and on the 10th the Supreme Army Commander, S.E.A.C., again visited the Battalion, and congratulated all ranks on their achievements. It was a pleasure

to hear him speak in Gurkhali to several men. After leaving, Lord Louis Mountbatten sent the officiating Commanding Officer (Major J. Milne) the following :

19th September, 1944.

“MY DEAR MILNE,

“I am writing to tell you how glad I was to have a chance of seeing the 3rd Battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, and to find them in such good heart.

“Your battalion have certainly done great things, and have every reason to be proud of themselves.

“Yours sincerely,

(Signed) “LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN.”

From September to November, 1944, training continued. The siege of Imphal was ended. The vaunted Japanese march to Delhi was halted, its army broken, and with 50,000 dead Japanese on that “bloody plain” the spine of the Imperial Japanese Army in South-East Asia was broken.

It is of interest to note that at this time (September, 1944) the Battalion had the opportunity of meeting the Mahindra Dal Regiment of the Nepal Army.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

(See Maps Nos. 1, 2 and 11)

[3rd Battalion—continued.]

Fourteenth Army advances—Arrive Mawlaik—Crossing the Chindwin—20th Indian Division plan—32nd Indian Infantry Brigade march—Capture of Budalin—20th Indian Division concentrated—To Monywa—3rd Battalion commandos—Monywa captured—Battalion commandos—In Brigade and Divisional reserve—Towards Myinmu—Cross the Irrawaddy—Bridgehead fighting—Awards—With 80th Indian Infantry Brigade—Enemy attack—Commanding Officer killed—General picture—20th Indian Division role—“C” and “D” Companies—“B” Company—End of Irrawaddy battle—To Meiktila—Decorations presented—Advance southwards—Tharrawaddy—Link with 26th Indian Division—Meet 1/8th Gurkha Rifles—Changes in command—Victory march—Monsoon quarters—To Pegu—On the Sittang—Back to 20th Indian Division—Change in Command—To Rangoon—To French Indo-China—Burma service reviewed—Tasks in Indo-China—Annamite rebellion—Disarming Japs—Relief by French troops—To North Borneo—Farewell Parade of 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade—Return to India.

IN November, 1944, following complete reorganization and thorough raining of all ranks, the Battalion commenced the forward movement leading to their second spell of fighting. Its first objective was the town of Mawlaik on the Chindwin river. The plan was to cross the Chindwin, and to drive southward through the arid, trackless hill country along the eastern bank of the river.

The general plan of the Fourteenth Army's operations which opened in November, 1944, was the capture of Mandalay. In this plan, the 20th Indian Division's main function in the over-all plan was to act as the right flank guard to the Fourteenth Army troops committed to make a frontal attack on Mandalay.

Without incident, the Battalion reached Mawlaik on 3rd December, 1944. Battalion Tactical Headquarters and patrol parties under the Commanding Officer had preceded the main body, and arrived at Mawlaik on 27th November, 1944. Their role was to send two long-distance patrols trans-Chindwin. By 8th December, 1944, the Chindwin river had been crossed—a tiring period, working with improvised rafts, native craft, ranger boats (dropped by air). The rounding-up of animals in mid-stream was an additional fatigue. However, the Battalion got across this 600-yard span of river without

damage to kit, or casualties to personnel or animals. In addition, the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade Headquarters column was also ferried across under Battalion arrangements, for which service a message of thanks from Brigade was received.

On 9th December, 1944, a group consisting of 3/8th Gurkha Rifles and 4/10th Gurkha Rifles with one section 31st Mountain Battery, R.A. (under Lieutenant-Colonel E. V. Whitehead, 3/8th Gurkha Rifles), moved southward.

With the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade across the Chindwin a short description of the 20th Indian Infantry Division plan of action may now be given.

While the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade maintained its southward push, the rest of the 20th Indian Division was to concentrate farther south on the eastern bank of the river at Maukkadaw.

Since the crossing at Mawlaik by 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade, Kalemyo and Malewa had fallen, and as a Bailey bridge had been thrown across the Chindwin near Kalewa, General Gracey was able to transport the remainder of the Division with comparative ease.

The 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade Group maintained its progress against slight opposition but under many difficulties, mainly caused by the absence of any road worth the name, and this necessitated supplies being dropped from aircraft throughout the long march which finally ended near Budalin on 3rd January, 1945.

Previous to this, on 28th December, 1944, a pursuit group consisting of "A" and "D" Companies, Pioneer Platoon and elements of Battalion Headquarters Platoon, under Major M. E. Ovans, M.C., was provided for the brigade column. This group did valuable work in locating retreating enemy, reconnoitring tracks, supply dropping points, and watering places.

On 3rd January, 1945, orders were received for the capture of Budalin. The ensuing fighting lasted a week. The Japanese put up a desperate resistance and had to be "winkled out" of six strongly built defensive positions, and hundreds of dug-outs used by snipers. Our advance had to be made over flat country which was covered by well-sited Jap machine guns. Working forward yard by yard, the 1st Northhamptons and 3/8th Gurkha Rifles tightened the ring around the enemy until they were squeezed into a small pocket. The third battalion of the Brigade, 9/14th Punjab Regiment, cut the southern approaches to the town.

In this action, the first fought by the 20th Indian Division in 1945, the Battalion casualties were light, but included the death of Subadar Shamsher Gurung (died of wounds).

At Budalin, the 32nd Brigade joined the 20th Indian Division after six weeks' detachment. The next objective, Monywa—an

important railroad junction, and once a flourishing Chindwin port—lay about twenty-five miles to the south. The 32nd Brigade group moved forward on 13th January, 1945.

On 14th January, the Commander, 33rd Indian Corps (Lieutenant-General Sir Montagu Stopford), visited the Battalion.

On 16th January, 1945, a Battalion commando force about 250 strong (consisting of "C" and "B" Companies with a detachment of H.Q. Company, under Major M. E. Ovans, M.C.), moved round east of Monywa with the objective of cutting the Monywa–Sagaing road. The enemy were engaged and casualties inflicted. On 19th January, Subadar Singbahadur Gurung, I.O.M., was wounded, and a rifleman killed.

By 22nd January, 1945, the capture of Monywa was completed. Once again Northhamptons, 3/8th Gurkha Rifles and 9/14th Punjab had scored a success. Monywa was in ruins. The final entry was somewhat of an anti-climax to the stiff fighting of two days before, only a few snipers on the extreme south of the town being met with.

The Battalion casualties were: Killed, 3 Gurkha other ranks; wounded, 7 Gurkha other ranks.

Our Battalion commandos, now assisted by armoured cars from 11th Cavalry, one troop 6-pounders from 111th Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A., and the 32nd Brigade defence company (4/17th Dogras), were still harassing the enemy, but on 25th January they were relieved by 1st Northhamptons, and rejoined the Battalion, which went into Brigade reserve in Monywa for a well-earned rest, and a long overdue wash and clean up.

The Battalion remained in 32nd Brigade reserve until 7th February, 1945, when it came under direct command of 20th Indian Division. On this day the Battalion was visited by Lieutenant-General Sir William Slim, commanding Fourteenth Army.

The advance was continued towards Myinmu, and on 9th February, "B" and "C" Companies were returned to 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade as reserve, and "A" Company to 9/14th Punjab Regiment (under command), so the divisional reserve now consisted of the Battalion (less three companies).

On 16th February, 1945, the Battalion (less "A" and "B" Companies) crossed the Irrawaddy near Myinmu to reinforce the 100th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 20th Division in their bridgehead.

On 19th February, the Battalion (less two companies) and one company 9/14th Punjab, the whole known as "Vickforce," relieved the 14/13th Frontier Force Rifles. On this day Major J. Milne was wounded. Information was received of awards of the M.C. to Major P. M. J. Rawson, and three M.Ms. for Monywa operations and two M.Ms. for Budalin operations. Again, on 21st



February, notification was received of the award of M.Cs. to Major J. Milne, Major J. B. Clements and Subadar Darabjit Gurung for Kabaw valley operations during the period January-March, 1944.

On 22nd February, 1945, the Battalion came under command of 80th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 20th Indian Division.

At 0200 hours on 22nd February, 1945, the Japanese made a determined attack. This was beaten off with severe casualties to the enemy. The Battalion losses were 1 killed and 13 wounded (Gurkha other ranks). Later in the day one company 1st Devonshire Regiment replaced the company of 9/14th with the Battalion, but were withdrawn the following day.

Intermittent fighting and shelling continued. On 27th February, 1945, Lieutenant M. A. C. Horton was wounded, 1 Gurkha other rank killed and 7 Gurkha other ranks wounded.

From 17th February, 1945, the Battalion had been located in the vicinity of Kanlan, a village on the eastern (left) bank of the Irrawaddy, north-east of Myaung. On 1st March, when the Battalion (less two companies), now back in the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade with one company 9/14th Punjab under command, and supported by one squadron 7th Cavalry, was moving forward to attack Myogon village (south of Kanlan), a tragic incident occurred in the village of Inya, just north-east of Myogon. Heavy enemy shelling necessitated a halt here to adjust positions, and whilst this was in progress an enemy shell killed Lieutenant-Colonel E. V. Whitehead, the Commanding officer, Major P. M. J. Rawson, M.C., O.C. "C" Company, and the Forward Observation Officer, commanding 19th Battery, 9th Field Regiment, R.A. The loss of Vic Whitehead was a grievous blow, and caused great sorrow throughout the Battalion, which, since assuming command, he had led so gallantly and successfully.

Major M. E. Ovans, M.C., assumed command. By midday on 2nd March, 1945, Myogon had been captured. The two detached companies ("A" and "B") rejoined in time to take part in the final assault.

On 4th March, 1945, in order to obtain communication with the 1st Northhamptons to the south, "C" Company (Commander, Captain J. C. Goldingham) advanced. Reinforced by two platoons of "D" Company, the operation was successfully accomplished, after severe fighting, by the evening. Captain Goldingham, seriously wounded early on, was succeeded by Captain W. R. Bates as O.C. "C" Company. Our losses amounted to 1 British officer wounded, 1 Gurkha officer and 3 Gurkha other ranks killed, and 35 Gurkha other ranks wounded. A total of 70 enemy casualties was claimed.

At this point a brief summary of the plan of operations by the

Fourteenth Army at the end of February and early March, 1945, will clarify the picture.

1. XXXIII Corps (to which the 20th Indian Division now belonged) was operating as under :

- (a) 19th Indian Division attacking Mandalay from the north.
- (b) 20th Indian Division to the east of the Irrawaddy threatening Mandalay from the west.

2. IV Corps was switched from the northern flank of the army above Mandalay to the neighbourhood of Pakokku on the west bank of the Irrawaddy, and 100 miles south of Mandalay. From here it was to seize Meiktila, the nodal point of road, rail and air communications below Mandalay, and containing the main dumps and installations of the enemy. The main Japanese Army in central Burma would thus be caught between the anvil of IV Corps and the hammer of XXXIII Corps, descending from the north at the moment that its nerve-centre was destroyed.

Although the 20th Indian Division bridgehead east of the Irrawaddy played a subsidiary role in the over-all tactical employment of the Fourteenth Army in this decisive battle of the Irrawaddy, it was none the less important as—

- (a) It drew off enemy forces from the defence of Mandalay.
- (b) It contained enemy forces south of the river, which otherwise could be employed in holding back the forthcoming blow at Meiktila from the Pakokku area.

This blow was to be the decisive stroke which must, at all costs, succeed.

To return to the Battalion. On 11th March, 1945, "C" and "D" Companies under Major N. W. Hocken carried out a spirited attack. They assaulted (without supporting fire from mortars or tanks) across 300 yards of open ground, enemy in position. With kukri and bayonet the Japanese were overwhelmed, leaving 35 killed and 1 prisoner of war. Included in the booty captured were two 150 mm. guns. The Battalion losses were : Killed, 3 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 1 British officer (Major R. W. Bates), 10 Gurkha other ranks. Subsequently the 20th Divisional Commander and the 32nd Brigade Commander (Brigadier D. A. L. Mackenzie) sent messages of congratulation on this achievement.

On 16th March, 1945, "B" Company (under Major J. B. Clements, M.C.) had a very successful brush with the enemy at Letweywa, west of the main railway line (Mandalay section), and six miles north of Kyaukse. Here they routed a Jap detachment, killed 25, captured 19 bullock-cartloads of ammunition, equipment and valuable

instruments, with the loss of only 4 Gurkha other ranks wounded.

Later the same day, the enemy, who hereabouts showed determined resistance, attacked "B" Company. They were driven off, taking with them their casualties excepting two killed. "B" Company lost: Killed, 3 Gurkha other ranks; wounded, 2 Gurkha other ranks.

The daily fighting, marching and transport difficulties persisted, but the eastward advance continued. All ranks were greatly cheered to hear that on 21st March, 1945, Mandalay had been captured.

After commanding the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade for seventeen months, Brigadier D. A. L. Mackenzie, C.B.E., D.S.O., left on transfer to G.H.Q. (India), and on departure thanked all ranks in a letter dated 24th March, 1945. He was succeeded by Brigadier E. C. J. Woodford, C.B.E., D.S.O.

In the meanwhile the Army Commander's great plan had succeeded and the battle of the Irrawaddy was over. To enumerate every village fought for, every town occupied, and every operation undertaken by the Battalion would be impossible. What was done can best be summed up in the words of the Commander, XXXIII Corps: "During the last ten weeks four Japanese divisions had been severely hammered, over 5,500 enemy dead have been counted on the battlefield, 72 guns and 19 tanks have been captured or destroyed, besides many other weapons, much transport, railway stocks, ammunition and stores."

The enemy, outfought and outgeneralled, had lost the decisive battle for Burma. The action of the 32nd and 80th Indian Infantry Brigades of the 20th Indian Division in forcing the remains of two Japanese divisions (15th and 31st) into the hilly country of the Shan states (instead of their hoped-for withdrawal to Rangoon), and therefore made useless to the enemy throughout the remainder of the battle for Burma, must not be lost sight of.

For six days the Battalion enjoyed a rest period, during which parties visited Mandalay.

On 10th April, 1945, the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade Group moved to Meiktila, and were relieved of their role of driving the enemy into the hills to the east by the 36th Division. The latter division took over the three British battalions from the 20th Indian Division, sending in exchange one Gurkha (1/1st Gurkha Rifles) and two Indian battalions (2/8th Punjab and 1/19th Hyderabad). The 4/2nd Gurkha Rifles also joined the 20th Indian Division as reconnaissance battalion. These moves meant farewell to the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment with whom the Battalion had been so happily connected for some sixteen months.

During April information was received of the award of several

decorations, and on one parade the Commander, Air and Land Forces, South-East Asia (Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese), presented these, and others previously earned.

The next task of the 20th Indian Division was to cut the enemy's communications to the oil-field areas and to capture Magwe. The drive southwards was on. On 20th April "C" and "D" Companies had a brush with an enemy column (about 100 strong). These Japs asked for trouble and got it, as they were marching along inside our battalion position, evidently thinking their road was clear. Ten were killed, including two officers, and villagers reported many retired wounded, and all in a state of confusion. We lost : Killed, 2 Gurkha other ranks ; wounded, 6 Gurkha other ranks.

Occasionally opportunities presented themselves for dealing with retreating Japs who were on the run, and rarely stayed to fight, unless surprised or cornered.

On 8th May it is tersely recorded that it was VE Day (the end of hostilities in Europe). No celebrations—no rum issue !

On 15th May, south of Tharrawaddy, one platoon of "D" Company succeeded in ambushing a Jap party, killed 7 and captured 1. The following day, in a reserve forest near by, a platoon of "A" Company met with great success in a similar undertaking. In this affair 19 enemy were killed and 15 wounded out of a total of 40. Our platoons sustained no casualties.

On 17th May troops of 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade linked up with 26th Indian Division on the Prome-Rangoon road. It will be remembered that this division had taken Rangoon after a seaborne operation. This meeting coincided with the announcement of the award of the Burma Star for operations in that country.

On 21st May a party of British officers, Gurkha officers and Gurkha other ranks visited Rangoon, and stayed with the 1st Battalion.

On 20th May Major W. G. Michels assumed officiating command of the Battalion *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel M. E. Ovans, M.C., transferred to another appointment; and on 11th June Major E. T. Horsford assumed command *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel W. G. Michels, evacuated to hospital.

One composite platoon under Major J. Milne, M.C., left to take part in the Victory Parade in Rangoon.

Until 19th July the Battalion, from its monsoon quarters near Letpadan, took part in the operations of hunting and harrying Japanese parties who were either trying to escape to the Pegu Yomas, or to eke out a precarious existence by raiding villages for food.

On 19th July the Battalion received orders to move to Pegu, and four days later came under command of the 48th Indian Infantry

Brigade, and moved east to prevent the enemy from crossing the Sittang river.

Following a most unpleasant march on 24th July, when the Battalion marched for some time in water chest high, the Sittang was reached. Here there was plenty of activity, and considerable casualties were inflicted on the enemy, particularly when they came floating down the river on large bamboo rafts. One stout-hearted Burman brought in an enemy machine gun, which he had helped himself to, whilst the Japanese crew were busy knocking down houses to obtain material for raft building.

On 29th July the Battalion was relieved by 1/7th Gurkha Rifles. During its five days on the Sittang, no fewer than 200 Japanese were killed for the loss of 2 Gurkha other ranks killed, and 8 wounded. This great discrepancy was due to successful ambushes, and attacking enemy-filled rafts, which offered easy targets.

On 30th July the Battalion returned to its own division (20th) at the monsoon quarters near Letpadan, and on 31st July a party of Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers, who had received decorations, proceeded to Rangoon, to be presented to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief in India (General Sir Claude Auchinleck).

On 13th August, 1945, the command of the Battalion again changed, Lieutenant-Colonel E. H. Russel taking over from Lieutenant-Colonel E. T. Horsford.

A warning order for a move to Rangoon was received on 13th August, followed, on 12th September, by an order to be prepared for a move by sea to French Indo-China, but it was not until 19th September that the move took place.

The stay in Rangoon was not a lengthy one, but opportunity was taken to do some sight-seeing, and to visit our 4th Battalion.

At 1730 hours on 26th September, orders were received for embarkation the following day. It is a tribute to the efficiency which prevailed in the Battalion to record that, despite this short notice, the embarkation was carried out without hitch.

Embarked on H.M.T.S. *Morton Bay*, the Battalion finally left the Rangoon river on 30th September. Its service in Burma had ended. Right well had the Battalion upheld the good name of the 8th Gurkha Rifles. Kabaw valley, Imphal, the Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Sittang, serve to remind us of duty well and truly done under difficulties of climate, terrain, communications probably unequalled in any other theatre of war. As the 20th Indian Division left Burma, the following message from its Commander (Major-General D. D. Gracey), who was officiating as Commander, IV Corps, was received :

“Extremely grateful for your unstinted help in loaning resources with which to consummate the destruction of Jap forces which you

had so large a share in routing earlier in the shooting match.”

On 8th October, 1945, the Battalion arrived at Saigon, disembarked the following morning, and marched to an airfield about nine miles distant, where it was engaged on defensive duties and on the difficult task of preserving law and order until French troops were able to take over. The lawless condition of the country was due to the activities of the Annamite Independence Party, and many encounters with members of this movement took place. In these, the Annamites found the Gurkha a particularly unpleasant person on whom to wage war. Large numbers were killed and captured with small losses to the Battalion.

As happened in other places in the east, Japanese help in quelling disturbances was occasionally given.

On 14th December, 1,000 Japanese officers and other ranks arrived at Battalion Headquarters. A formal parade under Subadar-Major Darabjit Gurung, M.C., was held. Japanese officers surrendered their swords to officers of the Battalion.

On 19th December, 1945, the Battalion was relieved by French troops, and sailed in M.V. *Highland Brigade* on 26th December for North Borneo, which was reached on 28th December.

This move was made in order to relieve Australian troops. The Battalion was now commanded by Major E. T. Horsford, D.S.O., who had returned to command on 25th December, 1945, *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel E. H. Russel, who proceeded on leave to the United Kingdom.

Guard duties on establishments, and on Japanese prisoner-of-war camps, and normal training was the Battalion's routine until 29th April, 1946, when, on a parade, the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade bade farewell to its Brigade Commander (Brigadier E. C. J. Woodford, C.B.E., D.S.O.), who gave the following address :

“To-day is the last occasion on which 9/14th Punjab Regiment and 3/8th Gurkha Rifles will parade together as units of 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade, and it marks the beginning of the disbandment of the brigade as a formation.

“We have all been justly proud of our division, 20th Indian Division, raised and commanded throughout its whole life by General Gracey. We have had a friendly rivalry with 80th and 100th Brigades, but the spirit of comradeship, good discipline and cheerful determination we have built up is the same in all formations and units of 20th Division. The 20th Division spirit has carried us through all hardships and difficulties to success, and earned us in Fourteenth Army the reputation of the easiest division to administer under its command.

“In addition to our pride in our division, we in 32nd Brigade have a

right to be proud of certain special achievements of our own. The battle of Bishenpur, under Brigadier Mackenzie, was vital in halting and defeating the Japanese drive on Imphal. Those who took part in that battle achieved something every bit as glorious as better-known victories in other theatres of war and no less decisive in its results. The long march through the jungles from Mawlaik to "Pink Gin,"\* planned by General Gracey and executed by 32nd Brigade under Brigadier Mackenzie, hastened the collapse of the Jap defence east of the Chindwin, and paved the way to rapid advance to the Irrawaddy and the hard-fought battle of the bridgeheads in which again 32nd Brigade played its part.

"In speaking of these great events, I will remind you of your British comrades in arms, the 1st Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, who shared with you the trials and the credit for the Brigade's achievement. Remember them, because wherever they go they too will remember 32nd Brigade, and the battalions they lived and fought with.

"This time last year we were engaged in another of our most important operations, the dash to Taungdwingyi, which cut off the Japs in Magwe and the oil-fields. In this the 4/2nd Gurkha Rifles had replaced the 48th, and I am sorry that 4/2nd are not all here on this parade. Their gallant fight at Tanbington showed that they were worthy successors to our British battalion. The closing stages of the Burma campaign for us were chiefly marked by the 9/14th bold pursuit to Onbinzu, and 3/8th notable share in the killings on the Sittang, under IV Corps, when General Gracey was acting as Corps Commander.

"In all our operations we shall gratefully remember our good friends and helpers, 9th Field Regiment, R.A., 92nd Field Company, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, and 59th Field Ambulance, who are all associated with 32nd Brigade's record of success. Without them we should not have been able to do what we did. We had also the support of 111th Anti-Tank Regiment and of Armoured Corps Units, but those three were practically our 'private army.'

"Since VJ Day you have upheld your reputation in Saigon and here in Borneo. Now you are going back to India where both civil government and the Army are being reorganized. Wherever you go, if you keep up the high standards of morale and conduct you have shown in 20th Division, you will make no mistakes. I can give you no better advice than that because I know no more than you do of what the future holds in store.

"Finally I wish to tell you this. You who have come safely through the war and your comrades who have given their lives in it have

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\* "Pink Gin"—Mingin.

created something that can never be destroyed. It is a contribution to the future. You cannot measure or define it, but it is there, your gift to those who are to rebuild the world out of the wreckage of the past.

“Before you march past me for the last time, I want to tell you that the year I have spent as your commander has been a privilege and an experience that I shall never forget. My predecessors would agree that no troops ever gave greater loyalty and support to their commanders. In their names and my own I wish you all the very best of luck in the future you have helped so much to build.”

The Battalion gained the following decorations in the Second World War: D.S.O., 1; I.O.M., 2; M.C., 12; bar to M.C., 3; I.D.S.M., 5; M.M., 23; bar to M.M., 1; O.B.E., 2; M.B.E., 1.

Casualties sustained in action by the Battalion in the Second World War:

Killed: Lieutenant-Colonel E. V. Whitehead.  
Major M. O. Seymour Taylor.  
Major R. D. S. Bulkeley.  
Major P. M. J. Rawson.  
Captain J. F. Crace.  
Jemadar Amarbahadur Thapa.  
Jemadar Manbahadur Thapa.  
Gurkha other ranks, 112.

Died of wounds: Lieutenant J. H. McNair.  
Lieutenant J. C. Goldingham.  
Subadar Shamsheer Gurung.  
Jemadar Tirbahadur Gurung.  
Jemadar Bhimbahadur Thapa.  
Gurkha other ranks, 28.

Missing, presumed dead: Gurkha other ranks, 3.

Wounded: Major M. E. Ovans.  
Major J. Milne.  
Major W. R. Bates.  
Major J. B. Clements.  
Lieutenant H. A. Jansen.  
Lieutenant D. W. Menzies.  
Lieutenant F. Bain.  
Lieutenant F. J. Chapman.



Lieutenant G. D. Grant.  
Lieutenant I. D. MacHorton.  
Subadar Singbahadur Gurung.  
Subadar Narsing Gurung.  
Subadar Jitbahadur Rana.  
Jemadar Karnabahadur Pun.  
Jemadar Patiram Bura.  
Jemadar Ranjit Pun.  
Jemadar Dhirbhakta Rana.  
Gurkha other ranks, 318.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

(See Maps Nos. 1, 2, 9, 10 and 14)

[*This chapter deals with the 4th Battalion in the Second World War.*]

4th Battalion raised—Shillong to Lansdowne—Join 7th Indian Division—To Attock—Change in command—Camp near Abbottabad—Mobilization of 7th Indian Division—From 114th Indian Infantry Brigade to 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade—Waziristan Operations—Return to Abbottabad—To 89th Indian Infantry Brigade—Divisional training—Chindwara—A vast training area—Major-General T. W. Corbett—Good marching—Change in command—Ranchi—To the Arakan—Bawli Bazar—General situation—From Bawli to Briasco's Bridge—In the line—First casualty—Constant enemy attacks repulsed—Rest—Over the Mayu range—Changes in command—Visit by Lord Louis Mountbatten—5th Indian Division capture Maungdaw—Action of 9th/10th January, 1944—Relief—Japanese Offensive—"Admin. Box"—Operations commenced—Enemy plan—Transport shot up—7th Indian Division Headquarters attacked—7th Indian Division in the "Box"—89th Indian Infantry Brigade ordered to the "Box"—"A" and "C" Companies cut off—Withdrawal to "Admin. Box"—Defence organized—"A" and "C" Companies rejoin—Subadar Narainsing Lama's platoon—From defence to offence—Air supply—Attack on "B" Company—"Box" relieved—33rd and 114th Indian Infantry Brigades—4th Battalion moves—89th Indian Infantry Brigade to Taung Bazar—Commanding Officer and Adjutant killed—Changes in command—Taung Bazar to Imphal by air—Imphal—Konglatongbi Ridge—Advance northward—"Harry" strong-point captured—To Ukhrul—Jap on the run—Back to rest—Imphal operations end—Congratulatory messages—Awards and casualties—Rest and training—Changes in command.

THE Battalion was raised at Shillong on 15th March, 1941, its first Commandant being Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Clarke, M.C. (2/8th Gurkha Rifles). It had a purely 8th Gurkha parentage, being started with contingents of about two hundred Gurkha officers and trained other ranks from each of the three battalions of the Regiment, and with drafts of recruits from the Regimental Centre.

Early in April, 1941, the Battalion moved to Lansdowne, and intensive individual training commenced. Lieutenant-Colonel H. S. Gordon, O.B.E., from 2/8th Gurkha Rifles, had assumed command *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel Clarke, who proceeded to take over command of the 2nd Battalion.

The Battalion suffered the usual teething troubles. In those days equipment, vehicles, clothing, etc., were in short supply, but enthusiasm made up for deficiencies. In October, 1941, the Battalion was

considered fit to join a field formation, the 7th Indian Division, which had been raised in October, 1940, as Frontier Defence Reserve. It was fitting that a battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles should once again belong to the 7th Indian Division, which had won such fame in France, Mesopotamia and Palestine in the First World War.

The Battalion moved to camp near Attock and joined the 114th Indian Infantry Brigade (Commander, Brigadier M. R. Roberts, D.S.O.). Training continued. With Japan now in the war, the training took on a "Jap-jungle" bias.

In February, 1942, Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. D. Gardner assumed command *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel H. S. Gordon, transferred to command a L. of C. sub-area at Ledo, Assam.

From March to July, 1942, the 7th Indian Division moved to a camp area north of Abbottabad, and here carried out company and battalion training. Pleasant camps and excellent training ground assisted progress, and the arrival of up-to-date M.T., to replace the few antiquated cars and lorries hired from a contractor, was a joy to the M.T. Platoon, though requiring, at first, additional agility on the part of anybody happening to pass that way when the Gurkha driver was being initiated!

In May the Battalion was transferred to the 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade (Commander, Brigadier G. Pigot, M.C.), and at this time began a friendship with the 4/1st Gurkha Rifles, destined to last throughout the war.

Later in May the mobilization and equipment of the 7th Indian Division was completed.

In July the 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to join the force being assembled for the relief of Datta Khel, which was besieged by tribesmen.

The operations went on until September, and included marches in the middle of the hot weather, very trying to young soldiers. The Battalion came through it with an excellent report, and received several "Mentions," their first active service awards. The 1939-45 medal was granted for these operations, as the General Service Medal was in abeyance.

In October the Battalion returned with 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade to the Abbottabad area. The 7th Indian Division was now reorganized with one British, one Gurkha and one Indian battalion in each brigade. This necessitated, on 20th October, a transfer to the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade (commander, Brigadier J. C. Martin, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.), which consisted of the 2nd Battalion King's Own Scottish Borderers, 7/16th Punjab Regiment and 4/8th Gurkha Rifles, and in which brigade the Battalion was to serve for a considerable time.

During November and December intensive divisional training was carried out in the Nowshera-Attock area.

In February, 1943, the 7th Indian Division moved to the Chindwara area in the Central Provinces. As this was a teak forest area, it was the first indication that the division was destined for a jungle sphere of action (Burma).

The Battalion camp was some ten miles north of Chindwara itself—delightful country (to those who know their Kipling, the original Mowgli country) consisting of forest, jungle-clad hills and rolling, park-like expanses.

This camp eventually became a vast training centre for the Burma operations.

Intensive training continued. It had for the Gurkha compensations in varied and practically unlimited shikar. Pig was eaten nightly when away in jungle bivouacs. On one occasion two tiger cubs were brought in by "B" Company, but succumbed to a diet of rice and rum after a short time.

With Brigade and Divisional T.E.W.Ts. for all officers, British, Gurkha and Indian, opportunity was taken to foster that spirit of comradeship and co-operation which was to animate the 7th Indian Division when engaged in active operations. In this connection, mention must be made of the Divisional Commander, Major-General T. W. Corbett, whose leadership and personality during this vital training period left their mark for years to come.

That the 4th Battalion had inherited the 8th Gurkha Rifles standard of marching was evidenced in a cross-country march of fifty-two miles in thirty-six hours, carried out as a stamina test, in the heat of mid-April, over rough going.

In early May, 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. D. Gardner left the Battalion to undergo an operation. He was succeeded by Major G. Twiss.

Later in May the Battalion moved to the Ranchi concentration area. The camp was situated about five miles west of the town—a rather depressing spot, with the monsoon as an accompaniment. Training continued, and an added item was that of tank training and co-operation with the 25th Dragoons, which regiment, later in the Arakan fighting, often proved to be a friend in need.

On 18th June Major C. W. Yeates, D.S.O., from the 2nd Battalion assumed command. Major-General F. W. Messervy, C.B.E., D.S.O., assumed command of the 7th Indian Division on 30th July.

On 7th September the Battalion left Ranchi, embarked at Madras on 14th September in S.S. *Elinga*, and disembarked at Chittagong on 20th September, finally arriving in the Arakan on 28th September, after a three weeks' journey, including four days at sea, and marching

made most arduous by the state of the roads and the climate—periods of torrential rain and steamy sunshine alternating.

Bawli Bazar was the initial destination of the Battalion, where it moved into the South Keep.

A brief summary of the position on the Burma front at this time has already been given in our 1st Battalion story (*vide* p. 141).

For a couple of weeks the Battalion was in reserve, occupied on improving defences in the Bawli south position, and getting initiated into Burma war conditions.

On 10th October a move was made to a point ten miles to the south where the main Bawli–Maungdaw road crosses a navigable creek. It was named “Briascos” bridge and a supply point was established there; the supply line then in use being by sea, up the Naf river, and the navigable creek mentioned.

By mid-October the weather improved, a very welcome change from the extremely severe monsoon which Arakan experiences.

On 15th October the Battalion moved forward to occupy points in the foothills (east of the main Bawli–Maungdaw road) which culminate in the Mayu range, the backbone of the whole of the Mayu peninsula.

On 28th October the Battalion had its first casualty in the Second World War, Jemadar Bindrabahadur Thapa being wounded in the arm.

Patrolling activity continued. The first brush with the Japanese fell to the lot of No. 15 Platoon of “C” Company under Jemadar Chakrabahadur Thapa. An enemy party under an officer were successfully dealt with. Chakrabahadur gained the I.D.S.M. for his leadership in this affair.

Until 9th November the Battalion remained in the forward positions. The enemy evidently considered the occupation of the points held by the Battalion important, as constant abortive attacks were made thereon.

On this date the Battalion was relieved by 1/17th Dogra Regiment, and returned to “Briascos Bridge” area for a six days’ rest. It is of interest to recall that these six days, and a thirty-six hours’ rest on 2nd/3rd February, 1944, were the only periods in which the Battalion did not hold front-line positions from 15th October, 1943, to 25th April, 1944.

On 15th November, 1943, the Battalion moved east of the Mayu range over the famous Ngakyedauk (“Okey Doke”) pass, then passable by jeeps for about half the way across. Incidentally the Sappers were working hard to render it fit for wheels throughout.

The reason for the move of the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade requires a brief explanation. It was to secure a bridgehead on the eastern side of the Mayu range, (1) to cover the completion of the

pass road, (2) to protect the 7th Indian Division's supply route, and, finally, (3) to link up with the other brigades of the division, which were advancing south down the valley from Taung Bazar.

Lieutenant-Colonel W. R. J. Spittle (8th Gurkha Rifles) assumed command on 29th November, *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Yeates, proceeded to rejoin 2nd Battalion. In his turn Lieutenant-Colonel Spittle was succeeded in command by Lieutenant-Colonel G. Twiss on 29th January, 1944.

The Supreme Commander, S.E.A.C., Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, inspected representative parties of the 7th Indian Division on 15th December, 1943.

Maungdaw, the river port on the estuary on the Naf river, fell to the 5th Indian Division in January, 1944; the position of XV Corps at that juncture being :

Right (west of Mayu range) : 5th Indian Division.

Left (east of Mayu range) : 7th Indian Division.

On 9th and 10th January attempts were made to occupy a strongly held hill feature in the Battalion area. Only one company ("D") could be spared for this operation. After gallant attempts, the venture was called off as being too much for the available troops to accomplish. During these two days of heavy fighting, "D" Company Commander (Major J. E. G. Vivian) was wounded, 10 Gurkha other ranks killed and 18 Gurkha other ranks wounded. Major Vivian was subsequently awarded the M.C. for his part in these operations.

The ceaseless game of patrolling and patrol clashes continued until 2nd February, when the Battalion was relieved by 3/14th Punjab Regiment, and moved to a rest area about three miles behind the line.

The following day the Battalion received orders regarding training with tanks, which would be followed by an attack on Buthidaung. Great satisfaction was felt, as the O.C. tanks had especially asked that the Battalion should work with them in this attack. These and similar plans, however, were rudely anticipated by the Japanese taking the offensive first, for on 4th February the enemy (over 1,000 strong) occupied Taung Bazar, fifteen miles to the north of and behind our front, and the Battalion was ordered to be ready to move to this threatened point. Thus began the action, later widely known as the "Battle of the Admin. Box"—a confused affair, but the doings of our own Battalion can be given with comparative accuracy.

Briefly, the enemy plan was to attack the XV Indian Corps in the Arakan, and by so doing to draw Fourteenth Army reinforcements to that area, and away from Imphal, where he planned to put in his main attack. To deal with XV Corps his intention was (1) to encircle

and destroy the 7th Indian Division east of the Mayu range, then (2) to cut the main line of communication from Chittagong to Bawli behind the 5th Indian Division on the west of Mayu range, and drive it into the sea.

Fortunately, the technique of resistance against encirclement by the formation of defensive "boxes" had been worked out by us, and the preliminary arrangements for the maintenance of these isolated entrenched forces by air supply made. Consequently the ambitious Japanese plans failed to achieve ultimate success.

To return to the Battalion. It was ordered to move northwards, to a position about five miles north of 7th Indian Division Headquarters, which was situated a little to the north of the eastern exit of the Ngakyedauk pass. No contact was made with the enemy, whose strength was now estimated to be near 7,000, until midday, 5th February.

Later this day the Battalion transport column and rear headquarters was shot up by enemy light machine guns. Many mules stampeded or threw their loads, an occurrence which led to much discomfort later.

About midday on 6th February an officer, sent to Divisional Headquarters to obtain information, returned to say that it had been forced to retire after a very gallant defence against a force of some five hundred enemy. What had happened is briefly as follows. Early that day the 7th Division Headquarters was attacked. The brunt of the attack was borne by Divisional Signals; staff officers and clerks joined in the confused fighting. Eventually the Divisional Commander (Major-General F. W. Messervy) accompanied by his staff and followed by the remainder of Divisional Headquarters, fought his way out to the famous "Admin. Box" (Sinzweya) at the foot of the Ngakyedauk Pass. Here it was joined by large numbers of XV Corps troops and elements of a brigade of the 5th Indian Division. A perimeter was formed in the dry, dusty bowl of paddy-fields east of the foot of the pass, and was soon crammed with men, mules, guns, tanks and other vehicles.

It was to reinforce the defence of this perimeter that the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to withdraw from its positions and, in compliance with these orders, the Battalion began to move to an important sector of the perimeter, which included "East Gate," through which roads ran north-east, towards the remainder of the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade, and eastwards towards the 33rd and 114th Indian Infantry Brigades, and the Kalapanzin river. Meanwhile, a most unfortunate event from the Battalion point of view had occurred. "C" Company, with two platoons of "A" Company, had been located on a ridge which was separated from the remainder of the Battalion

by a sheer 300-foot cliff. This precipice extended for about two miles, and the detached companies' only means of rejoining the Battalion was, firstly, by retracing their steps along the ridge, and then making a long detour. In the meanwhile, this track had been cut by the enemy, thus apparently blocking the return of the six platoons to the Battalion. To make matters worse, wireless communication with "C" Company failed completely at dusk. The Commanding Officer was then faced with the decision of delaying the Battalion's withdrawal in order to extricate the six platoons, or of continuing to withdraw as ordered. He decided on the latter course, in the hope that the platoons would be able to rejoin farther south.

The withdrawal was uneventful, miraculously so seeing that the enemy held the flanking ridges of the valley (the scene of the 7th Divisional Headquarters battle of that morning); but the Battalion arrived in the Divisional "box" the worse for wear, less five platoons (one platoon of "C" Company had rejoined), most of its baggage, and all ranks tired and hungry.

There was no rest possible, however. Positions were occupied, and digging-in commenced. Whilst this was in progress, the enemy (on the early morning of 7th February) attacked. Their only success, however, was to overrun the position held by Subadar Narainsing Lama's platoon of "D" Company. In a most gallant resistance the Subadar, his platoon havildar and two section commanders were killed, and there were only four survivors out of this gallant band of twenty-nine. Subadar Narainsing Lama was posthumously awarded the I.O.M.

Events followed one another rapidly. After the first tremendous surprise, the defence of the "box" soon became organized and the Japanese made little more headway, though, as anticipated, he had swept round and cut the pass.

On 8th February the enemy penetrated our defensive ring and overran the Field Hospital. Here they murdered some of the sick and wounded, including Major Hugh Harington of the Battalion, who had been wounded on 6th February.

On 10th February it was a great relief to receive a message from the 5th Indian Division that the platoons of "A" and "C" Companies had succeeded in fighting their way out over the Mayu range, after failing twice to get into the "box" owing to stiff enemy opposition. A few days later they recrossed the hills by a route free of the enemy, and rejoined the Battalion.

Time passed. Enemy attacks slackened, and appeared to have become less co-ordinated and controlled. On this, the garrison passed from the defensive to the offensive, and soon instead of a grim siege the whole battle became a glorified "Jap hunt," with tanks at call



to assist in the capture of strong points, in which the enemy persisted in holding out.

Throughout the "siege" and ensuing operations, rations, etc., had been dropped by air, and once this means of supply had become properly organized, all "fed like fighting cocks." This was probably the deciding factor, and one on which the Japanese had not counted.

On 19th February about seventy Japanese attacked "B" Company. Of this party 42 were killed and 1 taken prisoner.

At 1030 hours on 23rd February, the relief of the "box" was accomplished. How this was executed has been told in the 1/8th portion of this history (*vide* pp. 145 and 146).

Whilst the fighting round the "Admin. Box" was going on, the forward line occupied by 33rd and 114th Indian Infantry Brigades remained substantially unchanged. The former brigade was on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road, the latter east of the Kalapanzin river.

The 7th Indian Division, having survived its ordeal, once again prepared for the offensive, as the line of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road still had to be secured before the monsoon.

On 29th February the Battalion moved from its position in the "box," and went into reserve until the night of 5th/6th March, when it moved south to the Tatmin Chaung area, to form a secure base for the capture of Buthidaung.

To effect this, on the night 9th March the Battalion, with one squadron of tanks, was moved via the Letwedet area to a point south of Buthidaung, thus completing the 7th Division "right hook," and isolating the town. Much shelling was encountered during this period, which caused casualties in the Battalion, including Lieutenant P. F. Wickham and Captain S. R. Perkin wounded on 6th March, and Major R. E. Titley on the 15th. The same day the 4/8th Gurkha Rifles handed over to 1/8th Gurkha Rifles of 26th Indian Division, and on relief the Battalion moved back through Buthidaung to a point immediately north of the town.

Until 17th March the Battalion was engaged in mopping-up parties of the enemy, and in the destruction of enemy supply and ammunition dumps. Enemy artillery fire (from east of the Kalapanzin river) continually harassed the troops whilst carrying out these operations.

In the evening of 17th March orders were received for the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade to move back to Taung Bazar. The following morning the Commanding Officer, 4/8th Gurkha Rifles (Lieutenant-Colonel G. Twiss), and the Adjutant (Captain S. Ball), proceeding in a carrier to Brigade Headquarters, were killed by an anti-tank mine—a loss felt greatly by all ranks. Major D. G. Horsford, loaned from the 1st Battalion, assumed temporary command until 5th April,

when Lieutenant-Colonel N. D. Wingrove (10th Gurkha Rifles) took over.

At Taung Bazar the Battalion formed a "box" with the remainder of the Brigade group, with two companies east of Kalapanzin river to guard against another enemy attempt to turn the 7th Indian Division's left flank. On 20th April these two companies were relieved.

About the middle of April the Battalion anticipated moving to an area where a real rest and refit could be enjoyed. This hope, like many another during this campaign, was rudely shattered. Grave news came from the north where IV Corps faced the fullest weight of an attack by enemy forces pledged to plant the Rising Sun on the fort at Delhi. In the Arakan, the Japanese plan had been foiled. From there, therefore, reinforcements could be sent, so the 5th Indian Division did its famous "fly out" to the Imphal plain. Next came the turn of the 7th Indian Division. The Battalion's actual flight was from Sylhet, which was reached via Bawli Bazar, Dohazari, and Silchar by rail, road and steamer—none too pleasant a journey, mostly in heavy rain, and which occupied from 27th April to 5th May. The short flight was uneventful, and on 9th May the Battalion took over defences in the 89th Brigade sector, about twelve miles due north of Imphal, among the hills just east of the main Imphal-Kohima road. The 89th Brigade had been placed under command of the 5th Indian Division, while the remainder of the 7th Indian Division was in the Kohima area, desperately engaged in breaking the enemy's stranglehold on our vital L. of C. from Imphal to Dimapur.

The first action in which the Battalion took part in the Imphal operations was on the Kanglatongbi ridge, which runs due east from the main Imphal-Kohima road, and some fifteen miles to the north of the former place.

The attack was made on a two-battalion front, 4/8th right and 1/11th Sikh Regiment left. It was not successful, due to negligible artillery support, a very stiff ridge to climb, and the enemy position and its garrison being much stronger than reports of patrols had indicated.

This attack cost the Battalion—Killed, Lieutenant S. R. Perkin and 10 Gurkha other ranks; wounded, 30 Gurkha other ranks.

On the night of 20th/21st May the enemy withdrew from the Kanglatongbi ridge, thanks to fine work by 1/11th Sikh Regiment, which marched round the enemy's rear.

On 22nd May the Battalion moved forward, in conjunction with the steady northward progress made by the 5th Indian Division, and on 30th May succeeded, with tank support, in taking a strong-point named "Harry." This had been a hard nut to crack, rendered even more difficult by very heavy rain which made it difficult to

stand up at all on slippery grass slopes. Captain P. F. Wickham was again wounded on 22nd May, having rejoined at Silchar on 30th April, recovered from his previous wound (6th March, 1944).

After a rest period of ten days, and a short spell of pushing back enemy rear-guards, the Battalion was concentrated on 24th June for other work. The Imphal-Kohima road was finally cleared on 22nd June. Japanese attempts to break through along the Tiddim and Tammu roads had been defeated, and only the liquidation of the enemy force, which had attempted to reach Imphal from the direction of Ukhrul, remained outstanding. It was for this purpose that the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade was now detailed, and formed one of three brigades engaged. It moved due east from a point on the main Manipur road (twenty-seven miles north of Imphal) to Ukhrul (thirty-five miles distant as the crow flies). The march was uneventful on the whole. Going was hard, and each day's march contained at least one or two 2,000 feet up and down climbs. The presence of many dead enemy on the roadside gave evidence of the extent of their casualties, and, as can be imagined, advertised their presence in other ways.

At Ukhrul, reached on 2nd July, some fierce scrapping took place for the possession of the fort and village, during which Major P. O. Myers gained the M.C. The chief concern, however, was the non-arrival of the ration air drop, which previously had been very good and plentiful, not excluding the rum issue ! Weather conditions were responsible. On 5th July came the supplies, and none too soon, as most of the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade had been without rations for forty-eight hours.

The converging movement of the other two brigades in this movement soon convinced the enemy that he had better clear out, which he did on 8th July.

Ten days were spent six miles south of Ukhrul in patrolling and rounding-up the half-starved and fever-stricken enemy stragglers who still littered the countryside. The Battalion then marched back to a rest camp five miles north of Kohima. Rest and reorganization were badly required. The conditions under which the troops had campaigned for months had had a debilitating effect on all, and the chronic diarrhoea which effected everybody largely contributed to this. The battle of Imphal Plain was, however, over and won. The "Invade India" armies of Japan were broken, and were being driven out of Assam by fresh divisions. The 7th Division was given time to recuperate.

During the ten months since the Battalion arrived at Bawli Bazar in the Arakan it had gained as immediate awards: M.C., 3; I.O.M., 2; I.D.S.M., 3; M.M., 6.

Major-General F. W. Messervy (G.O.C., 7th Indian Division) decorated Jemadar Chakrabahadur Thapa with the I.D.S.M. As has already been stated, this was the first award for gallantry to be gained by a member of the Battalion. This gallant Gurkha officer, who was later awarded the I.O.M., was killed in action on 30th May.

Casualties had been heavy.

Killed : British officers, 3.  
Gurkha officers, 4.  
Gurkha other ranks, 66.

Died of  
wounds : British officer, 1.  
Gurkha other ranks, 17.

Wounded : British officers, 9.  
Gurkha officers, 5.  
Gurkha other ranks, 168.

Missing : Gurkha officer, 1 (believed P.O.W.).  
Gurkha other rank, 1 (believed killed).  
Gurkha other ranks, 5 (believed P.O.W.).

At the successful termination of the Imphal operations, messages of congratulation were received :

- (1) From the Commander, XV Indian Corps, to all ranks 7th Indian Division, dated 1st June, 1944.
- (2) From the Supreme Commander, South-East Asia Command, to all ranks of the Manipur fronts, dated 1st August, 1944.
- (3) Special Order of the Day by Lieutenant-General W. J. Slim, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., G.O.C.-in-C., Fourteenth Army, addressed to 7th Indian Division, dated 31st August, 1944.

The following extract from a Farewell Order of the Day by Major-General F. W. Messervy, C.B., D.S.O., dated 15th December, 1944, is here produced.

“It is with great regret that I have to leave the 7th Indian Division for another appointment. It has been for me a great privilege to command you all and to have been with you from your earliest action with the enemy up to the present time.

“We have been through some hard times together and your gallantry, efficiency, and above all your magnificent divisional spirit have pulled us through every time to victory.”

Training for what was ahead was strenuous, and to the soldier of a former generation it may be of interest to read that, in addition to the varied weapon field training, instruction was imparted in mortar firing, river crossing and watercraft work. The infantry soldier had indeed become most versatile.

On 25th November Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Walker, 8th Gurkha Rifles, assumed command of the Battalion, *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel N. D. Wingrove, appointed D.A.Q.M.G., XV Corps.

Major-General F. W. Messervy, C.B., D.S.O., on 7th December handed over command of the 7th Indian Division to Major-General G. C. Evans, C.B.E., D.S.O., on being appointed to command IV Indian Corps.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

(See Maps Nos. 2, 11, 15, 16 and 17)

[4th Battalion continued. Also No. 1 (8th Gurkha Rifles) Infantry Company.]

Leave Kohima—Tammu and onwards—7th Indian Division plan to reach the Irrawaddy—89th Indian Infantry Brigade left flank move—Marching south—Visit by Fourteenth Army Commander—A hard march—The Irrawaddy—Pagan—Crossing the Irrawaddy—Surrenders by Indian National Army—In the bridgehead—Milaungbya—7th Indian Division's task—"B" Company attacked—"D" Company attack—Bridgehead operations summed up—7th Indian Division's new task—Battalion awards—Singu—Second crossing of the Irrawaddy—An unpleasant march—Move south—Brigade groups—Taungdaw—"B" and "C" Companies—The battle—Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung wins V.C.—Serious situation—"A" and "D" Companies—Victory—Gallantry of Sikh signallers—Results of Taungdaw—Awards—Fine work by R.A. and R.A.F.—A plucky Naik of Burma Intelligence Corps—To Mindon and Thayetmyo—4/8th Gurkha Rifles Commanding Officer reports Battalion's good work to General Sir John Coleridge—Casualties—New task for 7th Indian Division—Change in command—To the Sittang river—Nyaungkashe—The terrain—Battalion's role and dispositions—Attack on village 3418—Rifleman Manbir Ale—Visit of Corps Commander—"A" Company at Kinmungan—Shortage of British officers—Information from villagers—Battle of Nyaungkashe—"C" Company withdrawn from Sittang bridge—Battalion Headquarters and Regimental Aid Post hit—"B" Company and the guns—Jemadar Manbahadur Gurung and No. 4 Platoon—Battalion ordered to withdraw—1/11th Sikhs—The withdrawal—The night march—After Nyaungkashe—Japanese capitulation—To Siam—Indian National Army guards—To Malaya—Gemas—7th Indian Division first S.E.A.C. troops in enemy occupied territory—Bentong—To Batavia—Join 37th Indian Infantry Brigade—Bekassi—Battalion dispositions—"Special" platoon in action—Control of east bank of Bekassi river—To 1st Indian Infantry Brigade—An ambush—To Batavia guarding docks—Back to Malaya—Active service ended—Awards and casualties—88th Infantry Company, 8th Gurkha Rifles Company formed—With 36th British Division—Title changed to No. 1 (8th Gurkha Rifles) Infantry Company—Major-General F. W. Festing—In Burma—Return to India—Voyage to Japan—Under Major-General D. T. Cowan—Guards of Honour—Back to India.

ON 23rd December, 1944, the Battalion, stimulated by a stirring Order of the Day, dated 20th December, by the Battalion Commander, set out on its momentous journey, preparatory to taking part in the operations which were to end with the overthrow of the Japanese in Burma.

It halted at Tammu until 8th January, 1945. From here, the Battalion moved by truck and march route to a village named Inthe, fifty miles

north of Gangaw, on the right bank of the Myittha river. Here it was given the honour of leading the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade in a long left flank move through the hills. The remainder of the brigade followed one day's march behind. The reason for this move of the 7th Indian Division can be given shortly as follows.

The first stage of the march was to take the division to Gangaw, which had fallen to the Lushai Brigade during the first week of January. From Gangaw, they were to move south 150 miles to the Irrawaddy. This concentration of the 7th Indian Division, followed by that of the 17th Indian Division, was the master stroke of the Fourteenth Army which completely deceived the enemy. The move was secret. Divisional signs were blacked out, and the use of wireless forbidden.

The task of the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade was to move south from Gangaw, to cut the road from Tilin to Pauk, and to capture Pauk itself.

To return to the Battalion. Together with one Mountain Battery, R.A., and a platoon of Indian Engineers, and known as "A Col" (remainder of 89th Indian Infantry Brigade was "B Col"), they marched on 18th January. The route followed lay between the Myittha and Chindwin rivers.

Of the march, space forbids a lengthy story. It was hard going, but enjoyed by all ranks, in a pleasant land, delightfully cool in January. On 27th January, 1945, the Battalion moved through Pauk to a village named Sinthe, thirty miles west of Pakokku, which was reached on 2nd February. Here, until the 10th, the Battalion helped in the construction of an airfield large enough to serve three divisions.

On 5th February the Battalion received a personal "Shabash" from the Fourteenth Army Commander (General Sir William Slim), who, together with IV Corps Commander (Lieutenant-General F. W. Messervy), 7th Indian Divisional Commander (Major-General G. C. Evans) and 89th Indian Infantry Brigade Commander (Brigadier W. A. Crowther), paid it a visit.

On 10th February the Battalion gave a very good example of the high standard of marching, of which the 8th Gurkha Rifles is justly proud. In ten hours it covered twenty-six miles over stretches of soft river (chaung) beds and a precipitous mountain track, the men carrying a large pack and all ammunition. The night was dark, and there was no moon. This exploit earned the approbation of the Divisional Commander later.

The Battalion had now reached Myitche on the Irrawaddy. Gone was the hill country. Instead one viewed the great valley with its

river, famous in history. On the eastern bank could be seen Pagan, the old capital and religious centre of Burma. Its vast sea of pagodas of varying size and colour, a fairyland of pinnacles and towers dancing in the warm evening sunshine, was a sight never to be forgotten by those fortunate enough to see it. It was hard to believe that such a beautiful countryside swarmed with a cunning enemy; but it did, and we must return to war.

The Irrawaddy reached, the Fourteenth Army plan, for breaching and turning of the river line, neared its climax. The 19th Indian Division advanced on Mandalay from the north. The 20th Indian Division crossed the river at Myinmu (later joined by 2nd British Division), and now the 7th Indian Division crossed at Myitche.

It fell to the 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade to be the first unit of the 7th Division to cross the Irrawaddy, which at this point is 2,500 yards wide and treacherous with shifting sand-banks. To the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade fell the task of finding fatigue parties to carry heavy loads across 600 yards of soft sand, assemble and launch rafts and barges, construct loading ramps for tanks, and perform the hundred and one jobs necessary to launch what was almost a "combined operation."

On 14th February, right glad to be finished with fatigues, the Battalion (less "B" Company) crossed the river and proceeded to enlarge the bridgehead already made by 33rd Indian Infantry Brigade. The 114th Indian Infantry Brigade (of the 7th Indian Division) held Pakokku.

Two parties of Indian National Army surrendered with weapons complete on 15th and 16th February.

The Battalion had now advanced 450 miles from Kohima, and so far had not come to grips with the enemy, but on the night of 25th/26th February a most successful patrol action took place at a village named Kinka, south of Pagan on the Singu road. A strong fighting patrol consisting of one platoon of "C" Company, with a section of pioneers, under Lieutenant R. Findlay, was sent out on reconnaissance. The results were most satisfactory. Japanese positions were accurately pin-pointed. Eleven enemy were killed, seven by Havildar Gambirsing Gurung alone. Lieutenant Findlay and five other ranks were, however, slightly wounded. For his part, Gambirsing was awarded an immediate M.M.

Active patrolling had ascertained that the enemy's main position in this area was at a village named Milaungbya, five miles south of Kinka, and three miles north of Singu. This area was the scene of the Battalion's activities for nearly one month.

The 7th Indian Division had played its part in securing the bridgehead. Now it was required to hold the vital position, whilst the



rest of the Fourteenth Army plan moved to completion. Mandalay fell, the link-up with 17th Indian Division (which had gone through Pagan bridgehead) in Meiktila was made, and the drive to Rangoon was on.

In holding the bridgehead much hard fighting fell to the 7th Indian Division. As regards the 4/8th Gurkha Rifles it was rarely that one day passed without some clash with the enemy and, typical of what frequently occurred, a couple of incidents can be recorded. In relating these accounts very briefly, no place-names are given. Without very large scale maps, and indeed with them, the inclusion of place-names would not help the reader, as the war diaries, etc., consulted refer to "local" names, known only to those who were present.

At 0300 hours on 3rd March, "B" Company (Commander, D. H. V. Sheil-Small), employed in "digging in," was attacked by a party of Japanese. Our men were in the open, not having had time to commence work. Heavily fired on by enemy artillery (75 mm. guns and discharger grenades), "B" Company stood firm, and after an action which lasted for three hours, the enemy had had enough, and literally ran to the place from where they had come. Major Sheil-Small was awarded an immediate M.C. for his share of the day's work.

Again, on 8th March, another one-company battle was fought. This time "D" Company (Commander, Major G. B. Bull) was engaged in a carefully rehearsed attack, supported by one squadron of tanks of the Gordon Highlanders. Despite resolute enemy opposition, the attack was completely successful, all objectives being taken. Major G. B. Bull received an immediate award of the M.C. for this action.

It must be remembered that owing to the wide dispersal of the brigades of the 7th Indian Division protecting the Pagan bridgehead, exploitation was not allowed, so any success gained was not followed up. A pursuit was to come only when the general move south commenced.

Perhaps the bridgehead operations of the Battalion can best be summed up in a 7th Indian Division account :

"Meanwhile 89th Brigade, which was disposed to prevent a Japanese advance on the bridgehead from the Chauk direction, was beating back determined Japanese counter-attacks. At Milaungbya, four miles north of the Singu, the 8th Gurkhas killed 250 Japs, a record bag being 94 in one day. . . ."

There can be no doubt that the crossing of the Irrawaddy and the subsequent holding of the Milaungbya bridgehead were noteworthy feats of arms for which the troops were justly praised. These congratulatory messages included :

- (a) By the Commander of the 7th Indian Division to all units on 16th February and on 31st March.
- (b) By the Commander of IV Indian Corps to the 7th Indian Division on 21st and on 28th February, 1945.
- (c) Among others who paid tribute to the achievements of the Battalion was Lieutenant-General Sir Francis I. S. Toker, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., Commander, IV Corps, in Burma during 1945, who, in a letter to General Sir John Coleridge, stated that the fighting reputation of the Battalion was a topic among the troops in the Corps.

Once the bridgehead was secure, the 7th Indian Division's next task was the capture of the oil-fields area, followed by the advance down the Irrawaddy towards Rangoon. In this drive their collaborators were the 20th Indian Division, which struck south from the Meiktila area, through Magwe to Prome, and in which our 3rd Battalion joined.

During this battle in the Pagan-Nyaungu bridgehead the Battalion gained 3 M.Cs., 2 I.D.S.Ms., 2 M.Ms., and 2 Certificates of Gallantry.

On 27th March the 4/8th Gurkha Rifles was relieved by 1/11th Sikh Regiment, and went to Brigade Headquarters area for a well-earned rest after nearly six weeks of continuous fighting.

The 14th April saw the Battalion back again in the line when it relieved the 1/11th Sikh Regiment. The capture of Singu was the next objective of the 4/8th Gurkha Rifles. Owing to an unavoidable delay, the leading company ("B" Company), which was expected to gain its objective before dawn, was held up for some hours in difficult ground 800 yards short thereof, and suffered heavy casualties. After sharp fighting, however, including considerable opposition from enemy snipers, Singu was in our hands by midday on 15th April.

The great Fourteenth Army pursuit was now on, and the position of the 7th Indian Division from east to west at this time will help to clarify the picture.

33rd Indian Infantry Brigade had captured Kyaukpadaung, and was driving on to Gwegyo.

89th Indian Infantry Brigade had taken Singu.

Early in April, owing to enemy pressure on an East African brigade on the right bank of the Irrawaddy, the 114th Indian Infantry Brigade had moved to the west to help the Africans in the Letse area. Following this up during the third week in April, the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade was moved to the right bank also to join in the "extermination" battle now in progress.

The Battalion crossed at Kyauke on 24th April, and marched to

Paunglin. It was a boiling hot day, the men marched with full packs across country which consisted of deep sand, plough, six-foot spear grass, chaungs (nullahs) and swamps—the most exacting and unpleasant march the Battalion had ever experienced. Arrived at Paunglin, it was found that the supply arrangements had gone awry (no road yet found for M.T.), so without food or bedding the Battalion spent the first night west of the river. A tired battalion had a good laugh at the journey's end when a boat, commandeered by two British officers to carry them across the last few hundred yards of water before the last halt was reached, was not up to their weight, and sank quietly in the lake, leaving the "boatmen" waist deep in mud and water.

On 3rd May the Battalion moved south, with "D" Company taking a route down the Sidaw valley, and acting as a right flank guard. The Japanese attacked this company in force but were repulsed. Among other casualties the company lost Jemadar Nathu Gurung bayoneted by Japanese, having inadvertently walked outside our perimeter in the dark. He died seven days later in hospital, and was the only Gurkha officer killed in action during the spring, 1945, campaign.

On 5th May the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade was formed into three groups :

"A" : 1/11th Sikh and one battery R.A.

"B" : Brigade Headquarters, 4/8th Gurkha Rifles and one battery R.A.

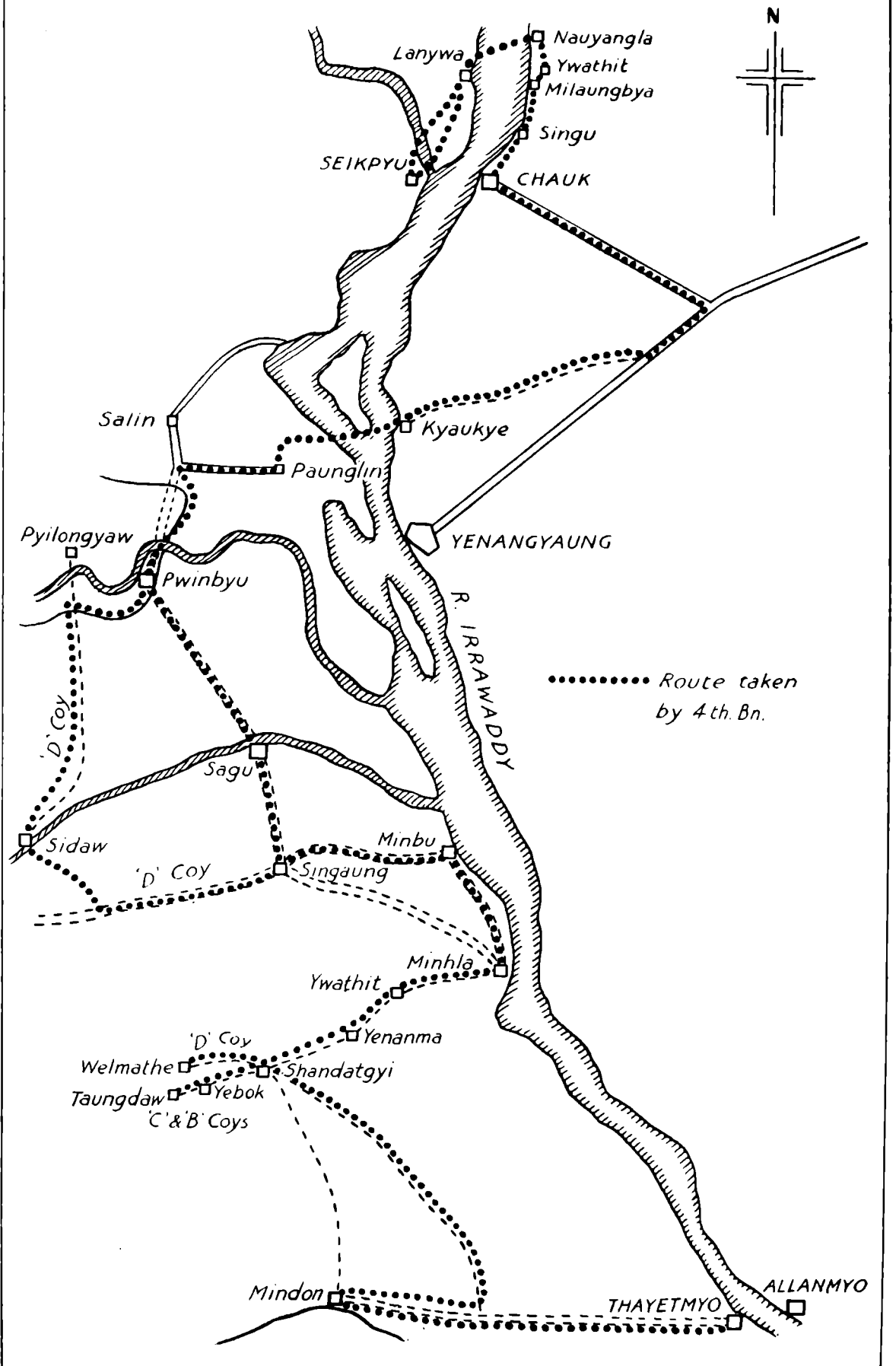
"C" : 2nd K.O.S.B. and one battery R.A.

to operate in area Minhla, Mindon, Thayethmyo. The hammer of the 114th Indian Infantry Brigade was pushing the enemy southwards, on to the anvil prepared by the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade.

In accordance with this plan, the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade operated to the south-west, to block the valleys down which the enemy might try to escape. These valleys ran generally in a north-to-south direction through a reserved forest area. This move brought the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade (less "C" Group) to Shandatgye by the evening of 10th May. Here the 1/11th Sikhs inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy as he moved westward. The 4/8th Gurkha Rifles was ordered to relieve the Sikhs. "B" Company (Commander, Major D. Sheil-Small) moved on 11th May to Taungdaw, and took up a position in a Taungdaw Paungi Chong (Priest's House), which was commanded by high ground to the north-west. As Taungdaw was the scene of one of the Battalion's most severe battles a description of the country is necessary (*vide* Map 16).

From Shandatgyi to Taungdaw the track ran through forest,

NAUYANGLA - THAYETMYO



crossing numerous small streams. Two miles east of Taungdaw was the village of Yebok. Between these two villages, and running north and south, was a high dominating ridge rising to a height of 960 feet. The track crossed this ridge over a small col, and then dropped down steeply to the Taungdaw valley, about 1,500 yards wide, with the village in the centre. About 150 yards north of the village was the Paungi Chong; 100 yards to the west was a stream, from which the ground again rose steeply to a height of several hundred feet.

A few hours after "B" Company was in position, "C" Company under Major P. Myers, M.C., was sent forward to strengthen the position at Taungdaw. Major Myers decided to hold the high ground west of the stream, and so cover "B" Company's western flank. Time for preparation was short, as the enemy were close at hand.

To follow this action incident by incident is, unfortunately, not possible. For three days and nights the engagement persisted. The Japs fought with fanatical fury, and launched wave after wave of suicidal attacks. Our men stood fast without any hope of assistance, short of rations, ammunition and medical aid.

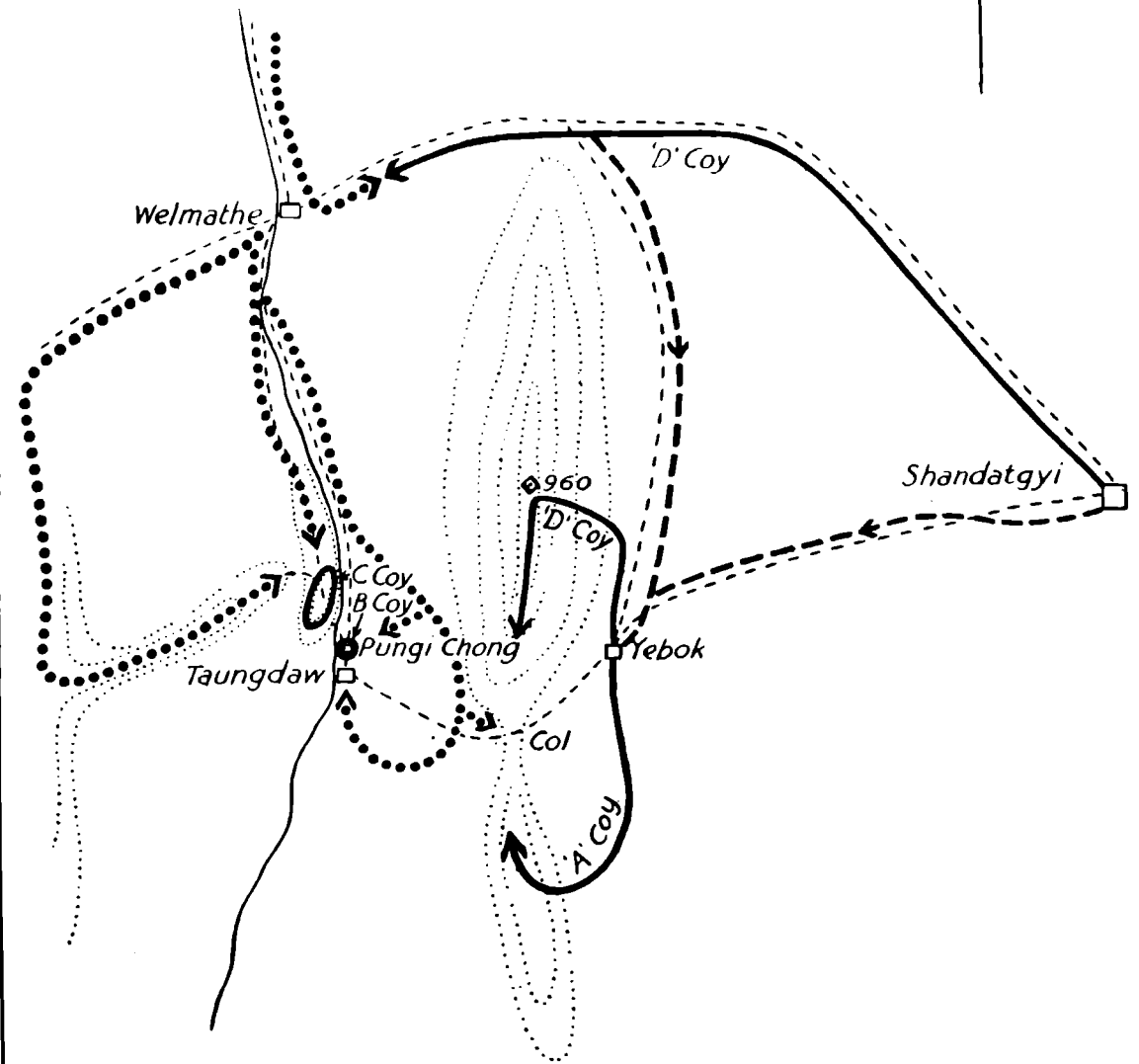
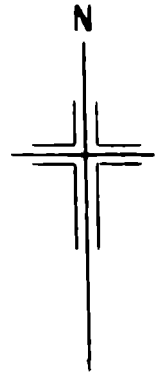
In our position, the key was that portion held by No. 9 Platoon (under Jemadar Padamsing Thapa), about 100 yards north of the main position occupied by "C" Company. The enemy appreciated this, and concentrated on its capture. The attacking Japs were a particularly tough division (54th), from the Arakan. It was here that Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung won the Victoria Cross (*vide* citation, p. 288). His valour contributed largely to the successful defence of their key position by No. 9 Platoon.

To relieve the pressure on "B" and "C" Companies the Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Walker) sent "D" Company on 13th May round to the north (the way over the col being blocked). At Welmathe, about two miles north of Taungdaw, large enemy forces were encountered. After a sharp fight in which No. 10 Platoon (under Jemadar Kharakbahadur Gurung) did particularly well, killing thirty Japanese, "D" Company was ordered to return to Yebok, where the remainder of the Battalion—"A," H.Q. Companies and Battalion Headquarters—were concentrated by the evening of 13th May.

By early morning, 14th May, the position at Taungdaw was fast becoming serious. From "C" Company came a report that there were a number of casualties which needed immediate evacuation, and the ammunition and food situation caused grave anxiety.

It was imperative, therefore, that the col route to Taungdaw should be opened. To effect this "A" Company (Commander, Major M. Tidswell) was ordered to capture the high ground north and south of the col. To the north, enemy resistance was very

TAUNGDAW



- 4th. Bn. movements
- ..... Enemy movements

strong, and the objective was not reached by "A" Company, who, however, succeeded in gaining possession of the entire ridge to the south of the road. In this fighting, Major M. Tidswell was wounded, and died before he reached the advanced dressing station.

"A" Company's capture of the ridge south of the road had the effect of drawing a large portion of the enemy towards the col area, and so considerably lessened the pressure on "B" and "C" Companies, who reported, on the evening of 14th May, that the enemy appeared to be thinning out, and moving towards the south.

At 0800 hours on 15th May "D" Company moved with orders to capture the north ridge at its highest point, and about one mile north of the Yebok-Taungdaw road. By 1000 hours the objective was taken. Below stretched the Taungdaw valley with the enemy in full retreat. The battle was won. The 1/11th Sikhs, sent to help at dawn on 15th May, had fought their way to Taungdaw from the north. The junction with the two beleaguered companies was now effected. The first troops actually to make contact was a platoon of the Sikhs, just ahead of our own "D" Company. Whilst mention is being made of the 1/11th Sikhs, the conduct of two of their signallers, which elicited great praise and gratitude from the 4/8th, deserves especial notice. These signallers were in charge of the 22 set with "C" Company. On the evening of the second day, both were wounded by a shell, and one died during the night. His comrade, Lance-Naik Mian Singh, though suffering great pain from his wound, maintained his set in communication until "C" Company was relieved. For his gallant conduct he was awarded an immediate M.M.

So ended the battle of Taungdaw, in which the Battalion had killed over three hundred of the enemy. This number was counted on the perimeter. He was also forced to abandon all his remaining M.T. and large quantities of stores.

Major P. O. Myers, M.C., was awarded a bar to his M.C., and Jemadar Padamsing Thapa was awarded the M.C., for their part in the battle. Other immediate awards gained were 1 I.D.S.M. and 2 M.Ms.

No account, however short, of Taungdaw would be complete without a record of the splendid work done by the R.A.F., who machine-gunned and put their bombs down on the enemy within fifty yards of our position. In addition, the R.A. observation parties greatly distinguished themselves.

Before leaving the Taungdaw battle, we must recount an incident which occurred on 11th May. On this day a party of five riflemen, under Lieutenant D. Farnbank, went south of Yebok on patrol. They discovered twenty-five Japs, and attacked them. Lieutenant

Farnbank was badly wounded in both legs. He owed his life to a naik of the Burma Intelligence Corps who accompanied him. Entirely alone, the naik carried him out of danger, hid him and reported his whereabouts to a platoon of "D" Company, then in Yebok. Lieutenant Farnbank was brought in during the morning of 12th May.

The next objective given to the Battalion was Mindon, a two days' journey farther south. The march from Shandatgyi commenced on 17th May. Having cleared the area north and west and taken Mindon, the Battalion concentrated there, and left by M.T. for a rest at Thayetmyo on 22nd May.

So ended another phase in the active service of the Battalion.

In a letter dated 27th May to the Colonel of the Regiment (General Sir John Coleridge), the Commanding Officer of the Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Walker) gave unstinted praise to all ranks, and in an Order of the Day dated 22nd May, 1945, he recorded that from 25th February, 1945, to 21st May, 1945, the Battalion had inflicted the following total casualties on the enemy :

Killed and counted ...	...	...	508.
Probably killed ...	...	...	200-300.
Wounded ...	...	...	Several hundred.

In this period the Battalion suffered casualties :

Killed : British officer, 1 (died of wounds).  
 Gurkha officer, 1 (died of wounds).  
 Gurkha other ranks, 32.

Wounded : British officers, 2.  
 Gurkha officers, 5.  
 Gurkha other ranks, 105.

The one Japanese prisoner of war recorded as captured in this period was an inebriated one, who is credited with having consumed one gallon of local alcohol !

Whilst the Battalion was in Thayetmyo, the 7th Indian Division continued its task of preventing the escape of the enemy to the Pegu Yomas to the east, their only course, as to remain on the western side of the Irrawaddy meant certain destruction. This task was well and truly accomplished, and it was only a depleted and shaken remnant of the escaping Japanese forces that found its way into the Pegu Yomas to join up with their equally battered comrades.

The task of the Division was not yet finished. The Irrawaddy valley having been cleared of the enemy, it moved east to the Sittang line, and it is here that the next operations engaged in by the Battalion were carried out.

Early in June, whilst on leave in India, Lieutenant-Colonel W. C.



Walker was appointed G.S.O.1 of the 7th Indian Division. This was a sad loss to the Battalion he had commanded with such outstanding ability, during continuous operations. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel C. E. Watson-Smyth.

The pleasant stay in Thayetmyo was ended on 19th June, 1945, when the Battalion concentrated at Allanmyo on the east bank of the Irrawaddy, and moved south to take over Nyaungkashe, a village some twenty miles east-north-east of Pegu, with the Sittang bridge defence position, noteworthy in 1942 when our troops retreated before the Japanese, two miles to the east. It was the most easterly unit of the Army, with its nearest neighbours (1/11th Sikhs) four miles north-north-west, and beyond the Sikhs to the north the third battalion of the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade, the 3/6th Gurkha Rifles, who had replaced the 2nd K.O.S.Bs., comrades since October, 1942.

To those who have not experienced a monsoon in the lower Sittang area of Burma, it is difficult to realize the appalling conditions in which the Battalion found itself in Nyaungkashe. The country is flat, with no cover, interspersed with villages a mile or two apart, dense little areas of trees and houses, waterlogged and muddy. In between is water and mud, paddy and coarse kaing grass, leeches, mosquitoes, rats and, in 1945, Japanese—a change from pleasant Thayetmyo.

The tasks allotted to the Battalion were :

- (1) To deny the enemy freedom of movement in its area.
- (2) To defend the railway marshalling yard and rolling stock in Nyaungkashe itself, together with an adjacent railway bridge.
- (3) To defend the Sittang bridge position, which alone required one company.

Three 25-pounders (there was no room for four on dry land) of the 500th Battery, 136th Field Regiment, R.A., and two platoons Dogra Machine Gun Regiment (the latter being relieved on 1st July by two platoons, 13th Frontier Force Rifles Machine Gun Regiment) were attached.

The disposition of the Battalion on its concentration on 24th June was :

- (a) At Nyaungkashe : Battalion Headquarters, H.Q. Company, "B" Company, "C" Company and one section medium machine guns.
- (b) In wooded garden one mile to west of Nyaungkashe, guarding guns : "A" Company (less one platoon) and one section medium machine guns.

- (c) Adjacent railway bridge position : One platoon, "A" Company.
- (d) Sittang bridge position : "D" Company with one section medium machine guns.

On 26th June the task of clearing the enemy out of villages in the battalion neighbourhood commenced by an attack on a village, known as 3418, which lay 1,200 yards to east-north-east of Nyaungkashe. The attack was carried out by "B" Company, with one troop of 25-pounders and section of medium machine guns in support. "C" Company gave flank protection.

The village was taken after some tough fighting in which "A" Company (less one platoon) participated in the final stage. Owing to the filthy state of the village, and the fact that the whole place was waterlogged, it was decided not to occupy it, so "B" and "C" Companies returned to Nyaungkashe.

The gallantry of Rifleman Manbir Ale, "B" Company, deserves recording. Manbir, a Bren gunner, being unable to fire his gun from a lying position owing to the state of the ground, stood up and, firing from the hip, covered his section attacking a medium machine-gun bunker. His right hand and lower arm were smashed by medium machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, supporting his gun on his shattered arm, this very gallant soldier carried on until mortally wounded. He was later awarded a posthumous Mention in Despatches.

The closing stages of this operation were witnessed by the Commander, IV Indian Corps (Lieutenant-General Sir Frank Messervy).

Intelligence reports, and occasional information gleaned from villagers, showed that the Japanese intended to build up his strength north of Kyaungkashe, and to strike at our L. of C. and communications with 1/11th Sikhs. To counter this threat, the acting Brigadier, Brigadier H. R. R. Conder, O.B.E. (who had succeeded Brigadier W. A. Crowther, D.S.O., who had commanded the 89th Indian Infantry Brigade since December, 1943), decided to put a company into Kinmungan, a village four and half miles north of Battalion Headquarters.

On 30th June, therefore, "A" Company and one section medium machine guns, with a large train of porters, moved to Kinmungan. The company's first night was a busy one, for the enemy, estimated strength one platoon, attacked. Without a single casualty to "A" Company, though the Dogras had one man killed and one man wounded, the attack was defeated with heavy losses to the Japanese. On 4th July "A" Company was ordered by the Brigade to withdraw on to the 1/11th Sikh position at Sathwagyon, thus depleting the Battalion of one company, and two medium machine guns. The

detaching of one British officer was in itself serious, as owing to the sudden notice to leave Thayetmyo, the Battalion was short of six British officers still on leave in India.

On 3rd July two villagers, who had escaped from the enemy, reported that 1,000 Japanese were lying up in the area north-east of the village known as 3418, and had stated that they intended to attack Nyaungkashe that night. This information proved correct, for at 1900 hours the enemy attacked from north-north-east and south-east, and maintained pressure until 0900 hours next morning, when, having achieved no success, they withdrew, their losses amounting to 120.

The Battalion's dispositions now were :

- (a) "A" Company with one section Dogra medium machine guns detached under 1/11th Sikhs.
- (b) "B" Company (less one platoon) with three 25-pounder guns and one section medium machine guns in wooded garden one mile west of Nyaungkashe.
- (c) "C" Company with one section medium machine guns, Sittang bridge position.
- (d) "D" Company, H.Q. Company, Battalion Headquarters with one section medium machine guns in Nyaungkashe.
- (e) One platoon "B" Company, railway bridge position.

The battle of Nyaungkashe, commencing on the night of 3rd/4th July, continuing until the night of 7th/8th July, was known to the world as "The battle of the bend" and received prominence in the home and dominions press. It is not possible to give an hour-by-hour account of the ordeal which the Battalion underwent ; space permits only of the chief incidents being related.

On 4th July orders were received that "C" Company should withdraw from the Sittang bridge position. This move was safely accomplished ; the company arrived back in the perimeter at 0200 hours on the 5th.

From then onwards, enemy attacks, accompanied by heavy gun fire, were made from all sides, the artillery concentration from both sides of the Sittang being particularly formidable ; in fact, the heaviest which the enemy had ever put on in this theatre.

Battalion Headquarters and the regimental aid post (in a brick building) were hit. The adjutant, Captain Q. Kennedy, and others, already wounded, were killed or received further wounds in this regimental aid post. The Medical Officer, Captain I. A. Dalton, I.A.M.C., and Captain A. Brand-Crombie, 4/8th Gurkha Rifles, were also wounded.

Rations were received by air drop, but owing to the very restricted

dropping zone (railway station area) many loads fell into enemy hands.

Parties with rations and ammunition succeeded in getting through to "B" Company and the guns on two occasions—no easy task, which involved crossing 500 yards of open water, overlooked from the railway embankment held by the enemy, and from which heavy fire was brought to bear. Not so successful were the efforts made to supply No. 4 Platoon at the railway bridge position, and eventually this platoon, which had suffered heavily, and had lacked food and ammunition, had to be withdrawn. The story of Jemadar Manbahadur Gurung and No. 4 Platoon is one of which the 8th Gurkha Rifles may well be proud. The tale of this epic of discipline and courage is as follows :

The platoon was disposed in trenches on either side of the railway line on top of the embankment. The section on the north-west end of the bridge was, after the first attack, isolated from the rest of the platoon, and an account of their action will be given later. On the night of 3rd/4th July the Japanese attacked the bridge, first from the north, and later from the south as well. His attacks were preceded by heavy mortar and 75 mm. concentrations. The first three assaults were direct, shoulder-to-shoulder charges, and were all repulsed with heavy loss to the enemy, who thereafter adopted different tactics, coming forward in twos and threes with grenades and swords. In the rain and pitch darkness the attackers were frequently able to creep right up to the trenches without being seen or heard, and this, and the heavy shelling, increased the strain on the defenders. During one such attack Naik Rankit Thapa hurled back no fewer than three bombs which had fallen into his trench ; for this he was awarded a Mention in Despatches. After the first night's attacks half the platoon were casualties, but during the next night the commander, Jemadar Manbahadur, succeeded in evacuating the serious cases to "B" Company Headquarters in the gun position. During daylight the men found it impossible to move out of their positions, the smallest movement being sniped from the villages to their north and south. Ammunition was low, and since the platoon was virtually isolated, not only from the Battalion, but also from the rest of "B" Company, Manbahadur ordered his men to use bayonet and kukri. That night, after several infiltration attacks, during which Lance-Naik Sarsaram Thapa received a sword cut on the forehead in a series of hand-to-hand encounters while defending the wounded men in his trench (for which gallant action he received an immediate I.D.S.M.), the Japs, after an intense bombardment, launched an infantry attack of about fifty men. Repelling this attack practically exhausted the ammunition

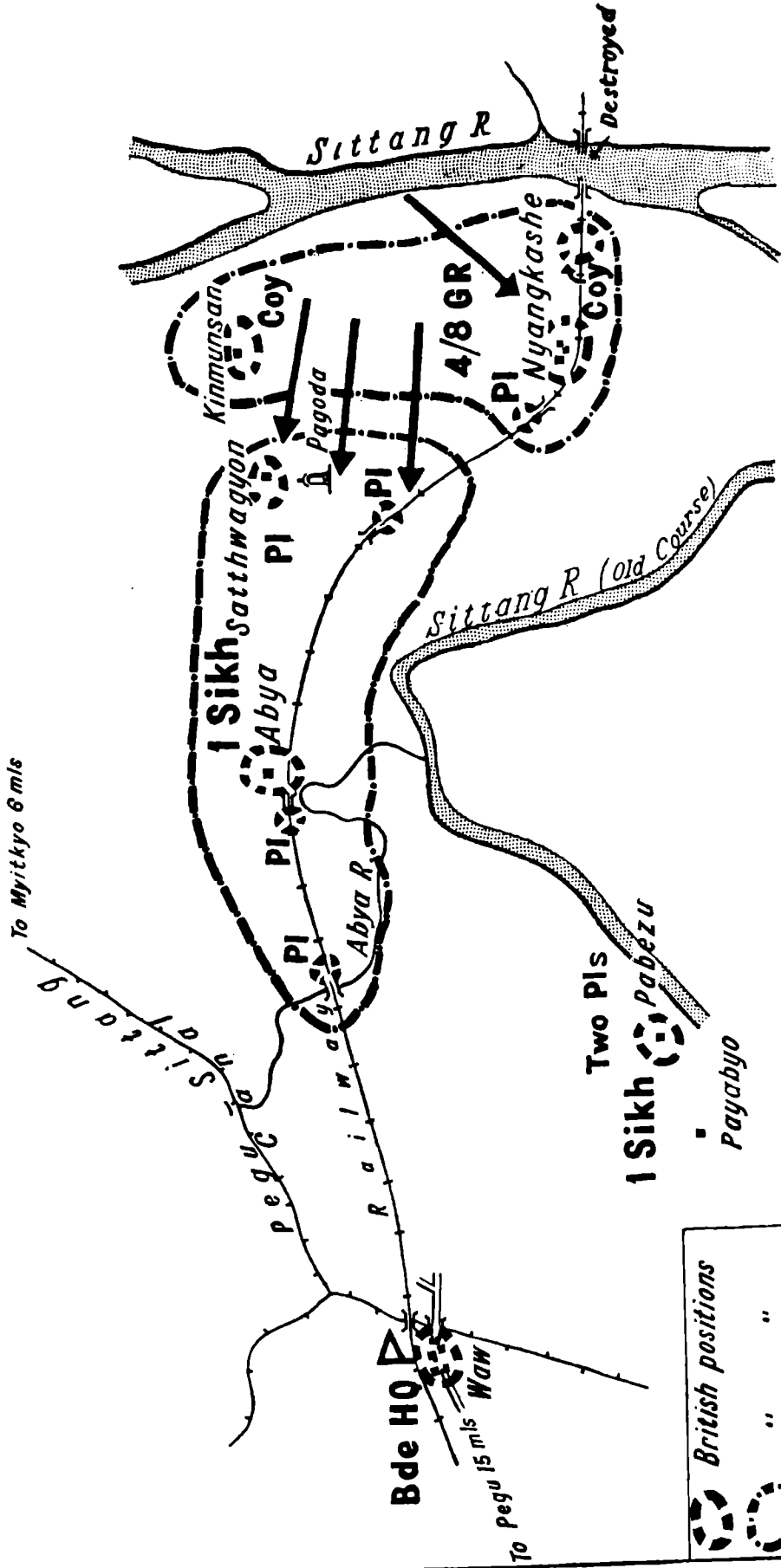
of the now weakened defenders, though they held their fire until the Japanese were upon them, and then made every round tell. After a short but sanguinary encounter, the Japs fell back, leaving twenty-five bodies behind. Thereafter the night was one of alternate shelling and infiltration, with cold steel as the only available reply. Throughout, No. 4 Platoon's ordeal was shared by one section of medium machine guns of the 13th Frontier Force Rifles Medium Machine Gun Battalion, who manned their guns until both were knocked out by shell fire, and whose casualties were as heavy as our own.

Four attempts, by day and night, were made from "B" Company and Battalion Headquarters to get through to the platoon with ammunition and reinforcements, but all were forced back by heavy fire. The night of 5th July started with the usual sporadic shelling and small attacks, plus an unusually heavy series of medium machine-gun shoots. At midnight the attackers withdrew, and the heaviest bombardment which the beleaguered party had experienced ensued. It knocked every trench to pieces, and forced the survivors out on to the line, who, after three days and nights of fighting without even a brew of tea for comfort, were indifferent as to their fate, being in a strange mental and physical state which Manbahadur describes as being akin to drunkenness. When this bombardment was followed up, the five leading Japs were bayoneted, and the remainder wavered and fell back; but, determined to make an end of the platoon's resistance, the enemy again lined up with all his strength and advanced to the embankment. Jemadar Manbahadur Gurung, realizing that he and those with him had done all within their power to hold the position, ordered the survivors to withdraw on "B" Company. There were seven men left with him, only two unwounded. There remains the story of the isolated section. Of its seven men, three were killed, two captured; one badly wounded is officially missing, while the seventh, left the sole occupant, escaped from the position and finally rejoined at Abya. The two captured men eventually escaped also, and reached the Sikhs' forward company several days later. One of them, already wounded in the leg, had been used by the Japs for light machine-gun target practice; he bit his bonds and, with both legs wounded, dragged himself through the water for several miles.

Jemadar Manbahadur, for supreme devotion to duty, outstanding personal gallantry and his defence to the last round and all but the last man, was awarded an immediate M.C. No decoration was ever more gallantly won.

To turn again to the Battalion.

By midday on 6th July the battle had gone on for sixty-five hours. The morale of the men was unshaken, and the Battalion would have fought on, but other factors made this course unnecessary, for, at



*Note* The whole country was flooded except for villages, railway lines and the canal bank

**SITTANG BEND**  
Night, 3rd-4th July, 1945

1530 hours on 7th July, it was ordered to fight its way out to the Headquarters of the 1/11th Sikhs. This fine battalion had made several attempts to clear the way down the railway line to the 4/8th, but, in spite of superb gallantry and determination, had been repelled on each occasion.

At 1700 hours on 7th July a contact party slipped through to the gun position under fire with orders, and at 1915 hours "B" Company, the R.A. personnel and medium machine-gun section withdrew into Nyaungkashe, having destroyed all their reserve ammunition and stores, and rendered the three guns useless. At 2115 hours "D" Company pulled out of the south perimeter, and the whole Battalion concentrated in a small lane, leaving "C" Company in position engaging the enemy, who were still active on the north-east and north-west faces of the perimeter.

Fortunately for the success of the concentration, enemy guns were silent, being engaged in shelling the area of Abya railway station some five miles to the north-west. This was a stroke of luck, for in that congested lane even a few well-directed shells would have caused great damage and dislocation.

The withdrawal was made in the form of a defensive box in which "C" Company was the rearmost company.

The 89th Indian Infantry Brigade plan to extricate the 4/8th was for the 4/15th Punjab Regiment to form a "corridor" from the 1/11th Sikh position at Satthwagyon to a rendezvous about two miles east-south-east, and "A" Company, 4/8th Gurkha Rifles, to contact the Battalion at the rendezvous, and act as its rear-guard whilst it withdrew down the corridor. This plan miscarried; owing to the pitch darkness of a monsoon night, and the very widely separated lines of platoon groups, contact with the Battalion was not made.

The Battalion splashed on, however, and, to the surprise and relief of the watchers in Satthwagyon, the light of early dawn revealed the columns converging on the village. The withdrawal had been completed after a night march in pitch darkness and heavy rain, and in a terrain devoid of landmarks. Wading, often nearly swimming, through the chaungs, squelching through leech-infested grass and plough, the march was accomplished without the loss of a single man, a fine performance, especially by the stretcher-bearers, who carried their sick and wounded comrades. For the Battalion, the events of this night bordered on the miraculous, as firstly, there was no shelling, and secondly, no enemy were encountered, though those sent out to assist the withdrawal had seen numbers of them. There was no more fighting, for the enemy, for reasons best known to himself, withdrew on the night of 8th/9th July.

With the end of the battle of Nyaungkashe came rest and reorganiza-

tion at a village named Hlegu, some twenty-eight miles north of Rangoon. Although the Battalion was engaged in patrolling, guarding bridges and road junctions to prevent a Japanese break-out to the east, it had fought at Nyaungkashe its last action in the war. Farther north the 17th Indian Division (now commanded by Major-General W. A. Crowther, D.S.O.) dealt with the retreating enemy. Japanese capitulation soon followed. Thus ended for the Battalion a chapter of history of which the Regiment will always be proud. Ngakyedauk, "Admin. Box," Buthidaung, Imphal, Ukhrul, Milaungbya, Taungdaw, Nyaungkashe are worthy of place amongst the honours won by the 8th Gurkha Rifles in former wars.

The Battalion gained the following immediate awards for its fine showing at Nyaungkashe: M.C., 1; I.D.S.M., 2; M.M., 2; Mentions, 5; Certificate of gallantry, 1.

Considering the nature of the operations, casualties sustained were not heavy and amounted to:

Killed: Captain Q. C. Kennedy.  
Gurkha other ranks, 14.

Missing: Gurkha other ranks, 4.

Wounded: Captain A. Brand-Crombie.  
Captain I. A. Dalton (I.A.M.C.), M.O.  
Gurkha other ranks, 32.  
Followers, 2.

Early in September, 1945, the Battalion moved to a big tented camp near Myngaladon, the aerodrome for Rangoon. Training continued, and with the Dashera just completed the Battalion was flown to Siam, being stationed in Bangkok. This progressive Westernized city offered many attractions, but guard duties, etc., were severe. Not the least, and certainly the most disliked, duty was guarding the dirty, indisciplined, insolent Indian National Army prisoners. In contrast with these rebels, the turn-out and bearing of the Japanese prisoners of war were excellent.

During October Lieutenant-Colonel Walker returned to assume command *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel C. Watson-Smythe on leave. Colonel Walker, not content with this "assignment," continued to carry out his duties as G.S.O.1 of the 7th Indian Division as well!

With no regrets, the Battalion left Siam on 12th December. The expected and hoped-for destination was Batavia, and more fighting. Plans were changed at the last moment, and it was at Port Dickson (Malaya), 150 miles north-west of Singapore, that the Battalion disembarked on 17th December, and moved to Gemas by train. Gemas is 140 miles from Singapore, in the centre of the lower



Malay peninsula, and on the main Singapore railway line—a small station rather like Shillong. Though the rations were not on the same level as those enjoyed at Bangkok, all ranks gained in every other way by the move—in billets, in climate and in the lovely countryside.

For some six months the Battalion remained in Malaya, engaged in duties of an internal security nature. Releases and leave made their calls, and farewells of many valued friends had to be taken. Once again Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Walker had to leave to take over his duties as G.S.O.1 of the 7th Indian Division, this time without alternative, which arrived in Malaya from Siam towards the end of January, 1946. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel G. Bull, M.C., second-in-command.

The 7th Indian Division were the first Allied troops in South-East Asia to enter enemy-occupied territory. It disarmed and concentrated 113,000 Japanese. It evacuated some 20,000 United Kingdom and Australian ex-prisoners of war, and succoured no less than 20,000 coolies who had been conscripted for labour on the Moulmein railway.

On 16th February the Battalion moved by M.T. to Bentong, a small town about forty-seven miles north-east of Kuala Lumpur and over 190 miles from Gemas. This again was a pleasant station which offered every facility for training and recreation. The detachment, however, of three companies, each at a considerable distance from Battalion Headquarters, was a drawback.

At the beginning of June, the Battalion was informed that it would remain in Malaya indefinitely. Something happened to change this plan, however, for on 6th June orders were received for the Battalion to embark at Singapore on the 13th for Java. This move meant leaving the 7th Indian Division after four and a half years. The G.O.C.-in-C., Malaya Command (the old 7th Indian Divisional Commander, General Sir F. Messervy), the Divisional Commander, (Major-General O. de T. Lovett, C.B.E., D.S.O.) and 89th Indian Infantry Brigade Commander (Brigadier Hutton) were present to see the Battalion off at Kuala Lumpur, where it was given a magnificent farewell.

Embarked at Singapore on the *City of Paris*, a most enjoyable though brief trip was experienced, as Batavia was reached on 16th June. The Battalion was posted to the 37th Indian Infantry Brigade, which was guarding the Batavia area.

On 18th June the Battalion proceeded to a village named Bekassi, to the north-east, some nineteen miles from Batavia.

The general situation in Java about this time has already been recounted in the chapters devoted to our 1st Battalion.

A few words are necessary as to the area which the Battalion was called to upon to operate in. Bekassi, a small village, stands on the river of the same name, flowing through it in a north-to-south direction. Crossing it is the railway which runs along the sea coast to Batavia. Of the two bridges over the river, the railway one was intact, while the road one had been demolished. Before the Battalion had arrived, an agreement had been reached whereby the Bekassi river was the boundary between the Allies and the Indonesians, and Allied troops were not allowed to cross the river to the eastern side ; the result being that the Indonesians subjected our troops to sniping and mortar fire whilst they were practically unmolested.

The Battalion was disposed : Battalion Headquarters, Admin. Company and one company on main road one and a half miles west of Bekassi ; one company covering the railway bridge ; one company in the jail 300 yards south of Bekassi station, and on the river bank ; one company two and a half miles west of Battalion Headquarters, as escort to one section of guns, 178th Field Regiment, R.A., who were in support of the Battalion.

The Battalion's task was to clear the area on the west bank of the Bekassi river from the village to the sea, and to stop any infiltration into Batavia.

In order to counter hostile activities which were taking place west of the boundaries, one platoon with a gunner observation post proceeded on 26th June to a village about three miles to the north. The same night the platoon was attacked, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place until dawn. All attacks were beaten off. In this affair the Battalion lost Subadar Kharakbahadur Gurung and one Gurkha other rank killed and two Gurkha other ranks wounded. Seven bodies were found in and near the platoon position, and some twenty-six wounded (including probably five additional killed) were taken off by the hostiles.

After deliberations at a very high level, sanction was given to control the east bank of the Bekassi, and so put an end to the impossible situation already noted. On 4th July, therefore, bridgeheads were established to the east of the river, and a Bailey bridge, seventy feet long, constructed in place of the blown road bridge.

After the crossing of the Bekassi had been completed, the Battalion came under command of 1st Indian Infantry Brigade, whose Commander (Brigadier N. D. Wingrove) had commanded the Battalion in the Kohima days.

On 16th July three Gurkha other ranks were killed in an ambush on two 15-cwt. trucks. Such incidents along our L. of C. were made possible by a lack of depth in our control east of the river. It was decided, therefore, to clear the main road and an area eastwards to a distance

of four miles. This was accomplished, and was the last real operation carried out by the Battalion in Java, as on 23rd August it moved back to the outskirts of Batavia, where, astride the Batavia-Bekassi road, divisional and brigade defence duties, including guards, occupied it until after the Dashera, when it moved to Batavia to take over the guarding of the docks.

After five weeks of this hot and dirty neighbourhood, all ranks were not sorry to embark on T.S. *Talma* for Malaya, which was reached, at Port Swettenham, on 21st November, 1946. Camped in an ideally situated position near Kuala Lumpur, the next few months passed very pleasantly. It was in these circumstances that the Battalion's term of active service in the Second World War came to an end. It had maintained a high standard, and had earned a fine reputation. It had done great credit to the 8th Gurkha Rifles, and those fortunate enough to serve with it can look back with pride to that association. Well done, 4/8th !

A summary of awards received is as follows : V.C., 1 ; D.S.O., 1 ; I.O.M., 2 ; M.C., 12 ; bar to M.C., 1 ; I.D.S.M., 12 ; M.M., 22 ; Mention in Despatches, 39 ; Certificate of gallantry, 6.

Alas, awards for gallant action cannot be gained without the counter-balance of comrades killed and wounded, and the Battalion casualties in the Second World War as recorded in the following list show that the price paid was high :

Killed : Major G. Twiss.  
Major M. Tidswell.  
Captain H. Harington.  
Captain Q. C. Kennedy.  
Lieutenant S. Ball.  
Lieutenant J. N. Henderson.  
Subadar Narainsing Lama.  
Subadar Kharakbahadur Gurung.  
Subadar Pahalsing Gurung.  
Subadar Jaibahadur Gurung.  
Jemadar Chankrabahadur Thapa.  
Gurkha other ranks, 124.

Died of  
wounds : Captain S. R. Perkin.  
Jemadar Nathu Gurung.  
Gurkha other ranks, 28.

Missing, presumed  
dead : Gurkha other ranks, 11.  
Non-Combatants, 1.

Wounded : Captain P. F. Wickham (twice).  
 Captain R. E. Littey.  
 Captain A. Brand-Crombie.  
 Captain I. S. Dalton (Medical Officer).  
 Lieutenant F. J. J. Hall.  
 Lieutenant R. Findley.  
 Lieutenant J. E. G. Vivian.  
 Second-Lieutenant W. A. Dodd.  
 Subadar Kharkabahadur Gurung.  
 Subadar Gangaparsad Pun.  
 Subadar Nandabir Thapa.  
 Subadar Narbahadur Ale.  
 Subadar Thamansing Thapa.  
 Jemadar Bindrabahadur Thapa.  
 Jemadar Narjang Pun.  
 Jemadar Harkabahadur Gurung.  
 Jemadar Dalbir Rana.  
 Jemadar Keshbahadur Gurung.  
 Jemadar Karnabir Thapa.  
 Jemadar Banbahadur Thapa.  
 Gurkha other ranks, 355.

#### 88TH INFANTRY COMPANY, 8TH GURKHA RIFLES

AN active unit of the Regiment, of which little, unfortunately, has been heard, was raised for service in the Second World War. Known at first as the 88th Infantry Company, 8th Gurkha Rifles, its role was mainly guard and escort duties. In previous wars, divisional and brigade headquarters were considered sufficiently well protected, situated as they were behind the front line. Possibilities of attack by parachutists, and (especially in Burma) the new infiltration methods, were the reason for providing Formation Headquarters with a defence unit, available also for guards and escorts.

It is not proposed to follow in detail the movements of the company, as theirs was not an operational role. Where the 36th Divisional Headquarters went, there the company went also and had its full share of duties, patrolling, escorts, etc., in the Arakan, at Imphal, on the Irrawaddy to Mandalay and Meiktila.

The Company first made its appearance in this history as noted in the 1st Battalion narrative pertaining to the Arakan. It was then the Defence Company of the 36th British Division, and served under Major-General F. W. Festing, C.B.E., D.S.O., who evidently took a particular interest in his Gurkhas.

Subadar Birtasing Gurung of the 1st Battalion, who had won the I.O.M. and I.D.S.M. on the North-West Frontier in 1940, as already mentioned in the account of those operations, did much to maintain the high standard maintained by the Company.

The Company went to Calcutta from Burma in May, 1945, and proceeded on 91 days' War Leave. On the conclusion of this, the Company, now located at Poona, carried out normal duties.

From 1st December, 1945, the Company was redesignated No. 1 (8th Gurkha Rifles) Infantry Company, and embarked at Bombay for Japan in H.M.T. *Dunera* on 4th March, 1946, preceded by one platoon as advanced party which had sailed in H.M.T. *Cheshire* during February, 1946.

The Company disembarked in Japan on 30th March. During the voyage it landed at Singapore on 17th March for a march past before the Supreme Commander, South-East Asia, and at Hong Kong, on 23rd March, a similar parade took place; the Commander on this occasion being their old Divisional chief, Major-General F. W. Festing, now G.O.C. in southern China. To be disembarked from the not too comfortable troop deck of a transport twice during a voyage to take part in large ceremonial parades is something of an ordeal, but the 8th Gurkha Rifles Company rose to the occasion, and did it well.

Until the end of its stay in Japan, the Company continued to carry out normal duties and fatigues at Headquarters of the British Indian Division, first at Hiroshima, and from 16th June at Okayama, under the command of the well-known Gurkha officer, Major-General D. T. Cowan, erstwhile commander of the famous 17th Indian Division. Guards of honour figured largely in these duties, and amongst the very important personages to whom this honour was accorded was Mr. Chifley, the Prime Minister of Australia. Once again did it parade for Major-General Festing, and by now the General must have known the "Little men," who had been his own bodyguard in the Arakan and Burma in the old days, very well.

And so on their homeward journey in March, 1947, we leave this Company which had worthily upheld the good name of the Regiment, and had displayed its badge with honour as far east as the land of the Rising Sun.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

(See Maps Nos. 1 and 11)

*[This chapter deals with the Regiment as a whole.]*

Regimental Battle Casualties in the Second World War—Stations, December, 1946-7—Partition—Battalion moves in 1947—Last British Commanding Officers—Evacuating refugees—Raising of 5th and 6th Battalions—1st Battalion moves—2nd Battalion proceeds on active service—Routine—5th Battalion at Calcutta—6th Battalion activities—6th Battalion proceed on service—4th Battalion—V.C. Day—Colonel D. L. Duncan—Final words.

### POST-WAR PERIOD

BEFORE continuing with our narrative, a summary of the total casualties sustained in the Second World War will be of interest.

Killed :	British officers, 13.
	Gurkha officers, 11.
	Gurkha other ranks, 403.
Died of wounds :	British officers, 5.
	Gurkha officers, 4.
	Gurkha other ranks, 108.
Died as prisoners of war in enemy hands :	Gurkha officer, 1.
	Gurkha other ranks, 12.
Missing, presumed dead :	Gurkha other ranks, 27.
	Total dead, 584.
Wounded :	British officers, 31.
	Gurkha officers, 40.
	Gurkha other ranks, 1,287.
	Total wounded, 1,358.
Total Battle Casualties,	1,942.

In addition, 151 Gurkha other ranks were accidentally killed or died of disease.

In 1946 a detachment of the Regiment took part, together with detachments of the 2nd, 5th and 10th Gurkha Rifles, in the Victory March in London.

The return of three of our battalions from overseas was completed

by December, 1946, and this is taken as a convenient date from which to resume.

The 1st Battalion moved from Kohat to Loralai.

The 2nd Battalion was at Secunderabad.

The 3rd Battalion was at Quetta in process of being disbanded.

The 4th Battalion was still at Kuala Lumpur in Malaya.

The year 1947 was a momentous one in the history of India, and events affected the Indian Army profoundly. In the case of regiments with a mixed composition, the partition of the country into India and Pakistan meant the break up of battalions in their composition by the transfer of Hindu companies to Indian regiments where the original composition was partly Mussulman, and the transfer of Mussulman companies to Pakistani regiments where the original composition was partly Hindu. In the case of Gurkha regiments, though no questions of religion arose, they were subjected to an upheaval almost as sensational. After prolonged negotiations, and for reasons which cannot be recorded here, it was decided that the 8th Gurkhas, together with the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 9th, would be absorbed by India into her army; while the remaining four regiments, 2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th, would be taken over by the British Government. These were made up of volunteers—*i.e.*, men who opted to serve with His Majesty's Gurkhas, as they were originally called, now officially termed the Brigade of Gurkhas, and a part of the British Army. It was sad to see the break up of the old Gurkha Brigade, but whether serving the British or Indian Governments it is certain the Gurkha regiments will continue to maintain the high standard of efficiency, together with those traditions of Gurkha loyalty, which have earned them their splendid reputation as soldiers.

Previous to the partition on 15th August, 1947, certain movements of battalions took place. The 1st Battalion moved to Dera Ghazi Khan in the hot weather of 1947. The 2nd Battalion remained in Secunderabad until June, 1947, except for a rather hot, unpleasant stay at Vizagapatam, which lasted for three months, which was followed by an even more unpleasant though more exciting experience in Lahore.

The 4th Battalion remained in Malaya until December, 1947, when it returned to India to be stationed at Dehra Dun under its Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel M. S. Chinwan, who had met the Battalion at Madras on 18th December, 1947.

The reader will find it of interest to know who were the last British Commanding Officers of battalions when, after 125 years, the 8th Gurkha Rifles changed their allegiance :

1st Battalion	...	Lieutenant-Colonel M. E. Ovans, M.C.
2nd Battalion	...	Lieutenant-Colonel F. G. C. Macartney.

4th Battalion ... Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Walker, D.S.O.  
Regimental Centre Lieutenant-Colonel R. R. C. Wall.

At the time of the partition, both 1st and 2nd Battalions were engaged in the humane task of evacuation of refugees. Details of the work done are not available, nor is it considered desirable to include in this regimental history the story of a period of India's history which is better forgotten. Suffice to say that the impartiality and strict discipline of the Gurkha soldier earned him high praise from both Indian and Pakistan Governments.

Subsequent to partition, the veil of secrecy has descended on the activities of our battalions, and the writer regrets that, for security reasons, actual whereabouts, dates and moves cannot be given with accuracy, and so the fortunes of the Regiment are followed in a somewhat obscured light.

In 1948 very important events, in the raising of two battalions, took place. The 3rd Battalion had gone and was not re-raised, and the new battalions were given the titles 5/8th Gurkha Rifles and 6/8th Gurkha Rifles.

In the case of the 5th Battalion this was a redesignation, for, on 17th February, 1948, the 4th Battalion 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkhas became the 5th Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles, its first Indian Commanding Officer being Lieutenant-Colonel N. K. Chatterji. The 6th Battalion began life at Dehra Dun. On 4th February, 1948, orders were received to raise the Battalion mainly from personnel of 2nd Gurkha Rifles and, to a lesser degree, 6th Gurkha Rifles who had not opted for service in their old regiments. Lieutenant-Colonel J. D. Nadirshaw from 2/8th Gurkha Rifles was appointed to command, and joined on 25th February.

Moves to Roorkee and Meerut kept the 1st Battalion (commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel N. C. Rawley, M.C., and later Lieutenant-Colonel K. S. Thapa) busy, and, following a hot and dusty month or two in 1949, the Battalion moved up to the hills in July of that year. The march of four days was not without incident, but the accommodation (British Troops Barracks) available at the end made the journey to the hills well worth while.

Meanwhile, in May, 1948, the 2nd Battalion (commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel H. S. Parab) once again proceeded from Ferozepore on active service. Details of its activities in Kashmir are not possible, but that it maintained its high reputation is borne out by an Order of the Day issued by its Divisional Commander. It was the Battalion's second visit to Kashmir, as a detachment had been in Gilgit from 1898 to 1901.



In all battalions, training and the routine of cantonment life followed, and only a few items of special interest will be alluded to.

Changes in command of battalions were frequent, and must have added to the difficulties of the post-war, or rather post-partition, period.

The loss of British officers, Gurkha officers and Gurkha other ranks of experience was an additional trial, and great credit is due to all concerned for the high standard of efficiency reached.

The addition of two new battalions has been mentioned. The 5th, stationed at Alipore, had as companions no less than four other Gurkha battalions, in and near Calcutta. It had its full share of looking after the unruly elements in this great city. In sport it held a good record. Various inspections and a guard of honour brought praise. A change of station to Barrackpore took place, but for a short time only, as the Battalion relieved the 3/3rd Gurkha Rifles in time for Dasher, 1948.

From August, 1948, to March, 1949, two battalions of the Nepalese Contingent (the Mahindra Dal and Ganesh Dal) were with the 5/8th Gurkha Rifles in Calcutta.

On 22nd May, 1949, the Commanding Officer of the 5th Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel N. K. Chatterji, was transferred to the 2nd Battalion, but soon afterwards assumed command of the Regimental Centre. He was succeeded in the 5th Battalion by Lieutenant-Colonel D. P. Gimi.

In June, 1949, the 5th Battalion left Calcutta for Dehra Dun. Soon after arriving, it bade good-bye to Subadar-Major and Honorary Lieutenant Balesor Rana Bahadur, O.B.I., who retired after thirty-two years' distinguished service. A Pipe Band was coming to full maturity, and showed promise of fulfilling the 5th Battalion's intention of making it the best in the 8th Gurkha Rifles.

With the winning at Dehra Dun in 1949 of the Divisional Football Tournament by the Battalion, we must take leave of the 5/8th.

To continue with the second post-partition addition—the 6th Battalion. From a camp situated behind the Regimental Centre at Dehra Dun at the foot of the Mussoorie hills, the Battalion moved into barracks at Clement town some ten miles from Dehra at the end of March, 1948. Two months later came a further move. The fog of "security" descends on the name of this station. A guard of honour for the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, was furnished by the 6th Battalion, and it took part in a march past before the Governor. These military activities, together with participation in "Tamashas" in which other units joined, point to this "mystery" station being a large one. The 6th Battalion football standard was a high one, as its team was chosen to represent the Army against the Police,

defeating them 3-0, and its "A" and "B" teams were the finalists in the Army Championship.

In October, 1948, the 6th Battalion proceeded on active service and, as befitted a battalion of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, earned distinction. To quote an extract from a commendation: "Though new to the area, yet they adjusted themselves to the circumstances so quickly and fought so well that they won a name for themselves. Their record is second to none."

A snowy winter was passed, and hardening up of the 6th Battalion continued under not too comfortable conditions. Amenities were limited, but every opportunity was taken to improvise games, outdoor and indoor. A band was formed, and the bandsmen, all ex-2nd Gurkha Rifles and mostly N.C.Os., made this possible by practising in their spare time.

Whether the 6/8th are in the hilltops or back in India is not disclosed, but it thrives, and the Regiment can feel proud of its junior battalion.

We left the 4th Battalion at Dehra Dun, reached after an absence of four years. Engaged on post-war reorganization and rehabilitation, it was kept busy. A change in Commanding Officers was made on 22nd February, 1948, by the appointment of Lieutenant-Colonel K. Rattan, *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel M. S. Chinwan, who took over the Regimental Centre.

An interesting innovation was the introduction of V.C. Day to commemorate the gallantry of Rifleman (now Havildar) Lachhiman Gurung. This was celebrated on 13th May, 1948, and on this occasion the presence of the 1st and 6th Battalions and Regimental Centre made it particularly notable. One British officer, Colonel D. L. Duncan, employed near Dehra, attended. His presence so near to the Regimental Centre was a link between the present and the past. His advice was always available to those who sought it.

On 2nd August, 1948, the 4th Battalion entrained for Hardwar. The duties are not for publication, but it sounds like Internal Security.

Like the other new battalions of the Regiment, the 4th continued to improve those adjuncts of a battalion which, in peace time, go so far to add to the pleasures of soldiering. Chief amongst these was the formation of a band, and the Battalion was fortunate in having in their midst two ex-bandsmen of the Regiment (now Captain Kharaksing Gurung and Subadar Dalbahadur Thapa), who spent most of their spare time training the new entries.

In returning to the 1st and 2nd Battalions for a final word, the writer does so with intent. "First in, last out." It was these, the old

battalions, that gave their traditions and personnel to the new battalions, and they had "lived" for over a century.

Not much, however, remains to be written of their activities. The 2nd returned to India from active service and resumed normal routine. The 1st came down from its summer hill station in September, 1948, and continued the activities common to all units in an Indian Cantonment.

This History is nearing its end, and there only remains to be told the story of two important units of the Regiment, without whose untiring efforts the active battalions could not have functioned. These are the Regimental Centre, still in being, and the 38th Gurkha Rifles, disbanded in 1946. To these the chapter that follows will be devoted.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### REGIMENTAL CENTRE AND 38TH GURKHA RIFLES

*The Regimental Centre*—Foreword by Major-General R. D. Inskip—Pre-Regimental Centre period—Battalion Training Companies—Expansion—Formation of Regimental Centre—Major F. H. Willasey-Wilsey, M.C., appointed Commandant—1940-1—Shillong—Splendid response to appeal for retired Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers—Band formed—Ordered to Quetta—A trying journey—1942 and new organization—1943: Strength of Centre—1944—Training devices—Boxing and athletics successes—Boys' establishment—Lieutenant-Colonel D. L. Duncan assumes command—Numbers who passed through the Centre—"Mentions"—After VJ. Day—Move to Dehra Dun—Amalgamation with 2nd G.R.R.C. as 28th G.R.R.C.—Resumes own identity as 8th G.R.R.C.—The Regimental Centre today.

THIS account is based on a comprehensive narrative written by Colonel F. H. Willasey-Wilsey, M.C., who commanded the Regimental Centre from 15th November, 1940, to February, 1945.

In a foreword to Colonel Willasey-Wilsey's narrative, Major-General R. D. Inskip, C.B., C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C., who was Inspector of Training Centres in India from 1942 to 1946, while commenting on the limitations of Quetta as a Training Centre, and paying high tribute to the zeal and efficiency of all ranks of the 8th Gurkha Rifles Training Centre, pithily summed up what these training centres, their Commanding Officers in particular, were up against, and how, by virtue of sheer grit, they overcame immense difficulties and provided the battalions in the field with a steady stream of trained reinforcements, which eventually made the defeat of the enemy a "splendid certainty." No mean achievement this, and what follows is the story of the part played by the 8th Gurkha Training Centre in bringing about this "splendid certainty."

After the First World War, when the Indian Army training battalion scheme was initiated, the question of extending this scheme to include Gurkhas was carefully considered, but in view of the fact that the numbers of Gurkhas to be obtained from Nepal were strictly limited, and in consequence, if training battalions were formed, a number of active battalions (as many as four) would have to be sacrificed, it was decided to drop the idea. In its place the "T" Company scheme was resorted to, which, though adequate to cope with Frontier expeditions between 1921 and 1939, proved to be totally inadequate when the Second World War broke out.

It should be noted here, however, that the absence of a Gurkha Training Organization largely contributed to the confusion, if not chaos, which occurred at the outbreak of the Second World War, and to which the narrative so graphically refers.

On the outbreak of war in September, 1939, the recruit companies of both the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Regiment, known as "T" Companies, with an approximate strength per company of 1 British officer, 1 Gurkha officer, 8 non-commissioned officers, some twenty to thirty recruits and a few recruit boys, were located at Shillong and Dehra Dun respectively. Arms and equipment existed for this establishment, and provided for some expansion, but were quite inadequate for any large increase in numbers.

The story of the Regimental Centre is the story of the growth of this puny infant to a giant with an over-all strength of some 6,000, and an organization and capacity to turn out hundreds of highly trained personnel per annum, to say nothing of maintaining the documents and accounts of every man in the entire Regiment, together with all pre-war Regimental and Private Funds—a vast expansion which had to be seen to be believed.

Prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, the average recruit underwent training for some nine months to a year. During this period his instruction consisted mainly of physical training, drill, fieldcraft (elementary weapon training in the rifle and light automatic only), and some elementary education. During the critical stages of the late war, training was reduced to five months, and superimposed on the pre-war basic training were such subjects as Thompson light machine gun, Sten gun, grenades (various), gas, anti-tank rifle, driving and maintenance, 2-inch mortar, 3-inch mortar, machine guns (Vickers), signalling (Wireless and R/T), and fieldcraft, embracing warfare in every theatre of operations from the desert to the jungle, and including such divergent instruction as dealing with booby traps, swimming, parachute jumping, etc.; all this with but little equipment and few weapons and, above all, with a constant shortage of instructors, not only for specialized subjects but for basic training itself.

Finally, the efficient administration of such a large and heterogeneous formation presented a formidable problem, and all there was to form a nucleus was an establishment of two Gurkha clerks (third grade) and a couple of Quartermaster Havildars, awaiting pension.

As is well known, the war came slowly to India, and it was not until June, 1940, that the Training Company of the 1st Battalion was warned to expect 450 additional recruits, and that of the 2nd Battalion (which had now arrived at Shillong) 300 recruits. No amalgamation of the two companies was ordered, and they continued to train separately

as heretofore. A British officer and some thirty Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers were dispatched from the 1st Battalion, which was in Razmak, as additional training staff, and the 2nd Battalion also provided its quota.

As recruits began to arrive in considerable numbers, conditions became difficult. Accommodation was limited, clothing and equipment was insufficient, and, worst of all, no fixed establishment was authorized.

In October, 1940, orders were received to raise the 8th Gurkha Rifles Centre (8th G.R.C.), as it was then named, with an authorized establishment of approximately that of an Indian Training Battalion. Major F. H. Willasey-Wilsey, M.C., Second-in-Command of the 1st Battalion, then at Kohat, was appointed Commandant and ordered to proceed forthwith to Shillong to raise the unit, and, on 15th November, 1940, the Centre came into being.

There was a general lack of amenities. Winter was setting in, and recruits, now appearing in hordes, were arriving in an underclothed and miserable condition, and but for the generous help of the Red Cross and local inhabitants in Shillong, a serious situation would have arisen.

In addition, the Centre, now some 1,300 strong, was sharing one set of barracks, Dudgeon Lines, with the 7/12th Frontier Force Regiment. In other words, some 2,000 men were trying to occupy space intended for about 800.

About this time orders were received that recruits were to be ready for active service in five months. Owing to the shortage of arms and equipment, every expedient was resorted to to carry out these orders. Parades began half an hour after reveille, and continued until lights out. Sundays were utilized in the same way as any other day. The supply of rifles was inadequate, and two men out of three used bamboo lathis as makeshifts; drill movements were reduced to essentials.

The 3rd Battalion, which had been raised in Shillong, left in October, 1941, and their barracks were temporarily annexed by the ever-increasing Centre. In December the 4th Battalion was also raised, and this necessitated another demand for British officers, Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers, in which the Centre was called upon to take its share; also a further congestion in accommodation.

At a conference of Centre Commanders summoned by the Army Commander in October, 1941, he reviewed the situation and stressed the important and vital part the Centres would be called upon to play as the tempo of the war increased.

Up to date (Autumn, 1941), no detailed syllabus of training had

been laid down by the Directorate of Military Training, it being considered no doubt that, as Centre Commanders had been selected for the appointments, they were best qualified to judge what was necessary. Discrepancies in training, however, began to arise, and consequently early in 1942 Centres were brought directly under the jurisdiction of the Director of Military Training, and became G.H.Q. troops.

During the winter of 1941-2 the first draft of Emergency Commissioned Officers, some twenty strong, arrived from England and commenced training.

The advent of Japan into the war, and the overrunning of Burma by May, 1942, threw an additional strain on personnel of the Centre. Air raid shelters had to be constructed. The "black out" restricted training. Defence schemes had to be prepared and rehearsed, including precautions against parachute landings, British officer reconnaissance patrols dispatched along the Indo-Burmese border, and numerous other duties of an operational character undertaken. All this retarded basic training, and there was still no appreciable increase in the scale of equipment.

Added to this acute shortage of arms and equipment, which had been present from the start, came the dearth of efficient and suitable instructors of all ranks. A personal appeal was, therefore, issued for Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers, who had retired or taken discharge to rejoin the colours. The reply was most gratifying and numbers of "grand old men," and some not so old, reported for duty from all over India and Nepal. A number whose hearts were willing, but who were not up to the requirements, had to be refused, but a very fine nucleus was obtained and proved of the greatest assistance; in fact it would not be too much to say that, without their keenness, hard work, and loyalty, to say nothing of their training ability, it would have been almost impossible for the Centre to carry on.

It was as the result of the success of this appeal to re-enlist that it was decided to raise the Regimental Band, which had been disbanded before the war. Here, too, the response was immediate, and bandsmen arrived from far and near, many of them bringing with them their instruments they had been given, or had bought, when the band had been broken up. These were bought back and formed a nucleus for expansion. It was from this small beginning that a full band came into being during the next three years. This band proved a great success, and was selected for the Victory celebrations at Delhi at the end of the war. The chief reason for its maintenance was, of course, to raise morale—it was no luxury.

The winter 1941-2 saw the collapse of the campaign in Burma.

Shillong was packed with sick and wounded, both British and Indian, and the need for hospital facilities and increased accommodation became imperative. It was decided, therefore, that the Training Centre should be moved to Quetta, and would take with it all the married establishment of the entire Regiment. Orders for the move were issued in April, 1942, and the Centre began its exacting task of preparing for this major operation of moving some thousands of recruits and a vast number of women, children and relatives, plus thousands of maunds of baggage, from one end of India to the other, at the hottest time of the year.

It was realized immediately that the main problem would be the evacuation of the families. With the influx of refugees into Shillong, causing no little panic and sending up the price of foodstuffs, it was evident that every Gurkha woman and child, not to mention elderly male relative, not only resident in the regimental lines but in all the surrounding bazaars, would endeavour, on one pretext or another, to attach themselves to the "official" families, and so it proved to be.

The move commenced in May, 1942, and was scheduled to take place in eight trains, each containing a proportion of families, baggage and recruits. A large proportion of the regular staff had already proceeded with the advance party. What remained was distributed amongst these trains, not an excessive complement to cope with a troop train loaded with a motley collection of recruits, followers, families, baggage, etc., on a journey which lasted eight days. Each train was commanded by an Emergency Commissioned Officer, a trial to any British officer, and to a young one fresh from the United Kingdom, with little knowledge of the language and customs of India, this particular operation must have been a nightmare.

The crossing of the Brahmaputra and entrainment at Pandu were an ordeal. Co-ordinated control was lacking, and this, plus the absence of railway officials, such as drivers, shunters, etc., necessary for the handling of baggage wagons, resulted in the Centre personnel having to handle wagons as and when these could be acquired.

Once Quetta was reached, however, expansion proceeded steadily throughout the remainder of 1942, but there was little improvement in the supply of arms, equipment or clothing. The organization to contend with ever-growing numbers was lacking, and the supply of trained instructional staff of all ranks was still inadequate. It was a case of improvisation in all departments, and officers and non-commissioned officers, without exception, gave of their best. Unexpected events such as (1) the replacement of some three hundred men of the 2nd Battalion captured in North Africa, (2) the formation of the 88th Company, 8th Gurkha Rifles (Divisional Defence Com-



pany), and (3) the raising of the 38th Gurkha Rifles exacting heavy calls on the limited resources of the Centre.

Towards the end of 1942 it was apparent to G.H.Q. (A.H.Q. had been redesignated early in the war) that all was not well with the Training Battalions, for a General Officer was appointed to assist the Director of Military Training Staff as Inspector of Training Centres. On appointment, the new Inspector (Major-General R. D. Inskip) made the most detailed tour of all Centres in India. Every detail and difficulty in the whole matter of recruit production was gone into, and on 1st April, 1943, a new organization came into being.

The main points in the new "Centres Organization" were briefly :

1. They were to come directly under G.H.Q.
2. They were redesignated Regimental Centres.
3. They were expanded to include a Regimental Centre Headquarters, with a number of staff and specialist British officers.
4. They were to provide a number of Training Battalions according to the strength of the Centre.
5. They were to provide a Holding Battalion for recruits' advanced training.
6. A Headquarters Wing and separate record and accounts section were to be formed for each centre.
7. The status of the Commander of each Centre was to be raised to Colonel, with a Lieutenant-Colonel as Second-in-Command.

Based on this reorganization, the Centre developed during 1943 and thereafter into an enormous and, of necessity, somewhat impersonal "sausage machine" with thousands of raw recruits pouring in one end, and thousands of "trained" men emerging from the other. Each intake of recruits was sifted on arrival, and then, or as soon after as practicable, those with more than average ability or education were earmarked for specialist training. The best were chosen as potential non-commissioned officers, and as often as not gained their first stripe within eighteen months of enlistment. By this means alone, it was possible to provide junior instructional staff and ensure a reasonable turnover with Active Battalions. A similar procedure was adopted with most "intakes" of British officers, although their retention at the Centre, naturally, for all wanted to be off to the front, was unpopular with many, and the subject of much heart burning.

During 1943 the equipment situation improved slightly, but was still much below scale. The Bren gun had been introduced to replace the Vickers Berthier, but the supply provided less than

one gun per platoon. Lathis were no longer in evidence on parade, but as yet there were only about three service rifles available for every five men. Mortars were limited to about three or four for the Centre, as was the case with most equipment, except perhaps trucks, which were adequate for the number of instructors available. Clothing was deplorable. In summer the men were dressed in grey cotton shorts and shirts known as "mazri" made from the shoddiest material, while in winter part-worn battledress, and greatcoats made from blankets, were the order of the day.

By devious means and considerable expenditure from Regimental Funds, it was found possible to provide one suit of reasonable smartness for walking out and ceremonial, and this was doubtless responsible for the reputation the Centre maintained for its "Spit and polish."

1. To take stock, about this time, in the autumn of 1943, the strength of the Regimental Centre had risen to some 6,000 Gurkha ranks. There were three Training Battalions, each of a strength of some 1,200-1,500. Companies were about 450 strong, platoons 110, but with no increase of non-commissioned officer or officer establishment beyond that of normal infantry battalions. There was one Holding Battalion, the strength of which varied in accordance with intakes of trained recruits from Training Battalions and the dispatch of drafts to Active Battalions, but it was usually about 1,000 strong.

2. The strength of British officers of the Centre fluctuated between forty and fifty, with possibly another fifty under training.

3. The establishment of boys, of which more anon, rose to 250, and they were formed into a separate company of their own.

4. Personnel for guard duties, fatigues, etc., were formed into a duty company, in strength varying between 200 and 300 men.

5. There was an "attached section" of some hundreds of leave personnel from Active Battalions, sick and wounded being rehabilitated, and the like.

6. The Headquarters Wing became a unit of formidable size with its innumerable clerks, "Q" personnel, storemen, police, sanitary section, anti-mosquito personnel, followers, band, etc.

7. As Government kukris were unobtainable, the Centre developed its own kukri industry. A large number of kukri manufacturers and other skilled artisans were imported, and within a few months it was possible to equip all drafts with weapons of the finest design and make. Considering that the only available material was scrap, such as springs from derelict motor cars and odds and ends of old metal parts, and that the workshops were converted huts with no facilities for manufacture, these craftsmen put up a fine effort which astonished visitors.

8. Last, but by no means least, was the Records and Accounts Section, with its two British Records and Accounts Officers, the clerks of all four Active Battalions, and the mass of newly enlisted talent of all shapes, sizes, and "Jats." The C.M.A.'s\* office had now largely ceased to function, hence the Records and Accounts section of the Regimental Centre had not only to maintain the pre-war funds and accounts of all the Active Battalions, but also the field service accounts relating to all effectives, non-effectives, families, etc.

The year 1944 saw a great upsurge in the war effort. Not only did equipment and arms of all kinds become available in great quantity, but the supply of efficient instructors was much improved, largely through the policy referred to earlier of training and retaining promising recruits, instead of asking Active Battalions for replacements. The number of British officers with suitable qualifications and war experience also increased considerably, and thus it was possible to decentralize both training and administration, and thereby lessen the strain which had been imposed on the few Regular officers who had formed the hard core of the establishment since its inception. The result was that not only did the general standard of training rise, but it was possible to introduce a number of devices for increasing interest and rounding off basic training, not a very easy task in country such as surrounds Quetta.

The most important of these devices were :

- (i) A jungle shooting range.
- (ii) A booby-trap course.
- (iii) A swimming bath.
- (iv) A range for assault training.
- (v) An obstacle course of diverse and novel construction.
- (vi) An information room with pictures and photographs of the enemy, their weapons, etc.

To encourage *esprit de corps* and morale as a relaxation from incessant work, competition in various sports with other units and civilians was encouraged whenever possible. Boxing in particular, as a means of inculcating many desired qualities, was given first priority, and a system of training in the finer points of its technique was adopted, which produced encouraging results. General Inskip, after watching the finals of one of the Regimental Centre's inter-unit competitions, was so impressed with what he saw, and the potentialities of the sport for the Indian Army as a whole, that he had it introduced into Regimental Centres throughout India. Without boasting, it is submitted that the successes in sport achieved by the Centre caused

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\* Controller of Military Accounts.

much interest throughout the country and, not least, to other Gurkha units, who, in the first case, were distinctly critical.

*The Statesman* of 10th March, 1944, published an account of the Centre's successes, which included the winning of the Open Novices' and Boys' Competitions in the Baluchistan Amateur Boxing Championships in 1943.

At Lahore in 1944 the Centre gained second place in the Open Competition, and Naik Lalbahadur Thapa (aged nineteen years) won the Burt "All-India" Fly-weight Championship, a distinction not previously held by a Gurkha.

Again, later in 1944 in the Punjab Championships, the Open and Novices' Team Competitions were won by the Centre.

Successes in the Sind, North of India and Indian Army Championships followed, and finally the Burt "All India" Championships were added to the list of boxing victories.

The boys of the Centre did equally well, and won the "All India" Boys' Championship at New Delhi.

*Athletics.*—A successful record in athletics was built up, and victories (in successive years) in the Baluchistan District and Baluchistan Olympic Team Championships were noteworthy achievements.

Whilst this development, along somewhat unusual lines for a Gurkha unit, was taking place, the older games of football and hockey were not neglected. Though it was difficult to build up teams owing to the constant change of personnel, they were sufficiently expert to give a good account of themselves.

At shooting the Centre did well, and competed with success at several District meetings.

#### EXPANSION OF "BOYS" ESTABLISHMENT (*vide* p. 277)

The policy of increasing the establishment of boys from 13 to 250 proved to be of value. At one time there were various objections to this. It was thought that insufficient numbers of the right type would be available, and in any case the controversy regarding the merits and demerits of "Line boys" was always to the fore. In the end a happy solution was found by taking only the pick of the boys bred in barracks, and obtaining a large number of boys aged about thirteen or fourteen from Nepal. To supplement these sources a number of boys of excellent physique and intelligence were obtained from Darjeeling and the surrounding district.

As already related, the boys were formed into a company of their own. Platoons were named after Regimental battle honours—each platoon possessed their own colours, their own boy non-commissioned

officers, and competed against each other at work and play. A system of efficiency badges was introduced, skilfully embroidered by ladies of the Regiment, which could be won for proficiency in various subjects or prowess at work and play. These were notified in Orders and presented on parade, with the result that keenness and efficiency were greatly increased.

Three weeks in the summer were usually spent in a jungle camp. Here the boys were instructed in jungle-lore, camouflage, fieldcraft, and the ability to move across country and through the jungle by day or by night. Inter-platoon exercises concluded training with, say, a platoon in Japanese uniforms operating against a Gurkha platoon, with a half-naked Naga platoon "beating up" both forces indiscriminately. It is of interest to relate that the most popular role and the most efficient work was that of the Nagas, which was the reason for introducing this novel method of bringing home to the young Gurkha that fieldcraft was elementary, and lessons taught in the army were nothing new, but merely an amplification of primitive methods and rules.

The variety of talent, latent or developed, may be gathered from the fact that one boy gained a prize for imitating the calls of some eighteen wild birds and animals with a skill which would have brought him to the front as a public entertainer. Another won a prize in an art show for free-hand sketching, whilst a third, although not gaining a prize, caused considerable alarm and despondency to the Commandant by rendering "When I grow too old to dream" on the piano.

Needless to say, the senior boys became non-commissioned officers almost as soon as they had passed their recruits' course, and the great majority became the backbone of all specialists' requirements, from W/T, R/T, 3-inch mortars, to driving and maintenance, and the Intelligence section.

It would be interesting to know what became of the younger boys who were too young to enlist as riflemen by the time the war was over.

Early in 1945, Colonel Willasey-Wilsey, who had been in command of the Centre for over four years, was relieved by Lieutenant-Colonel D. L. Duncan, on whom devolved the work of putting the machinery, built up with so much effort, into reverse, and carrying out the demobilization of all ranks.

And so to the end of the war with its VE Day, VJ Day, Thanksgiving services and Victory Parade. The Regimental Centre marched to the latter for the last time in its full strength, headed by their Band and Pipers, of which they were so proud.

The exact numbers who passed through the Centre are, at this date, impossible to arrive at, but approximately

British officers	...	...	...	...	300
Gurkha officers	...	...	...	...	300
Gurkha other ranks	...	...	...	...	13,000

were borne on its strength during the period covered by this account.

On this note Colonel Willasey-Wilsey's narrative comes to an end, and what follows is a brief editorial comment.

To the majority of those who had made it possible to turn out the efficient young front-line soldiers, without whom it would not have been possible to win the war, came little credit, honour, reward, or excitement. Theirs had been an unexciting, monotonous, and unremitting job, and when demobilization came they were the first to go, a sad thought, but by way of solace it must be remembered that some of our highest Commanders have recorded, that but for the unremitting efforts and improvisation displayed by Training Centres, the war could never have been carried to a successful conclusion. History supports this contention, and this surely provides a reward for those who gave of their best, in a difficult and essential task.

As detailed below, Colonel Willasey-Wilsey pays high tribute to his instructional staff in general. In the first place, however, Colonel Willasey-Wilsey's work as Commander deserves particular credit. It was he who raised the Centre. It was he who improvised and devised, and it was he who bore the responsibility. The story of the Centre related in this chapter is one of success, and it can be affirmed with confidence that Colonel Willasey-Wilsey played a conspicuous part in achieving this success.

The members of the instructional staff who may, with justice, be singled out were :

1. Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) F. G. C. Macartney, who served with the Centre from its inception until the end of the war, and on whom the bulk of the administration of the whole complicated organization fell.

2. Captain T. W. S. Pinder, the Quartermaster of the Centre.

3. Honorary Lieutenant (now Captain) and Subadar-Major Ganbahadur Rana, Sirdar Bahadur, O.B.I. The fine *esprit de corps* shown by all ranks was largely due to this officer's efforts.

4. Subadar Maniraj Thapa, who rejoined from retirement and commanded the duty company with conspicuous success.

5. Subadar Bahadur Gurung, O.B.I., who likewise returned from retirement, and became the mainstay and inspiration of the drill staff.

6. Havildar Mahommed Sherrif, the head armourer, who with unflinching skill kept the limited number of weapons available in working order.

7. To the large number of Emergency Commissioned Officers, of all ranks, who filled the innumerable posts in all departments of the Centre, also a great debt of gratitude is due. But for their initiative and hard work in difficult and strange surroundings, it would have been impossible for the Centre to have functioned at all, let alone to have attained, and maintained, the reputation that it did.

8. Last, but not least, must be mentioned those ladies of the Regiment, led by the Colonel's lady, Mrs. Willasey-Wilsey, who devoted themselves to the welfare of the Gurkha families. With their help and guidance, together with the devotion of Nurses Padma and Moti Kali, the Regimental Family Hospital went from strength to strength. The knowledge that their families were well cared for, and would lack nothing in sickness or trouble, was of the utmost value to the morale of all ranks, wherever Fate, and the orders of the Sirkar, decided that they should serve their King and Country.

Within a few hours after VJ Day, orders arrived for the complete transformation of the Centre. In future its main roles were to be :

1. A Demobilization Centre.
2. A Pre-Release Training Centre.
3. A Rehabilitation Centre for wounded and ex-prisoner of war personnel.

Number 1 reached a very high state of efficiency, and disposed of several hundreds of men weekly.

Number 2 consisted of training men for jobs in civil life, and courses catering for many occupations were organized by various Government establishments at Quetta, and rendered invaluable assistance.

In March and April, 1947, the Centre moved from Quetta to Dehra Dun. Not only were the barracks at Quetta required for other purposes, but an amalgamation with the 2nd Gurkha Rifles Centre ordered. This was duly carried out, and the new Centre became known as the 28th G.R.R.C., commanded by Temporary/Colonel H. F. C. Armstrong, 2nd Gurkha Rifles. Under his command were two wings, one of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles Training Battalion, and one of the 8th Gurkha Rifles Training Battalion, the 8th Training Battalion being commanded by Temporary/Lieutenant-Colonel R. R. C. Wall. In view of this new departure, Colonel D. L. Duncan proceeded on leave pending retirement after thirty-two years' service. He had done much for the Regiment, and his departure, followed shortly by his sad death, were matters of deep regret.

The amalgamation with the 2nd Gurkha Rifles was short-lived, and in August, 1947, the Centre resumed its own identity under the

command of Lieutenant-Colonel R. R. C. Wall, who handed over to Lieutenant-Colonel M. S. Chinwan. The remaining British officers were either transferred to the British Brigade of Gurkhas or left for the United Kingdom during the winter of 1947-8.

The 8th Gurkha Training Centre still functions at Dehra Dun, and forms an indispensable part of the Regiment, especially in view of its expansion to five Active Battalions.

### 38TH GURKHA RIFLES

**Formation of 38th Gurkha Rifles—First Commanding Officer and Subadar-Major—Join 115th Indian Infantry Brigade—Preparations to receive Trainees—Organization—Numbers greatly increased—Assam Regiment—38th Gurkha Rifles crest—Training system outlined—Training of British officers, Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers—Ammunition expenditure—Amenities—Donations to 8th G.R.R.C.—Disbandment—Thanks of C.-in-C., India—Figures of postings.**

And now to give a brief account of the work done by the second of our training units, the 38th Gurkha Rifles.

In 1943 battalions were formed to take over from Regimental Centres the post-basic (last stage of recruit training) of young soldiers. In the Gurkha Brigade, one training unit was intended to serve the two regiments of each group. Hence the forming of the "38th" to serve both the 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles and the 8th Gurkha Rifles.

On 15th August, 1943, in the lines of the 3rd Gurkha Rifles Regimental Centre at Dehra Dun, the 38th Gurkha Rifles commenced life under its first Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel W. R. J. Spittle, 8th Gurkha Rifles. The first and only Subadar-Major was Subadar-Major Bahadur Thapa, Bahadur, 3rd Gurkha Rifles, who did yeoman work from first to last, and was, in 1946, awarded the M.B.E.

In September, 1943, the Battalion moved to a camp fifteen miles from Dehra Dun on the Dehra Dun-Saharanpur road. Here it joined the 115th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 39th Indian Division, which, an all Gurkha Brigade, consisted of the 14th, 56th, 7/10th Gurkha Rifles besides the 38th Gurkha Rifles.

After some three months of preparing the camp area, and themselves, to receive the first drafts of young soldiers, training commenced. The trainees were received by a unit whose organization closely resembled that of an ordinary infantry battalion. Hardly an ideal organization for this particular job, but largely governed by the fact that, in an emergency, this 39th Indian Division (Training) would be converted into an infantry division for active operations.

The 38th Gurkha Rifles consisted of :

Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company.



Specialist Company of four platoons—to train signallers, 3-inch mortar numbers, transport, M.M.G. and pioneer sections.

Four training companies, each of four platoons, divided into four sections each of ten men. Two of these companies dealt with 3rd Gurkha Rifles and two with 8th Gurkha Rifles men.

A Holding Company in which was included a drafting section.

After two months in the Training Company, trainees went on to the Holding Company for one month's "polish," eventually finishing in the drafting section awaiting drafting orders.

Casualty rate in the field was, fortunately, far from being as high as estimated, but despite this fortunate state of affairs it produced a serious problem for these Training Battalions. Holding Companies were increased to two, and training periods extended. Numbers awaiting drafting rose, and at one time numbered over 1,500. No extra staff was allowed, so efficiency suffered. It is only fair to the Training Battalions to place this on record. This indefinite "hanging about," during which instruction was inadequate, plus delays, amounting to months in some cases, in reaching Active Battalions was the reason very often for the criticism levelled by Commanding Officers in the field at the standard of young soldier reinforcements.

In this connection it is of interest to reproduce an extract from the Parade State for 1st May, 1945, when the Battalion was almost at its strongest.

	<i>B.Os.</i>	<i>G.Os.</i>	<i>Havildars</i>	<i>Naiks</i>	<i>G.O.Rs.</i>	<i>Total</i>
Staff ...	15	36	101	121	232	505
Trainees ...	23	22	54	39	2130	2268
<b>Totals ...</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>2362</b>	<b>2773</b>

In August, 1944, the 38th Gurkha Rifles was augmented by the arrival of trainees of the Assam Regiment. These were formed into one composite company, with two training platoons and one holding platoon. Old enemies in Nagas, Lushais and Kukis trained with Gurkhas, and, apart from the language difficulty, soon became assimilated in friendly intercourse.

With the coming of the Assam Regiment a crest was designed to commemorate the fusion of the three regiments. It combined the crossed "A"s of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra's personal cypher with the crossed kukris of the 8th, the whole superimposed on a Dao to represent the Assam Regiment.

Training was organized and run generally by a training Major,

selected from one of the Company Commanders. It can be imagined his task was no light one, as, in addition to the ordinary training (the object of which was to fit the young soldier to take his place in the section in his battalion immediately on arrival in the field, and in contact with the enemy), the problems attending field firing in a small area required constant attention. Emphasis was placed on jungle fighting and for this the area of the regimental camp was well suited. Battle "inoculation" was incorporated in as many exercises as possible. The young soldier was taught to use his weapons in the jungle, and to know the right weapon for each situation. Finally, in the Holding Company, after more advanced exercises and toughening, the trainee was sent out on a four-day patrol, in which his behaviour in an enemy country was observed, and in which he gained valuable experience of living on the country.

So much for the training of the riflemen. For the training of British officers, Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers who began to come to the Regiment in large numbers there was no staff available, nor was the organization and equipment intended for this purpose. However, what could be done to help was done. In 1945 a Brigade Officers' Training Wing was organized to train young British officers, and did good work.

Without divulging the secrets of the Quartermaster's ledgers, it may be said that the average daily expenditure of ammunition, .303, grenades and mortar, was very large. With so much firing taking place, under conditions which peace-time safety precautions would not have tolerated, it is remarkable how very few were the casualties sustained in training.

To turn from training to amenities. These were improvised, of course, and became a source of pride to the 38th Gurkha Rifles. A swimming bath, football, basket-ball and volley-ball grounds were made (necessitating clearing forest land and hewing out roots of trees). Three Institutes, consisting of recreation rooms, tea rooms, canteens and contractors' shops, were formed. Company gardens produced welcome additions to the rations. An Information Room, showing maps of operations in the various theatres, was provided and furnished with weapons, model aeroplanes, types of bombs, etc., and organized by the Education Officer.

With the end of the war, activities turned from training to education, and the Information Room was transformed from being an "engine of war" to a Bureau of Information dealing with subjects like release and mustering-out terms, pensions and so on. Such an institution has much to commend it as a permanent part of every unit's amenities at all times.

From the credit balances of funds, the Regiment was able to

send Rs5915.1.6 to the Regimental Centre to be used for the benefit of the 8th Gurkha Rifles and thus provide a memento of the 38th Gurkha Rifles. In addition, the Brigade Commander (Brigadier J. F. Marrindin, D.S.O.) was able to send from the Brigade a sum of Rs2500 (raised by the sale of wood used in the construction of the camp) to the recruiting officer for Gurkhas for improvements at the Gurkha Recruiting Depot at Gorakhpur.

The time for disbandment was approaching, and by the end of February, 1946, only Headquarters staff and those required for guards and duties remained. A Special Brigade Order was published on 19th February, 1946, thanking all concerned for an arduous task well done and the thanks, too, of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief in India was received.

It is pleasant to place on record here appreciation of the work done by the Training Battalion in the Second World War.

Space will not admit of the inclusion of the names of all those deserving of mention for work done by the 38th Gurkha Rifles, but those of the successive Commandants, Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Clarke, O.B.E., M.C., and Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Yeates, D.S.O., must not be omitted.

Finally, a record of the numbers of all ranks who passed through the 38th Gurkha Rifles show what was achieved.

Total of all ranks of the three regiments—6,161.

#### 8TH GURKHA RIFLES—POSTINGS

	<i>British Officers</i>	<i>Gurkha Officers</i>	<i>Gurkha Other Ranks</i>	<i>Non-Combatant Establishment</i>	<i>Total</i>
1st Battalion ... ..	14	4	507	20	545
2nd Battalion ... ..	9	6	510	17	542
3rd Battalion ... ..	8	13	424	18	463
4th Battalion ... ..	14	3	563	16	596
Paratroops ... ..	5	—	113	—	118
Other Units ... ..	9	—	95	3	107
<b>REGIMENTAL CENTRE—</b>					
For release ... ..	—	19	625	3	647
For further service	—	3	153	4	160
<b>Total ... ..</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>2,990</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>3,178</b>





William George Cubitt, V.C.



Richard Kirby Ridgeway, V.C.



John Duncan Grant, V.C.



Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung, V.C.

## APPENDIX I

### HONOURS AND AWARDS

EARNED BY ALL RANKS WHEN EITHER ON THE CADRE OR SERVING WITH  
THE REGIMENT, ACCORDING TO RECORDS AVAILABLE.

<i>Honour or Award</i>	<i>Number gained</i>	<i>Honour or Award</i>	<i>Number Gained</i>
Victoria Cross (Citations appended)	4	I.O.M. ... ..	91
G.C.B. ... ..	1	I.D.S.M. ... ..	55
K.C.B. ... ..	2	M.M. ... ..	70
C.B. ... ..	8	M.M. and Bar ... ..	1
C.M.G. ... ..	1	O.B.I. ... ..	17
C.I.E. ... ..	2	*Mentioned in Despatches	186
D.S.O. ... ..	17	Gallantry Certificates ...	14
D.S.O. and Bar ... ..	3	I.M.S.M. ... ..	50
O.B.E. ... ..	10	Foreign ... ..	9
M.B.E. ... ..	8	Other decorations—	
M.C. ... ..	47	Dharamsala Earthquake	15
M.C. and Bar ... ..	5	Quetta Earthquake ...	4

### VICTORIA CROSS

#### WILLIAM GEORGE CUBITT

William George Cubitt commanded the 43rd Gurkha Light Infantry (2/8th Gurkha Rifles) from 12th August, 1881, to 12th August, 1888. Defence of Residency, Lucknow. Awarded the V.C. for saving the lives of three men of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (32nd) during the retreat after Chinhut (*London Gazette*, 2nd June, 1859). Wounded—Despatches.

#### RICHARD KIRBY RIDGEWAY

Richard Kirby Ridgeway commanded the 44th Gurkha Rifles (1/8th Gurkha Rifles), 1891-1895. Awarded the V.C. for most conspicuous gallantry throughout the attack on Khonoma on 22nd September, 1879, more especially in the final assault, when, under a heavy fire from the enemy, he rushed up to a barricade and attempted to tear

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\* Probably many others which now cannot be traced.

down the planking surrounding it, to enable him to effect an entrance, in which act he received severe rifle-shot wounds in the left shoulder.

#### JOHN DUNCAN GRANT

John Duncan Grant joined 44th Gurkha Rifles (1/8th Gurkha Rifles) in 1900, with whom he served until 1st February, 1921, when he was transferred to the 10th Gurkha Rifles. In the Tibet campaign he was awarded the V.C. (*London Gazette*, 21st January, 1905).

On the occasion of the storming of the Gyantse Jong on 6th July, 1904, the storming company, headed by Lieutenant Grant, on emerging from the cover of the village, had to advance up a bare, almost precipitous rock face, with little or no cover available, and under a heavy fire from the curtain, flanking towers on both sides of the curtain, and other buildings higher up the Jong. Showers of rock and stones were at the same time being hurled down the hillside by the enemy. One man could only go up at a time, crawling on hands and knees, to the breach in the curtain. Lieutenant Grant, followed by Havildar Karbir Pun, 8th Gurkha Rifles, at once attempted to scale it, but on reaching near the top he was wounded and hurled back, as was also the havildar, who fell down the rock some thirty feet. Regardless of their injuries, they again attempted to scale the breach and, covered by the fire of the men below, were successful in their object, the havildar shooting one of the enemy on gaining the top. The successful issue of the assault was greatly due to the splendid example shown by Lieutenant Grant and Havildar Karbir Pun. The latter was awarded the Indian Order of Merit.

#### 87726 RIFLEMAN LACHHIMAN GURUNG, 4/8TH GURKHA RIFLES Awarded V.C. for most conspicuous gallantry.

At Taungdaw in Burma, on the west bank of the Irrawaddy, on the night of 12th/13th May, 1945, Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung was manning the most forward post of his platoon. At 0120 hours at least two hundred enemy assaulted the company's position. The brunt of the attack was borne by Lachhiman Gurung's section, and by his own post in particular. This post dominated a jungle path leading up into the platoon locality. Before assaulting, the enemy hurled innumerable grenades at the position from close range. One grenade fell on the lip of Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung's trench. He at once grasped it, and hurled it back at the enemy. Almost immediately another grenade fell directly inside the trench, and again this Rifleman snatched it up and threw it back. A third grenade then fell just in front of the trench. He attempted to throw it back, but it exploded in his hand, blowing off the fingers, shattering his right arm, and

severely wounding him in the face, body and right leg. His two comrades were also badly wounded, and lay helpless in the bottom of the trench. The enemy, screaming and shouting, now formed up shoulder to shoulder and attempted to rush the position by sheer weight of numbers. Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung, regardless of his wounds, loaded and fired his rifle with his left hand, maintaining a continuous rate of fire. Wave after wave of fanatical attacks were thrown in by the enemy, but all were repulsed with heavy casualties. For four hours after being severely wounded, Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung remained alone awaiting with perfect calm each attack, meeting it with fire at point blank range from his rifle, determined not to give one inch of ground. Of 87 enemy dead counted in the immediate vicinity of the company's locality, 31 lay in front of this Rifleman's section, the key to the whole position. Had the enemy succeeded in overrunning and occupying Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung's trench, the whole of the reverse slope position would have been completely dominated and turned. This Rifleman, by his magnificent example, so inspired his comrades to resist the enemy to the last that, although surrounded and cut off for three days and two nights, they held and smashed every attack. His gallant and extreme devotion to duty in the face of almost overwhelming odds were the main factors in the defeat of the enemy.



## APPENDIX II

### FIRST COMMANDANTS

#### *Colonels*

**CAPTAIN PATRICK DUDGEON (1789-1825).** First Commandant, Sylhet Local Battalion (1st Battalion).

Patrick Dudgeon was born in County Haddington, Scotland, 27th June, 1789; joined the Honourable East India Company's service as cadet in 1804, arriving in India, February, 1805. Posted to 1/10th Native Infantry. Saw service, Haryana, 1809; Bhawani; capture of Java, 1811; Palembang, 1812. Commanded 1st Narbada Sebundy Corps, 1821-1824, and raised our 1st Battalion as Sylhet Local Battalion on 19th February, 1824, commanding it until his death in Calcutta on 5th October, 1825.

There is a monumental inscription in S. Park Street cemetery, Calcutta, to this officer.

(His mother was a Marion Yule, whose two brothers served in the Bengal Lancers—a family with a distinguished record of service to India.)

**CAPTAIN WILLIAM SIMONDS (1786-1865).** First Commandant, Assam Sebundy Corps (2nd Battalion).

William Simonds, the second son of James Simonds, was born at the family home at Wigton, Cumberland, in 1786.

After completing his early education in England, he joined the service of the Honourable East India Company, and arrived in India during the latter part of the year 1800. On arrival in India he studied at the Cadet College at Baraset, where Honourable East India Company cadets took their first training in the art of war.

From Baraset he joined 2nd Battalion Native Infantry and was engaged with them in actions against Holkar and Scindia in 1803 under General Lord Lake. He was present at the affair, with the column under Colonel Monson, in the Mokund Pass (9th July) against the whole force of Holkar, which was beaten back after a fierce contest of seven hours' hard fighting. On 25th July, after a march of thirty-six miles, he assisted in cutting off a convoy of provisions for Holkar's army near Kooshalgurh. Shortly after this action, being



**General Sir Horace M. Evans,  
K.C.B., Colonel, 8th Gurkha Rifles,  
1904-23**



**Captain William Simonds, raised  
2nd Battalion**



**General Sir John F. S. Coleridge,  
G.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Colonel  
of the Regiment, 1925-49**



overpowered by Holkar's whole force which had received strong reinforcements, Monson had to retire on Agra. In the engagements during this retirement the Company's troops under Monson lost 27 officers—nearly half their number.

William Simonds was also present at the infantry affair under General Fraser below the battlements of Deig, on 13th November, 1804, where eighty-seven pieces of heavy ordnance were captured from the enemy.

He was also present at the siege of Bhurtpoor in March and April, 1805, where he received a shell wound in the right shoulder whilst in the advanced position. He saw service in the Nepal War of 1816.

For these actions William Simonds received the Indian Medal (1799-1826) with the two clasps "Nepaul" and "Bhurtpoor."

In 1811, being on escort duty with Lord Minto (Viceroy), the latter, finding him useful, placed him on his staff as A.D.C., and from this appointment he was posted as Governor-General's Agent in Assam.

After transfer to 21st Native Infantry, May, 1824, he commanded the Arakan Local Battalion (formerly known as Magh Sebundy Corps), before raising the Assam Sebundy Corps (2nd Battalion).

It is interesting to note that his record shows him as Commandant of the latter Corps with date 16th March, 1835, though the official date of the 2nd Battalion being raised is 13th April, 1835.

He was invalided in September, 1841, and died in London, 4th October, 1865, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

(His wife was a member of the Angelo family, of whom many have served India with distinction.)

### *Colonels of the Regiment*

GENERAL SIR HORACE M. EVANS, K.C.B., Colonel, 8th Gurkha Rifles, 1904-1923.

General Sir Horace M. Evans, first Colonel of the Regiment, was born in London on 8th December, 1841.

He was appointed an Ensign in the Honourable East India Company's service on 28th June, 1858, at the age of sixteen and a half years.

He was appointed in succession to the 77th Foot (now 2nd Battalion Middlesex Regiment), 6th Bengal European Infantry, and 104th Foot (later 2nd Battalion Royal Munster Fusiliers), of which he was Adjutant for three and a half years, until posted to the 41st Native Infantry.

On 25th February, 1871, he joined the 43rd Assam Light Infantry

(2nd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles), with which he served until 31st March, 1894, being Commandant from 12th August, 1888, to 31st March, 1894.

After vacating command of the 43rd he was promoted Major-General and given command of the Allahabad Brigade. Later he officiated in command of the Lahore Division. He went to the unemployed Supernumerary List in 1899, being promoted to General in due course.

General Evans served in the Daphla Expedition, 1874-5; Naga Hills, 1879-80; Lushai Expedition, 1891; and Manipur. In all these he was mentioned in despatches, and awarded Lieutenant-Colonelcy in 1881.

The C.B. was awarded to him in 1894, and K.C.B. in 1910. Details of his Commission are as under, and it will be a matter of interest to the present generation to read the form of commission granted to our predecessors of the Victorian and John Company era.

His Excellency The Right Honorable COLIN Lord CLYDE, Grand Cross of The Most Honorable Military Order Of The Bath, General of Her Majesty's Forces, Commander-in-Chief of all the Queen's and Company's Forces in the East Indies, &c. &c. &c.

To Horace Moule Evans, Gentleman Ensign in the service of the East India Company.

By Virtue of the Power and Authority in me vested by Her Majesty, and reposing especial Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty, Courage and good Conduct, I do hereby constitute and appoint you the said

*Horace Moule Evans*

to hold the Rank of Ensign in the Queen's Army, in the East Indies, and in any other part of Her Majesty's Dominions or elsewhere, when employed on Military duty or on Furlough, and to take Rank as such from the.....Day of.....

But as this Commission is granted to you in Virtue of the Rank which you bear in the Service of the Honorable East India Company, it is to have Force and Effect no longer than you shall remain in the said Company's Service, unless you shall be transferred with similar Rank into the immediate Service of Her Majesty. You are therefore carefully and diligently to Discharge the Duty of an Ensign by doing and performing all and all manner of Things thereunto belonging; And I do hereby Command all Officers and Soldiers whom it may concern to acknowledge and obey you as an Ensign in the Queen's Army, in the East Indies and elsewhere as aforesaid. And you are to observe and follow such Orders and Directions,

from time to time, as you shall receive from Her Majesty, or any other Superior Officer, according to the Rules and Discipline of War, in pursuance of the Trust hereby reposed in you.

Given under my Hand and Seal at Simla in Bengal, this 24th Day of September in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty nine in the Twenty Third Year of Her Majesty's Reign.

By His Excellency's command,

SI STERLING, *Colonel,*  
*Military Secretary,*  
*East Indies.*

CLYDE, *General,*  
*Commander-in-Chief,*  
*East Indies.*

GENERAL SIR JOHN FRANCIS STANHOPE COLERIDGE, G.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Colonel of the Regiment from 1925 to 1949.

General Sir John Coleridge joined the army (Unattached List) in 1898, and was posted to the 44th Gurkha Rifles (now 1/8th Gurkha Rifles) in 1900, in which he served continuously during his regimental soldiering.

His war services include :

Tibet, 1903-4 : Medal and clasp.

North-East Frontier, 1911-12: Medal and clasp—Despatches.

World War I, 1914-1918 : In addition to the 1914-15 Star, General Service and Victory medals, he was awarded the C.M.G., D.S.O. and Bar. He was promoted to brevet Lieutenant-Colonel and brevet Colonel. Despatches.

North-West Frontier, 1930-1932 : Clasp—Despatches.

North-West Frontier, 1936-1940 : Medal and clasp—  
Despatches.

His principal staff and command appointments were :

Adjutant, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles, 1907-1911.

Command of an Infantry Brigade, 1917-8.

General Staff, A.H.Q., India, 1919-1923.

Assistant Commandant, Staff College, Quetta, 1923-1925.

Military Secretary, A.H.Q., India, 1926-1930.

Commander, Kohat district, 1930.

Commander, Peshawar district, 1930-1933.

Secretary, Military Department, India Office, 1933-1936.

G.O.C.-in-C., Northern Command, India, 1936-1940.

He was promoted Major-General in 1925, Lieutenant-General in 1933, General in 1936 and was A.D.C. General to His Majesty The King, 1936-1940.

General Sir John Coleridge was awarded the C.B. in 1921, K.C.B. in 1933, G.C.B. in 1940 on retirement.

He was Colonel of 2nd Battalion 1st Punjab Regiment, 1932-1947, and Honorary Colonel, 7th Battalion Devonshire Regiment, 1941-1946. Since retirement General Coleridge was employed on Army Welfare, 1941-1949, and was a Trustee (India Office representative) of the Imperial War Museum, 1943-1949.

#### MAJOR-GENERAL DAVID ROBERTSON

Major-General David Robertson was first Commissioned 20th January, 1861. General List Infantry. Joined 44th Sylhet Light Infantry (1/8th Gurkha Rifles), 13th July, 1865. Commanded 44th Sylhet Light Infantry, 30th November, 1883 to 31st December, 1890. Colonel, 1/8th Gurkha Rifles, 1904-1913. Promoted Major-General 1894.

War services :

Bhutan, 1865-6 : Medal and clasp.

Lushai, 1871-2 : Despatches, clasp, brevet Major.

Naga hills, 1879-1880 : Clasp.

Burma, 1886-7 : Clasp.

Died in 1913.

#### LIEUTENANT-GENERAL FREDERICK GEORGE LISTER (1790-1870)

The name of one described as "the Father" of the 1st Battalion has been frequently mentioned in the course of this History; it is fitting therefore that his services should be recorded in this Appendix.

Lieutenant-General Frederick George Lister was born in London on 1st January, 1790; was appointed a cadet in H.E.I.C.S. in 1805, and arrived in India, 11th July, 1806. Was posted, firstly, to 26th Native Infantry, with whom he saw service in the Nepal War, 1814-5, and the Third Mahratta War. In this latter he was mentioned in the *London Gazette* of 20th January, 1821, for services with the storming party at Satanwarra. Transferred to 52nd Native Infantry (late 2/26th) in May, 1824, he took part in the first Burma War. He was appointed acting Second-in-Command, Sylhet Local Battalion (our 1st Battalion), in January, 1825. Thereafter, until he left this battalion in 1854, his services are described in this history. After leaving the Sylhet Light Infantry (as 1st Battalion was then named) in July, 1854, Lieutenant-Colonel Lister was posted as Colonel to 31st Native Infantry, 13th April, 1855. He was promoted Major-General, 22nd August, 1857, and Lieutenant-General, 23rd August, 1869. He was Colonel, 2nd Bengal Native (Light) Infantry (late 31st Native Infantry), May, 1861, until 1869. He died at St. Helier, Jersey, 28th February, 1870.

## APPENDIX III

### LIST OF COMMANDING OFFICERS

NOTES.—(1) Ranks given are those shown on appointment as Commandant.  
 (2) Decorations shown were earned before or during Command period.  
 (3) In some cases actual dates of appointment and completion are not available.

#### *1st Battalion*

- |  |                |     |  |
|--|----------------|-----|--|
| 1. P. DUDGEON, Captain                                   | ...            | ... | 19. 2.1824— 6.10.1825  |
| 2. T. C. WATSON, Captain                                 | ...            | ... | 7.10.1825—13. 3.1828   |
| 3. F. G. LISTER, Captain                                 | ...            | ... | 14. 3.1828—17. 7.1854  |
| 4. R. B. P. BYNG, Captain                                | The Honourable |     | 18. 7.1854—25.12.1857<br>(Killed in action)                                      |
| 5. W. RICHARDSON, C.B., Major                            | ...            |     | 26. 1.1858— 5.10.1866  |
| 6. W. J. HICKS, Lieut.-Colonel                           | ...            |     | 6.10.1866— 3. 5.1872   |
| 7. J. M. NUTTALL, C.B., Lieut.-Colonel                   |                |     | 21. 2.1873— 5. 3.1880  |
| 8. T. N. WALKER, Lieut.-Colonel                          | ...            |     | 6. 3.1880—15. 8.1881   |
| 9. F. F. ROWCROFT, Lieut.-Colonel                        | ...            |     | 16. 8.1881—29.11.1883  |
| 10. D. ROBERTSON, Lieut.-Colonel                         | ...            |     | 30.11.1883—31.12.1890  |
| 11. D. G. RIDGEWAY, V.C., Lieut.-Colonel                 |                |     | 1. 1.1891—28. 4.1895   |
| 12. E. H. MOLESWORTH, Lieut.-Colonel                     |                |     | 29. 4.1895—30. 3.1902  |
| 13. M. A. KERR, C.B., Lieut.-Colonel                     | ...            |     | 31. 3.1902— 4. 6.1909  |
| 14. F. MURRAY, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel                    |                |     | 5. 6.1909— 4. 6.1914   |
| 15. J. A. WILSON, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel                 |                |     | 5. 6.1914—31. 3.1917   |
| 16. I. U. BATTYE, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel<br>(The Guides) |                |     | 7. 7.1917— 6. 8.1921<br>(Officiated whilst commanding in the field and in India) |
| 17. C. A. ROOSMALE - COCQ, Lieut.-Colonel                |                |     | 2. 9.1917— 1. 7.1919<br>(Depot Command in India)                                 |
| 18. C. G. STANSFIELD, O.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel             |                |     | 13. 8.1918— 1.10.1923<br>(Seconded for portion of command)                       |
| 19. D. W. MAXWELL, Lieut.-Colonel                        | ...            |     | 2.10.1923—31. 1.1925<br>(from Kumaon Rifles)                                     |
| 20. A. L. M. MOLESWORTH, C.I.E., Lieut.-Colonel          |                |     | 1. 2.1925—31. 1.1929   |



21. G. C. B. BUCKLAND, D.S.O., M.C. Lieut.-Colonel	1. 2.1929—22.10.1932
22. H. R. HARINGTON, Lieut.-Colonel ...	23.10.1932— 1.11.1936
23. J. B. SCOTT, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel ...	2.11.1936— 2. 9.1939
24. E. W. LANGLANDS, Lieut.-Colonel ...	3. 9.1939— 6.1942
25. C. B. LEWIS, O.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel (1st Gurkha Rifles)	9.1942— 5.10.1943
26. A. DE B. MORRIS, D.S.O., Lieut.- Colonel	6.10.1943—23. 3.1945
27. T. A. MASSIE, Lieut.-Colonel ...	24. 3.1945— 9. 2.1947
28. M. E. OVANS, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel	7. 8.1947—28. 9.1947
29. N. C. RAWLLEY, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel	31. 1.1948—13.12.1948
30. KUSHALSING THAPA, Lieut.-Colonel	3. 1.1949—To date

### *2nd Battalion*

1. W. SIMONDS, Captain ... ..	13. 4.1835—21. 9.1841
2. T. FISHER, Captain ... ..	22. 9.1841—24. 7.1847
3. H. FOQUETT, Major ... ..	18. 8.1847— 3.11.1854
4. R. CAMPBELL, Captain ... ..	4.11.1854—10. 3.1865
5. R. G. MAYNE, Major ... ..	11. 3.1865—18. 9.1865
6. S. B. COOKSON, Major ... ..	6.10.1865— 9. 4.1872
7. C. D. S. CLARKE, Major ... ..	10. 4.1872—11. 9.1875
8. A. POND, Lieut.-Colonel ... ..	12. 9.1875— 5. 8.1879
9. A. TULLOCK, Lieut.-Colonel ... ..	6. 8.1879—12. 8.1881
10. W. G. CUBITT, V.C., D.S.O., Lieut.- Colonel	13. 8.1881—12. 8.1888
11. H. M. EVANS, Lieut.-Colonel ...	13. 8.1888—31. 3.1894
12. A. L. BARRETT, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	1. 4.1894— 7. 3.1900
13. W. COOK, Lieut.-Colonel ... ..	5. 6.1900— 4. 6.1902
14. J. W. COWLEY, Lieut.-Colonel ...	5. 6.1902— 4. 6.1909
15. C. H. CLAY, Lieut.-Colonel ... ..	5. 6.1909—31. 3.1914
16. G. M. MORRIS, Lieut.-Colonel ...	1. 4.1914—26. 9.1915 (Killed in action)
17. E. H. SWEET, C.M.G., D.S.O., Lieut.- Colonel	2.10.1915—14. 4.1916
18. R. A. FIRTH, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	30. 4.1916—29. 7.1918
19. A. C. WALL, O.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel	30. 7.1918—29. 7.1922
20. D. H. R. GIFFARD, Lieut.-Colonel ...	30. 7.1922—28. 4.1927
21. C. D. ROE, D.S.O., O.B.E., Lieut.- Colonel	29. 4.1927—28. 4.1931
22. H. J. HUXFORD, O.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel	29. 4.1931—28. 4.1935
23. G. A. P. SCOONES, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., Lieut.-Colonel	29. 4.1935—28. 4.1938

24. H. S. GORDON, O.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel	29. 4.1938—14. 3.1941
25. F. D. CLARKE, O.B.E., M.C. Lieut.-Colonel	15. 3.1941—25.12.1943
26. C. W. YEATES, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	26.12.1943—11. 1.1945
27. R. P. T. MCGILL, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	12. 1.1945—26.12.1946
28. F. G. C. MACARTNEY, Lieut.-Colonel	27.12.1946— 6. 9.1947
29. W. R. J. SPITTLE, Lieut.-Colonel ...	7. 9.1947—31.12.1947
30. H. S. PARAB, Lieut.-Colonel ...	1. 1.1948—22. 4.1949
31. N. K. CHATTERJI, Lieut.-Colonel ...	11. 6.1949—12. 9.1949
32. G. W. R. FIRTH, Lieut.-Colonel ...	13. 9.1949—To date

### *3rd Battalion*

1. J. A. WILSON, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	7.1917—30. 5.1918
2. D. H. R. GIFFARD, Lieut.-Colonel ...	31. 5.1918— 8.1921
(Battalion disbanded)	
(Battalion re-raised)	
1. D. L. DUNCAN, Lieut.-Colonel ...	1.10.1940—14.12.1942
2. V. L. MISSELBROOK, M.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel (1st Gurkha Rifles)	15.12.1942—13. 3.1944
3. E. V. WHITEHEAD, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	14. 3.1944— 1. 3.1945
	(Killed in action)
4. M. E. OVANS, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel	2. 3.1945—19. 5.1945
5. E. T. HORSFORD, Major ... ..	11. 6.1945—12. 8.1945
6. E. H. RUSSEL, Lieut.-Colonel ...	13. 8.1945—to
	disbandment

### *4th Battalion*

1. F. D. CLARKE, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel	15. 3.1941— 4.1941
2. H. S. GORDON, O.B.E., Lieut.-Colonel	4.1941— 2.1942
3. J. H. D. GARDNER, Lieut.-Colonel ...	2.1942— 5.1943
4. C. W. YEATES, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	18. 6.1943—28.11.1943
5. W. R. J. SPITTLE, Lieut.-Colonel ...	29.11.1943—28. 1.1944
6. G. TWISS, Lieut.-Colonel ... ..	29. 1.1944—18. 3.1944
	(Killed in action)
7. N. D. WINGROVE, Lieut.-Colonel ...	5. 4.1944—24.11.1944
	(10th Gurkha Rifles)
*8. W. C. WALKER, D.S.O., Lieut.-Colonel	25.11.1944—15.12.1947
9. M. S. CHINWAN, Lieut.-Colonel ...	16.12.1947—22. 2.1948
10. KEWAL RATTAN, Lieut.-Colonel ...	25. 2.1948— 6. 9.1949
11. W. S. NENE, Lieut.-Colonel ...	7. 9.1949—To date

\* During absences of Lieut.-Colonel W. C. WALKER on a Staff Appointment, the Battalion was commanded by

C. E. WATSON-SMYTHE, Lieut.-Colonel	6.1945— 10.1945
G. BULL, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel ...	25.12.1945—14.12.1947

### *5th Battalion*

1. N. K. CHATTERJI, Lieut.-Colonel ... 11.12.1947—20. 5.1949
2. D. P. GIMI, Lieut.-Colonel ... 4. 8.1949—To date

### *6th Battalion*

1. J. D. NADIRSHAW, Lieut.-Colonel ... 25. 2.1948—19. 8.1950
2. P. K. BANNERJI, Lieut.-Colonel ... 20. 8.1950—To date

### *Regimental Centre*

1. F. H. WILLASEY-WILSEY, M.C., Major 15.11.1940—13. 2.1945
2. D. L. DUNCAN, Lieut.-Colonel ... 18. 2.1945—31. 5.1947
3. R. R. C. WALL, Lieut.-Colonel ... 1. 6.1947—31.10.1947
4. P. C. GUPTA, M.C., Lieut.-Colonel... 1.11.1947—22. 2.1948
5. M. S. CHINWAN, Lieut.-Colonel ... 23. 2.1948— 7. 8.1949
6. N. K. CHATTERJI, Lieut.-Colonel ... 24. 9.1949— 7. 9.1950
7. J. D. NADIRSHAW, Lieut.-Colonel ... 8. 9.1950—To date

## APPENDIX IV

### LIST OF SUBADAR-MAJORS

*Army Lists show this rank from 1870 only.*

Actual dates of assuming and vacating not always available.

#### *1st Battalion*

1. KURRUGSING RANA, Sardar Bahadur, I.O.M.	1. 5.1870—22.11.1879
2. MAHABOOLA KHAN, I.O.M. ... ..	23.11.1879— 9. 7.1887
3. GOORDYALSING, Bahadur ... ..	10. 7.1887—28. 2.1890
4. KALOO THAPA, Bahadur (Hon. Captain)	1. 3.1890— 5. 2.1897
5. BAKHANSING THAKUR, Sardar Bahadur, I.O.M.	6. 2.1897—29.10.1900
6. KABIRAJ KARKI, O.B.I., I.O.M. ...	30.10.1900—17. 3.1907
7. NAWALSING RANA, O.B.I., I.O.M. ...	18. 3.1907—31. 5.1912
8. RUKHMAN SAHI, Bahadur, O.B.I. ...	1. 6.1912—31. 7.1920
9. PARBIR THAPA ... ..	1. 8.1920—15. 2.1922
10. KHARAKSING THAPA, Bahadur, M.C., I.D.S.M. (Hon. Lieutenant)	16. 2.1922— 7.11.1927
11. KHARAKBAHADUR RANA, I.D.S.M. ...	8.11.1927— 8.11.1932
12. BHAWANI DUTT JAICI ... ..	16. 3.1935—15. 3.1940
13. GANBAHADUR RANA, Bahadur, O.B.I.	16. 3.1940— 1943
14. TULARAM GURUNG, M.B.E. ... ..	1943—1946
15. PARSAD GURUNG ... ..	1946—1947
16. DARABJIT GURUNG, M.C. ... ..	1947—1948
17. BILCHAND GURUNG ... ..	1948—To date

#### *2nd Battalion*

1. BAHADOOR, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I....	1868— 2. 9.1884
2. GAMBIRSING LAMA, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I. (Hon. Captain)	3. 9.1884— 1888
3. SINGBIR THAPA ... ..	1888— 1.11.1900
4. KARNABIR THAPA, Bahadur, O.B.I. ...	2.11.1900— 1.11.1905
5. BIRBAL NAGARKOTI, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I.	2.11.1905—24.10.1906
6. ABIRAM GURUNG, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I.	25.10.1906—31.12.1909
7. BIRBHAN THAPA, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I.	1. 1.1910—31. 1.1918

8. RIMANI THAPA, Bahadur, O.B.I. ...	1. 2.1918—30. 5.1920
9. BASANTE SAHI, M.B.E. ... ..	1. 6.1920—28. 2.1924
10. TEKBAHADUR PUN (Hon. Lieutenant)	1. 3.1924—28. 2.1931
11. KARNE THAPA ... ..	1. 3.1931—28. 2.1936
12. HOMBAHADUR THAPA, Bahadur, O.B.I. (Hon. Lieutenant)	1. 3.1936—30. 9.1940
13. KULBAHADUR GURUNG	1.10.1940— 1944
14. TIKARAM THAPA, Bahadur, O.B.I. ...	1944— 7.12.1947
15. JITBAHADUR GURUNG, M.C., I.O.M.	8.12.1947—To date

### *3rd Battalion (First World War)*

1. MAKHANSING GURUNG, Bahadur, O.B.I.	6.10.1917—21. 6.1919
2. SURBIR GURUNG ... ..	22. 6.1919—To disbandment

### *3rd Battalion (Second World War)*

1. HOMBAHADUR THAPA, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I. (Hon. Lieutenant)	1.10.1940—30. 6.1942
2. CHURAMANI THAPA ... ..	1. 7.1942—12. 5.1944
3. RAGHUBIR THAPA, M.C. ... ..	13. 5.1944—28. 5.1945
4. DARABJIT GURUNG, M.C. ... ..	2. 7.1945—10. 1.1947

(Battalion disbanded)

### *4th Battalion*

1. GANU RANA ... ..	Dates not available
2. BIRCHAND GURUNG ... ..	Dates not available
3. PARBIR THAPA ... ..	Dates not available
4. CHANDRU THAPA, O.B.I., M.C. ...	—7.12.1947
5. KRISHNABHADUR RANA, M.B.E. ...	8.12.1947—To date

### *5th Battalion*

1. BALESOR RANA, Bahadur, O.B.I. (Hon. Lieutenant)	17. 2.1948—26. 9.1949
2. DALBAHADUR THAPA ... ..	27. 9.1949—To date

### *6th Battalion*

1. DIWANSING GHALE ... ..	4.1948— 3. 9.1948
2. GAJBAHADUR RANA ... ..	18. 9.1948—31. 5.1949
3. DILBAHADUR THAPA ... ..	1. 6.1949—To date

*Regimental Centre*

1. GANU RANA ... .. 1940—1941
2. BUDHIMAN GURUNG, O.B.I. ... .. 1941—1942
3. TILBIR RANA, I.O.M., O.B.I. 1942—1943  
(Hon. Captain)
4. GANBAHADUR RANA, Bahadur, O.B.I. 1943—1947  
(Hon. Captain)
5. PARSAD GURUNG ... .. 1947—1948
6. BHIMBAHADUR GURUNG ... .. 1948—To date

## APPENDIX V

### NEPAL

It is fitting in a history of a Gurkha regiment that some mention be made, however brief, of the country from which the soldiers come, and of the people who inhabit that country.

Nepal, as a reference to any atlas will show, lies to the north of India, is bounded on its northern frontier by Tibet, to the east lies Sikkim, to the south Bihar and the United Provinces of India, to the west Kumaon (in India). It stretches about 540 miles in length, parallel to the Himalayan axis, averages about 100 miles in breadth, and has an area of about 54,000 square miles.

A policy of "isolation" has always been followed by Nepalese rulers, and this has been made possible by the policy of non-interference pursued by the British for over one hundred and thirty years, and by the inaccessibility of the country. A brief description of Nepal's natural boundaries will explain this latter point. To the west, north and east lies the mass of the Himalayas, consisting of great peaks and watersheds untrodden by man, well named the snowy girdle of the world.

It is interesting to note that Nepal has within or on its boundaries twenty-six peaks of over 24,000 feet, which include twelve of over 25,000, eight of over 26,000, three of over 27,000, and the one and only mountain in the world (Mount Everest) over 29,000 feet, a unique record.

Only on the southern frontier is the country at all accessible, and this frontier is guarded, so to speak, by three lines.

- (a) The Terai, a belt of dense tropical forest running its whole length, and intensely malarious for seven or eight months of the year ;
- (b) The equally unhealthy and trackless Siwalik ranges of foothills, north of the Terai ; and
- (c) Farther north again, the long range of Mahabharat that forms a further barrier to the hill districts of Nepal.

The whole kingdom is divided into two main zones : (1) The plains, including the Siwaliks ("Mades"), and (2) the hill districts or "Pahar."

The hill districts greatly exceed the plains in area, and are exclusively the source of recruitment for the Gurkha battalions of the Indian Army.

To give an idea as to the parts of Nepal which the Gurkha soldier calls home, it is well to divide the "Pahar" into four areas :

- (1) The eastern, which is the home of the Limbus, Rais, Sunwars and Lepchas.
- (2) The centre, from which the Gurung and Magars come. This area includes Gorkha, the ancient home of the Gurkha Raj.
- (3) The western, inhabited by a limited number of Magars and tribes of Tibetan origin.
- (4) The Nepal valley, fifteen miles in diameter, containing the capital Khatmandu, the city of palaces, and Patan, the sacred city of temples. A fertile plain lying at an altitude of 4,500 feet, it contains the seat of government as well as records of the oldest civilization, buildings, etc., some 2,000 years old. The population of the valley is about 350,000, mainly Newar.

The landlocked basin of the valley is Nepal to the Nepalese ; the rest is "Pahar" or "Mades."

Recruitment for the Gurkha battalions of the Indian Army is not allowed in the Nepal valley and adjoining hill districts, as this is the main centre of recruitment of the Nepalese Army. The Nepalese Army is recruited chiefly from the caste of Chhetri, Magar, Gurung and Limbu. Newars are not enlisted.

As regards the "Mades," no more will be said except that it contains probably the finest big game shooting in the world, and fortunate is he who has enjoyed the hospitality of the Maharaja at a big game shoot in the Terai.

A volume would not suffice to describe this fascinating country, and space does not permit, and in what remains we must say something of the Gurkhas, their history, and religion and customs.

Nothing in Nepal is more astonishing to an outsider than the diversity of races, tribes and languages which abound in a small country of some 6,000,000 inhabitants. This is accounted for by the various migrations. As regards the language differences, even within the limits of a single valley there may be, and often is, a village, the inhabitants of which speak a language completely unintelligible to their neighbours in the next village a mile away.

Owing to invasions from north, south and west, the aboriginal inhabitants of Nepal have been overlaid and the two main elements are thus (1) Mongolian and (2) Indo-Aryan, the former occupying,



roughly, the northern, central and eastern tracts, whilst the latter congregate in the western and southern tracts.

One invasion, or rather a peaceful penetration, which has had a predominant influence on present-day Nepal was that of high-caste Thakurs and Rajputs driven out of Rajputana and Central India as a result of the Moghul invasions, and forced to take refuge in the Himalayas. From these immigrants have descended the present rulers and nobility of Nepal. Thus the family of the Maharaja traces descent back to the Rana family of Udaipur in Rajputana.

Space does allow of details regarding those primitive and semi-aboriginal tribes which inhabit the Terai and Western Nepal, and this short account will confine itself to a few words about the tribes which, normally, have supplied the bulk of the recruits for nine of our Gurkha regiments. These tribes are four in number—Magars and Gurungs from Central Nepal, Rais and Limbus from Eastern Nepal—and are of Mongolian origin. The tenth regiment, the 9th Gurkha Rifles, is varied somewhat in that many of its men belong to the Chhetri race, that mixture of the Rajput immigrants and Nepalese already referred to.

It is of interest to note here that though the term Gurkha (or Gorkha) is applied generally to the inhabitant of Nepal, only Magars and Gurungs can, historically and geographically, claim to be the original Gorkhali or Gurkhas. Two hundred years ago Gurkha was a petty kingdom in the Gurung country with a small hill village, Gorkha, as capital. During the eighteenth century, the ruler of this territory, Prithwi Narayan Sahi, was an aggressor who first conquered the Nepal valley, and then gradually expanded his kingdom to cover the whole country, thus becoming the first king of Nepal.

The Limbus and Rais, the original Mongolian tribes of Eastern Nepal, were among his conquests.

Other Mongolian races living in outlying regions of Nepal include Tibetans, Lepchas, Sunwars, Bhotes and Sherpas—the latter world famous as participants in Mount Everest expeditions. All these make first-rate soldiers.

One important race remains—the Newars of the valley. Their origin has been a matter of considerable speculation. Some consider they came originally from southern India, being descended from the Nair soldiers who formed part of an army which once invaded Nepal one thousand years ago. It is more probable, however, that they have inhabited the valley for a much longer period, immigrating thereto from the north before the spread of Buddhism.

A legend, quoted by an authority, is of interest and, if true, suggests a possible origin of the Newars. Buddha, accompanied by a large following, made a pilgrimage to Nepal. Here he found that

the doctrines of which he was the apostle had already taken firm root. These had been introduced into the country by a distinguished teacher from Tibet. When Buddha returned to Hindustan, most of the followers who had accompanied him, being charmed with the beauties of the sacred valley, settled in Nepal, and became blended by inter-marriage with the earlier inhabitants of the country. History relates that one of these settlers was a disciple named Gorkha Nath, who established himself in Central Nepal, and the Gorkha village already referred to, maybe, is named after him. This brings us to religion and all that goes with religion.

There is in Nepal a curious blending of Hinduism and Buddhism. The latter was undoubtedly the original religion, not only in the Pahar, but also amongst the Newars. Hinduism, however, is steadily and surely pushing Buddhism out of Central Nepal towards the higher mountain ranges adjoining Tibet. This trend is naturally influenced by the fact that the rulers of Nepal are strict followers of the Hindu faith in all its details, and their prestige greatly influences the majority of their people towards the same religion. Certainly the Gurkha soldier, on coming to India, soon loses all touch with the Buddhism he may have practised, and enters into the various Hindu rites and festivals.

Further, the blending mentioned is emphasized in the presence of Hindu shrines and idols within the precincts of Buddhist temples. There are a number of great national festivals peculiar to Nepal, besides several others which differ little from those practised in India. Almost every day is marked by a religious ceremony or festival, many being mere local observances. These, with the indispensable dancing, music, and general hilarity which accompanies Hindu festivals, appeal greatly to the character of the Nepalese.

Of the festivals peculiar to Nepal, the most important is that in honour of Machhendra Nath, the Patron Saint of Nepal.

Mention will be made only of the four chief festivals for which our Gurkhas are granted holiday when serving :

1. *Indrajatra* is peculiar to Nepal, takes place early in September, and lasts eight days. A chief feature in Khatmandu is a great procession in which regiments of the Nepalese Army take part—a saturnalia of noise and revelry.

2. *Dashera* or *Durga Puja*, the best known of the festivals, lasts ten days, usually in October. Accompanying this festival is the head-cutting, and the various rites and entertainment so well known to all who have served with Gurkhas.

3. *Diwali* occurs three weeks after the end of Dashera. It lasts for five days and is called the festival of illumination, accompanied as it is by the lighting of multi-coloured lights on buildings, in the

streets and bazaars. An additional feature is the permitting of gambling, which usually is strictly forbidden in Nepal. The favourite game is Chharuwa. It is played with four players and sixteen cowries (shells), each player having a group of four numbers (*e.g.*, number one player has 1, 5, 9, 13 ; number two has 2, 6, 10, 14, and so on). The players shake the cowries in the closed hand and throw them on the board, and if, for example, nine cowries fall with the curved side upwards, number one player scoops the pool. It is not only in gambling that the Gurkha soldier is interested. His prowess in boxing and athletics has been brought out in this history. Probably the game he delights in most is football, and the proficiency he has attained at soccer is really remarkable and has reached a high standard.

4. *Holi* lasts for eight days and is celebrated in the spring. To those readers who have been in India at Holi time, the sight of vermilion-coloured persons and clothing, associated with this festival, is a familiar one.

In Khatmandu and in the two neighbouring cities, Patan and Bhatgaon, one finds magnificent modern palaces side by side with ancient picturesque temples and pagodas, the like of which cannot be seen anywhere else in the world.

Far too numerous to mention in detail, of the Buddhist temples the oldest, finest, and most perfect specimen is Swayambhunath, built on a small hill near Khatmandu. Its origin is lost in the mists of antiquity. Of the Hindu temples Pashupati is probably the most noted and sacred. It is situated three miles north-east of Khatmandu on the banks of the Bagmati river.

The most characteristic types of Nepalese temples are in the so-called pagoda style. It has been suggested that this style existed in Nepal long before it made its appearance farther east, and that the pagodas of China are due to the influence of the Newars, who were employed as skilled workmen (up to quite modern times) in Tibet and parts of China.

The position in Nepal as regards the ruler is unique. There is a King whose authority appears to be confined to matters of a religious nature. The real ruler is the Prime Minister, known always as the Maharaja. Coupled with this post, on occasion, has been that of Commander-in-Chief. This happened in the case of the Maharaja who became the first Honorary Colonel of all regiments in the Gurkha Brigade—viz., His Highness Lieutenant-General Sir Joodha Shumshere Jang, Bahadur Rana, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.\*

In both World Wars the Prime Ministers contributed to the war

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\* This paragraph was drafted some time ago before the recent troubles arose, with which this history is not concerned.

effort by the dispatch to India of brigades of the Nepalese Army, who did yeoman service on the North-West Frontier and in Burma. No less than 110,000 recruits were forthcoming for the Gurkha regiments of the Indian Army, whose strength was doubled—*i.e.*, increased from twenty to forty battalions. The provision of these recruits, plus the many thousands required as replacements for casualties, etc., was a tremendous effort for a comparatively small country. In addition to men, the supply of timber and other materials for war purposes was considerably increased, whilst money contributions to the various war organizations were liberally subscribed.

To conclude this brief note, the following figures of casualties sustained, and honours and awards gained by the Gurkha Brigade, in the Second World War alone, will show in part the measure of the help given by the faithful ally :

Killed in action, died of wounds and disease	7,544
Missing	1,441
Wounded and injured	14,670
	Total
	23,655

Including mentions, gallantry certificates, and foreign decorations, no fewer than 2,734 awards were won, and this inspiring total included twelve V.Cs.

From the foregoing, it might be inferred that Nepal is a land flowing with milk and honey. It is not. Palaces and temples may abound in the valley, but generally it is a primitive country. Food is hard to come by, and there is always a struggle for existence. Communications, especially in the Pahar, are exiguous, and what exist are mere ungraded mountain tracks. At frequent intervals raging rivers, fed by the Himalayan snows, have to be negotiated, sometimes by means of hair-raising bridges, but more often by dangerous fords. In fact a road journey, especially in the rains, demands a strong body backed by strong nerves. Such conditions alone produce a tough, active race of hillmen who are their country's main asset—an asset for which India and the Empire in general have every reason to be grateful, for indeed they are deeply indebted to Nepal for the devoted service rendered to them by the Gurkha soldiers for one hundred and thirty years. May this never be forgotten.

## APPENDIX VI

### GURKHA BRIGADE AND THE ROYAL NAVY

IT is considered fitting that a History of this kind should include a reference to the connection that exists between the Royal Navy and the Gurkha Brigade.

Before the outbreak of the First World War the Gurkha Brigade had not been given the chance of seeing much of the work of the Royal Navy, but from 1914 onwards this changed. Convoys protected by warships, service in coastal areas, the Suez Canal (1915), combined operations during both World Wars have shown the Gurkha soldier what he owes to the men of the senior Service.

The connection began in 1889 when the first Royal Navy ship to be named "Gurkha" was in service, hence it is interesting to record the histories of subsequent ships bearing this name or that of "Nepal," which histories have most kindly been written by the Admiralty.

#### "GURKHA"

1. *First-class Torpedo-Boat*.—Built at Paisley in 1888 as torpedo-boat number 101 (being one of the seven first-class torpedo-boats ordered by the Indian Government and built with the advice and assistance of the Admiralty). 1889: Dispatched to India for service in the Indian Harbour Defence Flotilla, and named "Gurkha" by the Indian authorities. 1892: On the transfer of the Indian Harbour Defence Flotilla to Imperial control, the *Gurkha* was commissioned as tender to H.M.S. *Magdala*, and afterwards reverted to her original designation T.B.101. As T.B.101 the vessel served in the local defence flotilla at Portsmouth during the First World War, 1914-1918, and was finally sold for breaking up on 27th March, 1920.

2. *Torpedo-Boat Destroyer*, 880 tons.—Built on the Tyne by Messrs. Hawthorne Leslie & Co. Ltd.; launched 20th April, 1907. First World War: 1914, Joined the Dover Patrol; 1915, assisted in the destruction of German submarine U.8 in the Channel; 1916, in action with enemy destroyers off Dunkirk; 8th February, 1917, sunk by mine off Dungeness.

3. *Torpedo-Boat Destroyer*, 1,870 tons.—Built at Glasgow by the Fairfield Shipbuilding Co. Ltd.; launched 7th July, 1937. Completed October, 1938. Sunk by aircraft off Stavanger, Norway, 9th April, 1940. This ship was named by Lady Coleridge, wife of General Sir John Coleridge, Colonel, 8th Gurkha Rifles.

4. *Torpedo-Boat Destroyer*, 1,920 tons.—Built at Birkenhead by Messrs. Cammell Laird & Co. Ltd., as H.M.S. *Larne*. Completed in 1941 and renamed *Gurkha*. Torpedoed and sunk in the Mediterranean, 17th January, 1942. This ship was named by Miss Mary Churchill (now Mrs. Soames), daughter of the Right Honourable Winston Spencer Churchill, O.M., C.H., Prime Minister.

#### “NEPAL”

5. *Torpedo-Boat Destroyer*, 1,760 tons.—Built by Messrs. Thornycroft at Woolston, as H.M.S. *Norseman*; name subsequently changed to *Nepal*. Launched 4th December, 1941, completed May, 1942. Still in service.

Ceremonies 3, 4 and 5 were attended by a number of officers of the Gurkha Brigade.

In 1937 a movement was started to make some tangible recognition of the connection between the Gurkha Brigade and H.M.S. *Gurkha*. In this a leading part was taken by Major-General Sir Charles Powell, K.C.B., then Colonel, 1st K.G.V.O. Gurkha Rifles, and the senior Colonel in the Gurkha Brigade. Subscriptions were made by all battalions and by retired officers. The result was the purchase of the following :

- (1) Two kukris.
- (2) Four drawings of Gurkha subjects—viz., Magar Gurung, Limbu, Rai, Chettri.
- (3) Miniature of the Gurkha Memorial at Gorakhpore in bronze on a green marble plinth, with crests of the ten regiments round the base.
- (4) Two copies of “The Land of the Gurkhas,” by Major Brook Northey, D.S.O., 1st Gurkha Rifles.

These were duly presented on 23rd November, 1938, at Portsmouth on board H.M.S. *Gurkha* in the presence of the officers and ship's company, and many senior officers of the Gurkha Brigade, serving and retired, and wives, widows and daughters of officers of the Gurkha Brigade.

Later, a further present was made in the form of a post-box for letters. This was appropriate in that petty officers and ship's company would see daily one of the gifts made. The letter-box is made of oak from H.M.S. *Victory*. The crest is that of H.M.S. *Gurkha* (crossed kukris in silver) on a shield, surmounted by a Naval Crown. The inscription on the letter-box is as follows :

H.M.S. GURKHA 1938  
FROM ALL RANKS OF THE GURKHA BRIGADE  
OAK FROM H.M.S. VICTORY

This post-box is now in the Imperial Defence College.

## APPENDIX VII

### THE ASSAM RIFLES

IN view of the association of the Regiment with the Assam Rifles, a brief account of the activities of that Military Police organization cannot be omitted from a history of the 8th Gurkha Rifles. This close association is due to the fact that many British officers of the Regiment have served with the Assam Rifles ; that both organizations have been on active service together on many North-East Frontier expeditions ; that they have shared cantonments in peace time ; and that Assam riflemen have frequently been attached to the 8th Gurkha Rifles for various forms of training. More than a hundred years ago a body of semi-military police, known as the "Cachar Levy," was raised in the Nowgong district of Assam. Their role was frontier watch and ward, small-scale punitive expeditions, and internal security. About 1852, expansion ensued. The title Levy was changed to Frontier Police, and in 1882 the whole force was reorganized in three battalions of military police under the titles of :

The Surma Valley Battalion.

The Lakhimpur Battalion.

The Naga Hills Battalion.

These battalions are now known as the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions respectively of the Assam Rifles.

In 1913 the Darrang Battalion was raised for service on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, but in 1915 it went to Imphal to relieve the Indian battalion stationed there. It became the 4th Battalion Assam Rifles in 1917. In 1920 a 5th Battalion was raised for service on the north bank, was disbanded in 1930, and raised again in 1940. The five battalions of the Assam Rifles, with their present titles, are stationed as follows :

1st (Lushai Hills) Battalion ...	...	Aijal.
2nd (Lakhimpur) Battalion ...	...	Sadiya.
3rd (Naga Hills) Battalion ...	...	Kohima.
4th Battalion ...	...	Imphal.
5th Battalion ...	...	Lokhra.

Battalions of the Assam Rifles became affiliated officially to groups

of Gurkha regiments in 1925, the 5th Battalion being linked with the 3rd Gurkha group (3rd and 8th Gurkha Rifles). Extracts given below, from Army Instruction (India) No. 213 of that year, are interesting :

“The affiliation will not in any respect affect the status of the Assam Rifles as a Military Police force under the Government of Assam.

“British officers shall be selected, as far as possible, from the Gurkha groups to which the battalions are affiliated. A party of one Indian officer, two havildars and four naiks from each battalion of the Assam Rifles shall be attached annually for training to one of the four battalions of the parent group ; such attachment not to exceed a period of six months in any one year.

“The Commandant and Subadar-Major of the Gurkha battalion to which the party referred to above is attached for training may visit the affiliated Assam Rifle Battalion during the year in which the training takes place.”

As regards personnel, the bulk of the men have always been Gurkhas, though a considerable number of Lushais, Cacharis, Kukis and other Assam tribesmen are also enlisted.

The organization is a military one, but every man is enrolled as a police officer ; their duties are primarily police rather than military, and they are under the control of the Inspector-General of Police, Assam.

The initiative shown by the Gurkha officers of the Assam Rifles is outstanding, due to the fact that they get plenty of practice in independent command in the frontier outposts, many of one platoon strength only. In these remote and isolated places in the hills, commanders soon become self-reliant.

Highly mobile, it is the pride of the Assam Rifles that they are ever ready to move out as self-contained parties, unencumbered by transport, and to maintain themselves in the field for six days.

It is not possible to give a detailed\* history of the Assam Rifles here ; suffice to say that they have not only served in practically every North-East Frontier expedition since their inception, but have taken a distinguished part in the two great World Wars. In the 1914-1918 war the Assam Rifles took no part as units, but furnished no less than 23 officers and 3,174 men in drafts to Gurkha units of the Indian Army. One and all they acquitted themselves right well, and earned the highest praise ; and it was in recognition of their

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\* The “History of the Assam Rifles,” by Colonel L. W. Shakespear, C.B., C.I.E., an officer of the 2nd K.E.O. Gurkha Rifles. A most interesting book which is a record not only of the Assam Rifles but of events on the North-East Frontier over a period of more than a hundred years.

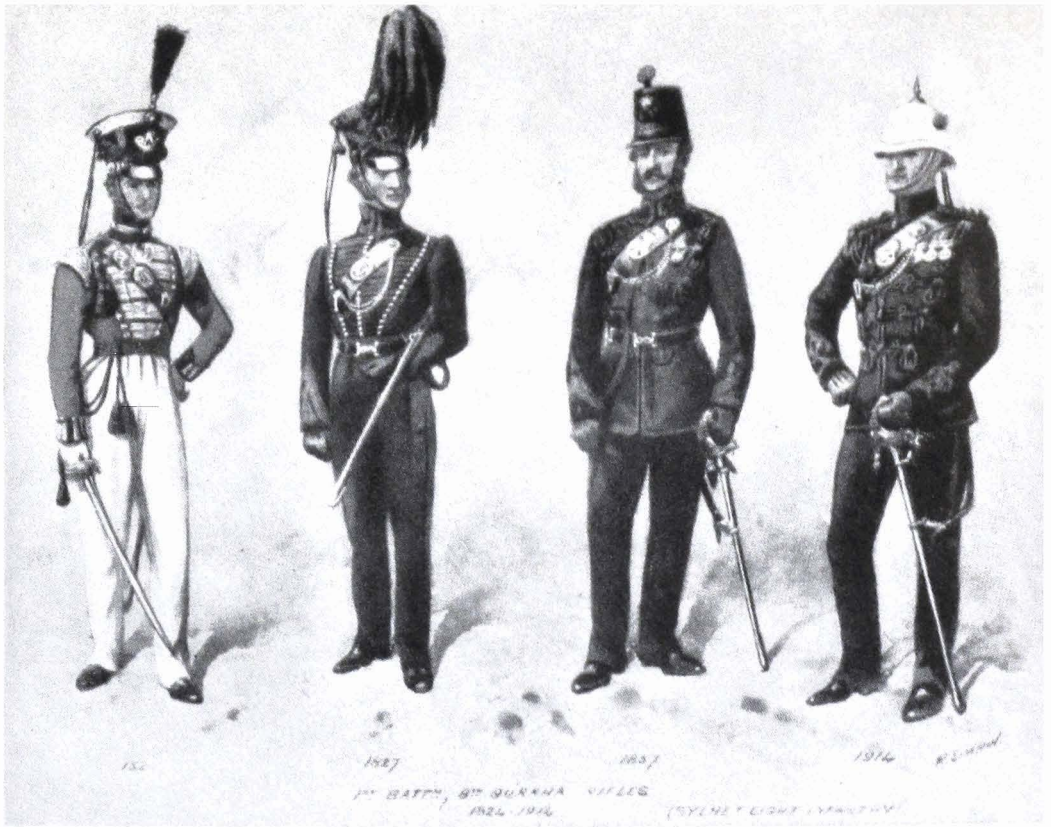


services in the First World War that the title "Assam Rifles" was bestowed.

In the Second World War the exploits of the Assam Rifles, operating as units, were many and distinguished. Special mention may be made of the part played by seven platoons of the 3rd Battalion in the defence of Kohima from 2nd to 23rd April, 1944.

Enough has been written, it is hoped, to show that its small cadre of British officers (one Commandant and a maximum of four assistant Commandants to each battalion) have every reason to be proud of the force their efforts have rendered so efficient, and can look back with pleasure on the time spent with the Assam Rifles.





1824

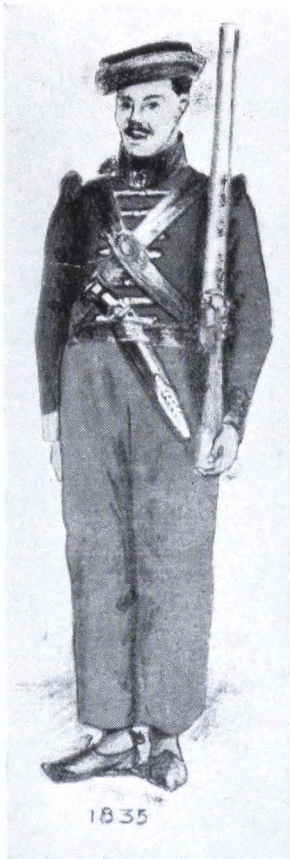
1827

1887

1914

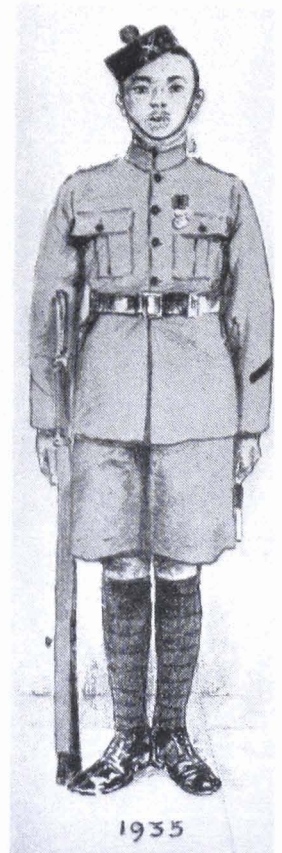
1<sup>ST</sup> BATTN, 8<sup>TH</sup> GURKHA REGT  
1824-1914

(SYLHET LIGHT INFANTRY)



1835

Types of Uniform  
worn by the  
Regiment



1935

## APPENDIX VIII

### ESTABLISHMENTS, ARMS, EQUIPMENT, UNIFORMS, MARCHES, ETC.

THIS appendix deals briefly with the many changes which have taken place in the Regiment as regards establishments, arms and uniforms. It is only proposed to sketch the evolution from the days of the sepoy working in his company one hundred strong, armed with a muzzle-loading musket, and dressed in a uniform and equipment neither comfortable nor practicable, to the scientifically organized, equipped and clothed soldier of today. Throughout the narrative no doubt reference has been made to changes in arms and equipment, hence any repetition here, though redundant, is apologized for.

#### ESTABLISHMENTS

For many years regiments of the Indian Army consisted of companies, usually of 100 men, commanded by Subadars. The number of companies varied from eight to ten. The 1st Battalion in 1860 increased in strength to twelve companies of 100 sepoys each, to be reduced the following year to eight companies of 75 men, once more to be raised to eight companies of 100 men in 1866. The early days saw a very small British officer establishment, one Captain as Commanding Officer and one as Adjutant being considered sufficient. These numbers were gradually increased by the addition of Wing Commanders, "Doing Duty Officers," and a Quartermaster. "Doing Duty Officer," a peculiar title, was in 1866 changed to that of Wing Subaltern. To assist the small cadre of British officers, two British warrant (or non-commissioned) officers—viz., one sergeant-major and one quartermaster-sergeant—were attached. There is no record of these two appointments subsequent to the year 1861, and it would appear that they were abolished when the 1st and 2nd Battalions became the 48th and 47th Regiments of Bengal Native Infantry respectively.

The British officer cadre was increased as the years went by, but no change in the company system, as outlined, took place until 1900, when the Double Company system was introduced. Each double company was commanded by a British officer, and British officers (except the Commanding Officer) were called Double Company

Commanders or Double Company Officers instead of Wing Commanders or Wing Officers as formerly. Companies were commanded by Gurkha officers.

There was no H.Q. Company. Signallers and machine-gunners belonged to Battalion Headquarters for training, but for administrative purposes were on the strength of companies. With this establishment, the First World War was started. In 1915 a new organization, built upon experiences gained during the war, was introduced. The four double companies became four companies, each of four platoons, numbered one to sixteen throughout a battalion. British officers commanded the companies, the platoons being commanded by Gurkha officers (Subadar or Jemadar). Specialists increased, the signallers and machine-gunners being joined by scouts, bombing and trench-mortar sections, all still under Battalion Headquarters.

In 1926 all Gurkha Rifle battalions were reorganized into H.Q. Wing, four active companies and one training company. This was followed some six years later by a change which organized battalions as follows :

H.Q. Wing.

One Machine-Gun Company of two platoons, each of four Vickers machine guns.

Three Rifle Companies of four platoons each.

One Training Company.

Very soon the Machine-Gun Company title was changed to Support Company.

On 1st January, 1939, instructions were received from Army Headquarters, India, to adopt an "interim" organization as follows :

H.Q. Company.

Four Rifle Companies.

One Training Company.

H.Q. Company included Battalion Headquarters, Signal Platoon, Administrative Platoon and a Carrier (M.G.) Platoon (eight guns). The last-named platoon became the Support Platoon after some weeks of trial. Each Rifle Company now consisted of three platoons, each of three sections.

This brings us to the Second World War, which saw further changes in composition of battalions. Mention has been made in the narrative of the 2nd Battalion becoming "Lorried." This was a temporary measure to suit the situation at the time. The M.T. (when there !) was a means of transport, and the Battalion fought as infantry in an organization of :

H.Q. Company.  
 Support Company.  
 Administrative Company.  
 Four Rifle Companies, each of three platoons.

Finally, we come to the Battalion establishment of 1944, the strength of which was :

British officers	...	...	...	...	15
Gurkha officers	...	...	...	...	24
Havildars	...	...	...	...	51
Naiks	...	...	...	...	68
Riflemen (including Lance-Naiks)	...	...	...	...	708
Total all ranks (851 Gurkhas) ...					866

and was composed as under :

Battalion Headquarters.

H.Q. Company.

Headquarters.

Signal Platoon.

3-inch Mortar Platoon.

Battalion Headquarters Platoon.

Pioneer Platoon.

G(R) Platoon.

Administrative Company.

Headquarters.

Q.M. Platoon.

Transport Platoon (A/T and M.T.).

Medical Platoon.

Rifle Companies (4)

Company Headquarters with one 2-inch mortar.

Three Platoons.

In the modern battalion is found a large number of different specialists—Snipers, Intelligence, runners, signallers, mortar numbers, pioneers, M.T. and A/T personnel, Medical. These instances do not exhaust the list, but enough has been said to stress the difference in organization to that of fifty years ago.

*Note.*—When considering the strength of Gurkha battalions, it should be noted that the “Contract” made between the Governments of India and Nepal laid down that the total number of Gurkhas to be allotted to the Government of India for the Indian Army should be limited to 19,000, or 950 per battalion, that is 100 more than the “establishment.” This 100 plus a small reserve of 100 per battalion

was, prior to the 1939-1945 war, the only "reinforcement" for battalions during the first months of a campaign—an inadequate supply, and one of the main reasons for the introduction of Regimental Centres.

Before leaving the establishment portion of this appendix, a few words regarding the conditions generally in the days before the outbreak of the First World War are of interest.

At the time the Regiment was raised early in the nineteenth century, the monthly rates of pay were :

Subadar	...	...	...	...	...	Rs30
Jemadar	...	...	...	...	...	Rs15
Havildar	...	...	...	...	...	Rs10
Naik	...	...	...	...	...	Rs8
Bugler	...	...	...	...	...	Rs6
Sepoy	...	...	...	...	...	Rs5

These rates were increased from time to time until, in 1908, the pay of a rifleman, then Rs7 monthly, was raised to Rs9 monthly. Out of this he had to pay for his own food (except on active service) and part of his uniform, though compensation was given when the cost of a man's ration rose above a certain monthly rate.

This applied particularly to Assam, for ever since 1872 troops serving there drew "batta" at Rs2/8 monthly, a boon indeed.

Before 1917 a chaudri was responsible for rationing. Each company had its own bunniah, who accompanied the troops everywhere and provided their rations. In 1917 the provision of free "peace" rations by Government commenced, and the chaudri and the bunniah were officially abolished. Successive increases in pay, and the introduction of clothing allowance, have made the lot of the rifleman more prosperous on paper, though, with the great rise in the cost of living, one wonders whether he is better off now than in the old days.

### *Arms and Equipment*

For many years following their raising, the battalions of the Regiment were armed with a fusil, a muzzle-loading musket of formidable aspect. The equipment worn consisted of two belts which crossed over the chest; one carried an ammunition pouch, and the second the bayonet. A large square pack was carried on the back in Field Service order.

In 1872 the Enfield rifle was issued, followed in 1874 by the Snider. In 1880 a valise equipment was introduced, so abolishing the old cross-belts mentioned above.

From old photographs it appears that kukris were invariably carried by Gurkha soldiers, but it was not until 1881 that these were

officially authorized. In the Assam regiments the men had to pay for their kukris, though the leather frogs were an Ordnance supply.

In 1884 a new short Snider rifle was issued, followed, in 1888, by the Martini-Henry.

The Mackenzie equipment of black leather was introduced in 1890. This, up to a point, resembles the present-day equipment in that it had leather braces attached by buckle and straps to the leather belt. Pouches on the belt held the ammunition, and on the back a valise was carried.

In 1902 the magazine rifle, the Lee Enfield of .303 calibre, was issued to the Regiment, and just before the Tibet campaign two Maxim machine guns were issued to each battalion.

For some unknown reason, in 1903, the Mackenzie equipment was replaced by a nondescript collection of articles with which the Indian Army soldier of the First World War was "equipped." These consisted of a brown leather belt and bandolier, with a khaki drill haversack and water-bottle. The haversack contained much small kit and the ration tin. The greatcoat was carried on the back, rolled and fastened by two short leather straps. However, the period 1907-8 produced articles of comfort in the shape of waterproof capes convertible for bivouacs, groundsheets, and canvas kitbags. Recently, government issues of blankets and a dhurrie have been made.

In 1912 battalions were re-armed with the new Mark III\* Lee Enfield rifle, which, improved from time to time, remains to the present day.

The First World War saw the Lewis light machine gun, trench mortar and various types of grenades added as infantry arms.

In 1926 Vickers guns replaced the old Maxim machine guns, and in 1934 the Lewis light machine gun was changed for the Vickers-Berthier.

Finally, we come to the Second World War, in which the arms used by men of the Regiment resembled a small arsenal. These included :

6-pounder anti-tank guns.	Bren and Sten guns.
3-inch mortars.	Rifle and hand grenades.
2-inch mortars.	S.M. Lee Enfield rifles.
Vickers machine guns.	Pistols.

The bayonet ("sword" to Riflemen) and kukri have changed but little during the passage of time, and have put the final touch to many a hard-won fight, as they did a hundred years ago.

The khaki webbing equipment with its front pouches and pack have become a familiar sight. Slightly modified since first issued, it is likely to remain the "last word" for many years.



## *Dress*

To give a complete account of the clothing worn by all ranks of the Regiment at different periods of its existence, together with the very many small changes ordered, is beyond the scope of a history of this nature. Search has been made for photographs or coloured prints of uniforms worn in the very early days by the various ranks of the Regiment, but results have been disappointing.

Long extracts from clothing regulations will be avoided, so, apart from a few general notes, it is hoped that the photographs and prints reproduced will present a fairly adequate picture as to appearance of the officers and other ranks of the Regiment as they appeared from time to time.

Excepting for a very short while from 1824 to 1827 when the 1st Battalion were dressed in red, the Regiment has always worn the traditional green of the Rifleman, with the black facings, which continue to the present day. In 1824 the Assam and Sylhet local corps were associated with the Nussereee (now 1st Gurkha Rifles), Sirmoor (now 2nd Gurkha Rifles) and Kumaon (now 3rd Gurkha Rifles) Battalions, in that, by a Government order of that year, these corps were to have black facings.

In an extract from a family record of the life of Colonel W. Simonds, who raised the 2nd Battalion, the following regarding dress is interesting: “. . . being allowed to determine the dress of the Corps, he selected Dark Green, Black Braid and Silver mountings something similar to the Rifle Brigade. . . .”

A drawing of an officer of the 1st Battalion in 1824 (reproduced) shows that the uniform was almost exactly the same as that for an officer of the Rifle Brigade.

An old print of a man of the Regiment of about 1835 shows him in the dark green, with short tunic and pantaloons, and wearing a pagri. This pattern of dress showed little change for some years, except that in 1844 the Kilmarnock forage cap was introduced. This cap, in 1866, was replaced by a pagri of the colour of the facings. In 1872 the 2nd Battalion were issued with a Glengarry forage cap and wore it until 1885. This is interesting, and a peculiar exception to have been made, as apparently this type of head-dress had previously only been worn by bandsmen and buglers of Madras Infantry. On the Glengarry cap was worn a red “toorie,” and it is a matter for speculation whether the red “pompon” of today is not a relic of that old head-dress.

An old photograph (dated 1870) of an outpost of mixed troops shows the 43rd (2nd Battalion) men in their Glengarry, and the 44th (1st Battalion) in their Kilmarnock caps. The Kilmarnock, of course, survived until the Second World War, and it was not until

the soft felt hat made its appearance in 1903, in fighting order, that the Kilmarnock ceased to be the general purposes head-dress, but was continued for ceremonial purposes, including duties such as guards and orderlies.

In 1860 khaki was adopted by the 1st Assam Light Infantry (6th Gurkha Rifles), and the 2nd Battalion (then 2nd Assam Light Infantry) no doubt followed suit, as these two battalions were ordered (on formation as Assam Light Infantry) to be clothed exactly alike. There is, however, no mention of this in the 2nd Battalion's records. Khaki had originally been worn by the Guides in 1846, but it was for many years an "unofficial" type of clothing, and old photographs show the Gurkha soldier campaigning in his green. Khaki did not become "official" clothing until 1890.

The modern type of tunic (or jacket to a Rifleman) and trousers becomes apparent about 1880, and in this year horn buttons as worn by British Rifle Regiments were sanctioned for 42nd (6th Gurkha Rifles), 43rd (2/8th Gurkha Rifles) and 44th (1/8th Gurkha Rifles).

About 1890 puttees appear. These were black when worn with green or khaki. A short description of the men's clothing at this time is of interest.

*Green*

*Khaki*

Rifle green tunic and trousers.	Khaki drill blouse and trousers.
Black puttees.	Black puttees.
Eight black plastic buttons.	Two pockets on breast for ammunition (five rounds each).
Numeral "43" or "44" on Kilmarnock cap.	Khaki cover on Kilmarnock cap.
No shoulder numeral or titles.	No badges or shoulder-strap numerals.

2nd Battalion wore a red pompon on the Kilmarnock cap.

Reproductions of some badges and buttons worn are given (p. 321). Unfortunately, nothing going back to the very early days can be traced. The 1st Battalion badge (possibly officers' pattern) of some sixty years ago is curious, showing the kukri suspended from the numeral "44" by two links.

On the amalgamation of the two battalions, badges were made in the pattern now in use. These are :

Cap.—Crossed kukris surmounted by figure "8." White metal for Kilmarnock or beret. Black metal for red patch on left side of felt hat.

Shoulder numerals.—"8 G.R." in black metal.

Buttons.—Plastic. Embossed with crossed kukris and "8."

Until about 1905 there had been no marked change for some fifteen years. We then see the arrival of "shorts," and the replacement of the blouse jacket by the coat. The drab pattern greatcoat was issued instead of the grey one, which had been in use for many years.

The First World War brought changes. In cold climates khaki serge became the campaigning kit, but the greatest change of all was the abolition of green "Full dress" and the substitution of "Review Order khaki." This, in hot weather, was khaki drill with shorts—black puttees, black leather belt. When serge was issued in cold weather, trousers were worn instead of shorts, together with medals, black chevrons, badges, etc. Officers and the Battalion Havildar-Major wore cross-belts and sling swords. (N.B.—Until 1899 no Good Conduct or similar badge or medal ribbons were worn except on full-dress jackets.)

A word as to the cross-belt which was worn by British and Gurkha officers and the Battalion Havildar-Major. It was of black patent leather. The front decoration, consisting of a central plate of white metal (silver), was a Maltese Cross with the Regimental badge in the centre, and surrounded by a laurel wreath with the Regimental battle honours on scrolls, the whole surmounted by the Imperial Crown. From left to right hung three chains linked from a lion's mouth to a whistle. On the back was a pouch, ornamented with the Regimental crest in white metal (silver).

Naturally in a regiment formed from battalions with, for many years, separate entities, there were differences in dress. In 1929, therefore, the Colonel of the Regiment (General Sir John Coleridge), when visiting the Regiment at Shillong, decided to put this right, and uniformity was arrived at. Exceptions are:

- (1) 1st Battalion wear a small red plume\* above the scarlet patch, with black metal badge, on left side of felt hat, whereas the 2nd Battalion wear a red "pompon"\* above the scarlet patch.
- (2) 1st Battalion wear a white metal plate on black leather belt. 2nd Battalion wear white metal buckle as issued.

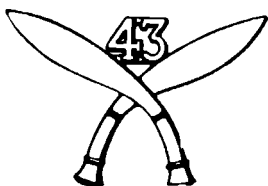
Mention must be made of Company Colours—very useful indeed to obtain ready recognition of a man's company, to mark kit, semaphore flags, etc. These are now widely used in India. The Regiment was one of the first units to adopt this idea.

The Second World War brought a number of changes. Bush shirts, battledress with short gaiters, and berets, have helped to alter

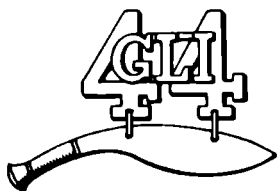
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\* 1st Battalion before the First World War, and until 1922, wore a red pompon, but of different pattern to the 2nd Battalion one which was adopted in 1885. The 1st Battalion red plume commemorates their association with The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) in the First World War.

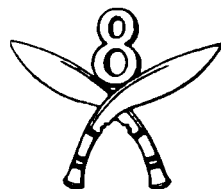
**SOME CAP-BADGES, SHOULDER TITLES AND BUTTONS WORN BY THE 8th GURKHAS**



**Cap-badge,  
2nd Battalion,  
about 1886**



**Cap-badge,  
1st Battalion,  
about 1886**



**Cap-badge,  
present day**



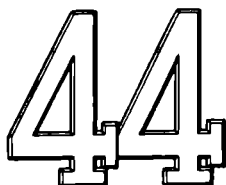
**Shoulder-strap  
numeral, 1913**



**Shoulder title,  
present day**



**Shoulder title,  
2nd Battalion  
when 43rd**



**Cap numeral,  
1895**



**Button,  
2nd Battalion,  
issued until 1877**



**Button,  
present day**



**Button,  
2nd Battalion,  
worn until 1901**

the appearance of the troops, but many of the 1939 articles of dress remain to be worn on the appropriate parade. To keep in touch, readers are recommended to subscribe to the Regimental News-Letter and Journal ("Eighth Gorkhas"), in which photographs there produced depict uniforms much more clearly than words can.

### *Regimental Affiliations, Marches and Customs.*

Before terminating this appendix it is well to include a few particulars regarding affiliations, march tunes, etc. Some of these have already been referred to in the narrative, but a few important ones still remain to be mentioned. It is hoped that some of these may continue in use in the future, but should this prove to be impossible, interesting facts will have been placed on record here, and generations of the 8th Gurkha Rifles yet to come will be able to read of affiliations, march tunes, etc., which were cherished by their predecessors who served in the Regiment for over a century prior to 1947.

1. *Affiliations*.—The drill, dress and customs of The Rifle Brigade have always been closely followed.

In the First World War the 1st and 2nd Battalions formed a strong liaison with The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) and The Leicestershire (now Royal) Regiment, respectively. Comradeship in many a hard-fought battle inculcated mutual respect and confidence.

2. *Regimental Marches*\*.—Band: "I'm Ninety-Five." Pipes: "Atholl Highlanders."

The following march tunes were played on occasions such as when approaching barracks, and on guest night at the Officers' Mess: "Windsor"; "Lutzow's Wild Hunt" (with Bugles).

3. *Customs*.—(i) All ranks stand to attention when "Retreat" is sounded; also during the playing of the Regimental March.

(ii) Recruits were "sworn in" on the Colours, or in latter years (in the case of the 2nd Battalion owing to the Colours becoming frail) on a silver kukri.

(iii) Before joining the ranks, recruits were conducted round the Officers' Mess to view the Colours, Pipe Banners, Trophies, etc., which are part of the Regiment, kept for it by their officers.

(iv) On appointment as permanent Company Commanders, British officers were permitted to possess a Pipe Banner. These, with one Battalion banner, were carried on Ceremonial occasions.

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\* Three of the marches mentioned are the regimental marches of famous British regiments:

"I'm Ninety Five"—The Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own).

"Windsor"—The Worcestershire Regiment.

"Lutzow's Wild Hunt"—The King's Royal Rifle Corps (60th Rifles).

APPENDIX IX : LOCATION OF BATTALIONS, 1939-1949

Year	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	Regtl. Centre	38th Gurkha Rifles	88th Infantry Company 8th Gurka Rifle Coy.
1939	North-West Frontier	North-West Frontier							
1940	North-West Frontier Dehra Dun	North-West Frontier Shillong Quetta	Shillong				Shillong		
1941	North-West Frontier	Quetta Iraq	Shillong Chaman	Shillong Lansdowne			Shillong		
1942	North-West Frontier Assam	Iraq North Africa	Chaman Trichinopoly Ceylon	Attock Abbottabad North-West Frontier			Shillong Quetta		
1943	Burma } Arakan }	Iraq (Paiforce)	Ceylon Ranchi Burma	Chhindwara Ranchi Burma } Arakan }			Quetta	Dehra Dun Camp, fifteen miles from Dehra Dun on Dehra Dun-Saharan-Pur road	
1944	Burma Arakan	Iraq (Paiforce) Italy	Burma Assam	Burma } Arakan }			Quetta	Dehra Dun Camp	India Burma (With 36th British Div.)
1945	Burma } Bangalore }	Italy Syria (Tripoli)	Burma French Indo-China North Borneo	Burma Siam Malaya			Quetta	Dehra Dun Camp	Burma India
1946	Java Kohat North-West Frontier	Quetta Secunderabad	North Borneo India Quetta (Disbanded)	Malaya Java Malaya			Quetta	Dehra Dun Camp (Disbanded)	India Japan
1947	Loralai North-West Frontier Dera Ghazi Khan Pakistan	Jhansi Lahore Ferozepore		Malaya	Alipore		Quetta Dehra Dun		Japan India (Disbanded)
1948	Roorkee Meerut	Ferozepore Kashmir		Dehra Dun Hardwar	Calcutta	Dehra Dun Kashmir	Dehra Dun		
1949	Batala "The Hills"	Dehra Dun		Hardwar Dehra Dun	Calcutta Dehra Dun	Kashmir	Dehra Dun		

N.B.—Subsequent to Partition in August, 1947, naming of locations is governed by security measures so exact accuracy is not guaranteed.



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