



FORT LOCKHART IN WINTER

The Frontier Force Regiment

Compiled by

BRIGADIER W. E. H. CONDON
O.B.E.

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GENERAL SIR ROB LOCKHART, K.C.B., C.I.E., M.C.
from a photograph taken in 1948 on retiring from the Army

FOREWORD

BY

GENERAL SIR ROB LOCKHART

K.C.B., C.I.E., M.C.

It is not quite forty years since the Regiment came into being in 1922, but the history of the Battalions which were selected to compose the then new 12th Frontier Force Regiment goes back over a hundred years.

And a glorious history each of those Battalions had : Guides Infantry, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sikh Infantry, P.F.F. All of it is now part of the History of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment.

There were many teething troubles in the early days of the new regiment and it took, I think, the Second World War to mould us truly into one regiment with a real 12th Frontier Force Regimental spirit.

Many other regiments of the Indian and Pakistan Armies had produced their histories before Partition. Here at last is our own. It has been written by an officer belonging to what was once our sister regiment, the 13th Frontier Force Rifles, Brigadier W. E. H. Condon, O.B.E. We were very lucky to get him to undertake the task. Not only is he an experienced writer of military history, take for example his History of his own old regiment, but he was faced with many difficulties. There was the time involved in obtaining information from Pakistan and other parts of the world. The Partition of the old India made the tracing of certain records most difficult and there were inevitable delays over this and the transfer of funds from Pakistan for the expenses of publication.

For these funds we are indebted to the present members of the Regiment, who most generously made the money available. Without this help this History could not have been written. We owe Bill Condon and our comrades in Pakistan, in particular our old friend Major-General Hayaud Din, a great debt of gratitude. "Ganga" was a protagonist in initiating the writing of the history and in taking steps to make its completion possible.

I am sure all members of the Regiment, past, present and future, will welcome this book. I heartily commend it to them all. I am confident that for those who are now serving and carrying on so splendidly the Piffer Tradition, as well as for those who may serve in the days to come, it will bring pride in the past and inspiration for the future.

R. M. M. Lockhart

PREFACE

THIS History is a companion volume to its predecessor by the same author, *The History of the Frontier Force Rifles*. Similarly it seeks to tell the story in one volume, of the Battalions of the Frontier Force Regiment from their inception as irregular units for special duties on the North-West Frontier of India, till the conclusion of their first ten years as Regular Battalions of the National Army of Pakistan.

Most of the prefatory remarks to the first volume apply therefore equally to this. Particularly applicable are those referring to the general lay-out and the occasional vagaries of style in the different narratives, which are due to using at times verbatim the writings of officers and thus preserving the vivid atmosphere of the events they describe.

The record of military achievement with its background of gallantry, endurance, loyalty and unquestioning sacrifice is no less outstanding in this volume than in the first; and the two Regiments, now one in the Pakistan Army, have a tradition to maintain that is second to none and of which they can be proud indeed.

In telling the story about half the book is devoted to the Second World War and half to the earlier years. This earlier period is covered generally in outline, but the narrative goes into more detail for events of particular interest or importance. Where details of minor happenings prior to the Second World War are required, the individual histories of Battalions must be consulted.

These histories indeed are the source from which the outline of the early period in this volume has been compiled, though in some cases Battalion records had to be consulted also. For the narratives of the Second World War, the War Diaries were available in nearly all cases. The only Battalion whose entire War Diary for its campaign in the Second World War is missing, is the 2nd Sikhs (now the 6th Battalion of the Regiment).

This Battalion's heroically tragic struggle in the Malayan campaign of 1941-42, ended with its extinction as a Battalion for the time being, its diary and records in the field being destroyed and the remnant of its officers and men going into captivity. The story, however, has been most ably written by Lieutenant-Colonel Grimwood and illustrated by his sketch maps. As Adjutant he fought through the campaign and went into captivity in Japanese hands on its disastrous conclusion. Of his narrative, which Chapter XX closely follows, Lieutenant-Colonel Grimwood remarked regarding himself and the 2nd Sikhs:

"I would never have attempted this record had I not seen for myself during

a recent visit to Pakistan (1953) the intense pride and interest shown by the present Pakistani officers and other ranks in the history of the battalions of the Regiment and their determination to carry on its traditions. The existence of such a spirit makes it imperative that as complete a record as possible . . . be handed on. The story (of the 2nd Sikhs) covering the war period has had to be written entirely from personal memories of events as no records exist to which reference can be made. All War Diaries and Battalion Orders of the period were destroyed by 2nd Echelon before the capitulation of Singapore, and no personal diaries survived the period of captivity.”

However, to provide a check on Lieutenant-Colonel Grimwood’s record, Chapter XX was read and verified by Brigadier Arthur Cumming who commanded the Battalion throughout the campaign and was decorated with the Victoria Cross for the greatest gallantry in one of its actions. He found little to amend in Grimwood’s narrative.

Where verification of narratives is concerned, this has in fact been carried out in all cases whether compiled from War Diaries of Battalions or from personal notes and records—on the same lines as above. In many cases where the Commanding Officer has changed more than once, several officers have assisted by reading and noting on narratives.

In this connection my acknowledgments are due to the following officers for the trouble they have taken in reading and checking narratives or otherwise assisting with personal reminiscences :

1st Sikhs

General Sir Rob Lockhart, K.C.B.,
C.I.E., M.C.
Brigadier L. E. MacGregor, O.B.E.
Brigadier H. E. Cubitt-Smith, C.B.E.,
D.S.O.
Lieutenant-Colonel H. E. Boulter,
D.S.O.

2nd Sikhs

Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Grimwood.
Brigadier A. E. Cumming, V.C.,
O.B.E., M.C.

3rd Royal Sikhs

Lieutenant-Colonel W. E. Dean, J.P.
Lieutenant-Colonel J. E. B. Barton.
Brigadier H. W. D. McDonald, D.S.O.
Major J. H. Chandler, M.B.E.
Major R. A. Nicholls.
Captain P. Glenn.

4th Sikhs

Lieutenant-Colonel O. L. Ruck, D.S.O.
Major-General R. G. Ekin, C.I.E.
Brigadier W. D. Edward, D.S.O.
Colonel J. L. Carter, M.C.
J. O. C. Beazley, Esq.
Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. Bryceson,
M.C.
Major R. Elsmie.
Major P. Stewart, M.C.

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P. A. Hughes, Esq.

7th Battalion

Lieutenant-Colonel A. S. Lewis, D.S.O.

8th Battalion

Lieutenant-General K. M. Sheikh.
Major D. D. Slattery.

9th Battalion

General Sir Douglas Gracey, K.C.B.,
K.C.I.E., C.B.E., M.C.
General Sir Stuart Greeves, K.B.E.,
C.B., D.S.O., M.C.
Brigadier L. R. Mizen, C.B.E.
Colonel H. R. Hugo, O.B.E.
Major D. G. Butterworth, M.C.
Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J.,
M.B.E., M.C.
Major A. R. Gurney.

10th Battalion and Regimental Centre

Colonel E. A. Stead, M.C.
Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. Cairns.

11th/14th Battalion

Lieutenant-Colonel R. E. F. G. North.
Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J.,
M.B.E., M.C.

Machine Gun Battalion

The late Colonel G. F. Taylor, O.B.E.
Colonel W. I. Moberly.

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Machine Gun Battalion

The late Colonel G. F. Taylor, O.B.E.
Colonel W. I. Moberly.

25th Garrison Battalion

The late Lieutenant-Colonel L. R.
Knight, M.C.

In particular I owe a debt of gratitude to Brigadier Pat Macnamara of the Guides, who not only read and checked the Guides' narratives, but offered to read the proofs of the whole volume. I was grateful for this generous offer as an insurance against the errors and omissions of my own proof reading, but found in addition that I was given a host of valuable suggestions for the improvement of the volume. These I was glad to accept almost without exception and I think the History has benefited greatly as a result.

Following the pattern of the first volume, the narratives of Battalions have been given individually throughout the Second World War, and almost throughout the First World War and earlier period also.

The order in which these narratives (relating to any particular war or period) have been placed, has been governed by how best to present the general picture of the war or campaign concerned. Already a generation has matured to whom the course of even the Second World War and the strategy of its campaigns is a vague miscellany of names of places and men; and before future generations of the Regiment can appreciate the part its Battalions played in the campaigns of the first 100 years of their existence, an overall picture of what was happening in those campaigns must surely be grasped.

The author has found that the best way to help to this end is to commence the Regiment's story in a given campaign or war theatre, with that of the Battalion that first entered it, and open its narrative with a short review of the situation and the events leading up to it. For this reason all order of seniority of Battalions or precedence of any kind has been set aside in selecting the sequence of narratives, and only considerations of clarity in presenting the general picture have been taken into account in deciding which narratives should be presented first.

The History has been provided with maps and illustrations on the same scale as the first volume, limitations being those of cost. The sketch maps cover all the campaigns or actions of first importance or interest, and two large itinerary maps at the end show the wanderings overseas of the Regular Battalions in the Second World War. For the excellence of the intricate work in these itinerary maps, I have to thank Colonel T. M. M. Penney of the Cabinet Historical Section who so kindly permitted his expert draughtsmen to carry them out.

As regards illustrations, officer groups of Regular Battalions taken just before the Second World War have been included as far as possible, since these show the leaders in the War that followed. Unfortunately one or two groups are missing. At the same time some interesting illustrations of Regimental or Battalion occasions in Pakistan add considerably to the interest of the final chapter. This chapter, added at the special request of the Regiment after its first

ten years in the Pakistan Army, gives an illuminating account of Battalions' doings and shows the keenness with which the "Piffer" tradition is being maintained.

In conclusion the author feels that he cannot do better than repeat some of the remarks with which he ended his introduction to the first volume.

The Second World War was perhaps the first great conflict in which the integration of forces on land, sea and in the air was studied and achieved. In particular the influences of the air at times became a ruling if not a decisive factor—tactically, strategically, and administratively. Particularly was this so in Burma in 1944-45, and this volume may be criticized for the very limited references to naval and air forces that it contains. The reader will realize that these omissions are not because the influence of these forces are not appreciated, but because in a Regimental History the focus must be kept on the Battalion and its doings. Others come into the story only when their activities come into the Battalion's picture. The reader who knows what the naval and air forces achieved, will readily fill in the blanks in his imagination and give these important arms the weight due to them.

Finally, if this History, like all Regimental Histories of the time, gives the impression that the Second World War was won by the Frontier Force Regiment, who would not welcome such a criticism! If such an achievement were possible in the spirit alone, assuredly these volumes show that the men were capable of it.

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*MIDDLE EAST at end
*BURMA AND MALAYA at end

*Itinerary maps showing movements of Battalions in the Second World War.

THE FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT*

“Pegu” “Mooltan” “Goojerat” “Punjaub” “Delhi, 1857” “Ali Masjid” “Kabul 1879” “Ahmed Khel” “Kandahar, 1880” “Afghanistan, 1878-80” “Chitral” “Malakand” “Punjab Frontier” “Tirah” “Pekin, 1900” “Somaliland, 1901-04” “Afghanistan, 1919”

The First World War.—“Suez Canal” “Egypt, 1915” “Megiddo” “Sharon” “Nablus” “Palestine, 1918” “Aden” “Tigris, 1916” “Kut al Amara, 1917” “Baghdad” “Sharqat” “Mesopotamia, 1915-18” “N.W. Frontier India, 1914, '15, 1916-17”

The Second World War.—“Gazala” “Keren” “Amba Alagi” “Landing in Sicily” “Impossible Bridge” “The Sangro” “Cassino II” “Gothic Line” “North Malaya” “Ngakyedauk Pass” “North Arakan” “Imphal” “The Irrawaddy” “Meiktila” “Mandalay”

Class Composition:—(a) In the (British) Indian Army—Pathans (from the N.W.F.P., N.W.F.P. States, and Tribal Territory). Dogras—P.Ms. and Sikhs.

(b) In the Pakistan Army—Pathans and P.Ms.

2ND BATTALION (GUIDES) (*late 5th Battalion Q.V.O. Corps of Guides*).—Raised at Peshawar in 1846 by Lieut. H. B. Lumsden as the Corps of Guides, Punjab Irregular Force, 1851, the Corps of Guides, Punjab Frontier Force; in 1866 The Queen's Own Corps of Guides, Punjab Frontier Force; in 1876 The Queen's Own Corps of Guides (Lumsden's); in 1904, The Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (Frontier Force) (Lumsden's) Infantry; in 1922, 12th F.F. Regiment 5th Battalion (Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides, F.F.). Present designation in 1956.

3RD BATTALION (*late 1st Battalion Prince of Wales's Own*).—Raised at Hoshiarpur in 1846-47, by Capt. J. S. Hodgson, as the 1st Regiment of Infantry of the Frontier Brigade. Became the 1st Regiment of Sikh Local Infantry, 1847; the 1st Regiment of Sikh Infantry, 1857; the 1st Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Irregular Force, 1857; the 1st Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Frontier Force, 1865; the 1st Sikh Infantry, 1901; 51st Sikhs, 1903; 51st The Prince of Wales's Own Sikhs (Frontier Force), 1921; the 1st Battalion (Prince of Wales's Own Sikhs) 12th F.F. Regiment in 1922; 1st Battalion The F.F. Regiment (Prince of Wales's Own) on Partition in 1947; Present designation in 1956.

4TH BATTALION (*late 2nd Battalion Dogra paltan*).—Raised at Kangra in 1846-47 by Capt. J. W. V. Stephen as the 2nd Regiment of Infantry of the Frontier Brigade. Became the 2nd (or Hill) Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Irregular Force, in 1857; the 2nd (or Hill) Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Frontier Force, 1865; the 2nd (or Hill) Sikh Infantry in 1901; 52nd Sikhs (Frontier Force) 1903; 2nd Battalion (Sikhs) 12th F.F. Regiment in 1922; 2nd Battalion The F.F. Regiment on Partition in 1947; present designation in 1956.

5TH BATTALION (*late 3rd Royal Battalion*).—*Renny-ki-paltan*.—Raised at Ferozepore in 1846-47 by Capt. F. Winter, as the 3rd Regiment of Infantry of the Frontier Brigade. Became the 3rd Regiment of Sikh Local Infantry, 1847; the 3rd Regiment of Sikh Infantry, 1857; the 3rd Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Irregular Force, 1857; the 3rd Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Frontier Force, 1865; the 3rd Sikh Infantry, 1901; 53rd Sikhs (Frontier Force), 1903; 3rd Battalion (Sikhs), 12th Frontier Force Regiment, 1922; the 3rd Royal Battalion (Sikhs) 12th F.F. Regiment in 1935; 3rd Royal Battalion, The F.F. Regiment on Partition in 1947. Present designation in 1956.

*Not including the Battalions that were Frontier Force Rifles in the (British) Indian Army, viz. the 1st, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Battalions of the Frontier Force Regiment in the Pakistan Army.

6TH BATTALION (*late 4th Battalion*) *Burmah paltan*.—Raised at Ludhiana in 1846-47 by Capt. C. Mackenzie, Madras Army, as the 4th Regiment of Infantry of the Frontier Brigade. Became the 4th Regiment of Sikh Local Infantry, 1847; the 4th Regiment of Sikh Infantry, 1857; the 4th Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Irregular Force, 1857; the 4th Regiment of Sikh Infantry, Punjab Frontier Force, 1865; the 4th Sikh Infantry, 1901; 54th Sikhs (Frontier Force), 1903; 4th Battalion (Sikhs) 12th Frontier Force Regiment in 1922; 4th Battalion the Frontier Force Regiment on Partition in 1947. Present designation in 1956.

Battalions raised in the Second World War and retained as Regular Battalions of the Pakistan Army.

8TH BATTALION.—Raised at Bareilly, U.P., on 1st April, 1941, by Lieutenant-Colonel J. E. Redding. Became the 13th Battalion in 1956.

9TH BATTALION.—Raised at Jhansi on 1st April, 1941, by Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. Bryceson, M.C. Amalgamated into 2nd Sikhs on 1st April, 1946. Re-raised as 14th Battalion on 1st October, 1948, by Lieutenant-Colonel S. K. Lodhi. Present designation 1956.

PAKISTAN NATIONAL GUARD (*late 11th Territorial Battalion, named 14th Battalion in the Second World War*).—Raised at Nowshera, N.W.F.P., on 11th March, 1922, as 1st (Territorial) Battalion 51st (P.W.O.) Sikhs. Became the 11th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment 1922. Present designation 1956.

REGIMENTAL CENTRE.—Raised from the 2nd Battalion Guides in 1921 as the 10th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment. Became the Regimental Centre 12th Frontier Force Regiment 15th September, 1941. Became the Regimental Centre Frontier Force Regiment (Pakistan Army) 1956.

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CHAPTER I

EARLY DAYS OF THE FRONTIER FORCE

The Birth of the Punjab Frontier Force—The Guides and the Frontier Brigade—The Punjab Irregular Force (P.I.F.).

The Birth of the P.F.F.

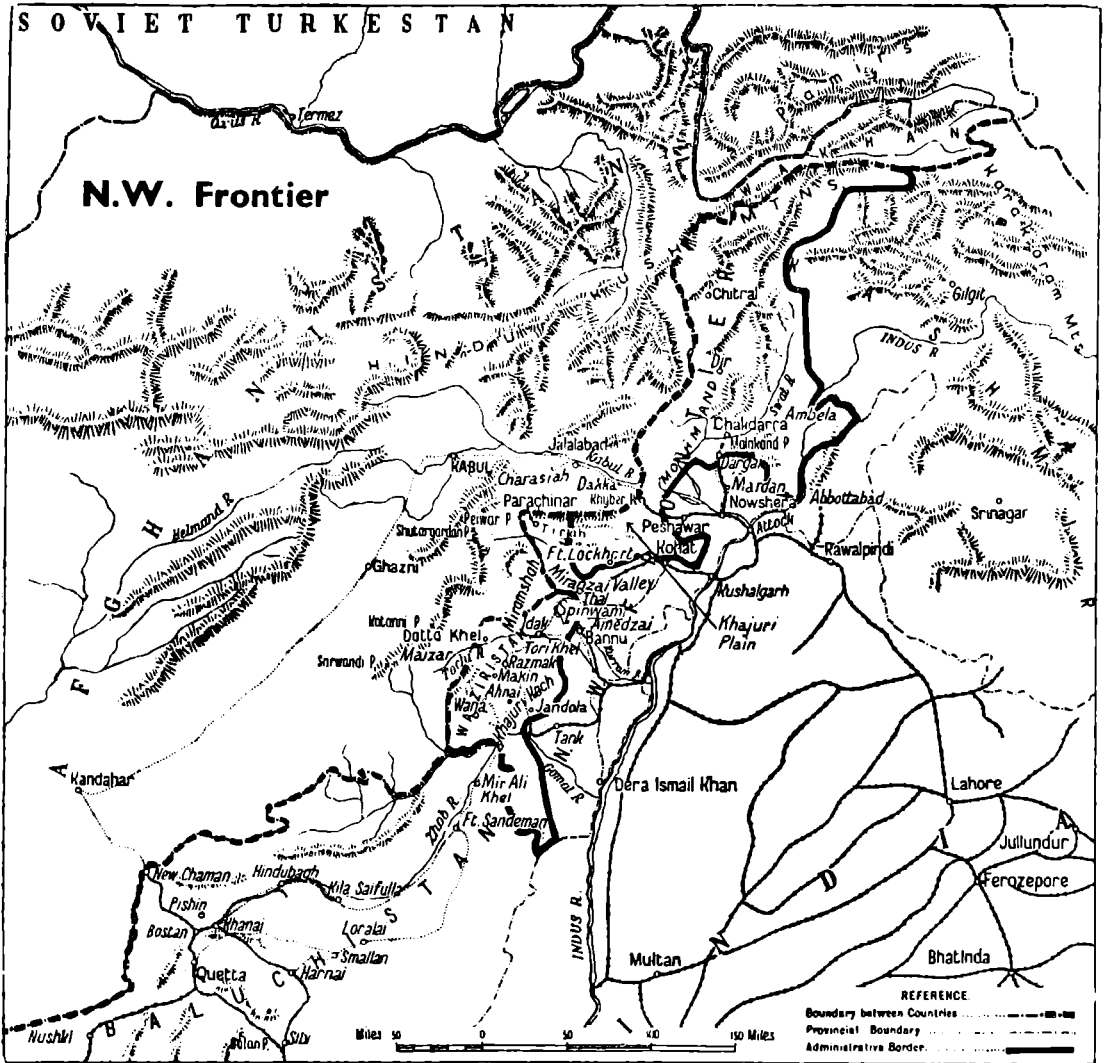
THE North-West Frontier has been from time immemorial the land gateway to the Indian continent, through which successive invaders have poured into the country. When the administration of the British Government gradually covered the North-West and replaced Sikh rule in the Land of the Five Rivers, the responsibility for watch and ward on the North-West Frontier had to be accepted by the British.

The Indian borderland is for the most part a barren mountainous region with few fertile valleys and an inadequate water supply. The lower spurs of the hills merge into the Indus valley, and the entire region is inhabited by turbulent tribesmen owing allegiance neither to the Government of Afghanistan nor that of India. Their habit has been to attack either whenever opportunity offered, and otherwise, when not engaged in internecine feuds among themselves, to raid the trade routes and villages of the plains. Living in an infertile, unproductive countryside in a severe climate, this had become their heritage and perhaps to a great extent their means of survival.

In the days of Sikh rule the Frontier roughly followed the line of the Indus. In 1846 the First Sikh War ended with the complete defeat of the Army of the Khalsa at the battle of Sobraon. This brought the entire Punjab to the feet of the East India Company, but the Governor-General determined not to take over the whole country but only the cis-Sutlej states and the tract between the Sutlej and Beas rivers.

The reverses to British arms, however, in the First Afghan War, which ended in the disastrous retreat from Kabul in 1842, had clearly shown the need for raising, from the local population of the North-West Frontier, troops to defend that region and maintain law and order. Accordingly, in 1846 the first of these was raised as an Irregular Force called "The Frontier Brigade," consisting of one company of artillery and four regiments* of infantry. In addition to this, Colonel Henry Lawrence, who had been appointed the Agent to the Governor-General on the Frontier, asked permission to raise from the border tribes

* These regiments of infantry were the equivalent of present-day battalions.



a small irregular body to be called "Guides," consisting of one troop of mounted men and two companies of foot. In a letter to the Government of India (7th June 1846) we find Lawrence writing as follows :

"The Guides I would wish to keep with myself in lieu of all guards now supplied by the Regular Army; when I would have half of them always employed in making themselves acquainted with localities and with the highways and byways of the frontier . . . The necessity of having a small force, acquainted with localities, at the command of the Civil Authority in a new country, bordering on troubled districts, is too apparent to require comment. Ordinary Police are usually very inefficient, and it often happens that the danger has passed and the mischief been

accomplished before the prescribed forms of military routine have enabled the local Civil Officer to obtain assistance from the Military Authorities.”

The Guides and the Frontier Brigade

By the end of that year Lawrence's proposals were sanctioned and Lieutenant H. B. Lumsden* was selected to raise and command the Corps of Guides. He was admirably fitted for the task and collected men from every wild and warlike border tribe. Tempted by the prospect of regular pay and enterprise, they formed a band that quickly became noted for both daring and fidelity. The Corps gave conspicuously loyal and reliable service in the Second Sikh War, and Lawrence saw the desirability of raising a much larger corps on the same lines.

In the meantime, the Frontier Brigade was raised in November 1846, each regiment receiving a nucleus of a few men from the regular infantry regiments of the line and some police. The following year the term “Frontier Brigade” was dropped and the four regiments were designated the 1st, 2nd (or Hill Corps), 3rd and 4th Regiments of Sikh Local Infantry.

As these four regiments, together with the infantry of the Corps of Guides, formed in 1947, respectively, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Regular Battalions of the Frontier Force Regiment, and during the intervening century achieved a record, as this volume will show, of loyalty, devotion and sacrifice second to none in military annals, it is opportune to record the name of the officers who raised them and the places where they were raised :

1st Sikh Infantry: raised by Captain J. S. Hodgson at Hoshiarpur.

2nd Sikh Infantry (Hill Corps): raised by Captain J. W. V. Stephen at Kangra.

3rd Sikh Infantry: raised by Captain F. Winter at Ferozepore.

4th Sikh Infantry: raised by Captain C. MacKenzie at Ludhiana.

The Corps of Guides: raised by Lieutenant H. B. Lumsden at Mardan.

The class composition of the Sikh battalions was never wholly Sikh, nor indeed did Sikhs preponderate even at the start, and eventually the composition conformed to that of all units of the Frontier Force, i.e. Pathans, Punjabi Mussalmans, Sikhs and Dogras. The reason for the name “Sikh Infantry” being given to them at their raising was that they were raised mainly from disbanded elements of the Sikh Army.

The Second Sikh War broke out in 1848 when these regiments had barely recruited and trained their personnel, but they demonstrated in it their enterprise, reliability and loyalty so signally that the raising of a much larger corps on the same lines suggested itself to Lawrence. He accordingly obtained

* Later General Sir Harry Lumsden, K.C.S.I., C.B.

the consent of the Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, to the formation in 1849, of a force known as the Trans-Frontier Brigade. It was to be used for service in the Punjab and the trans-Indus country, now known as the North-West Frontier Province, and also beyond these limits should it become necessary. It was to be independent of the Regular Army (in those days divided into Presidency Armies) and remain under the direct control of the Punjab Government.

The force consisted of three light batteries of artillery, five regiments of cavalry and the above five regiments of infantry, with a strength of 8,000 in all. It was distributed along the Frontier with detachments at Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat and Mardan, and was placed under the command of Brigadier-General J. S. Hodgson, who had, as recorded above, originally raised the 1st Sikh Infantry.

The Punjab Irregular Force

Two years later, in 1851, the force was augmented and reorganized under the title, "Punjab Irregular Force," from which early title emerge, for the first time, the historic letters "P.I.F." It was composed as follows:

- Five Regiments of Cavalry;
- The Corps of Guides (comprising both Infantry and Cavalry);
- Four Mountain Batteries;
- One Garrison Battery of heavier pieces;
- Four Regiments of Sikh Infantry;
- Six Regiments of Punjab Infantry;
- One Regiment of Gurkha Infantry.

Five of the six regiments of the Punjab Infantry in 1947 composed the Frontier Force Rifles. The original six regiments were the following:

- 1st Punjab Infantry (Coke Paltan*), later 1st Bn. (Coke's) F.F. Rifles;
- 2nd Punjab Infantry (Johnston Ki Paltan), later 2nd Bn. F.F. Rifles;
- 3rd Punjab Infantry (Moorcroft Ki Paltan), disbanded in 1882;
- 4th Punjab Infantry (Wilde Ki Paltan), later 4th Bn. (Wilde's) F.F. Rifles;
- 5th Punjab Infantry (Vaughan Ki Paltan), later 5th Bn. F.F. Rifles;
- 6th Punjab Infantry (Scinde Camel Corps), later the 6th Royal Bn. (Scinde) F.F. Rifles.

The Force, now 11,000 strong, was recruited generally from the same classes as the Guides, and the officers were men of the highest standard. In many cases their names are a source of pride to this day and their careers an

* The Hindustani word for "battalion," derived from the French "peloton," which also gave us the British "platoon."

inspiration to all. Such men were Lumsden, Wilde, Sam Browne,* Chamberlain, Keyes, Egerton, Roberts† and many others.

In 1854 Major-General Neville Chamberlain succeeded Hodgson in command of the Force. A veteran wounded more than once in the First Afghan War and the Sikh Wars, he was the first to study specifically the problems of mountain warfare. Under his forceful and energetic leadership the Punjab Frontier Force, as it was now called, soon gained an outstanding reputation among the Forces in India. And, indeed, this was to be transcended, not only in the great sepoy Mutiny, when practically alone with the Gurkha regiments the battalions of the P.F.F. helped British arms to save India from anarchy, but in our own generation, when they fought in two world wars in the cause of freedom with such valour, skill and fidelity that they could claim a place in the front rank, not only of the armies of India, but of the world.

The story must now divide itself for a while into separate narratives to follow the individual fortunes of the various battalions during the campaigns of the Great Mutiny of 1857-58 and the sixth, seventh and eighth decades of the last century.

* Later Lieutenant-General Sir Sam Browne, V.C., G.C.B., K.C.S.I., the inventor of the famous Sam Browne Belt that was destined to be worn by the officers of every modern army in the world, and by such men as Stalin, Churchill, Hitler, Mussolini, Eisenhower and all Allied leaders of the First and Second World Wars. Sam Browne is credited with inventing the belt so that, as he had lost an arm, the sword could be drawn with one hand, which was impossible with the sword-slings of those days. From his letters, however, it is clear that it was really part of a comprehensive scheme of more practical equipment for officers, and that he was working on it before the campaign in which he lost his arm.

† Lord Roberts, the great leader of the Second Afghan War, and afterwards.

CHAPTER II

THE MUTINY AND AFTER (1850-1878)

The 1st Sikhs, 1850-78—The 2nd Sikhs, 1850-78—The 3rd Sikhs, 1850-78—The 4th Sikhs, 1850-54 (Second Burmese War)—The 4th Sikhs in the Mutiny—The 4th Sikhs in the Mahsud Expedition of 1860—The Guides, 1850-57—The Guides in the Siege of Delhi—The Guides on the Frontier, 1858-78—Ambeyla Expedition, 1863.

The 1st Sikhs, 1850-78

THE first campaign in which the 1st Sikhs participated was the Black Mountain Expedition of 1852-53. As a result of the murder, by a section of Yusafzais inhabiting the Black Mountain, of Mr. Carne of the Customs Department, a punitive expedition was dispatched to that wild region, which the Battalion, though much below strength, accompanied.

The outbreak of the Mutiny in May 1857, found the Battalion at Dera Ghazi Khan, and a spontaneous petition was submitted from the J.C.Os. and rank and file in June, asking to be sent against the mutineers. It was not till the following December that the Battalion marched. It reached Ambala on the 11th, covering 145 miles in four days. It reached Roorkee on the 24th February and, as part of the Rohilkand Field Force, acquitted itself to such good purpose that in a Government order of 1859 it is mentioned as having served with great distinction in the United Provinces and Oudh.

The Battalion later became escort to the Governor-General's camp on the march northward, a duty which lasted five months and earned a message of approbation from His Excellency on its completion.

In 1862 the class composition of the Battalion was fixed as: 4 companies* Sikhs, 1½ companies Punjabi Mussalmans, 1 company trans-Indus Mussalmans, 1 company Hindustani Mussalmans, and ½ company Dogras.

For the next seventeen years the Battalion was engaged in duties on the Frontier, including a spell at Multan, and during this period only two operational tasks came its way.

In 1878 is recorded an inspection of the Battalion for the first time by Brigadier-General F. S. Roberts, V.C.† It was not long before both that great

* Company strength was approximately 100 men, and a battalion consisted of eight companies till the First World War.

† Later Field-Marshal Earl Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford.

captain and war leader and the Battalion were involved in the Second Afghan War—a campaign that brought renown to the forces and their commander, and a settlement, to last for forty years, with the Afghan Government.

During this war, the story of which follows in a later chapter, the 1st Sikhs were brigaded with the 17th Foot. By an interesting coincidence it was again brigaded with that battalion (under its new name, the Leicestershire Regiment) throughout the First World War in the 28th Frontier Force Brigade. The story of this will be found in Chapter VI.

The 2nd Sikhs, 1850-78

As noted above, this Battalion was originally called “The Hill Corps” of the Frontier Brigade. This was because it was raised in Kangra and was at first composed almost entirely of Dogras with a small proportion of Pathans and Gurkhas.

It was the first to enlist Dogras in the Indian Army and was known for many years as the Dogra Paltan.

The newly-raised corps was soon to receive its baptism of fire. In 1848 the Punjab was in turmoil owing to the outbreak of the Second Sikh War, and three companies of the Battalion were dispatched to assist in the suppression of an insurgent jagirdar (landholder).

In 1857 the outbreak of the Mutiny found the Battalion at Abbottabad. It was ordered to the United Provinces in the autumn of 1858, but by then only smouldering embers of the Mutiny remained to be stamped out, and the 2nd Sikhs took no part in the campaign.

Earlier however, the Battalion was actively enough employed, as follows, in the Peshawar plain and the mountain regions of Swat and Hazara.

In the middle of May 1857, three companies of the 2nd Sikhs in Abbottabad and Murree were the only infantry left to hold the whole of the Hazara District.

At this time the 55th Bengal Native Infantry had relieved the Guides at Mardan and was furnishing a detachment at Nowshera. On 21st June this detachment mutinied. A force of frontier police immediately moved out from Peshawar on the 23rd and approached Mardan on the following evening. The 55th broke out on hearing of their approach and swarmed off to the frontier close by, pursued by the frontier police, who killed 100 and took 150 prisoners. The remainder, some 600 strong, escaped into Swat, where they offered their services to the Akhund if he would raise the border tribes against the Government.

The Akhund refused and, expelled from Swat, the refugees of the 55th set out with the intention of entering Kashmir to seek asylum with Maharajah Gulab Singh. The 2nd Sikhs, less the three companies at Murree, were ordered

to head them off. Leaving only recruits for the protection of Abbottabad, the Regiment marched to Shinkiarā, some twenty-five miles to the north, to intercept the mutineers.

The move was successful and 200 mutineers were captured. The remainder of the 55th, now a disorganized rabble, fled into the hills of the border, where they were robbed and killed for their equipment and enslaved. The fate of the 55th N.I. was the source of Kipling's story "The Lost Legion."

After its return to Abbottabad the Battalion remained there during the winter of 1857-58, and in April 1858, was ordered on service to Sitana against the Hindustani Fanatics. This was the second of many punitive expeditions against these trouble-makers in the nineteenth century.

Sitana lies on a spur of the Hindu Kush range, on the right bank of the Indus, some twenty-five miles north-west of Abbottabad. Here, since the early part of the nineteenth century, a colony of Hindustani Mussalman fanatics, or Wahabis, had been established which had formed a rallying-point for fugitives from justice and a centre of subversive propaganda. A punitive expedition had been sent against Sitana in 1853, but the effect had not been permanent.

The Battalion formed part of a column consisting of the 6th Punjab Infantry (F.F.), the 12th Punjab Infantry and five mountain guns. Sitana was surrounded and destroyed, sixty of the Fanatics being killed for a loss to the column of six killed and twenty-nine wounded. After this the Battalion, as remarked above, went to the United Provinces till 1861.

The Battalion returned from its above-mentioned duty in the United Provinces in the spring of 1861 and was sent to Kohat. It was the commencement of a long association with that place, but at the start it was an unhappy one as a result of sickness there, which took a heavy toll of the Battalion during the first two years. It suffered severely from both cholera and what is now known to be malaria, and as a result missed the Ambeyla Expedition of 1863, being left to garrison Kohat.

From this time till the outbreak of the Second Afghan War in 1878 the 2nd Sikhs were employed on watch-and-ward duties along the Frontier.

The 3rd Sikhs, 1850-78

After it was raised in January 1847, this Battalion's early history contains nothing notable till 1852, when a request from all ranks to be sent on service to Burma was refused with regret.

On the outbreak of the Mutiny in May 1857, it was moved to Bannu. At that time it had a company of Hindustanis who were suspected of being disaffected, and they were disarmed, paid up and discharged.

The composition of the Battalion became: 5 companies of Sikhs, 2 companies of Pathans, 2 companies of Punjabi Muslims and 1 company of Dogras.

On 24th September 1858, it marched to the United Provinces to join in the mopping-up operations against the mutineers, and in the following February it is recorded as forming part of a field force operating in Gorakhpur, Oudh and Nepal.

Its steadiness and endurance in this campaign earned the thanks of the Governor-General. The Battalion did not return to the Frontier until 1863, and when doing so it marched north as escort to H.E. the Commander-in-Chief. This duty lasted from January to May.

Later,* in December of that year, it formed part of the Ambeyla Force and acquitted itself well in action on the 14th, 15th and 16th December.

From this time until the outbreak of the Second Afghan War the Battalion served on the Frontier, taking part in minor affairs with efficiency and zeal. None however were of sufficient importance to merit further description here.

The 4th Sikhs, 1850-54 (Second Burmese War)

As the 4th Sikhs of the original Frontier Brigade raised in 1846, the early history of this Battalion differs little from that of the other three, but in 1852 it volunteered, as did the 3rd Battalion, for service in the Second Burmese War, which had just broken out. Unlike the 3rd, however, its petition was granted, and in November 1852, it arrived by sea in Rangoon. Incidentally, it was thus the first Punjab regiment to cross the sea for active service.

On arrival in Rangoon the Battalion was immediately posted to the 2nd Brigade with orders to relieve Pegu,† fifty miles up river. This was successfully accomplished, the Burmese enemy refusing to fight; and during the ensuing cold weather the Battalion was employed on columns mopping up independent bodies of freebooters. These duties were very arduous and unhealthy, as fever and cholera were rife. They culminated in an attack on the stronghold of the chief Burmese leader, Myat Tun, and it proved somewhat costly before it succeeded. The Battalion lost 31 casualties, including 7 Indian ranks killed and the Commanding Officer, Major Armstrong, and 23 Indian ranks wounded.

The Battalion remained in Burma till 1854, when it returned to the Punjab, having acquitted itself right well in its first campaign. As a reflection on the changed conditions of modern campaigning in tropical climates (due to progress in hygiene and prophylactic measures against disease) the period spent in Burma cost the Battalion 122 deaths from fever and cholera.

* See p. 24.

† See Chapter XX. This Battalion's last major battle in the Second World War was also at Pegu, ninety-three years later.

The 4th Sikhs in the Mutiny

As this Battalion and the Guides Infantry were the two Battalions of the Regiment that were seriously engaged in the desperate fighting of the campaign against the mutineers of the old Bengal Army, it is convenient here to recall how the Great Mutiny in 1857 broke out and to sketch in outline the strategy of the campaign that ensued to deal with it.

Whilst many causes have been assigned to account for the outbreak, a state of acute discontent among the Indian ranks certainly existed and made the Indian sepoy ripe material for the plotter and intriguer. One strong complaint that was universally brought up to the authorities was that the cartridges (which in those days had to be opened by biting with the teeth before the powder could be loaded into the musket) were greased with fat obtained from the carcasses of pigs. The pig being an "unclean" animal, this was represented as a religious grievance.* In addition, the existence in the Red Fort in Delhi of the aged Bahadur Shah, nominally King of Delhi and descendant of the Mogul emperors, together with his daughter, a scheming and ambitious woman, formed a focus for agitation and anti-government intrigue. The sedition spread unchecked—officers, when warned, refused to believe that the slightest disloyalty was possible.

In the end the initial outbreak occurred at Meerut. It spread like wild-fire till almost the entire Bengal Army mutinied and a large proportion, beginning with the regiments in Meerut (only forty miles away), flocked to Delhi and received blessing and encouragement from the King's daughter on the battlements of the Fort.

Thus in the space of a few days the Government of the country with the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief in the Punjab (at Simla) were cut off from the main communications with Calcutta, the capital. Together with the mutinous sepoys, the bulk of the civil population also turned against the Government in the whole region from Benares and Allahabad to Delhi, and anarchy and bloodshed were unchecked everywhere in this huge area.

The strategy necessary to quell the Mutiny and restore order and safety demanded the recapture of the great cities of the United Provinces and, most important, Delhi itself. The loyal forces ready to support the British troops were small and the British forces themselves that were available to march from Bengal were wholly inadequate. Reinforcements from Great Britain could not be quickly transported across the sea in those days and there was no Suez Canal. Moreover, in one or two large centres such as Cawnpore and Lucknow the British garrisons, supported by small contingents of loyal troops, were holding out, besieged by overwhelming numbers of mutineers. At Delhi itself

* While the authorities issued official denials at the time to settle this grievance, subsequent inquiries after the Mutiny elicited the fact that in substance the complaint was well founded.

the garrison, together with the British garrison of Meerut, had taken up a position on the famous Ridge overlooking the city, and here to their support came all the British regiments and artillery that could be spared from all stations to the north, where generally the Mutiny had not spread.

At the end of May 1857, this small force on the Ridge was, in fact, the nucleus of all resistance and counter-measures from the North; and it was here that reinforcements and supplies flowed from the Punjab to build up the force until it was strong enough to take the initiative against the enemy. The latter were now in great numbers in the city, but from all accounts they were ill-organized and there was no effective leader to co-ordinate their efforts. At the same time they were well supplied with ammunition for both muskets and guns, as the main magazine of Delhi had been captured at the outset by the mutineers.*

This, then, was the picture when the 4th Sikhs, whose strength contained many recruits and young soldiers, left Abbottabad for Delhi. It arrived at Lahore on 1st June, at Ludhiana on the 8th (where it dealt with a body of mutineers which delayed it four days) and reached the Ridge at Delhi on the 23rd, where it went into action at once.

This march to Delhi was of course entirely by road and an exceedingly fine performance. Deducting the four days' halt at Ludhiana, during which the men got no rest, the time taken to cover the 560 miles was thirty days including halts, an average of eighteen and two-thirds miles a day for a month on end, and this in the hottest time of the year in one of the hottest countries in the world.†

The reason for the Battalion going into action with such speed was that the enemy had just launched a heavy attack from the west, through the gardens of the Sabzi Mandi. They had selected the anniversary of the battle of Plassey for this, and the garrison on the Ridge had been hard pressed. The Battalion, together with a detachment of the 2nd Fusiliers, were launched in a counter-attack which was completely successful and drove the enemy back into the walled city.

There now followed nearly three months of continuous heavy outpost duty and incessant attacks by the enemy.

During the latter part of July and August, however, the enemy began to lose heart somewhat, and their attacks were not made in the same determined manner as earlier.

By 6th September all the reinforcements that were expected, and the

* The heroic blowing-up of the magazine near the Fort by two British N.C.Os. was in fact a useless sacrifice, since this was only a minor "expense" store of ammunition—the main magazine was some miles outside the city, and this fell into the hands of the mutineers unopposed.

† See also pp. 17-22 for the account of the Guides in their march to Delhi and their part in the siege of Delhi. (Map p. 22.)

siege train, had reached Delhi. Preparations were immediately made for constructing batteries within close range of the walls for the purpose of breaching the bastions for the assault, for it was now determined to seize the initiative and capture the city.

On 11th September the bombardment began in earnest and continued for three days and nights. By the night of the 13th the Water and Kashmir Bastions had been breached, and orders for the assault were issued.

The main attack on the 14th September was to be made in three columns against respectively, the Kashmir Bastion, the Water Bastion and the Kashmir Gate.

The 4th Sikhs were detailed to the second column, which was to storm the breach in the Water Bastion. The other troops in this column were 200 men of H.M. 8th Foot and 250 men of H.M. 2nd Fusiliers. The Battalion went into action 350 strong.

The second column was on the left, to its right being the first and third columns making for the Kashmir Bastion and Gate respectively.

The following is Lord Roberts's description of the advance of the second column:

*“No sooner was its head seen emerging from the cover of the old customs house, than it was met by a terrible discharge of musketry. Both Engineer Officers who were leading it were severely wounded and of the 39 men who carried the ladders, 29 were killed or wounded in as many seconds. The ladders were immediately seized by their comrades, who, after one or two vain attempts, succeeded in placing them against the escarp; then amidst a shower of stones and bullets, the soldiers ascended, rushed the breach, and, slaying all before them, drove the rebels from the walls.”

The other two columns had been equally successful, but a fourth column, which had been ordered to make a flank attack on the Kabul Gate, had so far failed to capture it.

After re-forming, the first and second columns moved along the ramparts to the Kabul Gate, capturing the guns and driving all before them and finally planting the Union Jack on the Kabul Gate.

The Burn Bastion was, however, strongly held by the enemy and was only approached by a narrow lane down which the enemy poured a heavy fire. It was in the attempt to take this Bastion that General Nicholson was mortally wounded, and after several attempts to carry it, it was decided to wait till next day, when the troops could be reorganized. The men spent the night near the Kabul Gate.

* Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India*.

The casualties suffered by the 4th Sikhs on this date were: 1 J.C.O. and 7 rank and file killed, and 1 British officer, 1 J.C.O. and 42 rank and file wounded; total of all ranks killed and wounded, 52 out of a total strength of 350 engaged.

From the 15th to the 20th September the Battalion was continually engaged in street fighting. On the 20th the city was completely captured, and the next day the old King of Delhi was taken prisoner.

After the capture of Delhi the Battalion took no further part in the war but remained as garrison in Delhi.

After the Mutiny campaign the 4th Sikhs returned to the Frontier, and in the course of its service there between 1859 and the outbreak of the First World War it took part in many of the important punitive campaigns against one or other of the tribes. It took no part in the Second Afghan War of 1878-80.

While most of these affairs are more conveniently dealt with in the next chapter, one that occurred very shortly after the Battalion's return from Delhi is of sufficient interest to record here. It was the operation of General Chamberlain's column against the Mahsuds and Wazirs in 1860.

The 4th Sikhs in the Mahsud Expedition, 1860

In the spring of 1860, 430 bayonets from the Battalion, under Lieutenant Jenkins, were sent from Abbottabad to join the Tank Field Force, which was assembled at Tank for operations against hostile Mahsuds and Wazirs, under the command of General Chamberlain.

On 17th April the Force marched via the Tank Zam to Kot Khirgi and next day reached Palosina Kach, destroying Shingi Kot on the way. The main part of the Force then advanced up the Shahur valley, the remainder, including the Regiment, staying at Palosina with heavy transport and supplies. This detachment, though left behind, was destined to see the sharpest fighting of the expedition.

The camp was situated on the left bank of the Zam. It was protected on the south by piquets placed on the plateau to the south-east of the camp. Each piquet was composed of one non-commissioned officer and eight men and each had a support of the same strength in rear of it.

No information had been received of the proximity of the enemy in any strength. However, on the night of the 22nd the camp was sniped, but otherwise all seemed tranquil till suddenly, at dawn on the 23rd, 3,000 Waziris overwhelmed the piquets to the south-east of the camp with a rush and seized the plateau. Five hundred of them, continuing their advance, charged the south-east end of the camp itself. This end of the camp was occupied by the levies and the supply go-down, followers, etc., so the enemy quickly gained an entrance, and the greatest confusion ensued. Next to the levies were the Guides,

who formed up and drove the enemy out of that part of the camp with the bayonet.

The 4th Sikhs and the Hazara Gurkha Regiment (later the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles Frontier Force) were in the centre of the camp. Major Rothney, the Commanding Officer of the Battalion, who commanded it throughout the siege of Delhi (but who was at the time officiating Commandant of the newly-raised Gurkhas, many of whom had been transferred from the 4th Sikhs as a nucleus two years before) at once formed up the two regiments. The enemy were by this time pouring into that part of the camp, but the men, quickly falling in, drove them back with the bayonet and cleared them out.

Major Rothney then advanced onto the ridge and took the enemy on the plateau in flank. Both Battalions bore down on them with great steadiness and drove them off the tableland. Then, being joined by the Guides, all three pursued the enemy for three miles over the hills until they dispersed.

The loss of the Force was heavy, 63 being killed and 166 wounded, the levies, followers and the Guides, whose piquets were cut up, suffering the most severely. The Battalion did not have any casualties, as the men had time to get under arms and form up before the enemy attacked their part of the camp. The piquet found by the Regiment on the plateau held its ground when the enemy charged and was not driven in.

The enemy suffered heavily and received a sharp lesson: 92 bodies were found in camp and 40 more were abandoned in their retirement over the hills.

After a fierce action at the Berari Tangi, in which the Battalion was not engaged, the Force advanced to Kaniguram, the religious centre of the country.

After this the enemy offered no more resistance. The Force continued punitive measures; it destroyed Makin and Razmak and, retiring over the pass of that name, marched to Bannu, where it was broken up. The Battalion returned to Abbottabad.

It is interesting to note that sixty years later, almost in the same place, Mahsud tribesmen fought a similar fierce campaign against General Skeen's force in 1920.

The following extracts from General Neville Chamberlain's despatch are interesting, showing that in those early days of Frontier fighting the lessons of hill warfare against the Frontier tribes had already been learnt and the tactics had been adapted to the nature of the enemy and the country. They have not changed to the present day, except for the modifications necessitated by modern weapons.

“The shortest marches took hours to perform, the safety of the followers, supplies, and baggage, requiring the heights on both sides to be crowned and held until the arrival of the rear-guard. Though starting by sunrise it was generally midday by the time the new ground was reached, and often later. Arriving there, day piquets had to be posted and escorts

for the surveyors, cattle and foragers to be supplied. In the afternoon fatigue parties had to be turned out to construct breast works for the night piquets. These had to be substantially built with the stones collected from the hillsides, and to be palisaded, to prevent a sudden rush by overpowering numbers. At sunset from 700 to 1,000 men occupied these works, their comparatively isolated position rendering support difficult; at dusk the tents were struck, and, in addition to inlying piquets, half the men slept accoutred and the whole in uniform."

After this expedition the 4th Sikhs remained on the Frontier but engaged in no major enterprise.

The Guides 1850-57

It will be recalled that the initial raising of the Corps of Guides in 1846 was quite separate from that of the Frontier Brigade, and the purpose for which Henry Lawrence needed the Corps was quite different. As had been noted, he described the role to be assigned to it as that of a small force acquainted with the highways and byways of the Frontier and ready to the hand of the Civil Authorities in a new country bordering on troubled districts.

For this reason he included in its strength both mounted and foot. The Corps remained, after its expansion to the full strength of a cavalry regiment and a battalion of infantry, a unit organized as a separate corps, self-contained with both infantry and cavalry. Thus it remained until the reorganization of 1922.* It had its own well-equipped centre at Mardan—indeed, the Guides' home there remained jealously guarded and beloved by them and to a great extent their own property till 1938, when they finally left it.

In 1922, however, when the Indian Army was reorganized on a basis of regiments, the Guides Infantry were incorporated into the Frontier Force Regiment as its 5th Battalion, and the Guides Cavalry were given a separate entity as a cavalry regiment of the Indian Army. Nevertheless, the bonds between the two remain unbroken and are proudly maintained to this day.

It is as well that the reader should understand the above history of the inception of the Corps and its organization, tradition and status up to 1922 and subsequently; otherwise he might be somewhat mystified as to how a portion of the Corps became part of another regiment altogether, particularly as under its original title the Corps has been perhaps the most famous single unit of the Indian Army and probably the only one with a name and legend of world-wide character.

Many are the interesting stories told of Lumsden's early dealings with the wild characters of the Frontier from whom he recruited so largely the men of the Corps he was raising, but for these the reader must go to the history of the Corps or the biography of Lumsden (*Lumsden of the Guides*). He will not

* See Chapter X, "The Regimental Centre."

regret the time spent in reading them. Unfortunately, in a volume of this nature space does not admit of the inclusion of more than the major events in the lives of the Battalions of the Regiment.

One innovation of this time made by Lumsden must, however, be recorded, since it is a matter about which many erroneous claims have been made and much written that is incorrect. He was the first to introduce khaki as a colour for soldiers' uniform, and the Guides were the first corps to be dressed in it. The colour was earlier known among the Punjabis as "Multani mitti," but the Persian word (meaning dust-coloured) was briefer and more civilized and came into general use.

The fact that for obvious reasons the British Army had to be dressed in khaki for the South African War in 1899 has led many to suppose that that was its first appearance. Actually, the facts are as stated above, and it was on the Ridge at Delhi in 1857 that many units copied the Guides, and the wearing of khaki became more general both in the Indian Army and in British units serving in India.

As has been briefly recorded on p. 3, the Guides gave outstanding service in the Second Sikh War and by 1849 their value had been established and recognized by higher authority.

The Guides in the Siege of Delhi

The outbreak of the Great Mutiny of 1857 and the military situation it gave rise to are described above in the narrative of the 4th Sikhs. It was as part of the build-up of the army on the Ridge facing the walls of Delhi that the Guides were ordered to join it there with the utmost speed.

They were in Mardan at the time, and the march they performed has been acknowledged as one of the great classic marches in the annals of military history. It has indeed become almost legendary.

They marched as a corps, Cavalry and Infantry together, and arrived as a corps. Although camels were provided, one to every two infantrymen, to enable them to keep up with the cavalry, it may well be claimed that the major share of endurance in such a feat was that of the Infantry. Clearly, in any case, it merits description in some detail here, for many erroneous accounts of it have been given credence, and indeed the facts are even more astonishing than most of the legends.

The news of the outbreak at Meerut was received in Peshawar on the night of 11th May, and the Guides were originally ordered to Jhelum forthwith to form part of a column of all arms to deal with any outbreaks that might occur in that neighbourhood. They were relieved at Mardan by the 55th (an Indian battalion from Nowshera which subsequently mutinied*). They marched on 13th May—the very hottest time of the year in one of the hottest regions in the

* See page 7.

world. Their marching-out strength was 5 officers, 153 sabres and 349 rifles. In addition, it was the month of Ramazan, when all Mussalmans fast during the hours of daylight, so that a great proportion of the men were physically ill-prepared for the endurance that such a march entailed.

Before reaching Jhelum the Guides had learnt that the proposed movable column was not to be formed and that they were to continue the march to Delhi without delay. Thus it was that the march of 580 miles from Mardan to Delhi was carried out in one operation in twenty-six days, which included four days' halt on the orders of superior authority. The distance was covered therefore, in twenty-two marching days.

The following extracts from the diary of Captain Daly, who commanded the Corps, give some idea of the conditions under which a portion of the march was carried out (see also plate).

"May 20th. Reached Mandra, twenty miles at 5 a.m., having marched at 10 p.m. last night. Great difficulty in keeping awake. . . . Men very cheerful and ready to go anywhere; none admit themselves too knocked up or too stiff to proceed.

"21st. Sohawah, twenty-four miles, crossing the Bakriala; ravines and roads broken and intricate; spent a burning day; march at 8 p.m., wind scalding.

"22nd. Jhelum at 5 a.m.; encamping ground by the river, delightfully fresh after twenty-eight miles. First trumpet at dark; crossed the river at nine. Great storm of dust and rain made the road difficult to follow.

"23rd. Korla, fifteen miles from the Chenab and ten from Gujerat, twenty-one miles from Jhelum. Roads heavy from the storm, air delicious and fresh; so tired all night that I was compelled to walk myself awake; even that remedy failed, constantly found myself abreast of a sowar's horse. Some of the sowars in the rear troops kept passing right up through the column Resolved to take advantage of the cool day and push off to the Chenab. Cavalry first, Infantry in the evening. Marched cavalry at 3 p.m., reached the Chenab at eight and commenced the crossing.

"25th. Marched to Kamokee this morning by 7 a.m., thirty-two miles. Started for Lahore at 5 p.m., distance thirty miles.

"26th. Reached Lahore at 6 a.m. Was met by the Commissioner and Military Secretary—difficulty about selecting recruits.

"27th. Recruiting (Corps continued march).

"28th. Overtook the Corps at Powindiah at 7 a.m.

"29th. Reached the banks of the Sutlej close to Sobraon battlefield by 6 a.m., commenced the crossing at once. Here it was that the river ran red with Sikh blood. Determined to follow the Umballa road.

"30th. Reached Mihna, thirty-two miles, about 7 a.m. The cross-country road sent many straggling; some did not reach till dark; there was

baggage and three men missing when four o'clock struck. Resolved on a short march and to leave at the usual time, so as to enable them to make a night's rest. Marched at 6 p.m. to Jagraon, fourteen miles; reached before midnight.

"31st. Had a delightful sleep. Men much refreshed Marched at 7 p.m.

"1st June. Reached Ludhiana, twenty-four miles, at 3 a.m. and at once composed ourselves to sleep until daylight at the foot of the Kutcherri steps, the lowest step serving as a pillow Marched on Alawi-ki-Serai at 7.30 p.m., distance twenty-eight miles.

"2nd. Got a sight of the Serai soon after daybreak. Had two hours' sleep off the reel and was much refreshed. The men very cheery Officers and men fall asleep on the ground for an hour and the difficulty is, who shall remain awake to sound the trumpet? Off to Rajpoora, distance twenty-eight miles, at seven this morning.

"3rd. Reached the old Serai with the Cavalry at dawn just as the light was breaking Started for Umballa at 6 p.m., marched through the cantonment at 1 a.m., every house deserted Our guide took us down to the Boobial Tope, magnificent trees, under which a score of horses can stand free from the sun, and a large tank; altogether a beautiful spot. We all laid down to rest by the trunk of the old banyan tree.

"4th. Marched to Pipli, twenty-six miles, by 4.30 this morning. Road very heavy.

"5th. Pipli arrived at dawn. Road heavy. Spent this day in the tahsil and marched for Karnal, twenty-four miles, at sunset.

"6th. Reached Karnal at 3 a.m. Cholera appeared amongst us this evening and attacked three Gurkhas; one cook died, seven or eight men under its pressure at sunset; obliged to leave five men behind"

At Karnal the Corps carried out a punitive operation to destroy a mutinous village five miles away. This was at the request of the local magistrate. They marched on, however, the same night and covered thirty miles of the remaining sixty to Delhi before dawn. They arrived in one further march on the morning of 9th June.

As the Guides approached the Ridge at the close of their thirty-mile march from Larsauli, a staff officer galloped up to their Commanding Officer and inquired, "How soon can you be ready to go into action?" "In half an hour," was Captain Daly's reply.

The marching-in strength of the Corps of Guides was 5 officers, 9 J.C.Os. and 209 rank and file of the Cavalry, and 17 J.C.Os. and 406 rank and file of the Infantry—a total for the whole of 646 all ranks.

They had even managed to swell their ranks with recruits during the

march, so that they arrived on the Ridge stronger than they marched out of Mardan—and that in spite of sickness and casualties on the way.

The Guides could scarcely have had time to do more than pitch camp and take a very brief rest at the close of their historic march, when the rebels, during the afternoon of 9th June, made a sortie in force from Delhi and delivered a sharp attack on the Hindu Rao's house, a large stone building which crowned the south-western end of the long rocky Ridge. The Guides were at once called upon; and while the Infantry, under Captain Daly, with Lieutenants Batty and Hawes, were told off to reinforce the piquet on the extreme right of the Ridge, the Cavalry, under Lieutenant Kennedy, was directed to move along the foot of the Ridge on their right. The Infantry went straight into the fight, attacking the rebels fiercely and driving them back into the Sabzi Mandi.

The entry in Captain Daly's diary of the 10th is very brief: "The Regiment hotly engaged. Batty mortally wounded. Kahan Singh Rosa hard hit. Hawes clipt across the face with a sword and many good men down. Men behaved heroically, impetuously."

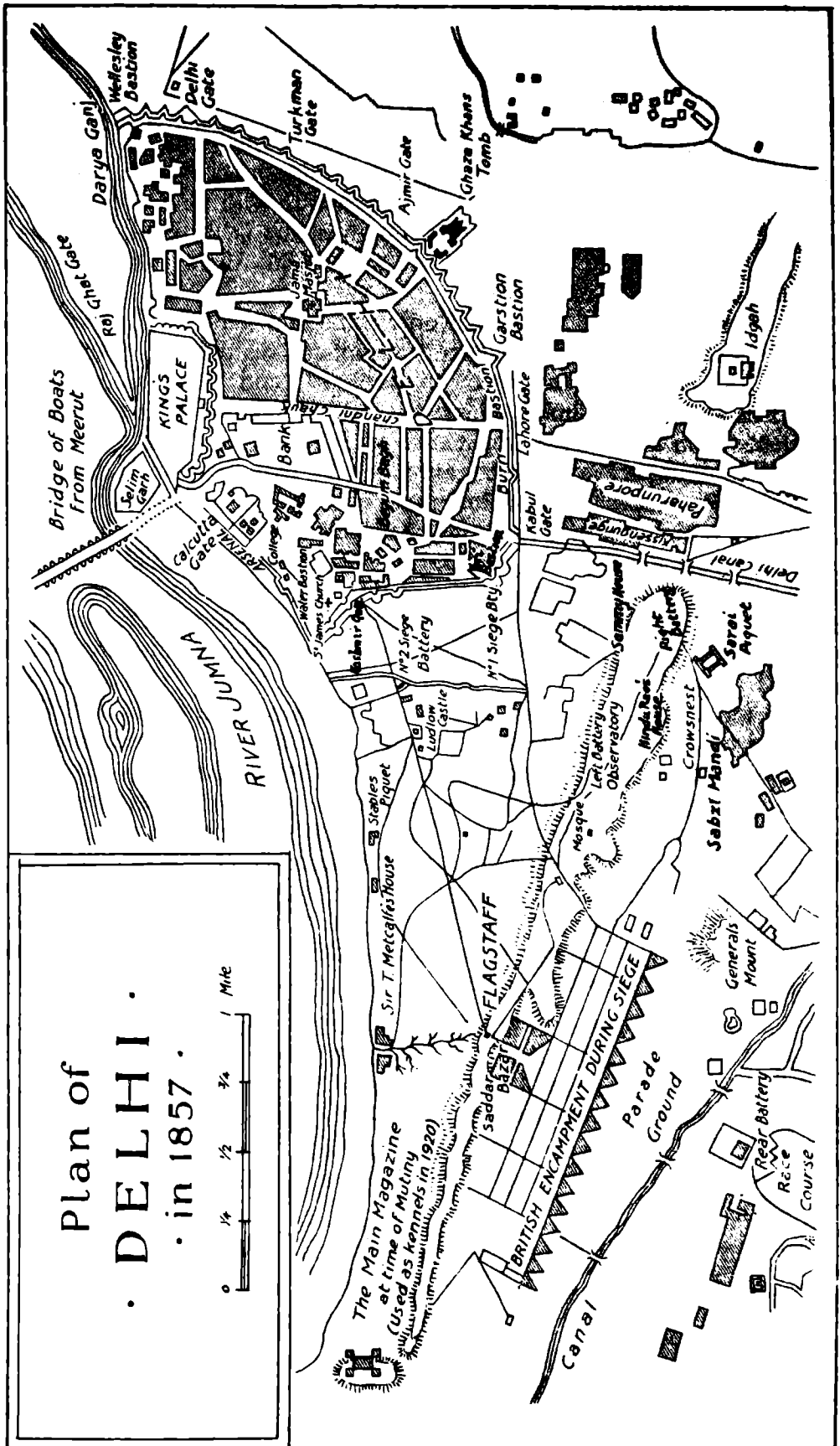
From 9th June till the 23rd the Guides were permanently posted and constantly engaged on the right flank of the Ridge, repelling enemy attacks (there were twenty-six in all on this flank). They greatly distinguished themselves and, in particular, Captain Daly, for his personal gallantry and leadership on 15th June, was considered worthy of the Victoria Cross.

The situation on this day was serious. The enemy had penetrated on the Guides' flank almost to the supporting artillery, when Daly led the Guides Cavalry in a magnificent charge to restore the position. He himself was severely wounded in the action, which an eyewitness described as follows: "I have no hesitation in saying that in all human probability that charge saved the guns from falling into the hands of the enemy. We were in a very nasty position and the enemy were very close to the guns and doing us great damage with their sharpshooters. Daly's charge was a desperate one, right up to the enemy's guns. It was a most perilous and bold movement, but necessary to save the guns."

That night General Barnard (the Commander-in-Chief) visited Daly and expressed his regret that he could not recommend him for the Victoria Cross, which was not then open to officers of the Indian Army. Early in 1859 the award of the Victoria Cross was thrown open to British officers of the Honourable East India Company's service, and Sir Hope Grant strongly recommended Daly to Lord Clyde, who was by then Commander-in-Chief, for the decoration; but the reply was that "His Excellency has been obliged to decline forwarding claims of this sort made so long after the occurrence for which the claim is preferred."

The enemy attack on 23rd June, the anniversary of Plassey, has already been referred to in the narrative of the 4th Battalion. The Guides took

Plan of • DELHI • • in 1857 •



their share in repelling this onslaught, and one of their officers, Lieutenant Murray (60th Native Infantry, attached to the Guides), was severely wounded.

On 14th August General Nicholson marched in with reinforcements from the Punjab, and these brought up the strength of the Delhi Field Force (as it was now called) to more than 8,000 effectives, while there were also nearly 2,000 sick and wounded in camp.

The time for resolute action had now come and the plan for the capture of Delhi by assault prepared by General Nicholson was put into effect on 14th September. It has been described on page 12, and the Guides Infantry were part of the fourth column, which was 860 strong and in fact made up of detachments from ten different regiments. Its role was to attack and clear the suburbs of Paharunpore and Kishenganj and enter the city by the Lahore Gate.

As has been recorded, this column met with little success. What happened was that a flanking party prematurely engaged the enemy, and troops were committed before the artillery were ready to support the attack. The Guides suffered severely, losing 1 officer (Lieutenant Murray) and 10 other ranks killed, and 2 officers (Lieutenants Shebbeare* and Bond) and 26 other ranks wounded. For this action Lieutenant Shebbeare was subsequently awarded the V.C.

With the success of the other columns Delhi was captured, and though a lodgment on the walls and city fringe was all that was secured on the day of the assault, the whole city was taken by 20th September.

The final task allotted to the Guides was to capture the bridgehead over the Jumna across the bridge of boats. This was achieved with an attack which drove the enemy from their position covering the bridge and captured a gun.

The cost of the so-called Siege of Delhi had been heavy, and of this the Guides paid a large share—their casualties out of a total strength of 646 on their arrival, amounted to 361. It is perhaps fitting to close this narrative with the words of Lord Roberts's tribute† :

“Where all behaved nobly it is difficult to particularize, but it will not, I hope, be considered invidious if I specially draw my readers' attention to the four corps most constantly engaged, the 60th Rifles, the Sirmoor Battalion of Gurkhas, the Guides and the 1st Punjab Infantry. Placed in the very front of the position, they were incessantly under fire, and their losses in action testify to the nature of the services they performed.”

The Guides on the Frontier, 1858-78

The Guides left Delhi on 18th December 1857, and marched back to Mardan in more leisurely fashion. Visiting Peshawar first for an official

* Wounded six times in all during the campaign.

† *Forty-one Years in India*, by Earl Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford.

welcome, they arrived in Mardan on 11th February 1858. They were not long however in peace.

The Hindustani Fanatics of Sitana,* reinforced by the absconders from the mutinous 55th Infantry mentioned above, started trouble by attacking the camp of the Assistant Commissioner of the Yusafzai District.

The Guides formed part of a punitive force of 5,000 assembled in April 1858, to deal with them. Advancing in converging columns, the force destroyed three Hindustani villages and returned home. The Guides were not seriously engaged and were back in Mardan by June.

In the same month Lumsden, who had been on a special mission to Kandahar, rejoined and resumed command of the Corps in time to take the Guides Infantry to join a punitive force in 1859 against the Kabul Khel in the Kohat District. Here the Battalion had a sharp fight, losing one man killed and ten wounded, but the tribe submitted immediately afterwards.

Again, only a few weeks after this affair the services of the Guides were once more required for a punitive expedition, but this time on a larger scale. It was the expedition against the Mahsuds in April 1860, already mentioned above in the narrative of the 4th Sikhs, and noteworthy for the fierce attack on the 23rd of that month on Palosina Camp.

The Guides were heavily involved in this action and lost fifteen killed and sixty-one wounded, but Lumsden (now a Lieutenant-Colonel) wrote in glowing terms of the manner in which the men rallied when taken aback and scattered by the sudden onslaught which penetrated the camp, and of the Guides' punishing pursuit of the enemy afterwards.

This and the defeat inflicted at the Berari Tangi on 4th May (which was the last action in which Lumsden commanded the Guides Corps) broke the tribes' resistance, and the punitive march through country that was to become so familiar (and give so much trouble) sixty, seventy-five and eighty years later, was completed without further difficulty.

After this, it was not till 1863 that the Guides were called on again, this time to form another expedition against the Hindustani Fanatics in the Black Mountain. This has since become known as the Ambeyla Expedition and involved severe fighting. But before this the Guides lost their Commandant,

* Early in the nineteenth century one Sayed Ahmed Shah, a native of Bareilly, returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca and preached the doctrines of the Wahabi sect, attracting a certain number of fanatical Mussalmans in Hindustan. With these he began a religious war against the Sikhs in Yusafzai in 1824. In 1829 he captured Peshawar. A year later he himself was killed and his followers (who now amounted to 1,600 Hindustanis) were defeated on the borders of Hazara, at Balkot. The remnant of his followers established themselves at Sitana in Buner. Here they were joined from time to time by other parties of fanatical Hindustanis. They were supported with arms and money from Patna, Bengal and parts of Rajputana.

The fanaticism of these people led them to raid into settled districts of India.

Colonel Lumsden, who accepted advancement outside the Corps and went to command the Hyderabad Contingent.

As one of the pioneers of soldiering on the North-West Frontier as we know it, and the father of the Corps of Guides, it is fitting to record here the tribute paid to him by a later commander:

“This fine soldier from the raising of the Corps in 1846, had held command of it for sixteen years; the brightest example of what a brave, chivalrous and resourceful leader should be. Commanders of regiments come and go and few leave their mark; but over the Guides the influence of Lumsden still burns bright and clear. To be alert and ready; to rise equal to the occasion, be the call small or great; to be not easily taken aback in a sudden emergency; to be a genial comrade and a good sportsman,—such are the simple soldierly maxims left to his comrades by one of the best soldiers who ever drew sword.”*

He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel A. T. Wilde, C.B. †

Ambeyla Expedition, 1863

This expeditionary force advanced in two columns, one from the Peshawar valley and the other from Hazara, and it was soon evident that the Hindustani Fanatics were being supported by contingents from tribes covering the whole Northern Frontier from the Indus to the border of Afghanistan.

The crisis of the Expedition occurred on 14th, 15th and 20th November, when the advance of the Peshawar column under General Chamberlain seized a pass leading to the valley of Ambeyla in Buner. A perimeter camp was established on this pass, and the camp piquets were repeatedly attacked by great numbers of fanatical tribesmen, two of them changing hands more than once. In the final recapture of Crag Piquet, ‡ General Chamberlain himself was severely wounded and had to relinquish command of the Force; but the tribes had suffered heavily—especially the Hindustani Fanatics themselves—and their resistance crumbled. The Force withdrew after carrying out severe punitive measures against villages and property and ensuring the expulsion of the Hindustani Fanatics from Buner.

In 1864 Colonel Wilde was promoted to command the Punjab Frontier Force in succession to General Chamberlain, whose above-mentioned wound had caused him to vacate the appointment on medical grounds. This left the command of the Corps of Guides vacant, and the officer who was appointed was Colonel Sam Browne. §

* Younghusband, *The Story of the Guides*.

† Later Lieutenant-General Sir A. T. Wilde, K.C.B., after whom the 4th Bn. F.F. Rifles (Wilde's Rifles) was named.

‡ Afterwards known locally as Katalgarh, “The Fort of Slaughter.”

§ See note on page 4.

After the Ambeyla Expedition in 1863-64 the Guides continued till 1878 in watch-and-ward duties and participated in several small affairs that were not of sufficient importance to describe here. One item of importance in 1875, however, needs to be recorded.

In November 1875, King Edward VII, then Prince of Wales, arrived in India on a tour, and when in the following January he visited Lahore, the Guides Cavalry marched there and provided the escort under Captain Stewart. On 10th March the following was published in the *Government Gazette*:

“The Viceroy and Governor-General in Council has the highest gratification in announcing that, in commemoration of the visit to India of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, the Queen has been pleased to appoint His Royal Highness to be Honorary Colonel of the following regiment:

“*****The Corps of Guides.

“Her Majesty has been further graciously pleased to confer on the following Corps the distinction of being styled ‘Queen’s Own’ and wearing on their collars and appointments the Royal CIPHER within the Garter.

“*****The Corps of Guides.”

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND AFGHAN WAR, 1878-1880

Outline of the Campaign—The Guides in the Second Afghan War, First Phase—The Residency, Kabul, 1879—The Defence of the Residency—The Sorties—The Final Sally and End of the Disaster—The Guides in the Second Phase of the Second Afghan War—Occupation of Kabul—Battle of the Asmai Heights—Winter in Sherpur Cantonment—The 1st Sikhs in the Second Afghan War—The 2nd Sikhs in the Second Afghan War—Ahmed Khel—The March from Kabul to Kandahar—The Battle of Kandahar—The 3rd Sikhs in the Second Afghan War.

Outline of the Campaign

THE outbreak of this war in 1878 was the outcome of Russian penetration towards Afghanistan and of a series of provocative actions by the Amir Sher Ali of Afghanistan. These culminated in August of that year with the reception and welcoming in Kabul of a Russian envoy, while the British representative, Sir Neville Chamberlain, and his mission were rebuffed and turned back at Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass.

As further diplomatic advances were not only ignored by the Amir, but active hostility began to be shown by him, the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, delivered an ultimatum demanding an apology for the treatment of Sir Neville Chamberlain's mission. This also brought no reply, and war was declared on 21st November 1878.

As this war involved four of the five Battalions of the Regiment, and in particular the Guides and the 2nd Battalion, their stories will now be followed separately; but first it is necessary to understand briefly the strategy and course of the campaign and an outline of the sequence of events.

In 1878 an advance into Afghanistan was made in three columns via the Khyber, Kurram and Bolan Passes, the columns being commanded respectively by General Sir Sam Browne (an ex-commandant of the Guides and the P.F.F.*), General Roberts and General Biddulph. The opposition met was signally defeated on each line and the Afghans submitted at the Treaty of Gandamak. The Amir Sher Ali fled to Russian Turkistan, where he died two months later, and the heir to the throne succeeded him in the person of one Yakub Khan. The latter, however, proved weak and incapable, if not actually treacherous. Under the above treaty the Indian Government sent an envoy, Sir Louis

* See page 4.

Cavagnari, with an escort to reside in Kabul. Within a month of their arrival, and in the presence of Yakub Khan, Afghan soldiery attacked the Residency in September 1879, and in spite of an heroic defence massacred Cavagnari and his escort of Guides under Lieutenant Hamilton.

Swift advances on Kabul and Kandahar were made at once by Generals Roberts and Stewart, and both cities were occupied throughout the winter of 1879-80. General Roberts's advance was resolutely opposed at the approach to Kabul in the battle of Charasiah, in which the Afghans and tribesmen were heavily defeated and dispersed. Thereafter his force was involved in continuous fighting round Kabul before the Afghans in that province were finally subjugated.

In the summer of 1880 the disaster to a brigade of the Kandahar Force, at Maiwand, led to Lord Roberts's famous march from Kabul to Kandahar and his destruction of the Afghan army there. This brought the war to an end and the British Indian Forces were withdrawn.

The Guides in the Second Afghan War (First Phase)

Such, in a few words, is an outline of the Second Afghan War. As already remarked, most of the Battalions of the Regiment were involved in it under their names and titles of those days, but the Guides played a leading military part in its initial phases. For that reason, while the narrative of each Battalion will be recorded separately in this chapter, that of the Guides will be taken first.

When General Sir Neville Chamberlain was chosen as the envoy to Kabul in 1878 to counter the growing threat of Russian penetration, the escort to his mission consisted of a detachment of 100 sabres and 50 bayonets of the Corps of Guides under Lieutenant-Colonel Jenkins (Commandant). As it was the turning back of this mission at Ali Masjid in the Khyber Pass that finally caused the rupture of relations with the Amir Sher Ali, a description of this illuminating incident is of interest.

In September 1878, Major Cavagnari, the Political Agent in Peshawar, commenced negotiations with the Khyber Pass Afridis for the mission's safe conduct. While these were progressing it became clear that the Amir was resolved to prevent our bringing matters to a test with him, and that for this purpose he would neither receive nor refuse to receive our mission, but keep it waiting indefinitely on the threshold of his dominions without any answer at all, while the Russian mission still remained at his capital. Such a position we could not possibly accept with either dignity or safety.*

* Balfour, *Lord Lytton's Administration*.

On 21st September the mission moved out from Peshawar to Jamrud, and within a mile of Ali Masjid, at a water-mill,* Major Cavagnari and Colonel Jenkins parleyed with the Afghan representative, Sirdar Faiz Muhammad Khan. There was a prolonged discussion in which the latter made it clear that he had received no orders from the Amir to let the mission pass and that in the absence of such orders he could not allow it to proceed.

On being further questioned, the Sirdar confirmed that his troops, who were in position to oppose the advance of the mission, would open fire. Thereupon, Major Cavagnari, Colonel Jenkins and the party of the Guides returned to Jamrud, and the Guides escort marched back to Mardan.

The hostility of the Afghan Government's attitude increased; and when the Afridi head malik's home was burnt by the Afghans as a reprisal for his share of assistance to the mission, an ultimatum was sent that led to the outbreak of war.

Of the three columns that were formed to invade Afghanistan, the Guides were allocated to General Sir Sam Browne's—called the Peshawar Valley Field Force.† The Guides Infantry were in the 2nd Infantry Brigade with the 1st Sikhs and the 17th Foot (later the Royal Leicestershire Regiment).

The first objective of Sir Sam Browne's Force was to drive the enemy from the Ali Masjid position in the Khyber Pass, which the Afghans were holding in strength.

The Guides Infantry reconnoitred the position to see if it could be turned by an advance via the Rhotas heights, which overlooked it on the north. This was found to be practicable by a seventeen-mile detour, and the 1st and 2nd Brigades were allotted the task of carrying it out by night. The advance commenced on 20th November, and in spite of the great difficulties of the route in darkness the Guides Infantry and 1st Sikhs reached a position commanding the rearward communication of the Pass by the afternoon of the 21st.

In the meantime the advance on the position itself was carried out by the rest of the Force, but by 11 a.m. on 21st November the Afghans had evacuated the position and fled.

After this the advance into Afghanistan continued without opposition and Jalalabad was taken on 17th December. Here news of the flight of Amir Sher Ali was received, but the Afghans still remained hostile and it was not until March 1879, that Yakub Khan, Sher Ali's successor, opened negotiations. While this was going on, tribal hostility grew in the neighbourhood of Jalalabad and Gandamak, and the Guides were involved in some severe fighting. In one action at Fattehabad, Major Wigram Battye was killed and Lieutenant W. R. P.

* This water-mill still exists and is a halting-place for caravans passing through the Khyber.

† Composed of one cavalry and three infantry brigades with a further brigade of cavalry and of infantry in reserve at Hassan Abdal.

Hamilton won the Victoria Cross while inflicting heavy punishment on hostile Ghilzais.

The negotiations, however, ended satisfactorily on 17th May with the Treaty of Gandamak, by which among other clauses, India was accorded the right to establish a mission in Kabul. To this mission Sir Louis Cavagnari was appointed as envoy and Lieutenant Hamilton of the Guides, Military Attaché. The escort was furnished by the Guides and consisted of: Cavalry—1 jemadar, 1 kote-dafadar, 1 dafadar and 22 sowars—total 25; *Infantry*—1 jemadar, 2 havildars, 2 naiks, 1 lance-naik, 1 bugler and 45 sepoy—total 52; with 1 hospital assistant. The Mission also included Mr. Jenkins as Secretary and Doctor Kelly as Medical Officer.

This party and the mission were received with friendship and respect, arriving at Kabul on 24th July.

The Residency, Kabul, 1879

At the outset, indeed, nothing could have been better than the reception accorded to the British mission on its arrival at Kabul, where it was lodged in a commodious building near the Bala Hissar, about 250 yards from the Amir's palace. The Amir's demeanour was most friendly and no restrictions seem to have been placed on the movements of the British officers attached to the mission, who were allowed to go about freely and ride out daily in the environs of Kabul.

This satisfactory state of affairs was not destined to last. Some two or three days after the arrival of Sir Louis Cavagnari and his mission, six regiments of Afghan infantry arrived from Herat and encamped for three days about two miles out of Kabul. On the morning of the fourth day they marched through the principal streets of the city, headed by their officers and with bands playing, staged a hostile demonstration, and shouted abuse at the Envoy.

The inhabitants of Kabul viewed the demonstration with indifference. The affair was, however, immediately reported to the Envoy by a pensioned Indian officer of the Guides Cavalry then living in Kabul. This man, Risaldar-Major Nakshband Khan, Sirdar Bahadur, appears to have recognized the danger from the first. Sir Louis Cavagnari tried to reassure him, but Nakshband Khan was not satisfied. During the ensuing days he noted and reported many disquieting signs which strengthened his suspicions that the Amir was not as well disposed towards the British mission as he would have it appear.

Reports from other sources must have confirmed those of the old Risaldar-Major, but it was not until 6th August that there appeared any word of disquiet in the envoy's correspondence.

However, it seems to have been hoped and believed that matters had quieted down, for on 12th August Cavagnari noted in his diary that the men of the Herat regiments had received their arrears of pay and that many had

been given furlough; and neither in the last instalment of the diary sent out, dealing with the events of 23rd August, nor in a telegram dispatched on the 24th and ending with the words, "Embassy all well," is there anything to show that any untoward event was expected, though on 23rd August four sowars of the Guides had been attacked in the Kabul bazaar, but managed to escape and return to the Residency.

It was not until the night of 4th September that news of an outbreak in Kabul came through to Simla. Upon receipt of it the Viceroy cabled as follows to the Secretary of State for India :

"During the night of 4th September information reached Ali Khel that, on morning of 3rd, British Embassy at Kabul was attacked by three Afghan regiments, joined later by six others. Embassy defending itself when messengers left Kabul. Tonight letters received at Ali Khel from Amir leave no hope as to fate of Embassy. General Massey ordered to move from Ali Khel on Shutargardan tomorrow. General Roberts from Simla will reach Peiwar in five days and take command of rapid advance on Kabul. General Baker will command one Brigade. General Stewart ordered to hold Kandahar and threaten Ghazni if necessary."

The Defence of the Residency

The tragedy of the defence of the Embassy in Kabul was an epic that excited the admiration of the world. An extract from the vivid account given in the *History of the Guides* merits a place in this History.

"The morning of 3rd September broke calm and clear, and Lieutenant Hamilton and Dr. Kelly went out riding, looking for a place where good grass could be cut for the horses of the escort. They had been preceded by a party consisting of three men of the Guides Cavalry and twenty-five grass-cutters. One man of the Guides Infantry was about the same time in the Kabul bazaar arranging for the purchase of flour for the escort. To the fact of being on these simple duties these men owed their lives, as none of them except the two British officers—and for them Fate willed it otherwise—was able to re-enter the Residency.

"Lieutenant Hamilton and Dr. Kelly must have returned from their ride about 7.30 a.m. and probably went to their breakfast in the Residency. While the British mission and its escort were thus going about their ordinary morning routine, a short distance away in the Bala Hissar the curtain was rising on the drama so soon to be enacted.

"Shortly before 8 a.m. the Turkestani Ardal Regiment, lately arrived in Kabul, was paraded to receive its pay. The men wore side arms but carried no rifles with them. There was another Afghan regiment with them in the Bala Hissar and on duty at the Arsenal close by. There is no doubt that the pay of the Ardal Regiment was in arrears and that the men

were thoroughly discontented. In lieu of the two months' pay which they demanded, they were given one. Brooding discontent gave way to open mutiny. From words the soldiers passed to deeds and started throwing stones at General Daud Shah, who at the Amir's orders was superintending the disbursement of pay. On his coming down to reason with them he was cut down with a tulwar and then bayoneted.

"News flies fast in the East, and the troops were soon joined by the other disaffected regiments lately arrived from Herat, and the riff-raff from the bazaars. The mob made for the Residency cavalry lines, started stoning the syces and troopers, and attempted to untie the horses. The troopers quickly armed and the mutineers met with sturdy resistance. The escort sustained its first casualty here, one of the troopers, a Sikh, being mortally wounded by a tulwar, but not before accounting for at least one adversary who lay dead beside him. Two or three shots were fired, but the crowd, who were mostly without rifles, retired and some 200 of them went to the Bala Hissar to fetch their arms.

"Lieutenant Hamilton came out of the Residency at this moment and gave orders for the door to be shut. The crowd contented itself with stone-throwing for a few minutes, and then it too made off to the Arsenal to procure more suitable weapons.

"Taking advantage of the temporary lull, the troopers and the men in the courtyard were ordered into the Residency buildings. Lieutenant Hamilton and about twenty men took up a position on the roofs, where luckily there was a parapet which was quickly loop-holed.

"Spasmodic firing now started from the Afghans clustered round the Arsenal, which, standing on higher ground, commanded the roofs.

"The fire of the Afghans gradually became general and from this moment the mutineers had one definite purpose—to destroy the defenders who had dared to show fight. This was at about 8.45 a.m.

"The men with Lieutenant Hamilton had meantime received orders to fire and after what must have seemed hours of inaction responded with a will, some at the Afghans round the Arsenal and others at those who had again entered the cavalry lines and were leading away or, out of sheer savagery, killing the horses. The party on the roof of the barracks, firing as they were from behind cover, must have taken heavy toll of their adversaries, the Arsenal itself being so close and the cavalry lines still nearer.

"To deal with Lieutenant Hamilton's party more effectively some of the mutineers, covered by fire from the Arsenal, advanced and secured a position closer still to the barracks and completely commanding them. This appears to have been some sort of enclosure north of the wall of the Bala Hissar, which is also on higher ground than the Residency.

The Sorties

“If the fire of his party was not to be silenced these Afghans had to be dislodged, and Lieutenant Hamilton decided to do it. It was not likely that a mere passive defence would suit him.

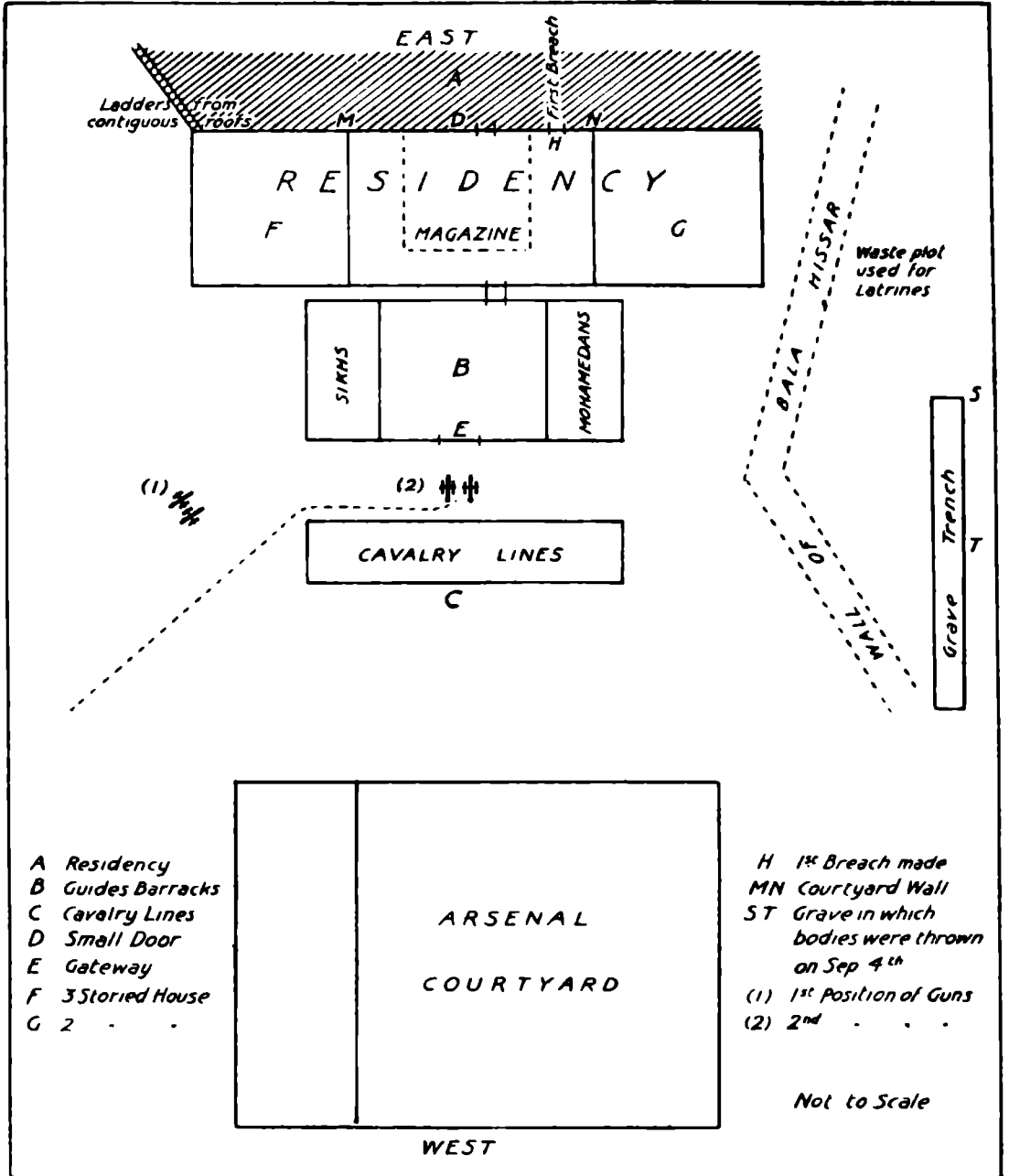
“An eyewitness stated: ‘At about 9 a.m., while the fighting was going on, I myself saw four European officers charge out at the head of some twenty-five of the garrison; they drove away a party that was holding some broken ground. When charged, the Afghan soldiers ran like sheep before a wolf. About a quarter of an hour after this another sally was made with three officers at their head with the same result.’ Cavagnari was not with them this time (apparently he was the first time, although wounded early in the morning). ‘A third sally was made with two British officers, Jenkyns and Hamilton, leading.’ (One can imagine Dr. Kelly having to stay behind to attend to the wounded.) ‘A fourth sally was made with a Sikh jemadar, Jewan Singh, bravely leading. After this no further sally was made, the defenders appearing to go up to the upper part of the house and firing from there.’

“The eyewitness in question was Risaldar-Major Nakshband Khan, above mentioned. On hearing of the mutiny he had made his way at once to the Residency, but was recognized and roughly handled by the crowd, eventually being forced to take refuge in a house. From the upper storey of this house, two hundred yards away, he watched the attack on the Residency.

“On his return from the third sally, Lieutenant Hamilton was met with the news that the mutineers were trying to force the small door in the eastern wall of the Residency. He hurried off to this new danger point and arranged for its defence by four men.

“Sir Louis must now have realized the full gravity of the situation—that the affair was more than a mere demonstration of hate by dissatisfied soldiery—for he wrote a letter to the Amir asking for help. This was sent by the hands of a Kabuli, Ghulam Nabi, who had previously served with the Guides and had been engaged as a Chuprassi in Kabul. It was a perilous mission, but although he succeeded in delivering the letter, he was unable to bring back an answer. The Amir’s answer actually was, ‘God willing, I am just making arrangements.’ As a matter of fact, he did nothing, although none of his cavalry and only a few artillerymen had joined the mutineers.

“To return to the fighting. A continuous and heavy fire was directed on the defence from the west and from houses on the east which practically adjoined the Residency wall. On this side, too, the Afghans had resorted to more active measures and by about 11 a.m. had succeeded in sapping through the wall. Covered by fire from the neighbouring roofs and by that



of the men who had penetrated into the courtyard, the Afghans placed ladders across from adjacent roofs onto the Residency roof and attempted to cross them. Time and again they attacked, only to be repulsed by fire and hand-to-hand fighting in which Jenkyns and about nine men took the chief share.

“It was not until midday, however, that they obtained a footing on the roof, by which time many of the gallant defenders had been killed. Driven from the roof, the brave remnant only retired to the storey below, from which they fired with such good effect that they prevented the Afghans from advancing further.

“It was about midday, too, that Cavagnari was wounded again, and this time seriously, by a bullet in the head. ‘He was lying on his bed with his knees doubled up. Dr. Kelly was attending him.’ This was the last mention of Sir Louis Cavagnari, who up till now had taken as gallant a part as any in the defence.

“Another danger more deadly than the Afghans now threatened the defence—fire. The wall had been sapped through in many places, and the Afghans, creeping through, had set fire to the woodwork on the ground floor. To make things worse, two guns had been brought up and were battering the wall of the barracks.

“The position was now desperate, and Jenkyns dictated another letter to the Amir and sent it out by a Hindu servant. Somehow or other this loyal man found his way out of the Residency but was caught and cut to pieces by the Afghans before the eyes of the defenders. By 2 p.m. the fire had got such a hold that its heat made one building untenable. Parched with thirst, scorched and blinded with smoke the survivors of this heroic band leaped across on to a narrow parapet round the roof of the barracks, from which they continued to fight.

The Final Sally and End of the Disaster

“Those still in the main building were fighting with the same grim determination and courage. From the roof of this building, Lieutenant Hamilton wrote out and sent the third and final appeal to the Amir. Sowar Taimus, Guides Cavalry, took it, but was captured in the Residency itself, thrown from its walls onto the roof of an adjoining house, soundly beaten and taken more dead than alive, before General Karim Khan. Even then he tried to save his comrades by putting before Karim Khan Lieutenant Hamilton’s message in which he promised the Afghan soldiers six months’ pay. Karim Khan replied, ‘I am powerless to stop the mutineers.’ Taimus was detained, but eventually escaped with the connivance of a wounded havildar of the Afghan Army, from whose back he removed a bullet, and lived to tell his very gallant story.

“Shortly before 3 p.m. one of the guns was moved from its first position to within seventy paces of and opposite to an archway through which it could fire point blank at the door separating the courtyard from the Residency. The door was finally blown in at about 3 p.m. and opened a way for the Afghans to attack, or perhaps set fire to, the Guides’ barracks from the east. What actually now passed through Lieutenant Hamilton’s mind can never be known, but it was then that he collected the few men who remained alive and, putting himself at the head of his beloved Guides for the last time, charged the gun. Some accounts say three charges were made. Lieutenant Hamilton shot three men with his revolver, cut down two more with his sword and reached the gun, where he was hacked to pieces. Jenkyns fell some twenty yards behind him, while Kelly was killed as he came through the archway. Of those that made the final desperate sortie all were killed.

“There is no record of Sir Louis Cavagnari’s ultimate end, but it seems that he perished in the flames of the building where he was last seen being attended to by Dr. Kelly. In any case his body was never found. The bodies of Hamilton, Jenkyns and Kelly were reported to have been buried in a garden about a hundred yards from where they fell. Their bodies, though stripped and hacked to pieces, are said not to have been dishonoured.

“All their officers had now been killed, but no thought of surrender entered the heads of those still holding out in the Residency. It was not until between 8 and 9 p.m. that all firing ceased with the death of the last of the escort, and a terrible silence fell over the smouldering ruins of what twelve hours before had been the British Embassy in Kabul.”*

Of the eighty all ranks of the Guides who formed the escort to the Embassy, seventy-one fell in defence of their trust: 1 British officer, 2 Indian officers, 68 sowars and sepoy, with 1 hospital assistant; only nine escaped the massacre. Of these nine, three were with the grass-cutters referred to above as out with Lieutenant Hamilton in the morning, three escaped during the fighting (one was Taimus, the bearer of the third and final appeal for help), one was away on leave, one was shopping in the bazaar, and one died the day before the tragedy.

Of the many tributes paid to the heroic little party, perhaps the most striking was that of the President of the Court of Enquiry assembled by General (afterwards Lord) Roberts:

“The conduct of the escort of the Queen’s Own Guides does not form part of the enquiry entrusted to the Commission, but they have in the course of these enquiries had the extreme gallantry of these men so forcibly

* Some idea of the loss inflicted on the mutineers may be gathered from the statements heard next day by a survivor that the Herati Regiment alone had lost 300 killed.

brought to their notice that they cannot refrain from placing on record their humble tribute of admiration. They do not give their opinion hastily, but they believe that the annals of no Army and no Regiment can show a brighter record of devoted bravery than has been achieved by this small band of Guides. By their deeds they have conferred undying honour not only on the Regiment to which they belong, but on the whole British Army."

Lord Roberts recommended that the Indian Order of Merit should be posthumously conferred on all members of the escort and that the Corps of Guides should bear "Residency, Kabul" on their colours as a battle honour.

In regard to this, however, honours and decorations were not posthumously awarded in those days, and no correspondence is traceable in regard to the award of a battle honour. It seems probable that the proposal was negatived when it came before higher authority, primarily by reason of the old ruling in such matters that "a Battle Honour shall not be awarded for the services of any smaller unit than the wing of a Regiment." Moreover, it was also against all precedent of the day to record a disaster as a battle honour (with gushing official phraseology) "notwithstanding its admittedly meritorious character."

The Guides in the Second Phase of the Second Afghan War

The greater portion of the troops composing the Peshawar Valley Field Force were withdrawn from the neighbourhood of the Afghan border during June and July 1879, and the Kurram Valley Field Force was not only the nearest available body of troops when news of the attack on the Kabul Residency reached India, but practically the only one at the time ready and in a position to act.

Major-General Roberts was temporarily absent from his command, at Simla, where the news of the happenings at Kabul arrived on the night of 4th/5th September. On the 5th a council was held, and as a preliminary measure Brigadier-General Massey, then commanding in Kurram, was directed to move a small force to the crest of the Shutur Gardan Pass and there entrench. In addition, a division of one cavalry brigade and two infantry brigades, to be known as the Kabul Field Force, was to be got ready for an immediate advance on Kabul, another division was to hold Jalalabad, and Kandahar was to be re-occupied and Ghazni threatened. A force of some 6,000 men had been collected at Ali Khel on 12th September, on which date General Roberts resumed command of the force in the Kurram valley, where was available the division composing the Kabul Field Force and a third and a fourth infantry brigade for the protection of the line of communications.

Meanwhile, on the Khyber line, steps had been taken to strengthen the weak garrisons of Landi Kotal, Ali Masjid and Jamrud, and a plan was drawn up to support General Roberts's advance from Kurram by a forward movement

by way of the Khyber, creating depots along the route and increasing the posts as fresh troops arrived. The Guides were allotted to this latter line and were the first to move forward and occupy Dakka at the earliest possible moment.

At this time (the end of September 1879) the Amir forbade any opposition being offered to the advance of the British-Indian forces, and the advance along the route to Kabul through Jalalabad and Gandamak continued without opposition.

Occupation of Kabul

In the meantime, however, General Roberts's column had encountered fanatical opposition on the heights above Charasiah on the approaches to Kabul. In the ensuing battle the enemy were heavily defeated, and General Roberts entered Kabul on 8th October. For the next six weeks the Guides carried out protective duties in the Pezwan—Jagdalak area, during which time the Amir Yakub Khan, now deposed, passed through for internment in India.

But trouble was brewing round the capital, and on 7th December an order was received from General Roberts that the Guides Corps was to march at once with all speed to Kabul.

Colonel Jenkins left Jagdalak with the bulk of the Corps on 9th December, and on the 11th marched from Seh Baba to Lataband, on reaching which place a helio message was received that reinforcements were urgently needed at Kabul. Leaving all baggage behind in charge of one company, the remainder, taking only ammunition with them, pushed on and marched that night into Sherpur Cantonment, a distance of thirty-six miles. On the days previous to the arrival of the Guides in Sherpur Cantonment the forces under General Roberts, organized in three columns for offensive operations against the tribal hordes that were now threatening, had been roughly handled. Moreover, on the days following their arrival a column sent out to clear the Takht-i-Shah, overlooking Kabul city had been only partially successful, and reinforced masses of tribesmen now occupied villages between Beni Hissar and Bala Hissar. There now followed three days of heavy fighting. On the 13th a force which included the Guides Infantry and 3rd Sikhs* was ordered to attack through this area and clear the Takht-i-Shah. The attack was completely successful, the Guides Infantry and 92nd Highlanders leading the assault with great dash, while the 3rd Sikhs drove a threatening enemy concentration back on the left flank (towards Siah Sung).

The withdrawal was not followed up and the night passed quietly. Next morning, however, the tribesmen were seen to be massing to the north on the Asmai heights, and they were joined also by hordes from the city and Chardeh

* Eight guns, one squadron 9th Lancers, 5th Punjab Cavalry, six companies 92nd Highlanders, 300 3rd Sikhs, 150 5th Punjab Infantry, and seven companies of the Guides.

valley. Roberts immediately decided to attack them. In his own words: "Foiled in their attempt to close in upon us from the south and west, the tribesmen had concentrated to the north, and it was evident they were preparing to deliver an attack in great strength from that quarter. I quickly decided to drive the enemy off the Asmai heights, to cut their communication with Kohistan, and to operate towards the north, much as I had operated the previous day to the south of Sherpur.

"At 9 a.m. I despatched Brigadier-General Baker to the east slope of the Asmai range with the following troops: 4 guns R.F.A.; 4 guns Mountain Artillery; 14th Bengal Lancers; 72nd Highlanders (192 rifles); 92nd Highlanders (100 rifles); Guides Infantry (460 rifles); and 5th Punjab Infantry (470 rifles)."*

The advance, composed of the 72nd, 92nd and Guides Infantry, was under the orders of Colonel Jenkins, C.B.

Battle of the Asmai Heights

After crossing some deep ditches and marshy ground under enemy fire, a conical hill west of the Asmai heights was reached and occupied, and here Colonel Jenkins was ordered to leave a sufficient force to hold the hill, taking on the remainder to storm the main Afghan position on the heights. Accordingly, two mountain guns were left here with sixty men of the 72nd Highlanders and sixty rifles of "A" Company of the Guides Infantry.

The first position held by the enemy was a very strong one, the ascent to it was both precipitous and rocky, and the enemy fought with great determination. The Guides worked round on the right, and the position was finally captured by a simultaneous rush of the Highlanders and Guides, the Afghans being driven out with severe loss. The enemy was pursued and driven along the Asmai heights towards Kabul city, suffering severely, but at the same time they inflicted no small loss upon their pursuers. The last and highest point, above the city, was very stubbornly held by a body of the enemy and was finally cleared by parties working round on both flanks—that on the right under Colonel Jenkins—and ending with a charge from front and flanks by the Highlanders and Guides, executed with the greatest dash and resolution. Meanwhile, General Macpherson had been directed to give all the assistance in his power to General Baker's attack, and accordingly the whole of the 67th Foot moved across the gorge at Deh Mazang and worked towards the enemy's rear, arriving just as the summit was finally stormed by the Highlanders and Guides.

The work had been very hard and everybody would have been glad of a rest, but heavy firing was now heard in the direction of the conical hill, and it was seen that the detachment left there was being attacked by large masses of Afghans arriving from the direction of Kohistan.

**Forty-one Years in India*. Vol. II, pp. 287-88.

Colonel Jenkins ordered ammunition pouches to be replenished and the force to march back to the relief of the isolated party on the hill, the 67th Foot, then arriving from Brigadier-General Macpherson's brigade, being left in charge of the high peak just captured. On arrival on the high ground overlooking the conical hill it was seen that the force there had been overpowered by numbers and forced to retire. Volleys fired by the Highlanders and Guides checked the pursuing enemy, but caused them to turn back right handed, swarm up the Asmai heights and attack their fresh assailants. At this moment, while the troops were actually engaged with the enemy, orders were received to fall back on Sherpur.

It was no easy matter to bring off a force from such a hill as Asmai in the face of an exulting foe, but it was done, and with remarkably small loss. A party of the Guides, under Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell and Captain Hammond, was the last to leave the crest of the Asmai under the covering fire of two companies of the 67th Foot holding the highest sangar; these men then retired down the hill under the shelter of the Bala Hissar walls. But the two guns of the mountain battery on the conical hill, which maintained a fire up to the last, could not be brought away and fell temporarily into the hands of the enemy.

During the withdrawal Captain Hammond won the Victoria Cross for a signal act of gallantry. General Roberts described it in his despatch as follows:

“Captain Hammond had been very forward during the storming of the Asmai heights, and now, when the enemy was crowding up the northern slopes, he remained with a few men on the ridge until the Afghans were within thirty yards of them. During the retirement one of the men of the Guides was shot and Captain Hammond stopped and assisted in carrying him away, though the enemy were at the time close by and firing heavily.”

Eight non-commissioned officers and four men of the Guides received the Order of Merit (Third Class) for gallantry in action this day, and there were a considerable number of casualties: killed or died of wounds, 2 J.C.Os. and 14 men; wounded, Captain F. D. Battye and 26 men.

As a result of this day's action, the determination shown by the enemy and his ever-increasing numbers, General Roberts came to a weighty decision.

The Winter in Sherpur Cantonment

“I was determined,” he writes,* “to withdraw from all isolated positions and concentrate my force at Sherpur, thereby securing the safety of the cantonment and avoiding what had now become a useless sacrifice of life.” The necessary orders for withdrawal were sent to Generals Macpherson and Baker.

The critical events of 12th, 13th and 14th December were followed by a period of some ten days' comparative calm, and attention was now devoted to

**Forty-one Years in India*. Vol. II, p. 292.

strengthening the defences of the very extended entrenched cantonment of Sherpur, pending the arrival of reinforcements from Gandamak for which General Roberts had asked.

The period of calm ended with an attack in force by the Afghans on 23rd December. It was launched in the early mists of dawn and the main assault fell on the sector held by the Guides Infantry and the 28th Punjab Infantry. To the flank were the two British battalions, the 67th and 92nd. Fire was reserved till the advancing masses could be clearly distinguished, and it was so outstandingly effective that the attack collapsed and General Roberts unleashed his cavalry and horse artillery through the gorge in the Bemaru Ridge on the enemy's flank. They effected terrible execution with sword and lance, and the rout was complete.

Next morning reinforcements amounting to six guns, two squadrons of cavalry and 2,000 infantry reached Sherpur.

Four days later Brigadier-General Baker marched through deep snow into the heart of the Koh-i-Daman to punish Mir Bacha, the leader of the Kohistanis in the fighting. General Baker had under his command four guns, the Guides Cavalry, 200 sabres and some 1,700 infantry, including 400 rifles of the Guides Infantry. Mir Bacha's fortified village of Baba Kushkar was burnt and razed to the ground, as were many other small forts belonging to him and his people, and the force was back in Sherpur on 31st December, having experienced no opposition, but all having suffered severely from the extreme cold.

The Corps of Guides passed the winter in tents within Sherpur Cantonment and was the only regiment in the force which was not provided with quarters; but the men kept very fit and healthy.

After this no further hostility was evinced on the part of the Afghans or tribes round Kabul, and at the end of March negotiations commenced to place Abdur Rahman, a nephew of Sher Ali and reputed to be able and influential, on the throne as Amir.

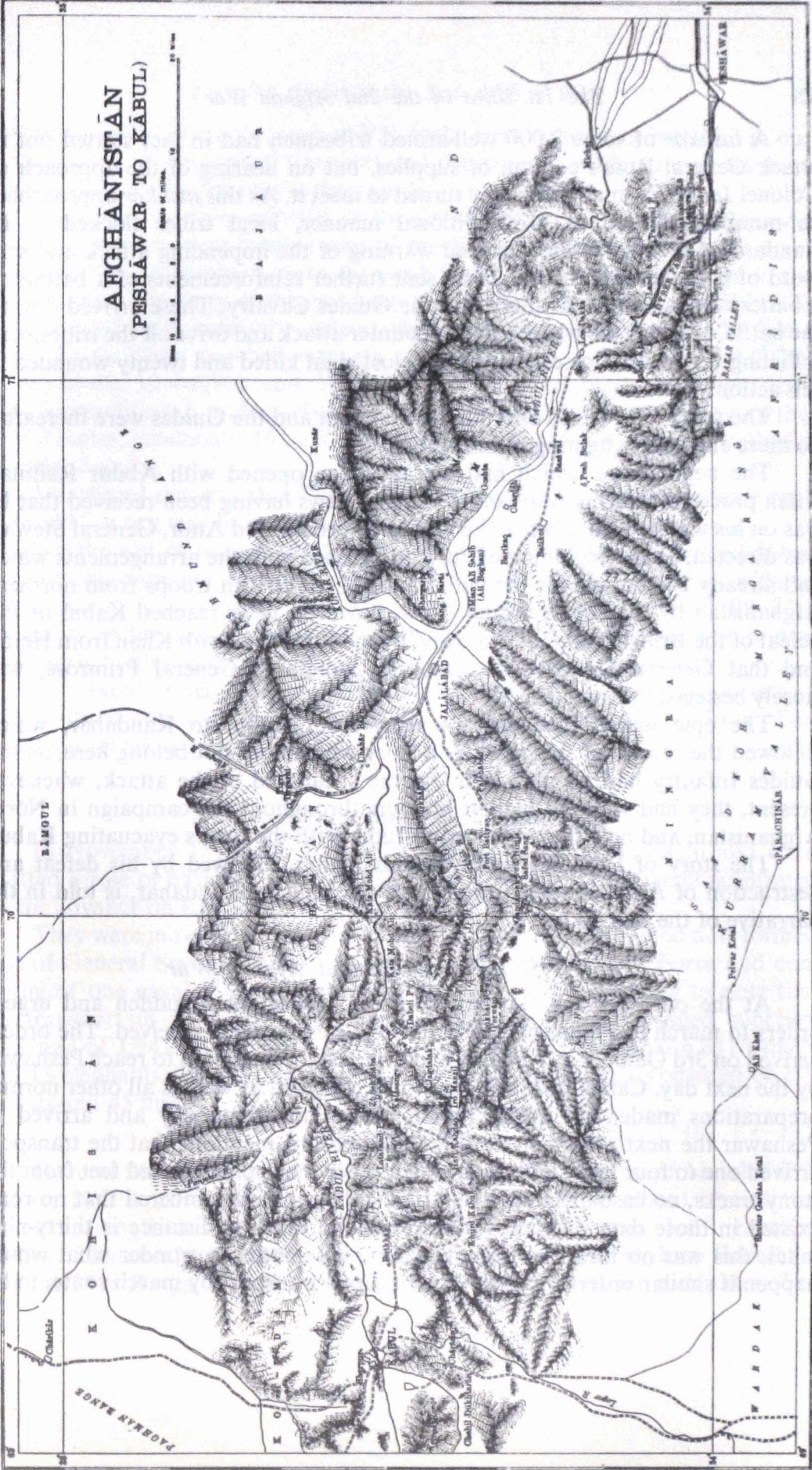
At the same time General Stewart's division marched from Kandahar for Kabul to help in the final pacifying of northern Afghanistan. The 2nd Sikhs were part of the 2nd Brigade of this division, and the story of the march and the battle of Ahmed Khel is given in the narrative of that Battalion that follows later in this chapter.

As General Stewart's division approached Kabul from the south a force marched out of Kabul under General Ross to meet the Kandahar column and take it some needed supplies. A few days later it seemed likely to General Roberts that the people from Wardak and Logar might attack General Ross's column, and on 20th April a force was sent towards Charasiah under Colonel Jenkins, consisting of two Royal Horse Artillery guns, two squadrons (250 sabres) of the Guides Cavalry, 266 rifles of the 92nd Highlanders and 600 of the Guides Infantry.

AFGHĀNISTĀN (PESHĀWAR TO KĀBUL)

Scale of miles. 0 10 20

B A J A D R



BAMOUL

K O H I B A T A N

P A S T O R A L

K A B U L R I V E R

J A L A L A B A D

H I N D U K U S H

M A R D A N

H E R A T

K A B U L

P E S H A W A R

W A R D A K

P A S T O R A L

P A S T O R A L

A *lashkar* of some 2,000 well-armed tribesmen had in fact started out to attack General Ross's column of supplies, but on hearing of the approach of Colonel Jenkins's small force they turned to meet it. As this *lashkar* approached, its numbers swelled as, in traditional manner, local tribes flocked to its standards. Colonel Jenkins received warning of the impending attack and sent word of it to General Roberts, who sent further reinforcements of a battalion, a battery Royal Horse Artillery and the Guides Cavalry. These arrived during the battle, enabling the whole force to counter-attack and drive off the tribesmen, inflicting very severe losses. The Guides lost eight killed and twenty wounded in this action.

The force returned to Sherpur Cantonment and the Guides were thereafter no more engaged in fighting round Kabul.

The negotiations which had already been opened with Abdur Rahman Khan proceeded during May and June, and news having been received that he was on his way to Kabul, where he was to be proclaimed Amir, General Stewart was directed, at the beginning of July, to proceed with the arrangements which had already been made for the withdrawal of the British troops from northern Afghanistan by the Khyber route. Now, however, news reached Kabul of the defeat of the British troops at Maiwand by the forces of Ayub Khan from Herat, and that General Stewart's successor in command, General Primrose, was closely besieged in Kandahar.

The epic march of Roberts's army from Kabul to Kandahar, which followed the receipt of this news, is a story which does not belong here, as the Guides Infantry had no part in it. As the spearhead of the attack, whenever present, they had won the highest honours throughout the campaign in North Afghanistan, and now they returned to India with the forces evacuating Kabul.

The story of Lord Roberts's famous march, followed by his defeat and destruction of Ayub Khan's army before the walls of Kandahar, is told in the narrative of the 2nd Sikhs.

The 1st Sikhs in the Second Afghan War

At the outbreak the 1st Sikhs were in Kohat when sudden and urgent orders to march to Peshawar, ready for field service, were received. The orders arrived on 3rd October at 7.30 a.m. and directed the Battalion to reach Peshawar by the next day. Camel transport had to be collected as well as all other normal preparations made, but the Battalion moved the same day and arrived at Peshawar the next afternoon at 4 p.m. The record mentions that the transport arrived one to four hours afterwards and, other than some bruised feet from the stony tracks, no casualties were reported. When it is remembered that no road existed in those days over the Kohat Pass and that the distance is thirty-nine miles, this was no mean performance. One is tempted to wonder what would happen if similar orders for a move with camel transport by march route, to be

completed within thirty-six hours at F.S. scale, were issued to a battalion in our modern times of mechanical transport and equipment! All honour to our forefathers, who took such things in their stride.

The 1st Sikhs were allotted to the 2nd Brigade, 1st Division, Peshawar Valley Field Force and formed part of the flank column that made the night march on 20th November to turn the north flank of the Afghan position on the Khyber Pass. The story of this has been told in the Guides' narrative above. It is of interest here to notice the scale at which units moved in the Second Afghan War. The 1st Sikhs marched, strength as follows: 7 British officers, 8 J.C.Os., 25 havildars, 10 buglers and 394 rank and file; and for this strength they had: ammunition, 5 mules; officers, 2 mules; hospital trunks, 1 mule; cooking-pots, 8 mules; greatcoats, 16 bullocks; provisions, 26 bullocks; grain, 3 bullocks; pakhals, 7 mules.

The record remarks that "The bullocks given by the Commissariat were a great evil." It can well be imagined.

For the rest of the year and during the subsequent advance to Jellalabad the Battalion were not called on to fight, but suffered severely from the cold and a pneumonic fever that ensued. Winter clothing was not received till 23rd December. Admissions to hospital averaged one-third of unit strength, and of these thirty to fifty per cent. died.

The Battalion remained in Jellalabad till June 1879, performing protective and punitive duties. It then returned to Kohat, arriving on 21st June. This ended the 1st Sikhs' part in the Second Afghan War.

The 2nd Sikhs in the Second Afghan War

In November 1878, the 2nd Sikhs were at Dera Ghazi Khan and were allotted a role of covering troops while General Biddulph's force concentrated for the advance on Kandahar.

They were moved forward to Kandahar in February 1880, and now formed part of General Stewart's Division, styled the Kandahar Field Force and consisting of one cavalry and two infantry brigades. It is interesting to note that the transport of this force, which had to live on locally foraged supplies, consisted of 1,942 horses, 714 ponies, 1,113 mules, 547 bullocks, 6,881 camels and 13 elephants. Of this, the transport of the 2nd Sikhs alone consisted of 259 camels and 45 mules.

Ahmed Khel

General Stewart's Division marched for Kabul at the end of March 1880, and on 19th April encountered an enemy force of 15,000 (about three times its own strength) near Ahmed Khel. The 2nd Brigade were leading, when hordes of fanatical tribesmen and Afghan cavalry charged the three Battalions and the 19th Bengal Lancers, outflanking these four units on both sides. The

3rd Gurkhas on the left, the 2nd Sikhs in the centre and the 17th Foot (Royal Leicestershire Regiment) were compelled to form squares when the cavalry were forced back, and the steadiness of the above, and in particular of the first two, held off all attempts to turn the left flank, while a charge by the 2nd Punjab Cavalry, F.F., restored the situation on the left. The arrival of the guns and the 1st Brigade on the scene turned the enemy withdrawal into a rout, leaving over 1,000 dead scattered along the front of the line—296 bodies were counted on the ground swept by the fire of the 2nd Sikhs. The Battalion lost one man killed and ten wounded, of whom one subsequently died. It is perhaps of interest to compare this battle with the similar encounter at Maiwand three months later. Then also, enemy swordsmen in swarms, together with Afghan cavalry, charged in the same way, and with fanatical zeal, an advancing brigade of all arms. The infantry failed to maintain steadiness and fire discipline after the cavalry withdrew on the flank, and the entire brigade, being without support of any kind was completely annihilated. Forces penetrating deep into tribal territory have always to face this hazard, and it is fair to record that while constantly operating under such conditions the units of the Punjab Frontier Force have never failed.

General Stewart's Division reached Ghazni, 223 miles from Kandahar, on 21st April. Continuing its march on 25th April the Division arrived in the Zalar valley, south of Kabul, on 8th May. The Battalion was moved on to Kabul in July and quartered in the Bala Hissar. Three days after its arrival, and just as preparations for peace were under way, news of the disaster at Maiwand mentioned above, was received.

The March from Kabul to Kandahar

A brigade of the Kandahar Field Force had in fact been destroyed by an Afghan force under Sardar Ayub Khan, a son of the late Amir Sher Ali, and Kandahar itself was in danger of investment.

A force of picked regiments was at once organized, under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir F. Roberts, to march to the relief of Kandahar. The 2nd Sikhs were detailed to form part of this force, now designated the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force. The Field Force was organized into one cavalry and three infantry brigades, the 2nd Sikhs forming the 2nd Brigade with the 72nd Highlanders, 3rd Sikhs and 5th Gurkhas. The strength of the Force was just under 10,000 fighting ranks, the 2nd Sikhs mustering 7 officers and 612 Indian ranks.

It is difficult in these days of mechanical transport, air supply, etc., to realize the criticism which was universally evoked by the projected expedition. The following extracts, taken from a paper prepared in 1881 by Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Chapman, who was Chief of Staff to Sir Frederick Roberts during

the march to Kandahar, throw an interesting contemporary light on what has become an almost legendary feat of arms.

“A march conducted without a base of operations or communications of any kind, through a hostile country, and towards a point presumably in possession of an enemy who had been recently successful, could only be warranted by such necessity as had arisen.

“The result justified the conception, and the march from Kabul to Kandahar has been recognized as a great achievement. But at the time it was undertaken, and until a crushing defeat had been inflicted upon Ayub Khan at Kandahar itself, the movement was condemned in no measured terms by military critics, its originators being judged to have acted in complete disregard of the principles of military science.

“With troops however, trained and equipped as were those selected for the undertaking, a commander may, humanly speaking, anticipate success in any enterprise. It is important to draw attention to the quality of the troops constituting the corps d’armée from which Sir Frederick Roberts’s force was drawn, to lay stress on their superior physique, and to recall the fact that officers and men had gone through together the training of a lengthened period of active service. It is not too much to say that, in fighting power and intelligence, the troops in question could not be surpassed, whilst their equipment was in the very highest order.”*

The celebrated march commenced on 9th August, and in view of the fact that two Battalions of the Regiment took part (the other was the 3rd Battalion) and not many contemporary accounts are available, a short description of it is merited here. Four days brought the Force to the end of the Logar valley, a distance of forty-six miles. Local supplies were plentiful and short marches had been carried out to harden the troops.

The normal daily routine during the march was as follows. The rouse sounded at 2.45 a.m. and the march commenced at 4 a.m. A halt of ten minutes was made at the end of each hour, the halt at eight o’clock being prolonged to twenty minutes for breakfast.

The daily work fell heavily on infantry units. Large fatigue parties had to be found daily to load Ordnance and Commissariat stores. Grass parties, foraging parties and other duties kept the troops employed throughout the day, and it was seldom that the men obtained more than four hours’ sleep during the night. The variation of temperature was very trying to all ranks. On occasions this ranged between freezing-point at dawn and 110° at noon. Water was scarce and sandstorms and dust added to the intense discomfort.

Each British officer was allowed one mule-load of kit, each Indian officer 30 lb., each Indian other rank 20 lb., and each follower 10 lb. This kit included a greatcoat and waterproof sheet.

* The Official Account of the Second Afghan War.

Normally the cavalry acted as protective screen with two regiments forward and one on each flank. One infantry brigade with a mountain battery and a small detachment of cavalry in turn found the rear-guard, a difficult duty increased considerably by the necessity of dealing with straggling followers and sick animals.

On 12th August the cavalry and the 2nd Brigade passed over the Zamburak Kotal (8,100 ft.), the remainder of the Force following the next day. The baggage of the Brigade did not arrive up that night, and the 2nd Sikhs had to bivouac without tents or baggage at Saidabad, a very cold night being spent.

Ghazni, ninety-eight miles from Kabul, was reached on 15th August. The next march, of twenty miles to Yarghati, passed over the battlefield of Ahmed Khel, where the graves of the dead of Sir Donald Stewart's force were found to have been desecrated and the bones exposed to view. The Force arrived at Chardeh the following day, where reliable information was received that Kandahar, though now closely invested, was still holding out.

On 21st August heliographic communication was established with Kalat-i-Ghilzai, where Colonel Tanner, in local command, passed the news of a disastrous sortie from Kandahar on the 16th in which General Brooke and eight other British officers had been killed. Kalat-i-Ghilzai, 225 miles from Kabul, was reached on the 23rd, where a day's halt was made. This place was then evacuated, Colonel Tanner's detachment accompanying the Force towards Kandahar.

On the 25th the column marched seventeen miles to Jaldak, and the same distance the next day to Tirandez. Here the reassuring news was received from General Primrose, commanding at Kandahar, that Ayub Khan had raised the siege on the 23rd and was entrenching to the north of the city. On 28th August the Force arrived at Robot, twenty miles from Kandahar. Here a day's halt was made in view of the likelihood of an action on arrival at Kandahar. For the same reason Kandahar was approached in two short marches of ten miles, the Force camping at Momund on the 30th.

At 3.30 a.m. on 31st August the Force left its camp and swung into Kandahar at 8.30 a.m., where it received a hearty welcome from the garrison. A camp site was selected to the west of the city, with its right on the cantonments and its left touching old Kandahar.

The distance of just over 313 miles from Kabul to Kandahar had been covered in twenty-three days, including two days' halt. Beyond some sniping, no opposition had been met with, but the privations of the march had taken their toll of the Force, six men and six followers having died *en route* and four men and five followers being reported missing. The latter were stragglers and can only have been murdered by the tribesmen. It is satisfactory to notice that of this total the 2nd Sikhs lost only one man dead and not one was reported missing. There were 940 sick men admitted to hospital at Kandahar

on arrival, but there appears to be no record of what proportion of these came from the 2nd Sikhs.

The casualties amongst the transport animals were very heavy. Of nearly 3,000 pack ponies accompanying the column, over 1,000 were non-effective on arrival. Of 4,500 mules, 1,100 were sick or dead, and 160 casualties had occurred amongst the 1,100 donkeys. Amongst this welter of useless animals, those of the 2nd Sikhs obtained a special report in the official account of the campaign. The Regiment marched into Kandahar with three only of its total transport animals in an ineffective condition. Of these, no case was due to a sore back.

Following an immediate reconnaissance, General Roberts decided to attack Ayub Khan's army, now in a prepared position to the north of the city.

The Battle of Kandahar

The guns opened at about 9.30 a.m., and the 1st and 2nd Brigades began their advance. The enemy were encountered almost at once in the walled gardens, houses, orchards and enclosures in the villages of Abbasabad and Gundigan, north of Kandahar.

General Roberts's despatch referred to the advance of the 2nd Brigade as follows:

"Meanwhile the 2nd Brigade had been threading its way through the lanes and walled enclosures, which lay in the line of its attack. The resistance it encountered was most stubborn, the enemy being well-protected by high walls, which they had carefully loopholed. The loss suffered in clearing these enclosures was necessarily severe.

"Of the Regiments of this Brigade, the 72nd Highlanders and the 2nd Sikhs had the chief share of the fighting. They were the two leading battalions, and frequently had to fix bayonets to carry positions, or to check the determined rushes of the enemy. Brigadier-General Baker speaks in high terms of the gallant behaviour of these two regiments, and notices especially the manner in which a charge of the enemy was repulsed by the 2nd Sikhs."

The charge referred to by General Roberts took place in the neighbourhood of Gundigan, about a mile and a half from the starting-line. Here the enemy was in great force and kept up a heavy fire. The charge was made by a strong body of the enemy which, aided by the excellent cover afforded by garden walls, was only stopped when it had got to within thirty yards of our forward troops. A spirited counter-attack was then made on this body by two companies of the reserve. The Afghans were driven back and by about 11 a.m. Gundigan was occupied.

The 1st Brigade now came up on the right and the entrance to the Argandab valley fell into the hands of the British. Organized resistance was virtually at an end. The 1st and 2nd Brigades commenced the right wheel preparatory to the advance up the valley on Ayub Khan's camp. The forward troops of the 2nd Brigade were now relieved by the 3rd Sikhs and the 2nd Baluch Regiment.

Ayub Khan's army had broken and fled. By 1 p.m. the deserted camp and all Ayub Khan's artillery, consisting of thirty pieces, were captured. The cavalry pursued the scattered remnants of his force until nightfall.

The casualties in the battle of Kandahar were 35 killed and 213 wounded. The casualties of the Battalion were 3 sepoy killed and 1 officer (Major Slater), 23 Indian other ranks and 2 followers wounded. One wounded sepoy subsequently died of wounds. Four of the casualties were caused by sword-cuts, the remainder being from gunshot. The strength of the 2nd Sikhs actually engaged in the battle was 512.

The bodies of 600 of the enemy were found between Kandahar and the Pir Paimal gap and it is probable that his total of killed amounted to at least double that number.

Two large drums and two side-drums captured from the Afghans at Kandahar are still in the possession of the Battalion.

The 2nd Brigade returned to camp outside the city the same evening.

The rout of Ayub Khan was complete and the campaign was now at an end. Abdur Rahman had already been established at Kabul as Amir, and General Stewart's force was withdrawing from Kabul to India. The evacuation of Kandahar now followed.

Before concluding the account of the exploits of the Kabul-Kandahar Field Force it is of interest to note the impression this march and battle had upon the world. The news of Maiwand and the siege of Kandahar had been gravely disquieting, and universal relief greeted the news of the result of General Roberts's expedition. General Roberts refers to "the glamour of romance thrown round an army of 10,000 men lost to view, as it were, for nearly a month, about the fate of which uninformed opinion was rife, and pessimistic rumours were spread, until tension became extreme, and the corresponding relief proportionately great, when that army reappeared to dispose at once of Ayub and his hitherto victorious troops."*

The Battalion returned to India by way of Quetta, being called on to assist in some minor punitive duties against local tribes *en route*. It arrived at Dera Ghazi Khan via Sibi, and rail to Multan, on 11th December 1880. It had thus returned to the post whence it had started after two years and two months of active service, during which no man had leave.

The casualties to the Battalion during the campaign were as follows:

* Lord Roberts, *Forty-one Years in India*.

killed in action, 8 Indian ranks; wounded, 1 officer, 31 Indian ranks; died, 2 J.C.Os. and 161 Indian ranks.

The 3rd Sikhs in the Second Afghan War

On the outbreak of the Second Afghan War the 3rd Sikhs were at Edwardesabad (Bannu), engaged in watch-and-ward duties. It was not until September 1879, when the murder of Sir Louis Cavagnari and his escort called for the rapid concentration of a force in Kohat to advance via the Kurram on Kabul, that the 3rd Sikhs were ordered to move on field service.

While the 2nd Sikhs, as described above, moved on Kabul later with Sir Donald Stewart's Division from Kandahar, the 3rd Sikhs were assigned to the force under Major-General Sir Frederick Roberts, which advanced on Kabul via the Kurram. In the initial advance, the chief danger spot on the route to Kabul that required to be kept open was the Shutur Gardan Kotal—a picturesque name which means "Pass of the Camel's Neck." The defence of this pass, which led into the Logar valley and was some forty-five miles from Kabul, was entrusted to the 3rd Sikhs, the 21st Punjab Infantry and the 1st Mountain Battery. It was of vital importance, as its loss would have endangered the entire Force advancing on Kabul, besides cutting off its supplies. This small force held the pass against repeated enemy interference and was threatened by overwhelming numbers (at one time by as many as 17,000) from 29th September till 20th October.

It was then relieved by a brigade from India and moved on to Kabul. As described above, this capital city had since been taken by Roberts's Force after that Force had inflicted a decisive defeat on the Afghans at the battle of Charasiah, and his force was in occupation of it.

On its arrival at Kabul the Battalion was paraded for Sir Frederick Roberts to offer his congratulations on the Battalion's feat at the Shutur Gardan Pass. Further congratulations were also received from the Commander-in-Chief in India and the Viceroy. The Battalion was accommodated in Sherpur Cantonment, Kabul.

Now followed the heavy fighting around Kabul undertaken by the troops of Roberts's Force, which finally defeated and subdued the enemy in the northern half of Afghanistan. The 3rd Sikhs were actively engaged in this till the end of the year, when it culminated in the Afghan attack on the Sherpur Cantonment, which was beaten off with heavy losses. Throughout these operations the Battalion never failed in any task assigned to it. In the Kabul campaign it suffered the following casualties: 3 officers wounded (two severely), 3 J.C.Os. wounded (two severely), 11 men killed in action, 73 died of disease, and 36 wounded.

The first half of 1880 was uneventful in Kabul for the 3rd Sikhs. Only

occasional punitive columns were ordered, and not till 3rd August, when the news of Maiwand was received, was it again involved in major operations, commencing with the great march to Kandahar.

Of this march and the battle of Kandahar there is little to record other than has been written above in the narrative of the 2nd Sikhs. The Battalion had three deaths on the march and reached Kandahar 509 strong, with fifty-eight men sick.

CHAPTER IV

1881-1914: MINOR OPERATIONS AND SMALL WARS

The P.F.F. placed under the Commander-in-Chief—The Relief of Chitral, 1895—The Great Frontier Revolt of 1897—Tirah, 1897—The Edwardian Decade—Tonnochy's Raid—The 1st Sikhs in China, 1900-01—The 2nd Sikhs in Somaliland, 1903-04—The Disaster of Gumburru—The Battle of Jidballi—Zakka Khel and Mohmand, 1908.

The P.F.F. placed under the Commander-in-Chief

FOR some years after the Second Afghan War there was peace on and beyond the Border, and all Battalions were occupied in watch-and-ward duties. These were their normal life in peace, and though they gave rise to occasional "incidents" and small punitive columns periodically went out, only the more important expeditions merit inclusion in this volume.

All the Battalions of the Regiment were involved in one or other of these, so that it is convenient now to leave for a while the individual stories of each of the Battalions and take the sequence of events on the Frontier instead. A short account of each of these minor wars is given in this chapter with an outline of the role played in it by such Battalions as participated, and of any happenings of particular interest connected with them.

The first event of importance was the bringing of the Punjab Frontier Force under the Commander-in-Chief. This happened in 1886. Previously, it will be recollected, it was a specialized force under the Punjab Government. The transfer was at the time regarded with doubt by many senior officers, and some, such as General Sir Henry Daly (an ex-commandant of the Guides) and General Lumsden, definitely deprecated it. The latter's opinion, as recorded by his biographers, was that "theoretically, there was reason for such a measure when great mobilization schemes were considered paramount, but in practice he considered it was detrimental to the interests of Government, unless some other like body were created on the Frontier." The last clause of this sentence is interesting in view of the fact that later, when the Battalions of the old Punjab Frontier Force were long established as regulars in the Indian Army, "other like bodies" were in fact created on the Frontier in the shape of the various Frontier Militias that exist to this day. Their task has been very much akin to that for which the old P.F.F. was originally created.

In regard to the Guides in particular, a change in regard to officers was

also made whereby Lumsden's system of making all officers in the Corps interchangeable, whether Cavalry or Infantry, was abandoned. From about 1890 officers in the Cavalry of the Corps henceforward remained Cavalry and the Infantry officers remained Infantry, but this was still a matter purely for the decision of the Commandant.

In 1888 a small punitive expedition was sent against the tribes of the Black Mountain. In this the 3rd Sikhs took part, but did not experience fighting that merits description here in detail. The column carried out punitive destruction of hostile towns and villages of the Hassanzai tribe, and the Battalion was chiefly employed in protective duties.

In 1890, in view of the continued unrest in the Black Mountain area, the Government ordered the construction of several roads leading from Agror up to the crest of the Black Mountain, following upon which it was decided, in the autumn, to send a small body of troops to march peaceably along the crest of the range. The Akazai, Hassanzai and other clans immediately collected to offer opposition and it was decided to send a force into the territories of these tribes in order to assert the right of the Government to move along the crest of the Black Mountain without molestation.

A Brigade group which included the Guides Infantry and the 4th Sikhs, together with the Seaforth Highlanders and two supporting mountain batteries, concentrated at Darband and Oghi and moved forward in two columns in March 1891. Very heavy gatherings of tribesmen were encountered, but there was no severe fighting and the tribes submitted unconditionally.

The Relief of Chitral, 1895

In 1895 trouble arose in Chitral which resulted in the investment of the garrison there and the despatch of a relief force. This became one of the major Frontier expeditions of the latter part of the nineteenth century, and two of the Battalions of the Regiment formed part of the Chitral Relief Force—the Guides Infantry and the 4th Sikhs.

The trouble was due to intrigues by certain tribal chiefs, which culminated in March 1895, in the murder of the Mehtar of Chitral. These chiefs then joined forces with the Chitralis in besieging the fort at Chitral, which, however, was relieved by a column from Gilgit by 20th April after considerable fighting.

In the meantime, however, on 14th March, the Government mobilized a division to advance into Chitral from Nowshera and punish the offenders. This campaign entailed an exceptionally arduous advance across four ranges of mountains (the Lowarai Pass has an altitude of 12,250 feet). Three large rivers and numerous smaller, though often dangerous streams had also to be crossed. All this was through (at that time) little-known and probably hostile country, the only reliable map being a sketch map previously made by a sepoy

of the Guides Infantry, for which he had been awarded the MacGregor Memorial Medal.

The Chitral Relief Force consisted of a division of three infantry brigades, divisional troops, reserve brigades and line-of-communication troops.

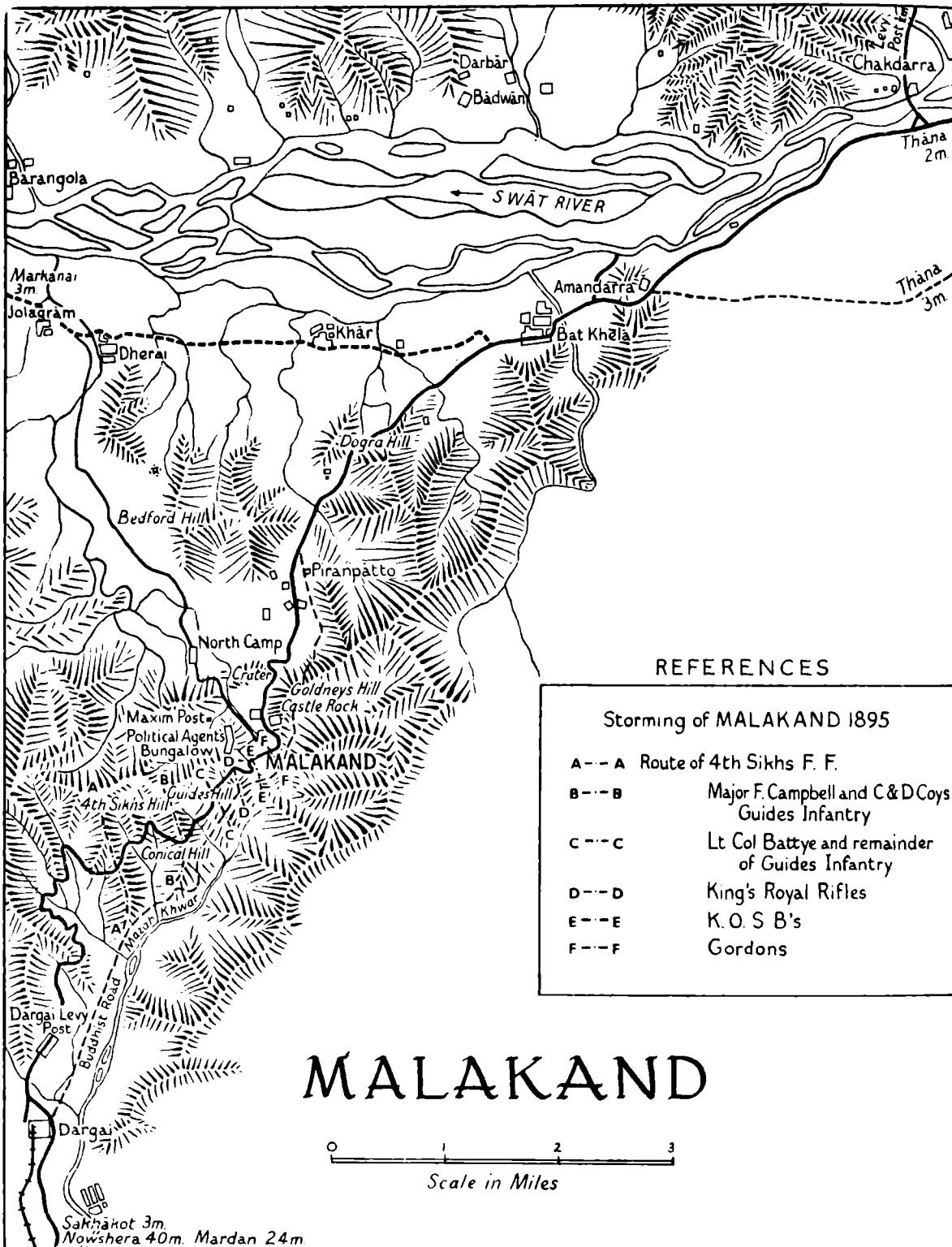
The Guides Infantry and 4th Sikhs were in the 2nd Infantry Brigade with the King's Own Scottish Borderers and the Gordon Highlanders, and this Brigade formed the spearhead of the advance. The tribes collected to offer opposition from the start, and the forcing of the Malakand Pass occasioned quite a stiff fight, in which the Guides and the 4th Battalion were the two leading battalions in the attack. While the advance up the Swat valley to the next mountain range was led by the cavalry, the 4th Sikhs and Guides Infantry remained on the Malakand ridge while the large column of camel transport crossed the Pass. In those days there was only a rough track where the present road runs, and the sappers took two days to make it passable for pack animals.

It was not until the 9th April that the 4th Sikhs and Guides Infantry once more led the advance over the next mountain range, the Kamrani Pass, while the cavalry followed the line of the Panjkora river. The Intelligence Officer with this advance was a Captain Robertson, later Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson of the First World War and father of General Sir Brian Robertson, Commander-in-Chief of the post-Second World War Commonwealth Forces in Germany.

As the further advance continued, punitive destruction of villages of the hostile Utman Khel was carried out, but all withdrawals were now vigorously followed up by the tribes, and the Guides had some hard fighting. A hampering factor in the advance was the Panjkora river, which was now a raging torrent from the melting snow and made crossing a problem. In this phase the Guides lost their Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel F. D. Batty, who was killed while conducting a retirement across the river. He was the fourth of the brothers to be killed and the third to lose his life on active service with the Guides. For their staunchness in this fighting the Guides Infantry received many tributes in despatches and subsequent accounts of the campaign.

Between the 13th and 16th April the difficulties of the Force were increased by the weather breaking just when the troops were distributed on both sides of the river and a suspension bridge was being constructed. However, the weather improved before the bridge was washed away, and the further advance to Chitral met with little difficulty or opposition. This completed the expedition. The troops withdrew to their cantonments after the hostile tribal leaders had made their submission.

Peace, however, did not continue long on the Frontier; and in 1897 unrest again showed itself, this time more widespread than ever before (or, indeed, since), for tribal hostility broke out from Buner in the north to Waziristan in



REFERENCES

Storming of MALAKAND 1895

- A --- A Route of 4th Sikhs F. F.
- B --- B Major F. Campbell and C & D Coys Guides Infantry
- C --- C Lt Col Batty and remainder of Guides Infantry
- D --- D King's Royal Rifles
- E --- E K. O. S B's
- F --- F Gordons

MALAKAND

0 1 2 3
Scale in Miles

the south-west, and the whole of the powerful Afridi tribes in the Tirah were up in arms.

Before continuing to an account of the campaign which followed, the death at this time has to be recorded of Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Lumsden, the "father" of the Guides. As this record bears witness, his early and far-sighted wisdom and brilliance placed the Guides, and indeed all the Frontier Force Regiments, eternally in his debt. His death came just before the Guides were due to celebrate their first jubilee after fifty years. It had been hoped that General Sir Harry Lumsden, who some years previously had retired from service and was living at home in Scotland, might have been able to attend, but for him the end had come on 12th August 1896. "On the morning before his death he talked cheerfully to his brother of the plan he had long cherished of revisiting Mardan during the approaching cold season and of spending the fiftieth anniversary of their creation with the Guides. But it was not to be. Attended to the last by his devoted wife, he passed away in the early hours of 12th August, and all who knew him, rich and poor, lost a friend whom to know was to love."*

The Great Frontier Revolt, 1897

To return to the story, the causes of the trouble which now spread so rapidly over the Frontier appear to have been somewhat obscure. An historian of the period has described them as follows: "I venture to submit that for the *fons et origo mali* we must hark back to the year 1893, when Sir Mortimer Durand returned from Kabul with the Boundary Agreement signed by the Amir of Afghanistan in his hand; and that that document was the outward and visible sign of all our subsequent troubles on the North-West Frontier. . . . (a) The Boundary Agreement was most distasteful to the Amir; and *a fortiori* to all his subjects. (b) The tribes on the border were thoroughly alarmed by the demarcation of the boundary; their fears were accentuated by our establishment of military posts in Wana, in the Tochi and Kurram valleys, in Chitral, on the Malakand and on the Samana Range, and in spite of our assurances they trembled for their independence."

Whether these things were indeed responsible or not, the fact remains that very soon, following a treacherous and unprovoked attack in the Tochi on a Political Officer, the tribes farther north in Swat and Buner were attacking the forts at Chakdara and Malakand; some 5,000 Mohmands were raiding the Peshawar plain around Shabkadr; and the Afridis and Orakzais in Tirah were on the war-path.

The attack in the Tochi, on 10th June 1897, led to a fierce battle and involved a detachment of the 1st Battalion.

* *Lumsden of the Guides*, page 289.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bunny, the Commandant, and 22 rank and file were killed, and 2 officers and 20 rank and file were wounded. As the anniversary of the action is celebrated annually to this day by the 1st Battalion, an account of it is merited here and is as follows:

On the 10th June 1897, an escort of 12 sabres 1st Punjab Cavalry, 2 mountain artillery guns, 200 rifles 1st Sikhs, and 100 rifles 1st Punjab Infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Bunny, 1st Sikhs, escorted the Political Officer to one of the Maizar villages to site a levy post. The force reached the Maizar group of villages at 9.30 a.m. and was met by maliks who were believed by the Political Officer to be friendly and loyal. After a reconnaissance to a village farther up the Tochi a meal for the Mohammadan sepoys was provided by the villagers about midday. About 2 p.m., on a preconcerted signal, the villagers who were with the troops cleared off and fire was opened from the nearest village, the second shot wounding Lieutenant Seton Browne in the thigh. The fire was directed on the officers, and Colonel Bunny was mortally wounded almost at once.

The two guns immediately opened on the villagers at only a hundred yards range, but having only sixteen rounds per gun their ammunition was soon expended. Both artillery officers were wounded, one fatally, and there was a general stampede of mules (this caused much loss of property).

A fighting withdrawal now commenced, abandoning all equipment, etc., that was carried on transport, and it was fought out deliberately and with the greatest gallantry. All officers were wounded (two fatally), but they continued to lead their men.

The enemy now appeared on all sides in great numbers and a determined stand was made by the wall of a garden, two subadars and a jemadar of the 1st Sikhs behaving most bravely and with great determination. Under cover of this stand the guns were withdrawn, the wounded carried or helped away, and a fresh position 300 yards in rear taken up. The retirement thus continued, successive positions being taken up with complete steadiness until the Sheranni plain (two miles) was reached. All this time the enemy was constantly enveloping the flanks.

Eventually, about 5.30 p.m., a good position was held about a mile back on the plain, and reinforcements appearing in sight the enemy was beaten off.

The retreat, covering three miles, had taken three and a half hours—an indication of the stubbornness of the fighting and the steadiness of the withdrawal.

At the start there were about 500 tribesmen, but their numbers swelled to over 1,000 during the afternoon. They lost ninety killed and many wounded.

Two brigades from Kohat and Bannu concentrated immediately and advanced in July up the Tochi. They met but small opposition and destroyed

the villages of the murderers. The 3rd Sikhs took part in this operation.

This ended the trouble in Waziristan. The measures to meet the hostility farther north, however, which blazed for several more months, called on the maximum military resources of the Government. The Guides were immediately called on to march to the help of the fort at Malakand, which was heavily attacked, while a force of two brigades under Sir Bindon Blood was collected to advance into Buner. Furthermore, a division under Sir William Lockhart was mobilized at Kohat and Thal to advance into Tirah and subdue the Afridi tribes. With the latter went the 3rd Sikhs. The stories of these two campaigns will be followed separately, commencing with the Malakand Field Force, as the force under Sir Bindon Blood was named.

First of all must be recorded the rapid action of the Guides at Mardan on receipt of news of the attack at Malakand.

At nine o'clock on the evening of 26th July a telegram reached the Commandant of the Guides from the Officer Commanding at Malakand, stating that the presence of the Corps was urgently needed there by reason of a serious outbreak of disturbance in the Swat valley and asking that the Cavalry might, if possible, arrive at daybreak for employment in keeping open the road between the Malakand and Thana for a force which was about to move out against the enemy. The Corps was rapidly mobilized and marched from Mardan, the Cavalry at 12.15 a.m. on the 27th, the Infantry starting an hour and a half later. The Cavalry, halting for three-quarters of an hour at Dargai, reached the Malakand Kotal at 8.30 a.m.; the Guides Infantry arrived at the Malakand Kotal at 5.45 p.m., having accomplished the thirty-two-mile march from Mardan in exactly sixteen hours.

Of this march of the Guides Infantry a writer tells us that "this wonderful feat was accomplished without impairing the efficiency of the soldiers, who were sent into the piquet line and became engaged as soon as they arrived. An officer who commanded the Dargai post told me that as they passed the guard there they shouldered arms with a parade precision, to show that twenty-six miles under the hottest sun in the world could not take the polish off the Guides. Then they breasted the long ascent to the top of the pass, encouraged by the sound of firing which grew louder at every step."

Not the least interesting feature of this account is that it was written by a young cavalry officer who was embarking on his first venture as a journalist. Although his regiment was in southern India he had managed to get himself attached to Sir Bindon Blood's staff, and his name was Winston Churchill.* Some further extracts from his vivid accounts of this campaign will follow.

Attacks on the garrison of Malakand, now reinforced by the Guides,

* The Right Honourable Sir Winston S. Churchill, K.G., O.M., Prime Minister of England and great leader of the Second World War.

continued till 31st July, when they slackened. In the meantime Sir Bindon Blood's force of two brigades began to assemble, the 1st Brigade absorbing the garrison at Malakand. On 2nd August it commenced to advance up the Swat valley to relieve Chakdara as the tribal gatherings had begun to withdraw. Large numbers of them were nevertheless encountered and the 11th Lancers and Guides Cavalry were able to launch a mounted attack in the valley that did great execution with sword and lance.

By 9th August the whole Malakand Field Force had been assembled and organized, and the Guides Infantry now joined the 2nd Infantry Brigade at Khar. On the 16th the advance of the 1st Brigade to mete out retribution to the aggressor tribes commenced, the 2nd Brigade remaining the while at Khar.

The 1st Brigade during the remainder of the month penetrated through Charbagh to the Kotke Pass, leading to Kohistan, without serious opposition.

While the Guides Cavalry and the 1st Brigade had been absent in Upper Swat the 2nd Brigade had remained camped about Khar. On his return from Upper Swat General Blood intended to visit and punish in turn each of the several tribes which had been concerned in attacks on our posts, beginning with the Utman Khel. Having dealt with the latter he proposed then to visit Buner and in the course of a ten days' march to overrun and thoroughly subdue the country. But by this time the condition of the Frontier had assumed a very serious aspect; the fanatical rising had now spread to the Afridis and Orakzais, who had attacked the British force and posts in the Khyber Pass and on the Samana range. Government therefore rejected General Blood's scheme for visiting Buner and ordered him to proceed only with the punishment of the Utman Khel, provided he still considered such action desirable and timely; but news now reached Sir Bindon Blood that the Hadda Mulla, an implacable hostile leader, had raised a large body of men and was marching through Bajaur to invade the territory of the Nawab of Dir in retaliation for the assistance that ruler had afforded the Government. Sir Bindon Blood was therefore ordered to advance by Sado and Nawagai to Kamali in the Mohmand country. The object of this was to destroy the Hadda Mulla's power and disperse his following, to clear Mohmand country of any enemy forces, and to give support to the Nawab of Dir and the Khan of Nawagai against any threatened attack by the Hadda Mulla. The punishment of the Utman Khel, as also of the Bunerwals, had thus to be postponed *sine die*.

The reason why the fever of insurrection had spread to the Mohmands is somewhat obscure, but two firebrands, called at the time the Mad Fakir and the Hadda Mulla, were busy inciting the tribes to raid the Peshawar plain and villages in administered territory. The presence and activities of fanatical firebrands of this type are a feature of all the major campaigns on the North-

West Frontier during the past hundred years, the last of them being the well-remembered Faqir of Ipi in Waziristan.

The 1st Brigade was now ordered to hold Malakand while the 2nd and 3rd Brigades advanced into Mohmand and Bajaur early in September.

On the night of 14th September the 2nd Brigade camp at Markhanai, at the foot of the Rambat Pass, was heavily attacked and the Guides Infantry were the only ones to escape casualties by entrenching before dark—a time-honoured lesson in Frontier perimeter camps.

The next day a squadron of cavalry issued from the camp in pursuit of the withdrawing tribesmen and, coming up with the enemy in Mamund country, killed twenty-one of them. The Guides Infantry, two guns and some Sappers and Miners, all under Major Campbell of the Guides, followed in support of the cavalry, destroyed certain villages north of Inayat Kila and collected some supplies.

The 2nd Brigade were now ordered to move against the Mamunds, a pugnacious Bajauri tribe that urgently needed punishment for participating in the recent fighting. The action which followed is worth describing as an example of the success of resolute counter-attack when in difficulties with a tribal enemy.

The Mamund villages were in the little-known Watalai valley and the Brigade were ordered to move in three columns to destroy them. We are concerned with No. 3 Column, under Major Campbell of the Guides Infantry, which consisted of two companies of the Buffs, five companies of the Guides Infantry, and some Sappers.

After carrying out as far as possible the destruction of the villages named in the orders to his party, Major Campbell received an order about 9 a.m. from the Brigadier, with the centre column, to march his force across the west side of the valley, a distance of about five miles, and protect the left flank of the centre column from the enemy then collecting to oppose it. This was done, and about 3 p.m. a general retirement towards camp was ordered and dispositions made to carry it out. But it had not long begun when Major Campbell received word that a company of the 35th Sikhs was in difficulties on the hills to the east, i.e., farthest from the flank of the column on which the Guides Infantry were operating. They reported that they had many killed and wounded, were hard pressed by the enemy and could not retire without assistance. The Guides were ordered to proceed forthwith to their relief. The Battalion was at once collected and about 4.20 p.m. moved off towards the hill.

Of the services of the Guides Infantry this day, Winston Churchill gives the following account*:

“At about 3.30, the Brigadier had ordered the Guides to proceed to the 35th’s assistance and endeavour to extricate their company. He

* *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, pages 192 et seq.

directed Major Campbell to use his own discretion. It was a difficult problem, but the Guides and their leader were equal to it. They had begun the day on the extreme left. They had hurried to the centre. Now they were ordered to the extreme right. They had already marched sixteen miles, but they were still fresh. We watched them defiling across the front with admiration. Meanwhile, the retirement of the Brigade was delayed. It was necessary that all units should support each other, and the troops had to wait until the Guides had succeeded in extricating the 35th. The enemy now came on in great strength from the north-west end of the valley. . . .

“The Guides arrived at the foot of the hill down which the 35th men were retiring. The Sikhs, utterly exhausted by the exertions of the day, were in disorder, and in many cases unable from extreme fatigue even to use their weapons. The tribesmen hung in a crowd on the flanks and rear of the struggling company, firing incessantly and even dashing in and cutting down individual soldiers.

“Both officers were wounded. Lieutenant Gunning staggered down the hill unaided, struck in three places by bullets and with two deep sword cuts besides. Weary, outnumbered, surrounded on three sides, without unwounded officers or cartridges, the end was only a matter of moments. All must have been cut to pieces. But help was now at hand. The Guides formed line, fixed bayonets and advanced at the double towards the hill. At a short distance from its foot they halted and opened a terrible and crushing fire upon the exulting enemy. The loud detonations of their company volleys were heard and the smoke seen all over the field, and on the left we wondered what was happening. The tribesmen, sharply checked, wavered. The company continued its retreat. Many brave deeds were done as the night closed in. Havildar Ali Gul* of the Afridi Company of the Guides, seized a canvas cartridge carrier, filled it with ammunition from his men’s pouches, and rushing across the fire-swept space which separated the regiment from the Sikhs, distributed the precious packets to the struggling men. Returning, he carried a wounded J.C.O. on his back. Seeing this, several Afridis in the Guides ran forward shouting and cheering to the rescue, and other wounded Sikhs were saved by their gallantry from a fearful fate. At last Ryder’s company reached the bottom of the hill and the survivors re-formed under cover of the Guides.

“These, thrown on their own resources, separated from the rest of the brigade by darkness and distance and assailed on three sides by the enemy, calmly proceeded to fight their way back to camp. Though encumbered with many wounded and amid broken ground, they repulsed

* He had already been awarded the Indian Order of Merit (Third Class) for gallantry at the Panjkora, when Colonel Battye was killed.

every attack, and bore down all the efforts which the tribesmen made to intercept their line of retreat. They reached camp at 9.30 in safety, and not without honour. The skill and experience of their officers, the endurance and spirit of the men, had enabled them to accomplish a task which many had believed impossible, and their conduct in the action in the Mamund Valley fills a brilliant page in the history of the finest and most famous frontier regiment."

During the next few days the Guides Infantry took part with the remaining troops of the 2nd Brigade in further operations in the Mamund country.

On 30th September, after punitive measures had been in progress for some days, the Guides were again involved in severe fighting when the destruction of the villages of Gat and Agra was carried out. This again received a glowing tribute in *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, when a rapid and vigorous assault by the Guides drove the tribesmen with heavy loss from their position overlooking the villages. The tribesmen now began to make submission and by 20th October the Malakand Field Force was on its way back to the Peshawar plain.

It will be remembered that large numbers of the Utman Khel had taken part in the attacks on the Malakand, and that punitive operations had been proposed against them, which had, however, to be postponed when the Malakand Field Force was ordered to advance into Bajaur and co-operate with the Mohmand Field Force. Up to 21st November only a few isolated sections of the Utman Khel had made their submission, and consequently a small force, of which the Guides Infantry formed part, was now sent into their country and succeeded in enforcing the demands of the Indian Government without a shot being fired. The force was back in Mardan by 20th January.

It is perhaps fitting here to record two congratulatory messages that were now received by the Corps of Guides and, as will be seen, are of unusual interest.

The Commandant of the Corps received the following letter from Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, V.C., K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.:

"I write a line . . . to tell you with what interest and admiration I have watched the conduct of your splendid Corps during the recent operations in Swat, etc. It delighted me to see the rapidity with which they started off on receipt of the call for help from the Malakand, and the keenness they displayed to come into contact with the enemy. I know no regiment with a grander *esprit de corps*. . . Please remember me to all your officers with whom I am acquainted, and tell the native officers and men that I always remember with pride and pleasure, their services at Delhi and under my command in Afghanistan."

Then the following very gratifying and greatly prized letter was received

by the Commanding Officer from General Sir Dighton Probyn, V.C., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., K.C.S.I., Equerry to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII):

“I am desired by the Prince of Wales to request you will make it known to the British and native officers, as well as to the non-commissioned officers and men (both Cavalry and Infantry) of the Queen’s Own Corps of Guides with what great satisfaction His Royal Highness has heard and read of the loyalty, devotion and gallantry displayed by the regiment in the late campaign on the North-West Frontier of India. The Guides Corps in this very trying campaign, has not only kept the great name it has always borne for loyalty and gallantry, but the Prince of Wales says it has gained fresh laurels and further distinction, and His Royal Highness wishes all ranks to know how proud he is to be the Honorary Colonel of this distinguished Corps.”

Tirah, 1897

Let us now turn to the operations in Tirah, which commenced in October 1897, and for which a force of two divisions under the command of Sir William Lockhart was assembled in the Miranzai valley for the purpose of advancing into Tirah over the Chagru Kotal.

The plan was for these divisions and attached troops and transport (named the Tirah Expeditionary Force) to penetrate to the heart of the Afridi country at Maidan and emerge to the north-east into the Peshawar plain. During the course of this movement destructive measures against selected villages and other suitable objectives were to be carried out. It was hoped, also, that the tribal *lashkars* would concentrate to oppose the advance, thereby offering chances to inflict punishment. In accordance with tradition and because they were trained and experienced specifically for the work, the task of protection, both in the role of advanced and rear-guards as well as of flank piquets, was given to the two Frontier Force battalions with the Force—the 3rd Sikhs and 2nd Punjab Infantry. Thus the 3rd Sikhs (later the 3rd Royal Battalion) led the attack on the Chagru Kotal as part of the 3rd Brigade during the initial advance on 18th October 1897, and two days later was shoulder to shoulder with the 1st Bn. Gordon Highlanders in the famous assault on Dargai, that was the most spectacular action in the campaign and attracted much attention at the time. As the operation had certain peculiar features, and the 3rd Sikhs suffered fairly severely, a further description is worth while.

The Dargai position had in fact been occupied the day before by a reconnoitring force from the 4th Brigade; and one company of the 3rd Sikhs, with the scouts of the 2nd and 5th Gurkhas, had also reached it. All, however, withdrew to camp for the night. The next day, 20th October, the same heights were found to be occupied by Afridis in large numbers to oppose the expedition. The Battalion Record describes what happened as follows:

“The Battalion was on the Kotal on the east of the Chagru valley. Behind the Regiment rose the precipitous heights of the Samana Suk.

“On the Kotal on our left and near the batteries, General Westmacott and staff were standing with a helio station. Below them in the dip of the valley were the 15th Sikhs in reserve, and the 21st Madras Pioneers making the road. Beyond them the hills rose again fairly steeply up to a village which at 3 p.m. the Gordons were holding. Beyond them again was a short level piece and then another rise up a spur leading to precipitous heights, on which the enemy were posted in strength. This spur, steep on the south side, on the north was sloped more gradually, and above the level piece mentioned the north side formed a sort of shallow cup. In this were assembled three battalions—the Sherwood Foresters, the Dorsets, and the 1st Bn. 2nd Gurkhas. Above them on the upper part of the cup were rocks and trees which barred the road except at the left side near the edge of the spur, where an opening, about twenty or thirty yards wide, gave entrance to a flatter part of the spur, since generally known as the Fatal Ridge, which was the only way (as far as then known) up to the enemy’s position and which was fully exposed to his deadly fire, the troops in the hollow below being fairly well sheltered. As we watched from the far side of the Chagru valley, we could see that isolated rushes were being made over this ridge, in which all, or most of the men, fell killed or wounded, and that in consequence the attack had failed so far.

“At 3 p.m. an order for the Battalion to advance to the village held by the Gordons was received. On this, the Battalion at once went down into the dip at a rapid pace, and across the valley. It arrived at the village as half the Gordons had moved out and at once was ordered to send up six companies* with the Gordons and leave one in the village. Word was passed for ‘A’ Company to remain behind. The others hurried on. Shortly after leaving the village General Kempster was met, and he stopped Lieutenant-Colonel Tonnochy, as the head of the Regiment came up, and said that there had been great delay in taking the hill, that it must be taken and that the Gordons and the 3rd Sikhs were to take it. He said that message was to be given to Colonel Mathias, of the Gordons.

“Colonel Tonnochy delivered the message on reaching the sheltered ground before mentioned, and asked Colonel Mathias how he would like the advance to be made. The latter said it should be made in rushes of sections of Gordons and 3rd Sikhs mixed together. This order was passed to the Regiment. A pencilled message was now received from General Kempster that the attack was to be made with Gordons and 3rd Sikhs

* Still eight companies in a Battalion. The four-company organization was introduced during the First World War.

in the first line, Foresters and Gurkhas in the second line, and Dorsets in the third line.

“Colonel Mathias addressed his men, saying that the heights must be taken and the Gordons and the 3rd Sikhs were to take them. The men cheered and called for the pipers. A tremendous fire began from the batteries and the maxims. Bayonets were fixed and an advance was made with the pipers leading. The first lot of men rushed at the opening, a large number to be at once shot down. Section after section, led by their officers, went across, though with many losses, and with the exception of Lieutenant White, who fell wounded on the ridge, all the officers of the 3rd Sikhs were soon across and under cover on the enemy’s side. In the few minutes that the rush lasted there were twenty-two casualties in the 3rd Sikhs. The enemy, seeing that the Gordons and 3rd Sikhs (there were also fragments of the other regiments) were not to be denied, slackened their fire and began to make off. The heights were soon crowned and volleys fired at the retreating enemy.

“The casualties were as follows: *Killed*, Subadar Malu Singh (died of his wounds in hospital shortly after) and three sepoy; *Wounded*, Lieutenant G. E. White, Subadar Lehna Singh, Jemadar Beli Ram (all severely), three Havildars, two naiks and eleven sepoy.”

During the next week the Battalion was in the van of the advance and took part in the attacks on the Sampagha and Arhanga Passes. In each case it was allotted a role on the flank. At night there was constant firing into camp, but the Battalion did not suffer. On 31st October the Force reached Maidan, the main centre of Tirah, with Bagh, its chief village, and the Battalion went into camp there. From this time till the 18th the Battalion was out almost every day in contact with the enemy, either foraging or on some other expedition. On the night of the 10th, “H” Company was sent out some distance west of camp to bring in the rear of General Westmacott’s brigade, in which the retirement from the pass enabled the Afridis to bring heavy fire from This was an instance where the premature withdrawal of a key piquet during the retirement from the pass enabled the Afridis to bring heavy fire from commanding heights onto the column of the Northhamptons in a defile below. They paid for the error with grievous losses. A company was annihilated.

On 18th November the first part of the force moved to Bagh with an advanced guard of four companies of the Queen’s and the 3rd Sikhs, all under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Tonnochy. Firing by enemy commenced as soon as Bagh was entered. Two companies, with a company of the Queen’s and a battery supporting, attacked and took a hill commanding the camping-ground with the loss of one man severely wounded. These two companies with the battery were heavily fired into from high ground all round all that day. The battery was withdrawn at night. The remaining companies piqueted

various villages about the new camp and lost one man killed. The rest of the Force came in next day.

From this time up to 26th November the Battalion was engaged in foraging and other small expeditions. The resistance offered was slight and the night firing by the enemy was less. On the 26th the Battalion started on the expedition over the Kahu Pass up to the head of the Khanki valley. It left Bagh as rear-guard at 7 a.m. Camp was reached, about five miles off, at 5 p.m. The road was bad and the baggage constantly obstructed. The camp was at the mouth of a narrow valley which turned to the left and was quite hidden beyond. Somewhere in this hidden part was the pass to be crossed. At 5 a.m. on the 27th, the Gurkha Scouts and the 3rd Sikhs started, and passing in the darkness two villages of the enemy, ascended the Kahu Hill, a high hill overlooking the valley mentioned. The enemy were taken by surprise, and in attempting to get on the hills to block the march of the brigade were fired into and many killed. The Kahu Pass was reached at 10 a.m. After a very hard climb "H" Company and half "D" Company were left on the first peak. "A" Company had been left in camp. The Battalion piqueted the east side of the pass. This operation was carried out with the loss of one man killed. A very cold night was passed without food or bedding. On the 28th the Battalion marched to the village of Dargai without opposition, "A" Company and half of "D" rejoining by the evening. On the 29th the Battalion halted to allow the remainder of the Brigade to come in, and on the 30th the Brigade marched to Hissar.

On 1st December four companies of the Battalion formed part of a force to reconnoitre the Lozakha Nullah. On this day Colonel Hill's force from the Kurram valley had gone to punish the Chamkanni tribe by burning their villages. It returned in the evening pressed by the enemy, and his force had as many as thirty casualties. Next day, part of General Gaselee's brigade was lent to Colonel Hill to complete the work which had not been altogether satisfactorily done the day before. Four companies under Lieutenant-Colonel Tonnochy formed part of the force. After a march of about five miles the force halted under slight fire from the enemy at the mouth of a nullah in the worst bit of country yet seen. After a halt of an hour and a half to let the Gurkhas reach the hill which commanded the village in the valley, the 3rd Sikhs moved forward into the valley, but as the enemy were on their left flank and above them, they had finally to wait and join hands with the Gurkhas. In this advance two men were badly wounded. As soon as the enemy had been driven off the hill the villages were set on fire by the Battalion. The total casualties of this force were seven. On the 3rd the Brigade marched to Dargai; on the 4th to Khanki Bazaar; 5th, to the foot of Shingakh Nullah; 6th, over the Shingakh Pass to Bagh, reaching it at 8.30 p.m.; 7th, it halted at Bagh; 8th, marched to Mastura; 9th, to Camp Haidar Khel; 10th, to Turkosain; 11th, it halted;

12th, Burand Khel; 13th, halt; 14th, it marched to Sapri (this was a difficult pass, but not held by the enemy, who fired only a few shots half-way at Khwaja Kiddar); 15th, it moved to Mamanai; 16th, Hamgudar; 17th, Bara; 18th, halt; and 19th to 23rd December was spent at Jamrud.

On the 24th the Battalion marched with the Brigade to Ali Masjid. A 4th Sikh company under Lieutenant Storr, with Subadar Sham Singh and Jemadar Kaka Singh, joined the Battalion on the 22nd and accompanied it on the small expedition which followed. On the 25th the Battalion marched to Chura, unopposed, with the Brigade. On the 26th the Battalion marched to China, when a few shots were fired by the enemy, who caused some casualties in piquets that evening. On the 27th the Brigade retired to Chura, the Regiment being on rear-guard. The enemy followed up closely, but the Battalion suffered only two casualties, the Queen's who relieved them as rear-guard about half-way, having five or six.

Next day the Brigade marched to Ali Masjid and the day after to Jamrud. This virtually finished the Tirah Expedition.

The work of the 3rd Sikhs, under Colonel Tonnochy, during this expedition had been a model of efficient Frontier campaigning—swift in movement, dashing and courageous in attack, safe in all protection work and never allowing the tribal enemy the opportunity to inflict losses.

The Edwardian Decade

For ten years after the campaigns of 1897-98 the Frontier remained substantially quiet. The South African War against the Boers gave opportunity to a few officers of the Indian Army to serve in the field with the British Forces, and, among these, one who enlisted in the Corps of Tasmanian Bushmen and afterwards joined the Guides, was G. G. E. Wylly, V.C. He received the Victoria Cross as a corporal in that war for gallantry in an ambush. Severely wounded, he kept the Boers at bay single-handed by quick and accurate shooting from behind a rock; and as a result all the wounded in the party were brought in. He served his entire career as an officer in the Corps of Guides, graduated at the Staff College, attained the rank of Colonel, and was decorated with the C.B. and D.S.O.

Concurrently with or shortly after the South African War, two or three minor campaigns that had nothing to do with the North-West Frontier demanded the services of the Battalions of the Regiment.

The first was the Boxer Expedition to China in 1900 to 1901. The 1st Battalion formed part of the 1st Brigade of the Expeditionary Force and took part in the action of Peytan-Yangstan against the Boxers and in the subsequent advance to and relief of Peking. The second was the Somaliland Campaign of 1902-04, in which the 2nd Battalion served in both phases and took part in the battle of Jidballi and the pursuit of the Mad Mulla to the Italian border.

In 1905 an expedition was sent into Tibet in which twenty-five rank and file of the Guides Infantry took part. There was insignificant fighting, but two of the Guides party distinguished themselves by swimming the Sanpu river when it was in flood and gained the Indian Order of Merit. They were Sepoy Muhammad Nasim and Naik Sohbat, but the latter lost his life in the act. His widow, however, benefited by his award.

Further accounts of the Boxer Expedition to China and the Somaliland Campaign are given in the pages which follow, but first a small punitive expedition in Waziristan merits attention for its extraordinary success and the lessons it affords.

Tonnochy's Raid

There were, during this decade, several minor affairs on the Frontier besides one or two clear-cut punitive expeditions that were carried out with little expenditure of time, blood or money.

Among these minor affairs, one in particular merits special attention for the astonishing success it achieved with a very small force. This indeed was against tribesmen who twenty to forty years later proved themselves the most formidable on the Frontier and cost the Government heavily in blood and treasure, i.e., the Mahsuds and Wazirs in the uplands of Waziristan. The incident has been called Tonnochy's Raid (from the name of the commander of the 3rd Battalion, who led the Force) and is instructive as a model Frontier operation in the excellence of its planning and execution. For though the many campaigns with varying success that have since been fought in Waziristan have, by comparison, endowed this exploit with almost legendary fame, its success was due in fact, to no more than the efficiency with which it was prepared and carried out.

In 1901 repeated tribal raids into administered territory and a truculent attitude on the part of the Mahsuds had caused the Government to institute a blockade of their territory. As the tribe's habitat is barren and infertile, this measure, it was hoped, would bring about their submission, but it failed to have any visible effect. The Government therefore resolved to take active measures against them by sending in light raiding columns to do as much damage as possible. One of these was ordered out from Datta Khel, advantage being taken of the arrival there of the 2nd Punjab Infantry (later 2nd Bn. Frontier Force Rifles) in relief of the 3rd Sikhs. Thus both Battalions were concentrated at Datta Khel on 22nd November, when the 2nd Punjab Infantry marched into the fort. Deceptive orders were now issued for a march on the 24th, which was given as *en route* to Bannu. On the night of the 23rd, however, at 9 p.m. the following column marched out of the fort and headed for the Mahsud stronghold of Makin via the Spinapunga and Shuidar Narais:

2 guns Derajat Mountain Battery, under Lieutenant Hill;
 500 men 2nd Punjab Infantry under Lieutenant-Colonel
 E. H. Rodwell;
 500 men 3rd Sikhs under Major Taylor.

The whole force was under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Tonnochy. Of the 500 3rd Sikhs, thirty mounted infantry on mules formed part. Two days' cooked rations were taken in haversacks; 100 rounds per man in pouches; and 1 lb. atta per man for 1,200 men was taken by porters in bags of 30 lb. No doolies were taken, but all available stretchers. Four followers were allowed to each regiment, and two hospital assistants and eighty-two porters accompanied. The Battery supplied one mule for the Officers' Mess and one mule for officers' great-coats. No mules except those of the Battery and the mounted infantry were taken. The infantrymen wore the field-service warm-coat with braces over it and carried a great-coat. The weather on the hills was very cold.

The following officers were with the 3rd Battalion:

Major F. H. Taylor, in command,
 Captain C. de L. Solbe,
 Captain G. E. White,
 Lieutenant J. R. Broun,
 Lieutenant C. A. Milward,*
 Lieutenant F. T. Thompson, Medical Officer.

The moon was almost full, the track steep and broken. At 3 a.m. on the 24th, as the moon sank behind the hills, the column rested at about 1,000 feet below the Spinapunga Narai (9,400 feet), which was reached by the rearguard at 10.30. Here a halt was made and piquets sent out. Much time was then lost owing to the misinformation of one of the guides. The men were much exhausted, but the march was unopposed. The Mahsuds had seen the column but, being surprised and unready, they were unable to concentrate in order to resist.

The column next bivouacked in a village at the head of the Shuvan Algad. One company on piquet missed the march of the column and stayed out all night, but rejoined on the march next day. On the 25th ten towers in the Shuvan Algad were destroyed by the explosive party under Captain Sheppard, R.E., and thirteen villages were burnt. There was resistance, but not of a formidable nature. By evening the force issued from the Algad about four miles from Makin, but it was too late to do more than seek night quarters. At a rapid pace, therefore, a retirement was made on the Mahsud village of Bitt Malik Shahi (Bitt's village) in the direction of the Razmak plain, and this became the column's base of operations for the next two days. Next day, food having been almost exhausted, Captain Down, the Political Officer, with 200

* The late Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Milward, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

men, requisitioned supplies from a Waziri village in the Razmak Narai, while a small reconnaissance went out towards the Shaktu, with intent to deceive. On the 27th 160 men, including all sick and footsore (among the former Captain White, who had got a slight touch of pneumonia) were left in Bitt's village, and the rest of the column marched for Makin. Again the deception succeeded, for this advance was evidently unexpected and slight opposition only was offered. Three towers were blown up (explosives having failed for more) and about three-quarters of the villages of Makin were set on fire. The work began at twelve and the retirement began under thick clouds of smoke at about 2 p.m. The enemy followed up, but did little damage. Night was passed in Bitt's village, and next day (28th November) the column retired down the difficult and wooded defile of Razmak. The 2nd Punjab Infantry were on rearguard and suffered some loss, for the Mahsuds, having had time to collect, now followed up in strength. The total casualties, however, in the whole raid were only 1 British Officer, 1 J.C.O. and 13 men wounded, and 3 men killed, of which loss that of the Battalion was 1 man killed and 1 wounded. The pursuit by the Mahsuds stopped soon after their border was crossed. The column made a short halt at Mami Rogha and then came late at night into Datta Khel, having marched and fought twenty-two miles since dawn, an amazing performance in such country. Congratulatory telegrams were received at Datta Khel from Sir Bindon Blood, Commanding the Punjab Army; from General Denning, Commanding the District; and from Mr. Merk, Commissioner on Special Duty; also from the Viceroy.

The Battalion then completed its move to Bannu.*

When the story is told in the later chapters of this volume (as well as that recorded in the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*) of the fighting in Waziristan in 1919-20 and 1936-40, during which Makin was twice destroyed at great cost, the extraordinary success of this raid will be appreciated. The factors that contributed to it were the measures for deception that repeatedly misled the enemy and caught them unprepared and unable to concentrate, the rapidity of movement, and above all the fitness, strength and efficiency of the men, which made them capable of remarkable endurance. It is sad to relate that Lieutenant-Colonel Tonnochy, the brilliant planner and leader of this raid, lost his life a few months later in a small action near Bannu. A handful of outlaws were surrounded by the Bannu Column in a fortified enclosure and refused to surrender. Colonel Tonnochy, who was in command, went forward to reconnoitre the application of fire to the fort from a battery that was in support, when he was mortally wounded by a bullet from one of the outlaws. His death was a sad loss, not only to the Battalion but to the Frontier Force

* See also pages 23-26 of the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles* for a personal account of this expedition by Lieutenant-General Sir Bertrand Moberly, who was then a subaltern in the 2nd Punjab Infantry in Colonel Tonnochy's force.

and the Indian Army, for had he lived he must have attained high rank and might well have been a great leader in the First World War.

The 1st Sikhs in China, 1900-01

In 1899 and early 1900 trouble threatened in China which culminated in violence to the persons and properties of internationals in the Peking region. This was the work of a secret society known as Boxers, whom the Chinese Government in Peking appeared to be unable to control or check, and an expedition was organized to preserve the interests of the Powers concerned and ensure the safety of their nationals.

The Powers included British India, the U.S.A., Russia, Japan, and to a lesser extent France. Germany, Austria and Italy were also represented.

The Expedition numbered:

10,000 Japanese with 24 guns,
4,000 Russians with 16 guns,
2,000 U.S.A. with 6 guns,
800 French with 12 guns,
and a British-Indian Brigade of all arms (about 3,000 men with 12 guns).

There were also 300 German, Austrian and Italian troops.

The objective of the Expedition was to crush the Boxers, who were active in the Tientsin-Peking area, and to occupy the capital, thus restoring the authority of the Chinese Government and securing the safety of the international Legations.

The British-Indian Brigade included the 1st Sikhs, who embarked for China on 6th July 1900, and arrived at Taku anchorage in the Gulf of Pechili, seventy miles south-east of Peking, on 26th July. Here a vast fleet of Allied ships was assembled while the Force was concentrating at Tientsin, twenty miles up the railway to Peking.

The Chinese Boxers with some Imperial troops were opposing the Allied advance at Peytsang, about ten miles west of Tientsin on the Pei-Ho river, and an attack was launched on them on 5th August in which the Japanese took the leading part, the British-Indian Brigade, with the 1st Sikhs under Lieutenant-Colonel Pollock, being in the second line. The Chinese were driven back and retired to Yangstan, twelve miles north-west towards Peking, where they again held a defended position. This was attacked by the Allied Force on 6th August, with the 1st Sikhs and the 14th Regiment of the U.S.A. leading and the 24th Punjabis and Royal Welsh Fusiliers in support. The advance was rapid and was supported by a British battery and, later, two Russian batteries. The Chinese had eighteen guns in action, but did not wait for the final bayonet charge, which was launched by the 1st Sikhs and the U.S.A.

Regiment together; they again retired towards Peking. The Battalion, which bore the brunt of the fighting at Yangstan, lost 4 men killed, 1 officer (Lieutenant Costello) and 3 men dangerously wounded, and 17 wounded.

The advance continued to Tangchow, fifteen miles from Peking, without further opposition (the British-Indian Brigade now bringing up the rear), and this place was occupied on 12th August.

The final attack on Peking itself was launched on 15th August 1900, with the Japanese, Russians and Americans in order from the right, and the British-Indian Brigade on the left. In this action the 1st Sikhs at the outset were in reserve, and the Japanese and Russians having driven the Chinese north to the wall of the Tartar City, the Battalion entered the city without opposition. The other Battalions were now given assignments to protect the right flank and secure the Temple of Heaven, while the 1st Sikhs became leading battalion and effected the relief of the Legations in Peking which had been invested by the Chinese.

An incident on this day is of great interest and concerns one Lieutenant R. N. Keyes* of the Royal Navy. He noticed that our units never had flags to hoist on captured positions, whereas the Russians and Japanese were liberally supplied with them.† He therefore brought a Union Jack and a White Ensign with him when he came to be attached to the staff of the British-Indian Force. He carried them attached to the "D's" of his saddle. When Peking was attacked he left the Union Jack on a Chinese spear with the guard at the City Gate and still had the White Ensign with him when he joined the 1st Sikhs for the advance to the relief of the Legations. It was the first flag of the relieving force to fly on the Legation buildings, and Keyes later presented it to the Battalion as a memento of the campaign. He had a silver truck made for it with "1st Sikhs" embossed thereon with a naval crown, and wrote of it as follows: "I have a letter from Colonel Pollock thanking me for the gift and telling me that the flag would be placed in the Station Mess at Kohat, which delighted me as my father commanded the Punjab Frontier Force for eight years and I was born there."

The flag is in fact with the 1st Battalion to this day.

The capture of Peking and the clearing of the area of hostile elements of Chinese completed the campaign, and on 27th August 1900, detachments from all contingents of the International Force carried out a flag march through the "Forbidden City" of Peking.

On 14th September an explosion of gunpowder occurred at Tangchow—

* Later Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, the great naval leader of the First World War and born in Kohat the son of General Sir Charles Keyes, a Commandant of the Punjab Frontier Force.

† This was also true of the Japanese forty years later in the Second World War, and many of their unit flags were captured as trophies in the later stages when the Japanese were defeated.

an accident in which ten men of the Battalion were killed; a tragedy which cost it more lives than all the fighting in the campaign.

The 1st Sikhs spent the winter (a severe one) in North China and returned to Kohat the following summer, arriving on 4th August 1901. The C.O. received a complimentary message from the Commander of the China Field Force, thanking the Battalion for its loyal and efficient services and recording that every man could look back on his stay in China with pride.

Fuller details of this successful campaign, with rewards gained by the Battalion, are to be found in the Battalion Record.

The 2nd Sikhs in Somaliland, 1903-04

This was one of the few campaigns that, excepting the two Great Wars, have taken Indian Forces overseas. Somaliland, being followed not long afterwards by the First World War, has received little notice in modern times, but in fact it was the scene of a major tragedy and during its course demanded courage and endurance of the highest order from the troops taking part.

The need for the campaign arose as the result of the revolt and raids into British territory committed by the Mulla Mohammed Abdullah (the "Mad Mulla") and his dervish followers. In 1901-02 the local forces, under Colonel Swayne, had proved inadequate in numbers to deal with the Mulla's adherents, and the King's African Rifles, with the local levies, had suffered a reverse.

The 2nd Sikhs, in Kohat, having mobilized for active service, sailed from Bombay on 2nd January 1903, and reached Obbia on 8th January. Here the Battalion joined a column that was forming for an advance into the interior. The strength on embarkation was as follows: 11 British officers, 17 J.C.Os., 722 Indian other ranks and 94 followers.

The Obbia column consisted of 2,000 Indian and East African troops with two mountain guns, and a similar column operated from Berbera. The two columns converged on Bohotele with the object of driving the Mulla and his followers from Italian into British Somaliland. Obbia, having no safe anchorage, was useless in the monsoon, and both forces were based on Berbera. While communications in this primitive and waterless region were being built up, the Battalion was given many arduous tasks, one being to improve the water supply by cleaning out wells and storing water. The filth in the wells was indescribable and included corpses and decaying matter of every description. The water was impregnated with salts, and the gaseous fumes often rendered men working in the wells insensible. Four Royal Humane Society Medals were awarded to the Battalion during this period for acts of gallantry in rescuing men from the wells when they were overcome by the fumes.

The Disaster of Gumburru

On 6th March the main column marched from Obbia under Lieutenant-Colonel Fasken* and halted at Galkayu on the 29th, no encounter having taken place with the dervishes. Many of the marches were through thick jungle in intense heat.

On 8th April Captain Vesey, with a party of two J.C.Os. and forty-seven other ranks, went forward with a convoy to the vicinity of Gumburru, forty-five miles farther west, where a small detached force under Colonel A. S. Cobbe, V.C., was operating. The convoy arrived at Colonel Cobbe's zariba on 16th April 1903.

On the following morning a report was received from a company of the King's African Rifles patrolling to the west that the enemy had been encountered in force and that this company was withdrawing on the zariba. Colonel Plunkett, of the King's African Rifles, was accordingly dispatched with a small column to cover the retirement. By special request, Captain Vesey and forty-nine ranks of the 2nd Sikhs formed part of this column, which left the zariba at about 9 a.m. No officer or man of Captain Vesey's detachment was again seen alive by the Battalion.

At about 11.45 a.m. firing was heard at the zariba from the direction the column had taken. During the afternoon thirty-eight of the King's African Rifles, most of them wounded, straggled into camp with the news that the column had been destroyed. With the exception of one wounded Somali subsequently picked up, they were the only survivors of the fight.

It appears that Colonel Plunkett's column had met the retiring company of the King's African Rifles about one and a half miles from camp. In his eagerness to engage the enemy, Colonel Plunkett had taken this company with him, which made the total strength of his column up to 224 all ranks. The column apparently advanced forming three sides of a square with the 2nd Sikhs on the front face. Afterwards a half-company was thrown across the rear face.

Colonel Plunkett moved to a distance of three miles from the zariba to a spot about one and a half miles south-east of the feature known as Gumburru Hill, where there was a comparatively open space some 500 yards in extent, partly surrounded by thick bush. Here he was attacked by the whole of the Mulla's forces estimated at 2,000 riflemen and 6,000 spearmen.

On the repulse of the first attack this tiny column appears to have advanced against the vast assembly to the middle of the open space, for some of the wounded survivors owed their escape to having been left on the ground in rear of the scene of the main action.

The first assault, which was made by horsemen, was followed by further

* Later Major-General C. G. M. Fasken, C.B.

attacks from all sides by riflemen on foot supported by masses of spearmen. All attacks were repelled until the ammunition gave out. There was no reserve ammunition. The 2nd Sikhs carried 100 rounds per man, the remainder 150. Captain Vesey is believed to have been killed early in the action. Colonel Plunkett, one of the remaining officers, now gave the order to charge through the enemy and make for camp. He was immediately afterwards shot through the head.

It seems probable that the action began at about 10.45, reached its climax at 11.45, and was all over soon after noon, when the final attacks overwhelmed the square. "The few who escaped to tell the tale, related how the dead bodies of the enemy lay in heaps before the square, a monument to the determined valour of the devoted band of defenders who composed it."* There can be no doubt that the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy deterred him from following up his success by an attack on Colonel Cobbe's zariba and from subsequently harassing Cobbe's column in its withdrawal. Deserters from the enemy estimated their losses at about 1,000. The total casualties to the column were: killed, 9 British officers (including Captain Vesey), 176 other ranks (including 2 J.C.Os.† and 47 I.O.Rs. of the 2nd Sikhs); wounded, 28 (all Africans). Eleven, therefore (all Africans), escaped unscathed.

The staunch behaviour of the detachment of the Regiment on this occasion was universally commended. A British officer attached to the Abyssinians, who visited the battlefield after the action, reported that the bodies of the men of the 2nd Sikhs lay in an unbroken line and that their portion of the square had been preserved intact.

Tributes to the magnificent behaviour of the men of the 2nd Sikhs at Gumburru were received from both Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief in India, and General Manning, Commanding the Force. The latter wrote: "Their valour is the talk of all who have reported to me on the action. They fought and died where they stood, and we who remain should be proud to have been their comrades. Their death should be an example to us all."

That this disaster was due to ammunition running out has been commented on as a military lesson in connection with warfare against savages. The inference is that in such actions fire-discipline is all important.‡

By June the strategy of the campaign had succeeded in driving the Mad Mulla and his dervishes into British Somaliland, where it was possible to strike at him again.

Major-General Sir Charles Egerton, K.C.B., D.S.O.,§ landed at Berbera on 4th July and took over command of the Field Force. A long pause in the

* The Official History of the Campaign.

† Subadar Naurang Singh and Jemadar Mohammed.

‡ *Small Wars*, Calwell, page 394.

§ Field-Marshal Sir Charles Egerton.

operations ensued while the Force was augmented and reorganized and supply and transport improved.

The 2nd Sikhs marched in fierce heat, between 16th June and 12th July, a distance of 317 miles in nineteen marches. Captain Prissick's detachment, between 8th June and 12th July, marched 460 miles in twenty-seven marches.

On the arrival of the Battalion at Sheikh most of the men were in rags and a number were beginning to show signs of the hard work, poor food and bad water. An outbreak of scurvy marked the first period spent there, but during their stay all ranks recuperated and were in first-rate fettle when they left.

The Battalion, having been re-equipped, remained at Sheikh and was employed on road-making on the Berbera—Sheikh road from the end of July till the end of December.

On 2nd October 1903, India Army Order 181 was brought into effect, and the Battalion changed its name. The 2nd (or Hill) Sikh Infantry, Punjab Frontier Force, became the 52nd Sikhs, Frontier Force, and it will be so referred to in this record till the end of the First World War and the reorganization of 1922.*

The Battle of Jidballi

On 10th January 1904 two brigades were concentrated near Jidballi, where the Mulla and his force was located, and moved out to the attack. Both brigades, under Sir Charles Egerton, left camp at 4.30 a.m. in echelon from the centre, the 52nd Sikhs leading. Echeloned back on the right flank marched the 1st Brigade. Echeloned back on the left came the wing of the 1st Hampshires, 100 men of the 27th Punjabis, and the King's African Rifles. The staff, battery, hospital and transport were in the centre. In this formation the force was ready to attack or to form square for defence, the Battalion forming the forward line in each case.

Just after 8 a.m. the square was closed up and halted for the issue of thirty rounds of ammunition per rifle from the reserve. Reports began to come in that the enemy was in strength. The force then moved forward to within 1,000 yards of Jidballi, and the mounted troops moved out to envelop the enemy's right. The ground consisted of a wide, open plain covered with clumps of dry grass and no bush.

A line of heads now became visible about 800 yards ahead. At first these were taken to be our own Somali Mounted Infantry, but it was soon discovered that they were the Mulla's troops. The enemy fired a few shots and our men lay down. A heavy fire was then opened on the enemy from the maxims and rifles. As the dervishes were well extended and used cover well, the fire was checked

* See Chapter X and Appendix X which shows the changes of names of all Battalions in 1903.

after about ten minutes. The Lahore Mountain Battery now came into action in front of "H" Company and did much execution.

However, the enemy came on in parties for short distances, advancing from cover to cover. Finally, they made a very determined rush on the front face of the square, but were met by a terrific fire. At the same time our mounted troops came down on the right flank, and the enemy broke and fled. The action was short, sharp and decisive, lasting, as far as the infantry was concerned, about half an hour. By 10 a.m. the enemy was in full flight, effectively pursued by the Mounted Infantry, who inflicted heavy casualties.

The Mulla's army was estimated to be 6,000 strong, of whom 666 bodies were afterwards counted on the battlefield and many more were disposed of by the Mounted Infantry. Their casualties were estimated at over 1,000 killed. A large number of prisoners and 360 rifles were captured, amongst them being two Lee-Enfields belonging to the Battalion, which had been lost at Gumburru.

The total casualties to the British force were: killed, 3 officers and 16 other ranks; wounded, 9 officers and 27 other ranks.

In spite of the prominent position the Battalion had occupied in the action, only one casualty was sustained, a bugler being severely wounded in the thigh.

The action of Jidballi disposed of the pick of the Mulla's forces and he could not be induced to stand for battle again.

The Battalion remained in Somaliland till May and covered great distances on the march with columns mopping up parties of insurgents. It finally embarked for India on 27th May 1904, and arrived back in Kohat early in June. From June 1904 till the outbreak of the First World War the 52nd remained in Kohat, Malakand, Peshawar and Bannu without being engaged in any operations.

Zakka Khel and Mohmand, 1908

The Zakka Khel rising in February 1908, caused a force to be mobilized against them in which the Guides and the 53rd and 54th Sikhs were included. The Guides also sent detachments to Shabkadr and Abazai to release other units. The expedition only lasted about a fortnight and very little fighting occurred. The Zakka Khel had barely come to terms, however, when trouble once more arose farther north in the adjacent Mohmand country. This appeared to be serious, as large lashkars were gathering around Matta Mughal Khel, Hafiz Kor and Shahbaz Khan Kor, and overt acts of hostility had been committed. With the concentration and advance of a Brigade Group, however, and a minor clash during punitive measures, in which the 4th Sikhs and the Guides were the spearhead, the Mohmands thought better of it and returned to their homes. A threat of trouble in the Khyber meanwhile arose and the Guides were called in to make a forced march to Ali Masjid. This they

did in blazing heat, leaving Abazai after 2 p.m. and arriving at Ali Masjid at 6 p.m. next day; but again the tribesmen submitted without fighting. The troops were back in peace stations by early June.

After this, beyond minor incidents that were inseparable, in those days, from watch-and-ward duties on the North-West Frontier, nothing of note occurred till the outbreak in 1914 of the First World War.

CHAPTER V

THE GUIDES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

France, 1914-15 and the Guides Company with Wilde's Rifles—Colonel Blacker's Account of his Experiences in the Battle of Neuve Chapelle—The Guides in Operations on the North-West Frontier, 1915-16—The Platoon Organization—Mesopotamia, 1917-18—Palestine, 1918—The Final Offensive—Syria and Egypt, 1919-20—Return to India and Resettlement.

France, 1914-15, and the Guides Company with Wilde's Rifles

NONE of the Battalions of the Regiment formed part of I.E.F. "A"—the code name that was given to the force that was sent from India to fight in France in 1914—but three battalions of the sister regiment, the Frontier Force Rifles, did (57th Wilde's Rifles, 58th Vaughan's Rifles and the 59th Scinde Rifles). They covered themselves with glory; moreover, some of the honour and glory (and these words are used in their deepest and most respected significance) can rightly be shared by men of the Frontier Force Regiment, since the latter was heavily drawn on for reinforcements as soon as the devastating toll of casualties and war wastage was felt. In only one instance, however, was any body of reinforcements from a Battalion of the F.F. Regiment incorporated into any of the above three Battalions as a complete detachment with its own officers and N.C.Os. This was the Guides Infantry Company with Wilde's Rifles; and this volume is fortunate in being able to chronicle its story with much interesting colour and anecdote provided by Colonel L. V. S. Blacker* who fought with it through much of that desperate campaign of warfare in trenches, with barbed wire, mud, bitter cold and wet.

Such conditions, especially against an enemy comprising the most highly trained, armed and organized modern army of its time, were anything but what the Indian Army of 1914 was designed to tackle. Indeed, while trained, equipped and organized for the defence of India and well suited to any task that could be envisaged in eastern theatres, the idea that any formation of the Indian Army might be called on to take part in a European war was regarded as completely fantastic. The author recollects hearing a distinguished battalion commander of a British unit in India remark in September 1914, very soon after it became known that Indian Expeditionary Forces were to

* Colonel L. V. S. Blacker, O.B.E., T.D.

go overseas to secret destinations: "I have come to the conclusion that these I.E.Fs. are going to mop up the various German colonies—they could never stand up to the fighting in France under modern shell fire." Poor chap!—he was later killed in France himself, and the extent to which he erred in his opinion of the fighting qualities of the soldiers that are now the men of Pakistan and India, you who read this record shall judge from the pages that follow.

Let us then recall the circumstances under which Indian forces were sent to France in 1914, to succour the hard-pressed British, French and Belgian Armies in their struggle against the greatly superior German-Austrian enemy.

The European picture—indeed, the world picture—in 1914 was superficially peaceful in the extreme. The so-called "Concert of Europe" was a balance of power with Britain, France and Russia in one alliance, and Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy in another. The U.S.A. was not concerned with European politics and adhered to its own (Monroe) doctrine of isolation from the Western World. Peace under these conditions had lasted substantially for nearly a hundred years. Such wars as those in the Crimea, the Balkans, and even that in 1870-71 between Prussia and France, were localized struggles, and most of Europe and the world were spectators. Up to this time the sea was all-important, aeroplanes were in their infancy and motor transport insufficiently developed to replace the horse for military purposes.

In its peaceful somnolence Europe failed to notice the growth of Germany and how her increasing wealth, industry and manpower were being devoted to militarism on land and sea. Lone voices like that of the great Lord Roberts (whose achievements we have already recorded), who warned England on lecture platforms and in the Press of the impending storm, went unheeded. He was disregarded as a senile scaremonger. He died within earshot of the guns of the Indian Corps in France in 1914.

By 1914 the German leaders had forged a huge war machine—a vast army with plans prepared to overrun Belgium and France before either they could stem the attack or their allies could come to the rescue. They had built, also, a navy equipped with large numbers of submarines of design and capacity in advance of anything built up to that time. These were instruments that were calculated to make Germany world leaders, if not world masters, in 1914.

On a trivial pretext she struck with her army (rejecting all diplomatic parley) and rapidly overran Belgium, while Britain, true to her treaty obligations, mobilized her small expeditionary force and sent it to the aid of the French Army. That the British Fleet had been able to mobilize with great speed and gain command of the sea, which enabled the British Forces, and later the Indian Expeditionary Forces, to reach their overseas destinations in safety, was a saving factor.

But it was soon seen what was in fact the nature of the German onslaught. Before the Germans, who were prepared in every detail of plan, training, equipment and supplies, the wholly unprepared French Forces gave way all along the front, and the small British Force on their left flank, though inflicting heavy losses at Mons, Landrecies and Le Cateau, fell back with them to escape isolation and investment. The need for fresh forces was foreseen at once, and the most that Indian military resources of trained troops and equipment could offer was two divisions—the 3rd Lahore and the 7th Meerut Divisions. They were mobilized as quickly as possible and organized as an Army Corps. They were placed under the command of General Sir James Willcocks (then commanding the Northern Army in India at Rawalpindi), but it was some time before they could leave for France. Apart from recalling thousands of personnel from leave, making up equipment and all the purely military tasks involved in a sudden and unexpected mobilization, a huge and complicated programme of rail movement was necessary and an enormous armada of shipping had to be collected, prepared as troopships and organized in convoys with the necessary protection. In spite of all, the Indian Corps reached France by the end of September 1914 (albeit with nothing warmer than drill uniform!), and were hurried north to the battle front.

In the meantime the fortunes of war, in quite miraculous fashion, had stemmed the German advance after it had reached almost the outskirts of Paris itself. Partly owing to the ineptitude of the German Command, which had in fact proved incapable of controlling its huge war machine once the fog of war descended, and partly owing to the opportunism and initiative of the French General Gallieni, a counter-attack at the battle of the Marne threw back the German Armies to the River Aisne. The German advance having thus lost its momentum, a stalemate ensued. Moreover, the Germans were now handicapped by the need to meet the Russians, whose slow-moving forces were at last advancing on East Prussia. While this gave the Allies breathing-space in France by drawing off the German forces, the latter were, fortunately for them, as well handled in dealing with the Russians as they were badly directed in their campaign against the French. In the battle of Tannenberg in September 1914, a hastily collected German army completely destroyed the flower of the Russian Imperial forces, driving their leader to suicide on the field.

But the respite in the West had enabled reinforcements to reach both the British and the French Armies, and in a series of outflanking movements to the north-west both sides had extended their lines till they rested on the sea at Nieuport. As this development took place so also did both sides dig in and protect themselves with barbed wire. Very soon both armies were below ground in complicated wire and trench systems that had practically paralysed all warfare of movement. Such was the picture in the World War in 1914 when,

with winter looming ahead, the Indian Corps arrived in the trenches in khaki-drill clothing.

In writing the record of the Regiment in the First World War it is desirable to revert once again to the individual narratives of each Battalion and tell them separately, for each has a shining story to tell of activities of different formations and often in different theatres. For reasons which will be obvious to the reader, the Guides Infantry narrative is convenient to relate first since they were the only Battalion of the Regiment to send a self-contained unit (albeit only a company) to the main theatre of war in France.

To return now to the North-West Frontier for a moment. The general picture there, when the First World War broke out, was as peaceful as in Europe. It found the Guides Infantry in the normal hot-weather condition of all units, i.e. one of depleted strength due to absence on annual leave of both officers and rank and file.

Although, like all other Battalions of the Regiment, it was not in either the Lahore or Meerut Divisions, and therefore could not anticipate immediate mobilization for active service overseas, the situation clearly demanded a state of readiness for war. All those on leave or furlough therefore were at once recalled and all further steps to ensure instant preparedness were at once taken.

As has already been noted, the security of the North-West Frontier as well as that of India as a whole was as important a consideration towards prosecuting what was clearly to be a world war as that of sending troops to fight. Indeed it was not long before the Frontier tribes began to be insurgent once more and were being incited to attack India by firebrands with stories of the weakness of the Government and the departure (so it was rumoured) of all the troops to the war theatre.

Indeed, the Frontier during those years, as this story will show, was no sinecure. As always, the Guides Infantry gave their loyal and devoted services, but now it was under the handicap of having to provide trained reinforcements for other Frontier Force Battalions in the field overseas. Moreover, though they would be the last to notice it, all publicity was now on the theatres of war, and the Guides were for the time being "out of the limelight." Nevertheless, their traditions and efficiency went with the drafts they sent to the other units in the field, and as will be seen in due course they have cause to be proud indeed of their men and their record from 1914 to 1919.

The first to be called on for active service were the officers, particularly those on leave or furlough in the United Kingdom. Thus Major Buist, M.V.O.,* Captains Clementi and Trail, and Lieutenant Murray were detained in England for duty, and all went to France, Captain Trail being killed there while serving with the Jodhpur Lancers. Major Bogle† was called to Simla to take up an

* Major Buist was actually staying with friends in Germany at the outbreak of war.

† Major Bogle later went to Egypt with Indian States' Forces.

appointment, and Captain McLeod went to France with the Lahore Division, while Lieutenant Blacker, who was away in Yarkand when war broke out, intending to walk over the Pamirs to Constantinople, made his way home by way of Russia and Finland, and on arrival in England was posted to the Royal Flying Corps.

Other calls also were speedily made upon the Corps. Captain H. Campbell, M.V.O., was summoned to Patiala to do duty with the States Forces proceeding overseas. Captain Wyllly, V.C., had barely rejoined from the Staff College at Quetta when he left again to take up the appointment of Staff Captain, 5th Cavalry Brigade, in France; and Captain Browne,* Lieutenant Hankin, Jemadar Natha Khan and forty-eight rank and file left as a reinforcement. Lieutenant Hankin was later attached to the Royal Flying Corps and was shot down in combat with two enemy planes, remaining for two and a half years a prisoner in Germany.

On 16th January 1915, Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott-Lockhart, D.S.O., was appointed to command the 59th Scinde Rifles, F.F., and left to join his new unit in France, where he was killed in action within two months of sailing from India.

In January 1915, the first large draft of the Guides, 211, with four J.C.Os., under Captain P. D. A. Banks, was sent overseas. It went to France as a reinforcement to Wilde's Rifles (4th Battalion F.F. Rifles).

On the day after the arrival of the Guides the Battalion moved forward to Vieille Chapelle and the Richebourg St. Vaast section of the front line and relieved the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas in the Rue du Bois.

Wilde's Rifles remained in these parts during February, but in the early days of March was moved about a good deal in preparation for the battle of Neuve Chapelle,† in which the main attack was to be carried out by the 8th (British) and Meerut Divisions supported by the 7th (British) and Lahore Divisions respectively. "During the battle," writes Sir James Willcocks, "I had ridden into the village of Richebourg St. Vaast, and came on a company of my old friends the Guides, just arrived as a reinforcement from India. The village was at the time being shelled, but our meeting was all the more opportune. I spoke to the men and had a handshake with the Indian officers. One of the sepoys, who had once served as my orderly in the Peshawar Division, said as I rode down the ranks 'General Sahib, if you are in need of an orderly I am with you, but I must just see one pukka larai (real fight) first, then I am ready to come'."‡

The role of the Ferozepore Brigade was to consolidate any success gained by the leading brigades. On 14th March Wilde's Rifles took over a section of

* Killed in France with the 15th Lancers.

† See later in this chapter for Colonel Blacker's description of this battle.

‡ *With the Indian Corps in France*, by General Sir J. Willcocks, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.C.S.I., D.S.O., LL.D.

the front line on the edge of the Bois du Biez, and here they remained under heavy shell fire until the 22nd.

It will be remembered that the battle of Neuve Chapelle was the first offensive action undertaken by the Allied Forces in France since the above-mentioned battle of the Marne. It was a blood-bath and served only to show how ineffective the offensive weapons and tactics of those days were against entrenched positions protected by barbed wire and well supported by artillery.

In the Bois du Biez the Guides suffered their first serious casualties, two men being killed and eleven wounded, including Subadar Afzal, who was very severely hit in the thigh by a large fragment of shell but remained on duty till he was able to hand over command of his platoon to his successor.

After a brief rest, orders were received on the 23rd April for the Lahore Division to hold itself in readiness to move to the north into the line about four miles north-west of Ypres. It arrived at noon on the 25th, the men footsore and tired after plodding in heavy rain for about thirty miles over pavé roads.* The Germans had made their first gas† attack three days previously and portions of the Allied line had given way, so that all fresh units as they came up from the south had to be put straight into the firing line, unprotected as they were by any form of respirator.

The Lahore Division had now come under the orders of the Second Army, by whom an attack was ordered for the afternoon of the 26th, and at 5.30 a.m. on this day the Ferozepore Brigade moved by way of Vlamertinghe to St. Jean. They came, *en route*, under heavy shell fire which caused many casualties. The position of the assembly for the attack was reached at 1.15 p.m. and was four hundred yards from La Bricque, a village three-quarters of a mile north of Ypres. Only a very short time was available for giving hurried instructions to the commanders and for the issue of tools and bombs, and the Battalion was then formed up in column of platoons, the Guides Company being on the right of the front line.

The ground to be advanced over was devoid of all cover and was completely commanded from the enemy trenches on the Grafenstafel ridge, 1,500 yards in front, while the British artillery support was practically negligible.

During the 750 yards of the advance the casualties were considerable, but after crossing the ridge just north of the road the attack was met by a perfect hail of rifle, machine-gun and gas-shell fire, and the losses rapidly mounted. The advance, however, continued to within a few yards of the German line, the

* i.e. cobblestones.

† The use of asphyxiating gas released with the wind or incorporated in shells was started by the Germans in 1915 to break up the stalemate of trench warfare. It was never used in the Second World War.

Guides Company getting so close to it that several men, including Captain Banks, who was at the head of his men, were killed by German hand grenades. Finally, the attack was checked by the sudden discharge of phosgene and chlorine gases, carried obliquely across the front from left to right and causing many casualties. Some of the men actually reached the German trenches, where the Connaught Rangers and men of the 47th Sikhs and Wilde's Rifles were intermingled. Among these were some of the Yusafzais and Sikhs of the Guides Company, of whom Havildar (later Subadar) Sirdar Khan and reservist (later Colour-Havildar) Shamatai of Toru particularly distinguished themselves, the latter, an old soldier of fine character and massive physique, being responsible for bringing in Captain Fellowes of the 47th Sikhs, who was lying wounded under the German parapet.

The commander of the Indian Army Corps makes special mention of the Guides Company in the following words: "Here, too, fell Captain P. d'A. Banks of the Guides, attached Wilde's Rifles, an officer of particular and varied attainments, and one who was marked out for distinction. His orderly, notwithstanding a severe wound he had received, carried Banks through a storm of bullets until he fell from overstrain; but some mark of his officer he must retain, and being unable to do more, he took off his accoutrements and brought them back."* The casualties suffered by the Guides Company in this action amounted to 13 killed, 2 missing and 54 wounded.

Lieutenant L. V. S. Blacker of the Guides now joined Wilde's Rifles and took over the command of the Guides Company and also, for a time, of the Battalion, which had lost, in this action, seven British and ten Indian officers killed and wounded. Wilde's Rifles remained two days longer in the open in front of the enemy line, heavily shelled and without blankets, and was then withdrawn and sent to the rear, meeting while on the southward march to Estaires and St. Quentin, a draft of the Guides under Subadar Bahadur Khan. The new draft, which now brought men from three more Guides Companies, and the battered remains of the Regiment it was to reinforce came suddenly upon one another at a turning in a country lane.

Wilde's Rifles, which now consisted of men from six different battalions, was reorganized, and while the Guides Company no longer existed henceforth as a separate unit, the bulk of it remained in No. 3 Company.

During the attack on the 9th May on Aubers Ridge in the battle of Festubert, Wilde's Rifles remained in support in the old German trench, captured in March, immediately in the rear of the village of Neuve Chapelle; but No. 3 Company was detailed to support the 4th Suffolk Regiment and the 40th Pathans, and during the night was brought up into the front line to repel a German counter-attack. The shelling was heavy and casualties considerable, attacks being continually made and bloodily repulsed. Wilde's Rifles remained

* *With the Indian Corps in France*, page 271.

in trenches in front till they were sent back to billets at Riez Bailleul. This respite only lasted a brief twenty-four hours, however, since on the 31st May the Battalion was ordered up to take over a new section of the line in the Rue du Bois. There were no trenches here, only breastworks. The enemy were between seventy and 150 yards distant, and the intervening no-man's-land was piled up with corpses, mostly of Highlanders and Gurkhas, left from the recent attacks, the Rivière des Layes being choked with them. Here the first four days of June were passed.

In this sector the men of the Guides held a small post, within forty yards of the enemy's parapet, known as the "Pope's Nose." It was an object of special attention to the German gunners, and here Havildars Mangtu and Ditta greatly distinguished themselves by the stubbornness of their defence. The position was three times captured and recaptured, being finally handed over intact to the 1st/4th Gurkhas on the 29th June 1915.

During June the Guides had suffered some twenty casualties, and in the next few weeks Captain Blacker and six Indian other ranks were wounded.

In September Wilde's Rifles were back again in the Rue du Bois, where between the 22nd and 25th feint attacks were made in order to assist the Meerut Division in a subsidiary attack made by it in connection with the battle of Loos. In these operations the Guides had five men killed, twelve wounded (one for the third time) and a few men gassed.

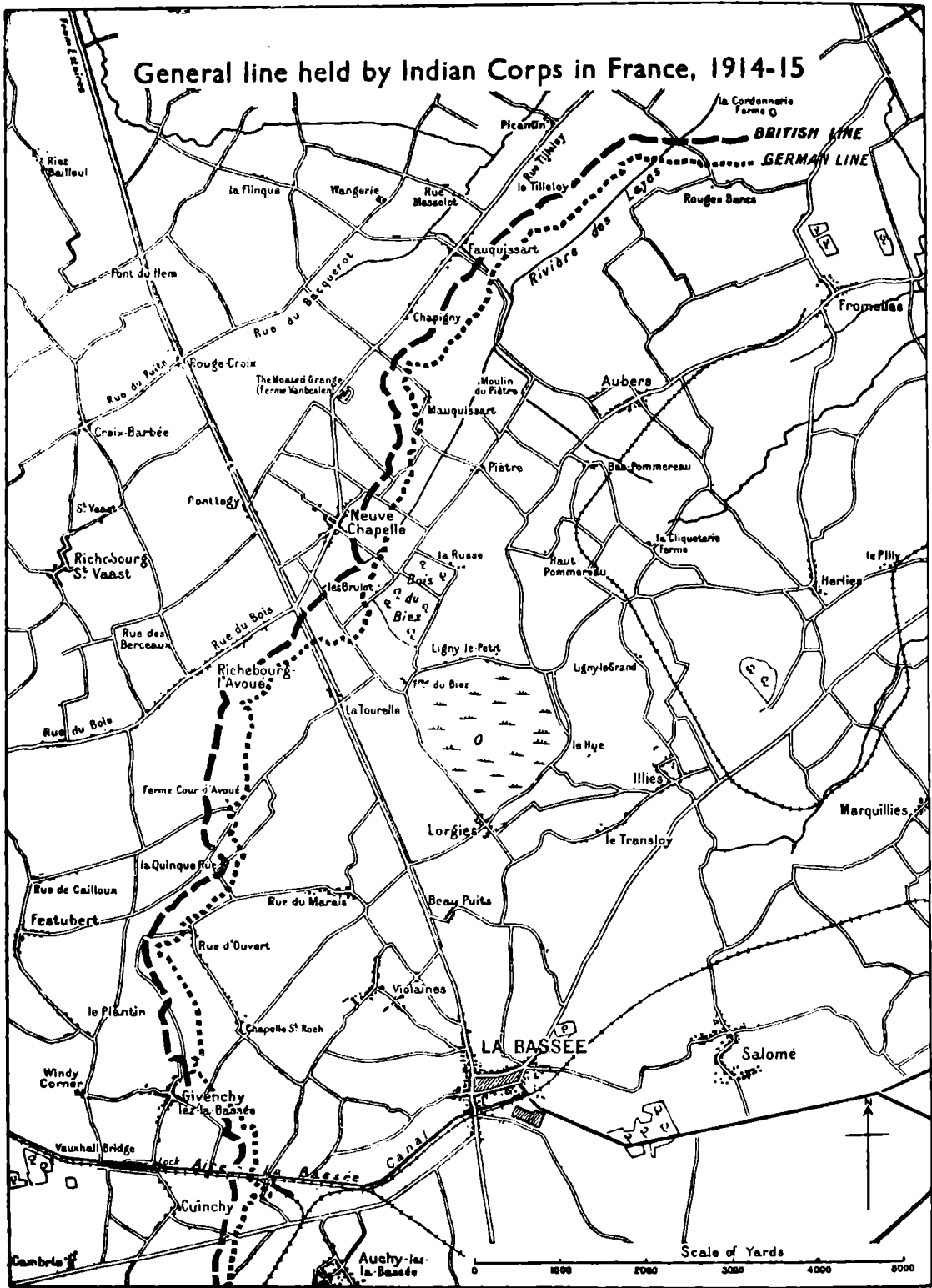
After forty-two consecutive days in the line the Battalion went back to rest on the 4th October. On returning to the line it was engaged in another feint attack, to which the German retaliation was sharp and effective, causing some twenty casualties among the Guides, including four killed. This practically concluded the active participation of Wilde's Rifles in the operations in the Western Theatre, as it was now decided to withdraw the Indian Corps from France.

However, before leaving the narrative of the exploits of drafts of the Guides sent to France in the early days of the First World War, the following notes by Colonel Blacker of his experiences, and in particular of the conditions under which our forces fought during that terrible campaign of 1914-15, are of unique interest.

*Colonel Blacker's Account of his Experiences in the Battle of
Neuve Chapelle*

"I was in Yarkand when the Kaiser war broke out, so hurried across Russia to get to France. After a tremendous party in Kashgar as a guest of the 4th Orenburg Cossacks, I joined up with the machine-gun company of the 3rd Turkistan Rifles. This was a four-battalion regiment whose light Maxim guns on Sokolov mountings were organized into a sixteen-gun company. The excel-

General line held by Indian Corps in France, 1914-15



lence of their armament and equipment was very marked. (Our forces in France in 1914 had only two old and heavy Maxim guns per battalion, and no machine-gun companies at all.) Moreover, the Russians had high-velocity ammunition with pointed bullets, which did not reach the Army of India until years later. The divisional artillery had fifty-four guns, all of which could fire H.E. shell (of which they seemed to have plenty), whereas the British 18-pounder was the only field gun in Europe which could not fire H.E. In fact, it had hardly any ammunition at all. The French called it caustically, 'L'artillerie de deux coups par pièce' (the artillery with two rounds per gun).

"When we (in the Lahore Division) suffered very dreadful casualties in the second battle of Ypres on 15th April (described above), I do not remember having any supporting fire from British artillery. However, I saw a couple of field batteries of the Belgian Army putting over some stuff for us, and have a vivid mental picture of the piles of brass cases alongside the guns, a sight not seen in British batteries until well on in 1916.

"For the first few months of 1915 I was in the Royal Flying Corps and saw little of the Indian Corps except for paying a quick visit in February. In the battles of Hill 60 and St. Eloi we flew for medium and heavy artillery, so had nothing to do with Indian gunners and the mountain batteries engaged there with British divisions.

"Neuve Chapelle however, was as it turned out, very much an Indian Corps battle. It was planned with the notion of capturing Aubers Ridge, which commanded the low ground held by the Indian Corps, so as to give us 'observation.' Lance-Corporal ('Gefreiter') Adolf Schickelgruber* was in Aubers village with a Bavarian reserve regiment. I well remember, on being 'briefed' by 'Stuffy' Dowding† on the evening before, being told that we were on no account to go beyond Lille next day. He might equally well have told us to mark time on the left bank of the Rhine. The battle was to be fought by the Indian Corps on the right, under Sir James Willcocks, and by the IV Corps on their left. The dividing line was in Neuve Chapelle village. The whole battle was commanded by Sir D. Haig as G.O.C. First Army. He borrowed guns and ammunition from here, there and everywhere, and a cavalry brigade to exploit the hoped-for breakthrough. The guns were a very scratch lot, many of them being black-powder shooters. For instance, the borrowed Territorial medium batteries had only worn-out 4.7's, which often could not spin their black-powder shells because their rifling had expired. Later, the 59th (6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles) suffered considerable casualties from this, just at the moment when they had to beat off a German counter-attack. This 'scratch' lot of guns, fired for (I think) ninety minutes, making a thick bank of smoke, but not doing much real harm. My aircraft was assigned to doing what is nowadays called a 'tactical

* Later known as Adolf Hitler.

† Later Marshal of the R.A.F. Lord Dowding.

patrol,' and was to fly over behind the German front and to report any movement of their reserves. A second task was to look out for any of our medium or heavy shells bursting wide of obvious targets and to put them on to the correct ones by means of our very rudimentary spark wireless.

"We flew over low, about 4,000 feet, because our 80-h.p. engine could not raise our 'mechanical cow' any higher. I went over Aubers and neighbouring enemy-held localities at this height, and it was just right to catch all the small-arms fire which was going. So it was that numerous holes appeared in both wings from machine guns, rifles and the unpleasant double 77-mm. shell. These, in fact, were too much for our poor little engine, which in due course stopped. This was about 3,000 or 4,000 yards behind 'Jerry's' front trenches, and 4,000 feet of height very rapidly became much less. I found myself pointing towards the precise junction between the 8th Division (of the IV Corps) and 7th Meerut Division of the Indian Corps. The wind at this height was about 40 m.p.h. from the west, so we had no hope of reaching our own forward troops, and therefore made a quick decision to crash land in the undergrowth of the Bois du Biez and to hide in it until the Meerut boys came through. I remember thinking that as I was wearing the pre-war Guides serge of a grey-green, with silver buttons, I might with luck be mistaken for a stray Bavarian light dragoon. However, during our rather rapid descent the engine almost miraculously restarted itself. Then it stopped again, and again restarted. Then again, for a third time, it started, which one could only ascribe to supernatural agency or to a fairy godmother. These bouts just lifted us fifty feet over the heads of the German infantry, and through the white smoke of our own shrapnel, which was still bursting in front of the 8th Division. To our right the German soldiery were crowding four deep in their front trench to get away from our shrapnel, and since in those days there were no steel helmets, we could see their saucer blue eyes and red cap bands.

"The aeroplane, or rather its tattered remains (it had 300 holes!) eventually put me down in front of the guns of the Chestnut Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, commanded by 'Wattie' Winter,* who was soon giving us cocoa in his headquarters shelter. A few minutes later a bombardier looked in to say, 'Sir, there's an aeroplane down in the next field.' So we hurried across several hundred yards, just behind the attacking infantry of the Meerut Division, to find a B.E. of our own flight which had received a direct hit from a shell and was deep in the soft ground. Soon an ambulance appeared to take away the two bodies, and as we looked about us there was a complete Infantry Brigade of British regular troops, all sitting down by the side of the road and obviously quite 'flummoxed' to know what was happening. The officers of a battalion of Scots Guards and of the Border Regiment asked us, so I told them what I had seen. They had no orders, and I believe got none all day.

* Later G.S.O.1 to General Herdon in Waziristan.

“Our artillery ammunition then, for the most part, gave out. The 8th Division had made no progress, being stopped by a concreted machine-gun post in the Moulin de Pietre, but the Meerut Division had done wonders. On the left the 39th Garhwal Rifles, on the right the 59th, led the advance, the latter commanded by Percy Elliott-Lockhart, who was killed during their attack. The advance penetrated beyond Neuve Chapelle village and the vital strong-point of ‘Port Arthur.’ The 59th (and the Garhwalis) got through to the Bois du Biez in great style, but with shocking casualties. In fact, the 59th must have got very near to Lance-Corporal Adolf Schickelgruber at his Regimental headquarters in Aubers village, on the top of the ridge. I did not see what the 58th (5th Battalion 13th Frontier Force Rifles) had been doing, but I know they also took a good slice of ground. The 57th (with the Guides Company) were in corps reserve that day.

“That evening, I was sent to Merville, where Trenchard* and Sir D. Haig were, to report what I had seen. I was quite horrified to find that Haig had been back at Merville all the time and had no idea what was happening in the battle. All telephone cables had been cut by fire, and no runner could expect to survive. Therefore, no use whatever (so far as I am aware) had been made of that British Infantry Brigade with which we conversed, or of a Cavalry Brigade which was there. Had they been thrown into the attack when the 59th had got well forward, there might have been no limit to the results. Had the Army Commander himself been forward in one of the still fairly intact cottages at Rouge Croix or Croix Barbée, on the La Bassée road, he could have seen the battle with the naked eye (as the morning was clear) and controlled his reserves by means of runners, cyclists or gallopers. He remained miles back and continued this method of command also during the May battles for Aubers Ridge. In point of stark fact, however, the 7th Meerut Division achieved most creditable success. They and troops of the Lahore Division captured (and held) the only bit of territory which we took from the enemy during the year the Indian (Infantry) Corps functioned in France.

“The horror that I experienced over those two unused brigades in the battle made me feel that I was not helping on with the war in the Royal Flying Corps, especially in its ridiculous stick-and-string aircraft, so I determined to betake myself to the 57th, where our Guides Company now was.”

The Guides in Operations on the North-West Frontier, 1915-16

We have seen above the part played by men of the Guides Infantry in the early stages of the First World War when feeding other Frontier Force Battalions in the field overseas with reinforcements.

For the next two years the Battalion remained on the North-West Frontier

* The late Marshal of the R.A.F. Lord Trenchard.

before being called on itself to go overseas to take part in the Mesopotamian campaign. During this period the tribes were far from quiet, and a short account must be given of the Battalion's activities in dealing with them.

Moreover, as the war effort in the First World War increased, the Guides Infantry were called on to expand, and two more Battalions were raised at Mardan—the 2nd Battalion in January 1917, and the 3rd Battalion nine months later. The stories of these two Battalions and the permanent retention of the 2nd Battalion as the Training Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment, follow in later chapters, but first let us return to the 1st Battalion and its doings in 1915 and 1916.

In April 1915, trouble once more arose in Mohmand country, fomented by a fanatical mullah, and the Khyber Moveable Column was ordered out to Shabkadr. The Guides made a rapid forced march from Mardan to join it, but the Mohmands dispersed and the Battalion returned to Mardan.

In August 1915, however, further trouble arose in Buner, and a *lashkar* gathered including a number of Hindustani Fanatics. A column under Major A. H. Buist, M.V.O., consisting of 430 Guides Infantry (three companies), with cavalry, reached Rustam on 16th August to find a huge gathering with twenty-five standards. In the meantime General Crocker arrived, took command and decided to attack with the three companies, sending the cavalry on both flanks. As the attack went in, a field battery of artillery opened covering fire. The enemy fled, but a number of Ghazis hid in the nullahs and undergrowth and made suicide assaults on individuals at a few yards' distance. Eighteen of these Ghazis were killed for the loss of four men, but Lieutenant Macnamara and his orderly were killed by a rush of seven Ghazis from a nullah—a tragic loss of a fine officer. The Ghazis were all killed, and the Record remarks that a blanket would have covered Macnamara, his dog, his orderly and the seven fanatics. Macnamara's revolver had two fired cartridges. Lieutenant Macnamara's son followed him into the Guides Infantry and attained distinction* in the Second World War.

The column remained in the Rustam area till mid-September, an operation to destroy two villages being very successfully carried out on the 30th and 31st August.

The Guides received most appreciative messages from the Divisional Commander after these operations, and indeed they deserved them.

In October 1915, the Battalion took part in an operation by the 3rd Brigade from Peshawar against a Mohmand *lashkar* near Shabkadr. They were given the task of taking an eminence known as Tower Hill, and during the advance were ambushed from a nullah, losing a J.C.O. and six men killed and Major Battye and twelve rank and file wounded. Major Battye was, in fact, severely wounded in the stomach, but let no one know till he collapsed. He

* Brigadier P. R. Macnamara, D.S.O.

was awarded the D.S.O., and in addition, for gallantry on this day, Subadar-Major Alam Khan was promoted to the first-class of the I.O.M. and two other ranks were awarded the I.D.S.M.

The Mohmands continued to give trouble (thinking that the Government had sent all its forces to the war), and it was decided towards the end of 1916, to blockade them along their frontier from Abazai to Michni with a chain of blockhouses connected with barbed wire.

On 26th October 1916, the Guides Infantry, with a machine-gun troop of Guides Cavalry, a wing of the 81st Pioneers and the 24th Mountain Battery, moved secretly to take up a covering position to enable the work of construction to commence. The Mohmands were taken completely by surprise, and beyond some sniping there was no interference till a *lashkar* collected four weeks later. This was dealt with by artillery and air bombardment, and the Guides' covering screen was not involved.

Introduction of the Platoon Organization

In November 1916, the Platoon organization was introduced into the Guides Infantry, the whole Indian Army being now organized on this system instead of the old "double companies." The new organization replaced the four double companies* with four companies, each of four platoons. Each platoon was under a J.C.O. and the Company Commander was a British officer. As will be seen in later chapters, this basic organization was varied during the next thirty years as the needs of more modern firepower dictated. At this time the distribution of classes under the platoon organization in the Guides Infantry was as follows:

- "A" Company: two platoons Dogras and two platoons Yusufzais and Riverine Akora Khattaks;
- "B" Company: two platoons P.Ms. and Cis-Indus Khattaks and two platoons Gurkhas;
- "C" Company: two platoons P.Ms., one platoon Dogras and one platoon Sikhs;
- "D" Company: two platoons Trans-Indus Khattaks and two platoons Sikhs.

Incidentally, the above change in the Indian Army brought a slight linguistic confusion in its train, since the word "platoon" was really none other than the original of the Urdu word "paltan" (battalion), both indeed being derived from the French "peloton" (body of troops).

* A double company was two companies, each about 100 strong under a J.C.O.; the whole under a British officer.

The Guides in Mesopotamia, 1917-18

Three months after the construction of the Mohmand Blockade Line, the 1st Guides were mobilized and sent on service overseas to Mesopotamia. It was the first time in their history that they had gone overseas, and the Battalion embarked at Karachi on the 27th February 1917. The following officers accompanied:

Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Buist, M.V.O.
 Major I. U. Batty, D.S.O.
 Captain D. Sandeman
 Captain C. E. T. Erskine
 Captain J. V. C. Anderson
 Lieutenant H. H. Fagnani
 Lieutenant C. Doncaster
 Lieutenant J. C. Coates
 Lieutenant H. Grose-Hodge
 Lieutenant E. A. Cave-Penny
 Second-Lieutenant W. R. P. Spurway.

The Depot was left under Lieutenant P. Grant.*

When the Battalion arrived in Basra our forces were nearing Baghdad in their campaign against the Turks,† and there was disappointment that the Battalion was not sent to the front immediately but assigned to the line of communication at Azizieh, where however it carried out intensive training.

Early in May it moved to Samara and joined the 21st Brigade of the 7th Meerut Division, which was to be its formation for the rest of the First World War.

The Battalion's first contact with the Turks was not till September 1917, when the enemy made a demonstration against the Battalion's position, but no fighting occurred.

On the 1st November the 7th Division began an advance on Tekrit, which was occupied on the 6th, but without the Guides being involved in the fighting. Lieutenant Roseveare, sad to relate, was killed while serving with the 59th Scinde Rifles, Frontier Force, at this time.

Early in December the 3rd and 7th Indian Divisions were moved to Palestine. The war situation that demanded this strategic transfer arose from the need to reinforce the Allied front in France with British divisions from Palestine and is described in Chapter VI.

En route to the Palestine front the Battalion met the Guides Cavalry at Hinaidi. They had just arrived from India and a short reunion was possible.

* Twenty years later killed in Waziristan while commanding the Battalion (see page 191).

† For the war situation at this time and the events leading up to it in Mesopotamia, see Chapter VI.

On arrival in Egypt the Battalion spent two and a half months training at Moascar and finally reached the front line at Jelil in the coastal sector north of Jaffa at the end of March 1918. Here the 7th Division formed part of XXI Corps with the 3rd Indian Division and the 54th and 75th British Divisions, which were holding the left flank of General Allenby's army in Palestine.*

Palestine, 1918

The trench system here consisted of a chain of strong-points connected by communication trenches where the configuration of the ground did not allow of a covered approach. When the Battalion took over, the average width of no-man's-land was 2,500-5,000 yards of open rolling downs without any cover.

For two months there was only static warfare with patrol activity, but at the end of May the line was pushed up to within 600-800 yards of the Turkish position. At this time the Battalion lost a company which, with Captain Fagnani, Lieutenant Wainwright and two J.C.Os., was transferred complete to form the nucleus of the 3rd/151st Infantry. This company later received a most eulogistic report for its work in Palestine and Waziristan from the commander of that Battalion.

As a result of the move forward, the line now held by the 7th Division was overlooked by the enemy from a ridge held in strength and from which all the Battalion's movements could be observed by day. It was therefore decided to capture this ridge, and the 1st Guides Infantry and 2nd Black Watch were detailed for the operation.

The attack was made at 3.30 a.m. on the 8th June behind a creeping barrage, "D" Company leading, followed by "A" with "C" in reserve. It was completely successful, the ridge being consolidated and held against an enemy counter-attack at 6.40 a.m. Tragically, however, both Captain Doncaster and Captain Anderson, the Company Commanders of "A" and "D" Companies, to whose gallantry and good leadership the success was due, were killed during the attacks, and Lieutenant Cave-Penny, the remaining Company Commander, was killed during the Turkish counter-attack. Heavy fighting continued for three days, during which the depleted companies repulsed all enemy attacks but suffered severely from shelling. On the 11th June the Battalion was relieved by the 1st/8th Gurkhas and withdrawn into reserve. In the three days' fighting it had lost 3 officers and 33 rank and file killed, and 1 officer, 6 J.C.Os. and 147 rank and file wounded, and 19 men were reported missing. The casualties amounted to forty per cent. of the men engaged.

Well-deserved congratulatory messages were received from the Divisional and Corps Commanders, and Captain C. E. T. Erskine and Lieutenant J. C.

* For further details of the situation of General Allenby's army see pages 117-120.

Coates were awarded Military Crosses. In addition, Subadar-Major Man Bir received the I.O.M. and Subadar Saida Khan and three rank and file the I.D.S.M.

The summer passed with no further activity beyond that of normal static warfare, though one well-executed raid on two enemy strong-points was noteworthy. It was carried out on the 13th July by Lieutenant C. A. Winton and twenty Gurkha volunteers. They cleared the two strong-points, killing fifteen and capturing fifteen Turks, and returned across 150 yards of no-man's-land in the space of twelve minutes. Only three Guides were wounded, and the Gurkhas used their kukris to great effect, the head of one Turk leaping from his shoulders just as he was attacking Lieutenant Winton!

The latter received a Military Cross, and a havildar the I.D.S.M.

The Final Offensive in Palestine

The preparations that were now being made for the final blow, on the 19th September 1918, that knocked Turkey out of the First World War, are described in Chapter VI. For this, the 1st Guides were attached to the 19th Brigade, which comprised the main 7th Division column of attack on a 400-yard front near Tabsor. The Battalion formed up for the assault behind the Seaforth Highlanders in four lines of platoons at fifty yards' interval and distance. The advance began at 4.25 a.m. behind a shattering barrage; and on the Seaforths reaching their first objectives the 1st Guides went through, meeting practically no opposition other than shelling, and occupied their own objectives. The advance continued to the main El Tireh position, which was cleared without much opposition, the whole Turkish Army being taken completely by surprise. The break-through was complete, and at 9.30 a.m. the Desert Mounted Corps passed through on the left, while naval bombardment and air attack of the Turkish back areas continued.

Early on the 20th the advance was resumed, now eastward into the Judean hills with the 1st Guides (once again with the 21st Brigade) leading. The day was hot, the men heavily laden, the hills stony, steep and waterless. At 5.30 p.m. they were held up by enemy fire from a defended village, Beit Lid, which was defended by Turks with fourteen machine guns. The 19th Brigade, who were now in the van, suffered many casualties and the men of other units of the two Brigades were very exhausted, but Colonel Buist volunteered to outflank the enemy position. This meant a long and arduous climb by men already fagged, but they succeeded. It was a fine effort at the cost of only twenty casualties, and enabled the Guides to close with the enemy, who bolted forthwith. The Brigade bivouacked that night behind an outpost line.

On the 21st September the advance continued along the Nablus—Tulkeram road to Messudie, where animals were watered for the first time for forty-eight hours.

The fighting was now over. The Battalion's casualties were Lieutenant Arnott and three rank and file killed; Colonel Buist slightly wounded, and Captain Hodgins, Lieutenant Lee, one J.C.O. and fifty-nine men wounded. Three were missing.

Syria and Egypt, 1919-20

The 7th Division now marched northwards via the coast road to Beirut and Tripoli. The Turkish Army had been completely broken and the roads behind its front were littered with destroyed transport, dead horses and wreckage—all the result of air attack. The 21st Brigade reached Beirut on 10th October and Tripoli on the 30th, and the armistice with Turkey was declared next day. The Battalion had covered 270 miles in twenty-two marching days.

It now remained in Syria till November 1919, providing guard duties, and working parties for supply and ordnance dumps, improving roads and doing such training as was possible. Finally, after spending a fortnight in Beirut it embarked for Port Said on 14th December.

At this time Egypt was seething with unrest, which had broken out in 1919, and on New Year's Day 1920 the 1st Guides were sent to Tantah to the 10th Division in an internal-security role. After spending three uneventful months distributed in towns in that area the Battalion was moved to Mex, near Alexandria, on the 19th March with one company detached at Famagusta in Cyprus. At Mex the Battalion provided guards over the main Base Ammunition Depot (a heavy duty), while the Cyprus company guarded Russian refugees till it rejoined the Battalion at Mex in November.

During the winter of 1919-20 a number of awards to Indian ranks were published which included Jangi Inams of Rs. 600 annually to Subadar-Major Man Bir and Subadar Afzal and twenty-five Meritorious Service Medals.

In December 1920, the time came at last for the 1st Guides to return to India, but a final incident in November at Mex must first be recorded in which courage and presence of mind were shown by a J.C.O. and some men.

A truck-load of Very lights caught fire near an ammunition dump where there were 20,000 tons of explosives, and the working party of another unit who were unloading the truck all fled. Subadar Mohammed Khan, seeing the danger, called up the guard of the Guides, who ran to the spot and at great risk managed to extinguish the fire.

Return to India and Resettlement

The Battalion embarked at Suez on 9th December 1920, in the *Franz Ferdinand*—the same steamer that had brought it to Basra four years before—and reached Karachi on the 19th. Colonel Buist received letters from both Lord Allenby in Egypt and Lord Rawlinson in India congratulating the Battalion on the services it had performed, and the latter welcoming it back to its own country.

On arrival in Mardan the Depot was absorbed and the Battalion was visited by Lord Rawlinson, the Commander-in-Chief, who complimented the men on their bearing and turn-out.

In the new year demobilization and leave for those returned from overseas commenced, and Lieutenant-Colonel Buist himself, the last Commandant of the Corps of Guides, who had commanded the 1st Guides throughout its service in the First World War, decided to retire on pension. He was indeed the only officer who left India with the Battalion and returned with it. The Battalion Record says: "He had served uninterruptedly with the Battalion except for very brief periods, and was in command in every action in the Great War in which the Battalion took part—a fine sportsman and good comrade . . ." He was succeeded for six months by Lieutenant-Colonel Hector Campbell, D.S.O., M.V.O., who then went to command the 2nd Guides, then still in Egypt and later to be reconstituted as the Training Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment.* In August Lieutenant-Colonel I. U. Battye, D.S.O., assumed command.

Finally, it remains in this chapter to record two events. First, the introduction of the Regimental System, into which the British-Indian Army was reorganized after the First World War, and second, the departure from the Guides, as a result of the reorganization, of the Gurkhas.

The former event, whereby the 1st Guides became the 5th Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment, and the 2nd Guides the Training Battalion of the Regiment, is dealt with in Chapter X. Of the latter it must be said that the loss of the Gurkhas was deeply felt. Up to this time the Guides were the only regular battalion in the Indian Army (other than Gurkha Regiments) to have Gurkhas permanently in their ranks. They were liked and respected by all ranks and had proved themselves to be second to none as fighters.

* See Chapter X: "The Regimental Centre."

CHAPTER VI

THE 51ST AND 53RD SIKHS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR *(Incorporating the Story of the 28th Frontier Force Brigade)*

The 28th F.F. Brigade—The Suez Canal, 1914-15—Aden, 1915—Mesopotamia, 1914-15—The Battle of Sheikh Saad—The Battle of Dujailah and the Fall of Kut—The Advance to Baghdad and the Conquest of Mesopotamia, 1917—The Capture of Baghdad—Operations North of Baghdad in 1917—Palestine, 1918.

The 28th Frontier Force Brigade

WHEN they went overseas on active service in the First World War, the above two Battalions of the Regiment (then still called the 51st and 53rd Sikhs) joined the 28th Frontier Force Brigade. Although other battalions joined and left the Brigade at various times during the war, these two, together with the 56th Rifles, Frontier Force (later the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles), remained with it throughout. They served in the war theatres of Egypt, Aden, Mesopotamia and Palestine from November 1914, till the final rout and destruction of the Turco-German Armies under Liman von Sanders, in Palestine in September-October 1918.

The clearest and most coherent way of recording the deeds of these two Battalions, therefore, in the First World War is to tell the story primarily of the 28th Frontier Force Brigade and give the roles and activities of the Battalions individually as and when the occasion demands. That, then, is how the reader will find the narrative set out below. He will find it no less inspiring than either the stories of earlier campaigns that are recorded above or of those of the Second World War that follow later. How highly His Majesty the King and his Government rated the achievements of these two Battalions may be estimated from the fact that the 51st was rewarded by being designated "Prince of Wales's Own," and the 53rd (at a later date) was given the title of "Royal Battalion."

The circumstances under which the First World War burst on Europe and the civilized world have been outlined in Chapter V, together with a description of the mobilization and despatch to France in September 1914, of the Indian Corps, consisting of the Meerut and Lahore Divisions. This was called Indian Expeditionary Force "A," or in short, I.E.F.A.

In addition, India sent forces to other overseas destinations to deal with enemy threats or centres of resistance, and with I.E.F. "F" went the 51st and 53rd Sikhs. This force was of the strength of a Division of three Brigades—the

28th, 29th and 30th—the 28th Brigade being composed entirely of Frontier Force Battalions, i.e., the above two Battalions of the Regiment, the 1st Battalion 5th Gurkhas, Frontier Force, and the 56th Rifles, Frontier Force. The Brigade was under the command of Major-General Sir George Younghusband, an ex-Commandant of the Guides.

Although believed to have been, at Lord Kitchener's special request, originally destined for France, the task of I.E.F. "F" was in the first instance to safeguard the Suez Canal area, because that waterway was of vital importance to the Allies, not only as the overseas line of communication of the Indian Corps and other forces being mobilized from Australia and New Zealand, but as a general supply route from the East for the Allies. In this connection it will be remembered that while the original war-makers were Germany and Austria (Italy remained out of the alliance), it was not long before German influence (in the form of the cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau* at Istanbul) brought the Turkish Empire in on her side, thus rendering the whole of the Near East up to the Canal itself hostile to us, or potentially so.

Moreover, up to this time the Khilafate was vested in the Sultan of Turkey, who was regarded as the religious head of Moslems the world over. This caused no small embarrassment to the Government of India, nearly half of whose fighting men belonged to the Moslem faith. It is as well, therefore, that this fact should be kept in mind when reading the story of the Regiment in the First World War, and noting the loyalty and devotion that practically all the Moslem soldiers of the Regiment, and indeed of the Indian Army, showed to their leaders and the cause of freedom throughout the war. Contemporary reports were silent regarding the continual attempts made by the Turkish leaders to exploit the position and influence of the Sultan of Turkey as Khalifa and subvert from their allegiance Moslem soldiers in the Allied Armies. The Turkish leaders spared no effort to do this, but where our men were concerned it was a waste of time and money on the part of the enemy. However, in saying, above, "practically all" Moslem soldiers, mention must again be made of the Afridis of the Guides Infantry, whose intentions were suspect from the first and were put to the test.* It was only the defection of a few ill-informed and misguided individuals that had prevented the staunch loyalty to their oaths of all Moslem soldiers being recorded in the First World War as universal and without exception.

To return, however, to the I.E.F. "F" and the 28th Frontier Force Brigade: the orders for field service reached the Battalions in October 1914, and the 51st were at Dargai and Chakdara (Malakand frontier) when orders to mobilize arrived on 11th October 1914.

* Suspicions of the Afridis' reliability were aroused by some men deserting when on leave or recruiting duty. To test them, batches of 25 at a time were warned for the draft and sent on leave. Of four such batches only the two J.C.Os. and two or three old soldiers returned.

Proceeding via Jullundur (the Group Centre), the Battalion first concentrated at Lahore with the rest of the 28th Frontier Force Brigade. It then embarked at Karachi in a convoy for Suez on 17th November. The Battalion was at full strength plus the normal ten per cent. first reinforcement, and the following officers accompanied it:

Lieutenant-Colonel W. Beadon, Commanding
Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel W. F. Bainbridge, D.S.O.
Major P. E. Knapp
Captain P. L. Beddy
Captain F. E. Koebel
Captain R. C. G. Pollock
Captain A. de T. Mouillot
Lieutenant H. Forbes
Lieutenant C. N. Buist
Lieutenant W. H. L. O'Neill
Second-Lieutenant R. M. M. Lockhart*

Captain R. M. Adams and Second-Lieutenant K. A. Garrett remained at the Depot in Jullundur.

Turning now to the 53rd, this Battalion was in Jullundur in 1913, and during the summer of that year was honoured by being ordered to provide the detachment annually furnished by a selected Indian battalion for the duty in Simla of guards for Their Excellencies the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief. In October the Battalion marched to Kohat on transfer, the above Simla Detachment following by rail.

It was therefore stationed in Kohat, with a proportion of officers and men on their annual leave, when war broke out in August of the following year. Two months later, in October, orders to embark at Karachi as part of I.E.F. "F" were received, and the Battalion left Kohat on 15th November by rail. Its strength was : 10 officers, 18 J.C.Os., 808 rank and file, i.e., field-service strength plus ten per cent. first reinforcement. The following officers accompanied the Regiment :

Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Davies, D.S.O., Commanding
Major J. F. Finnis
Captain G. Tomes, Adjutant
Captain G. H. Chapman
Lieutenant C. A. Proudfoot
Lieutenant H. Finnis†
Lieutenant V. W. K. Mackinnon

* General Sir Rob Lockhart, K.C.B., C.I.E., M.C.

† The late Lieutenant-General Sir H. Finnis, K.C.B.

Lieutenant G. C. Southern

Lieutenant C. W. E. Arbuthnott, I.A.R.O.

Captain H. K. Rountree, I.M.S.

The Suez Canal, 1914-15

The 28th Brigade having embarked, the convoy sailed from Karachi on 20th November and arrived at Suez on 2nd December. Proceeding thence by rail to Moascar camp, just outside Ismailia, the Brigade took over part of the Suez Canal defences on 3rd December.

From then till the beginning of February it remained at work strengthening the Canal defences, but by then it was known that a Turkish force from Palestine had advanced across the Sinai Desert and was threatening the Canal. On 2nd February, therefore, the 53rd was moved to Bench Mark Post and Ferry Post (where the 51st was already in position), as these areas were most likely to be attacked by the enemy.

On the next day the Turkish attack was in fact launched on Ferry Post and the two Battalions' camp was shelled all day, but there were no casualties. The action was brought to an end by a terrific sandstorm, and the Turkish attack achieved no tactical success. Their force (which was in fact no more than a brigade group) retired on the 4th February. No further actual attack on the Canal came from this direction, but in the light of post-war examination, this Turkish enterprise was of interest and may even be accounted a strategic success for the enemy. Indeed, it was a considerable feat to organize a force capable of crossing 150 miles of waterless desert without supply and carrying pontoons for the Canal crossing, and with a somewhat suicidal task to tackle in the end against a superior entrenched enemy. That the Turkish force actually traversed the desert, launched its pontoons, and crossed the Canal at one point in the face of prepared defences, was no mean performance; but the real object of the enterprise was not to cut the Canal, but to cause the Allied Command to tie up as many forces as possible in Egypt. In this it cannot be denied that they were successful, for none of the British, Colonial or Indian Forces in Egypt went to the main battle theatre in France as reinforcements in the critical early days of the war.

In regard to life on the Suez Canal defences at this time, a description with anecdotes of interest is to be found in the story of the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles in the History of that Regiment—the companion volume.

In January while on the Canal, the 51st received the sad news of the death in action under very gallant circumstances of one of its officers, Captain E. Jotham, who was serving on the Frontier with the North Waziristan Militia (now called the Tochi Scouts). In an action against Khostwal tribesmen near Miranshah, he sacrificed his life attempting the rescue of one of his men who

had lost his horse. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. (See Appendix IX.)

The Brigade remained on the Canal till 8th July, when it embarked for Aden. During this period there is little of interest to record. It had only one day in the field as part of a column to engage enemy in the desert on 23rd March. The task was successfully accomplished, and the enemy fled, leaving behind equipment and ammunition. The 51st lost 3 killed and 8 wounded, and the 53rd 1 killed and 5 wounded, in what is described as a "very trying day's marching and fighting over the desert." These were the Battalions' first casualties in the First World War.

In addition to this, on 1st June Major Cowan (74th Punjabis, attached 53rd) was shot dead in Suez by a disgruntled Dogra sepoy. Major Cowan had reason to apostrophise him and called him "a damned fool," or some such epithet. The Commandant afterwards told the man that he had often called him that himself, whereupon the man pointed out that the Commandant was an old officer of the Regiment, but that Cowan Sahib was new!

Aden, 1915

It is to be remembered that at this time the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, up to the borders of the British Colony at Aden, was part of the Turkish Empire, and it was not long before this important harbour and coaling station was threatened.

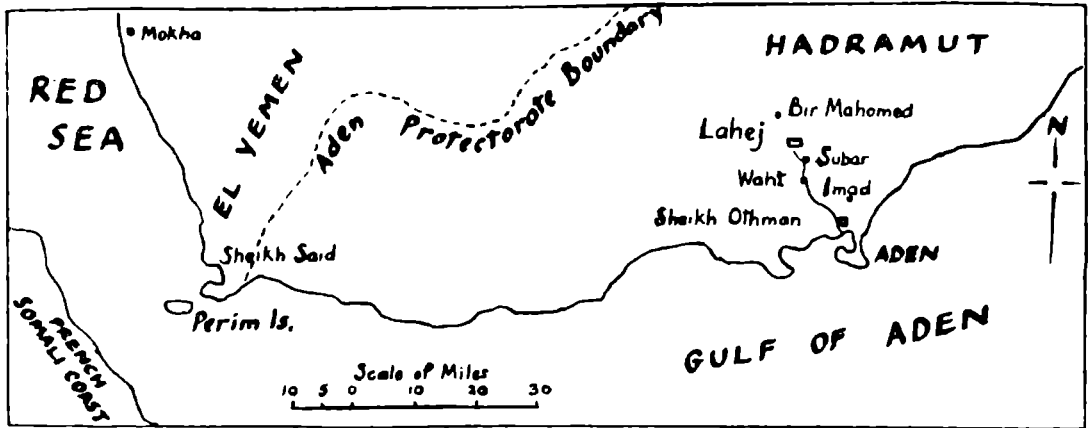
The despatch there from Egypt of the 28th Frontier Force Brigade was in order to meet this threat.

Aden at this time was garrisoned weakly by a small force of all arms barely enough to hold the rocky peninsula on which the town and harbour stand, which was well fortified, and to provide a movable column of battalion strength with a troop of cavalry and two 10-pounder guns.

The Turkish threat came from a portion of their 39th Division under the Governor of Yemen, who, after an abortive attempt on the Island of Perim, invaded the Aden Protectorate with a force several thousand strong, with twenty guns. He was also supported by a horde of armed Arabs.

The Aden movable column, which was ordered out when intelligence sources reported the approach of a Turkish force, was badly mauled in an action at Lahej in which the Sultan of Lahej (a strong British supporter) was killed. The column nearly lost its guns and only got back with difficulty. The Turks, following up, occupied Sheikh Othman and advanced right up to the approaches to Aden itself. This reverse and the death of the Sultan had indeed been a blow to British and Allied prestige all along the Arabian coast from Hadramut to Muscat in the Persian Gulf.

Such was the situation when the 28th Brigade disembarked at Aden on 20th July 1915, and marched out to Khor Maksar and bivouacked. On the



*Sketch Map to illustrate 28th Brigade Opns
(51st & 53rd Sikhs, at ADEN July-September 1915.*

21st, at 3 a.m., the Brigade advanced to attack the Turks in Sheikh Othman. The 53rd was on the left, with the 56th on the right, the 51st in support, and the 62nd (who had replaced the 5th Gurkhas) were in reserve at Khor Maksar. Arrived at the place of deployment, the 53rd was deployed, but failed to gain touch in the dark with the 56th, so, as time was passing, the Commanding Officer decided to advance to the attack. When the leading lines had got within a few hundred yards of Sheikh Othman (by which time it was getting light) a brisk fire was opened on them from the houses and walls. The advance, however, continued, and after a short resistance the Turks retired and were followed up by the force through Sheikh Othman and for some miles to the north of it as far as Bir Mahomed. The force then returned to Sheikh Othman and bivouacked after a hard day's marching and fighting over heavy sand. During the attack Lieutenant Mackinnon and Lieutenant Southern were killed. Other casualties in the 53rd were : killed 3 Indian other ranks; wounded 22.

After this the Turkish force retired right back to Lahej. Sheikh Othman was occupied by the 28th Brigade, a battery and the Aden Troop.

The next engagement was on 28th August, when the 53rd, supported by two companies of the 51st, marched by night to surround some anti-British Arabs at Waht. But it was found that Waht had been reinforced by some 2,000 Turkish infantry with fourteen guns and 100 Arab horsemen, so the column withdrew. The withdrawal, in great heat over soft sand, was harassed by the enemy and proved very trying. The 53rd suffered the following casualties: officers—wounded, Second-Lieutenant P. F. Durand, I.A.R. (severely) and Major J. F. Finnis (slightly); Indian other ranks—killed 2, wounded 18, missing 3.

The short and arduous campaign at Aden came to an end for the Brigade on 7th September, when it embarked again for Suez, which was reached on the 13th.* But it was warned that it was to leave for an unknown destination overseas before long, and orders were received on 7th November to be ready to embark for Basra.

In the meantime, however, the sad news was received by the 53rd that Captain H. S. Smart, who had left the Khyber Rifles on leave soon after the outbreak of war and had not returned, had been killed in France. The story of this headstrong and gallant officer's departure to England without authority, his enlistment under an assumed name in the Queen's Regiment as a private and his death in action is too long to be recorded here.

Mesopotamia, 1914-15

The situation that developed in Mesopotamia after the outbreak of the First World War must be made clear if the reader is to understand why a Brigade like the 28th should be sent there during 1915, when the war in the main theatre in France was still so critical.

After the outbreak of war with Germany in 1914 the pro-German sympathies of the Turkish leaders made war with Turkey probable, and the Indian Government prepared a force to land in Mesopotamia. This was the 6th Poona Division under General Townshend, and its object in the first instance was no more than to safeguard the Anglo-Persian oilfields at Abadan. To do this it was decided to capture Basra and its vilayet by a surprise invasion. As a secondary aim it was designed to keep the Middle East and Persia from following Turkey into the arms of the Central Powers, for this would further aggravate the situation on the North-West Frontier of India. The landing occurred in November 1914, and the following developments ensued.

1. A force was sent up the Karun to guard the right flank, drive the enemy off the pipeline from the oil wells, and to mend and safeguard it.

2. In the beginning of April a force, under Major-General Melliss, V.C. (who had just arrived from Egypt with his 30th Brigade), moved out to Shaiba (south-west of Basra) and engaged a Turkish force which had come across from Nasiriyah on the Euphrates, and threatened our left flank. The Turks were defeated after a hard-fought action, and with heavy casualties retired back to the Euphrates, abandoning their camp at Burjisiyah.

3. The main force pressed on up the Tigris and occupied Amara.

4. A force was then sent up the Euphrates, and after driving back the Turks occupied Nasiriyah.

The main force then continued up the Tigris from Amara, and three

* Actually *en route* for the Dardanelles, but the evacuation took place and the Brigade got no farther than Port Said.

months later, on 29th September, after a two days' battle occupied Kut al Amara.* In the meantime, a further reinforcement had arrived from India, bringing the total force in Mesopotamia to a strength of about two Divisions and a Cavalry Brigade, the whole under General Sir John Nixon.

The greater portion of this force was up the Tigris at Kut, only small forces having been left on the Euphrates at Nasiriyah to guard the left, and up the Karun to guard the right, with small detachments in posts on the line of communication at Amara, Ali-Gharbi, etc.

The operations so far had been uniformly successful. The objects of the expedition had been achieved with the minimum of cost, and at this juncture the advice of the Chiefs of Staff in both the United Kingdom and India, as well as of the Government of India, was to call a halt and avoid further commitments in this theatre. It was, after all, not a decisive field of operations (as the Dardanelles might have been), and Turkey could not be eliminated by defeating her here.

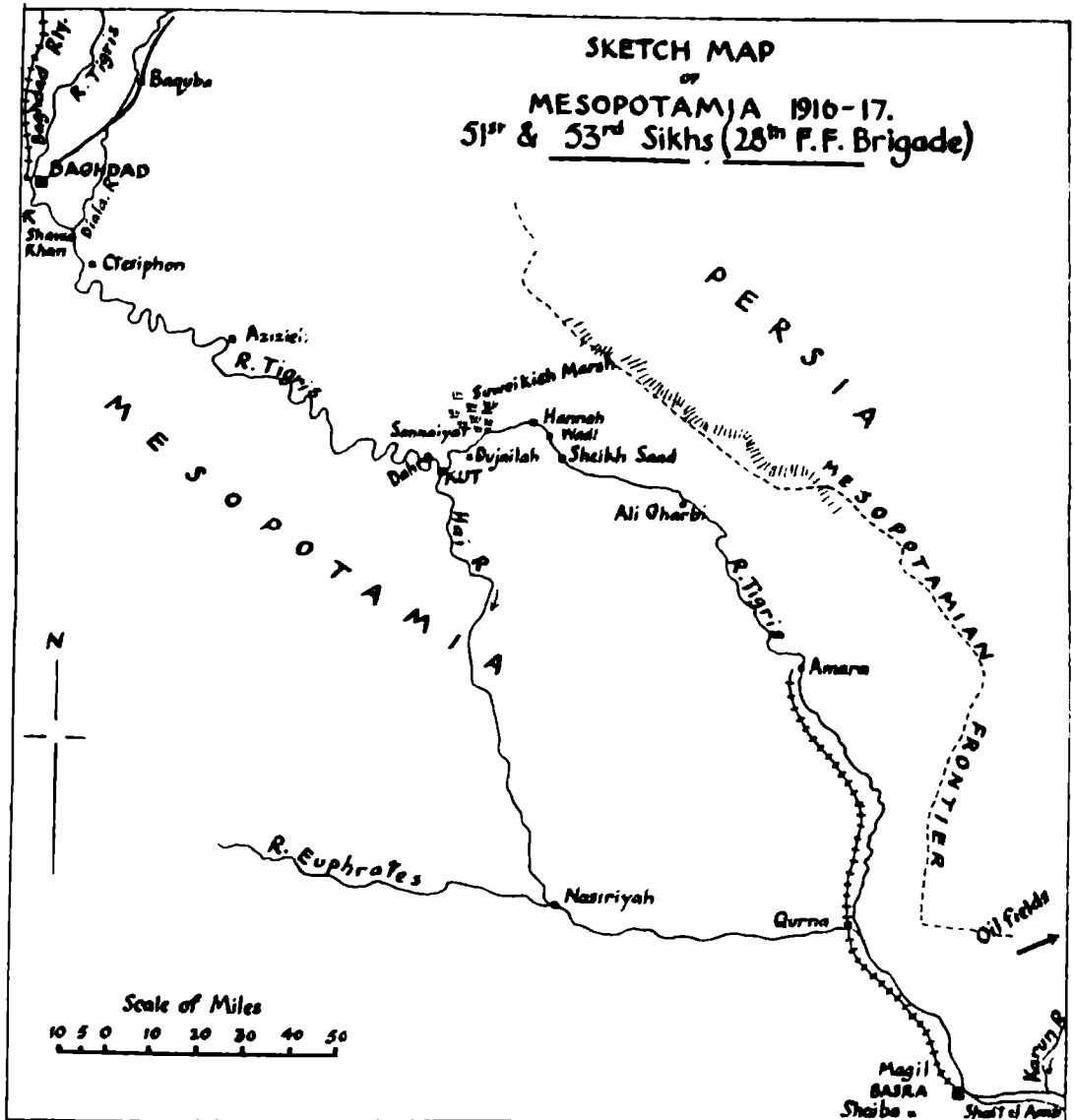
It was also difficult to supply and reinforce troops at the Persian Gulf, and the climatic conditions in that region were the worst possible. However, the politicians in Whitehall thought otherwise. The Cabinet badly wanted a spectacular success that would have a resounding political effect on neutrals, particularly in the Middle East. Such a success now seemed easy to achieve by the capture of Baghdad†—a religious and political centre revered by Moslems in the East even more than Istanbul. The temptation was too great, and the misgivings of the military leaders, who saw too clearly the dangers of sending forward a spearhead force that could not be supported into an enemy country where reinforcements could in fact be quickly concentrated against it, were not considered. The order to advance on Baghdad was given, and after forming an advanced base at Kut the main Tigris force pressed on upstream in early November. It consisted of the 6th Poona Division, one Cavalry Brigade, and part of the 30th Brigade, the whole under Major-General C. Townshend.

Unfortunately, the misgivings of the General Staff were to prove only too well founded, and Townshend's gallant and efficient force soon ran into trouble. The abortive Gallipoli Campaign had only a month earlier ended in stalemate, and our own forces had been withdrawn from the Peninsula. This enabled the Turks to move two divisions with artillery hastily to Mesopotamia for the defence of Baghdad. Moreover, the two divisions were seasoned Turkish first-line veterans that had fought through the Gallipoli Campaign—very different adversaries from the local Turkish forces hitherto encountered by General Townshend and the Poona Division in Mesopotamia.

Thus the victorious British force advancing up the Tigris with high morale and little experience of strong enemy opposition, found a Turkish force holding

* To be called "Kut" in the future, for brevity and clearness.

† *History of the Great War*, Buchan.



a defensive position in strength at the Arch of Ctesiphon. In the ensuing battle General Townshend's forces achieved the astounding feat of driving the Turks from their positions, but reinforcements were still reaching the enemy, while there were none for General Townshend, who had in fact suffered heavily in his victory. He was forced to withdraw on Kut. During the retirement he soundly thrashed a Turkish following force in a rear-guard action and thus reached Kut unmolested. Here, somewhat ill-advisedly, he elected to stand, on the understanding that relieving forces reached him within six weeks. It was ill-advised

because Kut is situated on a U-bend of the River Tigris. The Turkish commander was thus able to hold the neck of land joining the U-shaped arms of the river—thereby containing General Townshend's force with a fraction of his own army—and use the bulk of it, with other reinforcements, to move down the Tigris and oppose the British-Indian forces advancing to the relief of Kut.

This was the situation when the 28th Brigade from Egypt arrived at Basra and moved up to join the relieving forces. The convoy carrying the Brigade berthed on 4th December 1915, and transshipping into river steamers with barges lashed on each side, began arriving on 8th December at Ali-Gharbi. The Cavalry Brigade, sent back from Kut before it was invested at the beginning of the month, had arrived at Ali-Gharbi a few days before.

The 28th Brigade was employed during the rest of the month in digging a perimeter and unloading barges, while the force was concentrating for the advance on Kut. All the time fresh units were arriving every few days, mostly of the 7th Division from France.

The Battle of Sheikh Saad

By 3rd January the leading force had concentrated at Ali-Gharbi and commenced to advance. The 28th Brigade, with one Brigade Field Artillery and the Cavalry Brigade, moved up the right bank while two Infantry Brigades and supporting howitzer artillery advanced up the left bank of the Tigris.

On approaching Sheikh Saad on 6th January (about twenty-five miles), orders were issued for an attack on the Turkish position which had been entrenched here on both sides of the river. The 53rd and 56th led the attack at 1.30 p.m. with the 51st on their left, and came under heavy fire almost at once, advancing over a dead level plain absolutely devoid of cover. They advanced by rushes to within about 250 yards of the Turkish trenches, losing fairly heavily, and dug in behind slight cover afforded by a small dry water-cut.

The night was spent digging and improving the line, getting up food and water after dark, and sending back wounded. The Leicesters were dug in on a line a little to the left rear of the 53rd, with the 51st in line with them. During the night their line was reorganized so that the 51st came between the 53rd and Leicesters. The next day the artillery bombarded the enemy trenches all the morning, and attack orders were received at 1.10 p.m. for the whole line to assault the positions on a given signal. The men never actually got in with the bayonet, for as soon as the assault started the enemy opposite had had enough and came out and threw their arms down (4 p.m.).

The position was consolidated during the night, while rain fell, making it very cold. Next morning a cavalry reconnaissance that was sent forward came under heavy fire, and news was now received that the attack on the left bank had suffered severely and failed to make headway. However, on 10th January

the Turks evacuated their positions and retired to another strong one about seven miles up river from Sheikh Saad.

The casualties at Sheikh Saad were :

51st: officers—killed 1, died of wounds 1, wounded 3; J.C.Os.—killed 2, wounded 9; other ranks—killed 28, wounded 193 (of whom 4 died).

53rd: officers—wounded 6 (including the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Davies (slightly); J.C.Os.—killed 4 and wounded 2, besides an unrecorded number of rank and file killed and wounded.

The advance to relieve Kut was now dogged by the worst imaginable weather conditions, reducing the level open plain to a quagmire and making movement extremely difficult. Under such circumstances the defending Turks had a great advantage and the relief of Kut began to assume a graver aspect. General Townshend was informed of the situation and fortunately discovered supplies in the town of Kut that enabled him to hold out.

On 12th January, after a further slow advance of five miles, the Brigade faced another strong enemy position known as Wadi, to which the Turks had retired after the operations of the 10th.

On the 13th orders were received to attack this position, which was now reported to be weakly held, and after capturing it the Brigade was to push on and join up with the left of the Meerut Division, which was advancing parallel to it. The 53rd advanced with the 56th, as directing battalion on the right, and the Leicesters on the left. The 51st were in reserve. The advance was over a mile of dead level plain with no cover whatsoever, and in face, almost from the start, of very heavy field-gun, machine-gun and rifle fire. This caused heavy casualties before a line was dug 200-300 yards from the Wadi (which is at this point a very considerable obstacle ten to fifteen yards wide with sheer banks about ten feet high). Immediately in rear of this were the Turkish trenches. During the advance, owing to casualties and the extent of line to be attacked, the force had become somewhat scattered, and the attack could not be pressed home. The position remained one of stalemate till night fell, and orders were then received to withdraw and dig in on a line some distance back. Thus ended another day of toil, exhaustion, loss and disappointment.

The casualties in this action were heavy :

51st: officers—killed 1 (the Commanding Officer, Colonel Beadon—a great loss); other ranks—killed 7, wounded 64.

53rd: killed and died of wounds, 3 officers, including Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Finnis, 3 J.C.Os. and 13 other ranks; wounded—1 officer, 5 J.C.Os. and 168 other ranks.

The Turks now once more retired to a prepared position in rear, this time

about four miles distant. It was known as the Hanna position and was to prove one of the main obstacles to the relief of Kut.

While the Brigade rested on 15th January, the weather again became very bad and turned to rain with cold and wind, hampering clearance of the battlefield, reorganization, and preparations for further advance. These conditions continued till the 19th, when it became fine again, but the country was by now a quagmire. The Brigade moved forward to a camp across the Wadi, and the remains of the 53rd were reorganized in two wings.

On the 21st the Brigade marched at 4.30 a.m. to a position in rear of the artillery, as Corps reserve for an attack on the Hanna position. Intense bombardment started at 7.45, after fifteen minutes of which the 7th Division assaulted. At about noon the Brigade advanced up to a supporting position in rear of 19th Brigade, and at 3.30 the 53rd and the 51st pushed on as far as the 19th Brigade support trenches. The advance was over water-logged ground in heavy rain and wind and under fire. But for the covering fire, during its advance, of the Seaforth Highlanders, the 53rd must have lost far more heavily. They stayed in a trench in rear of the Seaforths till after dark, it having been decided that in the present state of the ground and weather the enemy were too strong to be dislodged. In the meantime the 51st had suffered severely during the advance, losing three of its four surviving officers. The additional casualties during the day was 2 J.C.Os. wounded, 9 rank and file killed, 4 missing and 91 wounded.

Shortly after dark, orders were received from the 19th Brigade for the Seaforths and the 53rd to withdraw the line about half a mile to the rear, having first cleared the battlefield and sent back wounded—a very difficult and trying job with the men drenched to the skin and the ground waterlogged and very slippery. It was eventually completed and the Brigade spent the night about 1,000 yards from the Turkish line. Rain was continuous throughout the night and the next morning.

The Brigade was now rested, and none too soon. The Battalions had marched and fought most gallantly and in the most difficult conditions against a staunch and resolute enemy until only a fraction of their initial strength remained. Indeed, whole battalions totalled little more than a company at full strength, and all were near exhaustion.

On 3rd February, after twelve days' rest, the Brigade moved up and relieved the 19th Brigade in the line, but for the time being the front remained quiet and on 10th February the Brigade was again withdrawn to a standing camp in rear. Reinforcements of both officers and men were now received by the 53rd, bringing its strength up to 11 officers, 15 J.C.Os. and 591 rank and file. The 51st were similarly reinforced.

For the next four weeks the Brigade engaged in sapping when in the front line, but no active operations were undertaken. It was clear that concentration

of force for a decisive blow to open the way to relieve General Townshend's now weak and hungry force in Kut, was being prepared.

This blow was, in fact, delivered on 8th March at the Turkish right flank, which was holding an entrenched position called Es Sinn, with its flank resting on a fortification called the Dujailah Redoubt. This flank offered the nearest and most direct approach to Kut, which lay only five miles behind the Redoubt itself, and the way to it would be open if the Redoubt were captured and secured.

The Battle of Dujailah and the Fall of Kut

The story of this tragic action, which sealed the fate of Townshend's force, is one from which the military student can learn much, for it is one of a plan that aimed at surprise, was brilliantly conceived, carefully prepared, efficiently carried out by the troops up to their arrival, unobserved, at the very ramparts of the Redoubt itself. But from then on it tells of indecision by the commander, resulting in failure to reap the success that was already in his grasp. The results were dire. A heavy defeat with grievous losses was inflicted on the relieving force, which thereafter was unable to resume the offensive effectively till the following year. Although repeated piecemeal attacks were in fact made on the Turkish defences during the next seven weeks, all were unsuccessful and heavy losses were incurred.

In the battle of Dujailah the 28th Brigade were part of the spearhead of assault and suffered severely. The story therefore merits telling in full.

The plan consisted of a night march through the desert on the right bank of the Tigris by an attacking force consisting of six Brigades and one Cavalry Brigade (this comprised the whole Tigris Force except the 19th and 21st Brigades). It was divided into three columns—"A," "B" and "C"—and the 28th Brigade formed part of "B" Column, under Major-General Kemball.

At 9.25 p.m. the march started. It was slow going with continual halts. Shortly before dawn the Force arrived at the Dujailah depression (in front of the enemy position), at which point it split up, two columns proceeding south-west along the depression, while a third column turned north to take up position facing the Dujailah Redoubt from the east. The first two columns continued along the depression as far as a bend where it turns north to the Redoubt (subsequently known as Kemball's Corner), where they formed up in the depression for attack. Here the 36th Brigade was detailed for an enveloping move against the enemy's right. By this time it was nearly sunrise, but the enemy had given no sign of having spotted the Force. This was in fact the case, and a reconnoitring patrol with an Intelligence Officer actually went forward, entered the Redoubt and ascertained that it was unoccupied. Unfortunately, the prearranged programme included an artillery bombardment before the assault was to be launched. Still more unfortunately, the occasion produced no leader with the vision to seize the opportunity and say the one word "Advance" and

let the H.Q. in rear take care of the artillery. Instead, word was telephoned back to the Force H.Q. with a request for orders, and the fatal reply came back, "Stick to programme." It was unquestionable that had the Dujailah Redoubt been taken at dawn on the 8th March, not only would Kut have been relieved, but the safety of the whole Turkish Army on the left bank would have been menaced.

At 10 a.m. the advance started (by this time the artillery had carried out their bombardment on the Turkish camp and there was no longer any hope of a surprise) and almost simultaneously large bodies of the enemy infantry were seen advancing, some from even the Turkish reserve areas on the left bank. These were unharmed by our gun fire and advanced to a line of well-concealed trenches south of the Dujailah Redoubt, where they disappeared from view. Our line, after advancing about 250 yards, was met by heavy rifle and machine-gun fire from a range of about 700 yards, but the advance continued, the Brigade sustaining considerable casualties. By noon a firing line had been established about 500 yards from the enemy, the men digging with their "Sirhind"* tools. At 12.45 p.m. orders were received to continue the advance and assault the Redoubt. The advance was continued and further heavy casualties were suffered. The assault of the Redoubt was now out of the question, it being still a mile away with strongly held enemy trenches barring the way. However, the advance was carried forward about 150 yards, but at 2.30 p.m. the Commanding Officer of the 53rd sent a message to Brigade Headquarters saying that he considered further advance with the existing force impossible and that it would entail its practical annihilation.

At 4.30 p.m. a message was received that the Lahore Division was about to assault the Dujailah Redoubt from the east and that the 29th and 28th Brigades were to co-operate, but this assault was postponed till 5.15 p.m. The only co-operation that the 28th and 29th Brigades could make was by fire, advance being out of the question. At 6.35 p.m. orders were received to consolidate the line and hold it for the night.

The assault during the afternoon from the east by the Lahore Division was in fact carried out with great gallantry, and the Redoubt was penetrated by the 59th Scinde Rifles, F.F., of the 8th Brigade, but they could not be supported and were driven out again. †

During the night the Brigade withdrew to Kemball's Corner and the next morning the entire Force retired to its original position. During this retirement the Brigade provided the rear and left flank guards (the 51st and 53rd respectively), but the Turks only followed up with a small force of all arms which made no attempt to attack.

* The "Sirhind" tool was a small portable entrenching tool carried as part of his field equipment by the soldier.

† *The History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter VII.

The following casualties were sustained :

51st: 4 killed, 2 missing, 54 wounded of rank and file.

53rd: officers—killed 4 (including Captain G. H. Chapman, officiating Brigade Major, 28th (F.F.) Brigade); J.C.Os.—killed 4; officers wounded 2 (1 J.C.O. was badly wounded and subsequently died); rank and file—killed 28, wounded 136, missing 19. Total of 53rd killed 36; wounded 139; missing 19.

From the 10th March till the 29th April, when General Townshend capitulated in Kut, repeated attempts were made to force the Turkish lines on the left bank of the river. These were situated with both flanks protected by water—the right flank by the river and the left by the Suwaikieh Marsh, now heavily swollen by rain. Only frontal assaults were therefore possible, supported by artillery barrages. As has been remarked, these attacks all failed. The 28th Brigade took part in the following attempts to break through the Turkish lines.

On 6th and 7th April an attack on the Turkish Sannaiyat position round the enemy left flank was held up with severe losses.

On 10th April a night advance from the position reached after the above operation was stopped by an adverse wind causing the Suwaikieh Marsh to flood the ground and make entrenching impossible.

On 19th April the Brigade was ordered to support a further attack on the Sannaiyat position, but the weather and flooding caused a postponement till the 22nd. When it eventually took place it became bogged down and ended in a truce to recover casualties and bury dead. The truce was indeed unofficial and quite spontaneous on both sides.

Before the end of April, General Townshend and his gallant Division, having exhausted their supplies, surrendered with the honours of war and went into captivity.

This ended the operations for the relief of Kut in 1916. The losses of the 51st in the first four and a half months of this campaign up to the 22nd April 1916, were as follows :

	<i>Officers</i>	<i>J.C.Os.</i>	<i>Rank and file</i>
Killed or died of wounds . .	6	6	134
Wounded	14	23	698
Missing	—	—	33
Died of disease	—	—	13
Total	20	29	828

The losses of the 53rd for the same period are not recorded, but must have been similar.

The Advance to Baghdad and the Conquest of Mesopotamia, 1917

After the surrender of General Townshend's Force in Kut, the British-Indian Forces on the Tigris opened no further offensive operations that year.

Their war-worn units required rebuilding, their newly arrived officers needed training and knowledge of their men. Many of the elderly leaders of higher formations were replaced and a thorough overhaul of the Army on the Tigris, with measures to restore morale, was undertaken. Indeed, the Army felt very keenly the blows that had been suffered, the privations endured, and the losses—that all should have ended in disaster could only be due to mishandling by someone.

The bitter feeling that had been engendered among the officers by the disastrous campaign that had taken place, was exemplified by a cynical “alphabet” that circulated about this time. Two of the stanzas may be quoted, *en passant*, as a matter of interest.

“V’s for the Victory won at Dujailah—
I know it is true, I was told by a sailor
Who said he had heard it on board a Mahela*
On the Tigris in Mesopotamia.”

and also

“W stands for the wonder and pain
With which we regard our infirm and insane
Old aged Generals who run this campaign
We are waging in Mesopotamia.”

With the passing of the hot weather, during which units alternated between holding portions in the front line and resting and training in rear, Battalions recovered their strength, fitness and efficiency. Reports by both the Commander-in-Chief India, and the Commander of the Army on the Tigris, who made visits of inspection later in the summer, remarked on the smartness and bearing of all the Frontier Force Battalions.

From an operational point of view nothing occurred during the rest of the year to break the monotony of trench warfare—that form of war-stagnation that looking back, we now recognize as perhaps more than anything else the characteristic of the First World War.

Early in 1917 (on 9th January) a raid on a fairly large scale was undertaken by the 53rd and 56th, each sending out a raiding party of two British officers and thirty men to raid three separate objectives in the enemy’s first line. They were protected by a barrage which lifted for ten minutes, allowing them to do their work in the enemy trench. “All the raids were boldly and successfully carried out and the parties returned at 5.14 a.m.”—so say the Regimental Records, but the casualty list of the 53rd makes the reader wonder. . . . It was as follows: killed Second-Lieutenant W. J. Arbuthnot, I.A.R.O.; missing, believed killed, Second-Lieutenant R. B. Webb, I.A.R.O. and 4 men; died of

* The Arab river craft known as the “Mahela” was extensively used for waterway transport by both sides in this campaign.

wounds 1 man; wounded 10 men. Second-Lieutenant Arbuthnot was shot through the head and fell into the Turkish trenches after the raiding party had been in the enemy's trench for five minutes. From observations made in the daytime, there was little doubt that the body of Second-Lieutenant Webb, with those of two sepoys, was lying on the parapet of the Turkish trench. Second-Lieutenant Arbuthnot was Adjutant of the 53rd and Second-Lieutenant Webb was Transport Officer. Raids have been better planned than this!

The Capture of Baghdad

By the autumn the process of reinforcing, training and re-muniting the Army on the Tigris was completed. The line of communication was also built up with the railway, and supply and hospital arrangements were perfected.

The strategic position was now ripe for an advance on Baghdad, the capture of which would relieve pressure in the Middle East and Persia.* Moreover, an offensive against the Turkish Army in this theatre would prevent the enemy concentrating against our forces that were advancing from Egypt on Palestine, where decisive results were possible. The decision was therefore taken to resume the offensive against the Turkish Army with the object of capturing Baghdad and consolidating our hold on the whole Turkish province of Mesopotamia. The task was entrusted to General Maude, who now became Commander-in-Chief in succession to Sir Percy Lake. With this in view, offensive operations on the Tigris were opened early in January. The first phase was to push back the Turkish right wing that lay on the right bank of the Tigris and held a trench position astride the Hai river running east and west with the bend of the Tigris in its rear. Success here would menace the Turkish communications and jeopardize their entire army. This plan was in fact successfully achieved, after desperate fighting, by the 13th (British) and 14th Divisions by the end of January.

By the 10th February the only remaining enemy positions on the right bank of the Tigris were across the loop of the river north-west of Kut, known as the Dahra Bend.

Preparations were now made for an attack on the Sannaiyat position, and on 22nd February the 28th Brigade attacked in conjunction with the 19th Brigade under concentrated artillery support. The attack succeeded and all objectives were captured, but at great cost.

The 51st lost 1 officer killed and 1 died of wounds, and 32 rank and file killed; also 4 officers and 226 rank and file were wounded. The 53rd lost 3 officers, 2 J.C.Os. and 30 rank and file killed, and 4 officers and 193 rank and file wounded.

After this action the Brigade was withdrawn to rest, but on 24th February the Turks were found to have evacuated their position and were in full retreat towards Baghdad.

* *History of the Great War*, John Buchan, Vol. III, page 368.

The Turkish Army was, in fact, now broken and had abandoned vast quantities of ammunition and war material of all kinds. The way to Baghdad lay open with only opposition by comparatively weak forces to overcome. The only stand made by these was at the confluence of the Diala river with the Tigris, and the 28th Brigade, after crossing to the right bank, attacked the enemy protecting Baghdad from the south-west at Shawa Khan. In this action the enemy held on to their position in face of the attack, but withdrew during the night, leaving the way open to Baghdad. In the meantime, the Diala crossing had been forced with great gallantry by the 13th Division in face of stubborn enemy opposition.

Losses at Shawa Khan were again considerable. The Commanding Officers of both Battalions, Lieutenant-Colonels Grattan, 53rd, and Magrath, 51st, were wounded, while 37 Indian ranks were killed and 127 wounded in the two Battalions. Baghdad was occupied on 11th March and the Brigade rested in camp two miles west of the city.

Operations North of Baghdad in 1917

The repose of the 28th Brigade was shortlived, for it was detailed as advanced guard to the force to pursue the withdrawing Turks. Contact was made at Mushaidie on 14th March, where the enemy rear-guard put up an obstinate fight before withdrawing. The 53rd led the attack with the 56th, and the 51st were in reserve.

The Brigade now withdrew again to the Baghdad area, where it was employed on protective duties while the 13th Division and Cavalry Brigade carried out operations to trap a Turkish corps that had moved up the road from Baghdad north-east towards Persia. Eventually these Turks escaped to the north, and on 9th April a move in force northwards along the Baghdad Railway was planned. The 7th Division concentrated at Harbah for the purpose.

The Turks were now known to be holding a strong position at Istabulat (some eighty miles north of Baghdad), and our attack on this was led by the 21st Brigade (to which the 51st were temporarily attached) with the 28th Brigade in Divisional reserve. By the evening of 21st April the main Turkish positions had been captured, and the 28th Brigade passed through to attack their supporting line at 4 a.m. on the 22nd. The Leicestershire Regiment and the 56th led the attack, but the advance went too far and was thrown back by a strong enemy counter-attack supported by murderous close-range fire from an embankment on the left flank. This attack also exposed the left flank of the 51st, who, with the 56th, suffered severely. Eventually, the 53rd, aided by a machine-gun company (one of whose officers won the Victoria Cross for gallantry on this occasion), held up the counter-attack, and the captured position was consolidated. The losses in the 51st were heavy: 1 officer and 25 rank and file were killed, and 2 J.C.Os. died of wounds; 2 officers (including the acting

ERRATUM

Page 115, line 25.—*For* “Was Deputy Commander-in-Chief in India during 1944-46 in the Second World War,” *read* “Became Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army on Partition.”

Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Barrett), 4 J.C.Os. and 166 rank and file were wounded.

The 53rd losses were not so severe, but Lieutenant-Colonel Grattan was again wounded and died afterwards. In addition, 4 other officers (of whom 1 died), and 65 rank and file were wounded; and 2 J.C.Os. and 7 rank and file were killed.*

After Istabulat the Turkish Army retreated, and the Brigade formed part of a defensive piquet line covering Samara railway station (the northern terminus of the Baghdad Railway). This completed operations for the hot weather, during which reinforcements were received and the battalions were again brought up to strength. Among the officers to join the 53rd, two names are of interest. On 25th May Major C. A. Milward is recorded as arriving from France (where he was in Staff employ) and taking over command of the Battalion. He became Major-General Sir Clement Milward, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., and died in retirement in 1952.

The other name is that of Lieutenant A. E. Cumming, who is shown as joining the 53rd at Samara on 21st August 1917. Nearly twenty-five years later, in the tragic Malayan retreat before the Japanese in 1942, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Cumming, then commanding the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment, won the Victoria Cross in circumstances that for both gallantry and endurance have been seldom equalled. (See Chapter XIX and Appendix IX).

At the same period (the summer of 1917), in the Record of the 51st, on 22nd August, at Samara, a distribution of officers in Battalion appointments shows Captain R. M. M. Lockhart as Adjutant. General Sir Rob Lockhart, K.C.B., C.I.E., M.C., was Deputy Commander-in-Chief in India during 1944-46 in the Second World War.

Also recorded by the 51st was the immediate award, after the battle of Istabulat, of the D.S.O. to Major F. E. Koebel for conspicuous gallantry and resource in meeting the Turkish counter-attack on the Battalion's left flank (see above).

In October operations were resumed. Although the situation in Mesopotamia was now secure, the operations undertaken were doubtless part of a concerted plan to prevent the Turkish command reinforcing its Palestine front, against which a successful offensive by General Allenby at Gaza was commencing.

The three Brigades of the 7th Division were detailed to attack an enemy position at Daur which was an outpost covering his main position at Tekrit, some thirty miles upstream. The 28th Brigade were advanced guard and the 56th were vanguard in the advance. The action was notable for being conducted (on somewhat elastic orders) with a determination to avoid repetition of set-

* For an account of the 56th's share in this battle see *The History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, page 47.

piece battles after the pattern of Dujailah. The Brigade did a remarkably fast night march of eighteen to twenty miles, followed by an attack at dawn on the flank of the Turkish position. Everything was staked on the speed of the advance; the enemy flank outposts were overrun and the Turks fled. Losses caused by the enemy fire were not allowed to check the attack, which went in at a tremendous pace. Some three hundred prisoners were taken by the Brigade and also a quantity of stores. The 51st suffered fairly heavily, Captains Garrett and Lushington and Lieutenants Scotland and Perry being wounded. In addition, 1 J.C.O. and 73 rank and file were wounded and 4 killed.

This was the Brigade's last action in Mesopotamia, and on 7th December orders were received for the 7th Division to leave the country for an unknown destination.

Palestine, 1918

The Brigade embarked at Basra at the end of December, and it was soon known that the destination was Palestine, where Allenby's victorious army had driven the Turks out of their positions on the Gaza—Beersheba line and captured Jerusalem. The Brigade was now to take part, with the 7th Division, in the final drama on the plain of Sharon which witnessed the destruction of the Turco-German armies there. This forced the capitulation of Turkey and brought that country's participation in the First World War to a close.

The officers now with the two Battalions of the Regiment on their way to Palestine were as follows:

51st Sikhs:

Lieutenant-Colonel P. L. Beddy
 Acting Major G. E. Bruce, M.C., 53rd Sikhs (attached)
 Captain E. P. Watts, M.C., 53rd Sikhs (attached)
 Acting Captain K. A. Garrett, M.C.
 Acting Captain A. W. Harris, I.A.R.O.
 Lieutenant E. L. Macgregor, I.A.R.O.
 Lieutenant F. V. R. Woodhouse, 55th Coke's Rifles (attached)
 Lieutenant A. G. Scotland
 Lieutenant E. G. Perry
 Second-Lieutenant J. G. Elliot, 55th Coke's Rifles (attached)
 Second-Lieutenant P. T. Clarke, 59th Scinde Rifles (attached)
 Second-Lieutenant E. H. S. Shuttleworth, 53rd Sikhs (attached)
 Lieutenant E. R. Daboo, M.C., I.M.S.

53rd Sikhs:

Lieutenant-Colonel R. Gardiner, Commanding
 Major C. I. Shepherd, D.S.O., Second-in-Command
 Captain St. J. A. Brown, commanding "D" Company

Captain R. D. Crew, 52nd Sikhs (attached), commanding "B"
Company

Captain D. M. Newitt, acting Adjutant

Lieutenant C. E. Fieldsend, M.C., commanding "C" Company

Lieutenant A. E. Cumming commanding "A" Company

Lieutenant G. B. Mould, Quartermaster

Lieutenant W. E. Dean*

Lieutenant A. S. Cruickshank

Lieutenant C. N. Heathcote

Captain T. R. Fulton, R.A.M.C., Medical Officer

Both Battalions had been greatly reinforced and were now each over 1,000 strong. This was later to enable some fruitful reorganization to be effected in preparation for the final attack to be delivered on the Turks.

The First World War was now entering on its fifth calendar year, and though the Turks had been driven back in both Palestine and Mesopotamia, the deadlock in trench warfare in the main theatre in France continued. Indeed, owing to the defeat and disintegration of the Imperial Russian Army on the eastern front, the Germans were able to concentrate in France in greatly increased strength. On the 21st March 1918, the German Army struck at the junction of the British and French Armies in France on a frontage of forty miles and achieved great initial success. The British Fifth Army front and the adjoining French defences were breached and the enemy drive forward was held only after the loss of some twenty miles of territory, a number of prisoners and guns, and quantities of equipment and supplies. After this disaster to the Fifth Army in France, the 52nd Lowland Division, with other British formations, was recalled from Palestine and replaced by the 3rd and 7th Indian Divisions.

General Allenby's Army was now holding a line from the sea coast eleven miles north of Jaffa south-eastward, astride the Jerusalem—Nablus road, to the Jordan valley. The 7th Division remained in Egypt for training till early April, when it went up to Palestine into the line on the left, the 28th Brigade being in reserve near Tel el Rekkait. The 19th and 21st Brigades were in the front line, the 19th Brigade on the left with its flank on the sea and the 21st Brigade on the right.

Except for minor limited operations undertaken in order to improve the front line of the 7th Division, the next five months passed under conditions of static warfare. A major reorganization took place in May which has been referred to above and which provided the Army Commander with several new battalions. This was done by withdrawing from each existing Indian battalion one company at full strength, complete with officers. Thus the 2/151st Infantry

* Later Lieutenant-Colonel W. E. Dean, Commander of the 3rd Sikhs in Abyssinia and the Western Desert, in the Second World War (Chapter XVI).

were formed with four companies taken one from each of the 1st Guides (see Chapter V), 51st, 53rd and 56th. The battalions so raised were for the duration of the war only, and as it proved, the end of hostilities was now not far off.

In September the offensive by General Allenby's Army that was to force Turkey out of the war was prepared. First, the striking force was transferred from the right flank of the Army and concentrated in the coastal sector where the break-through was planned. This concentration was concealed from the enemy by various ruses which were completely successful, and he was kept absolutely in the dark. One of these ruses, laid on for the benefit of enemy air observation, was a series of troop columns whose task was to march from west to east (i.e. away from the concentration area) by day, returning by night to the place from which they had started. By repeating the process for several days, a convincing picture was presented of large bodies of our troops being moved to the Army's right wing. The real concentration on the left wing was kept carefully hidden. Five Infantry Divisions were concentrated in this manner in the coastal area unobserved. After these had broken through they were to wheel to the right while the Cavalry galloped through the gap, heading due north to cut the Turkish line of communication.

The battle opened on the 19th September and the attack was completely successful, the enemy's line being driven back all along the front. The 28th Brigade, which was in divisional reserve, took up the pursuit, with the 56th as advanced guard. The advance of the Brigade across the rear of the recent Turkish front from west to east, led through Tireh, Tayibieh, Kefr Sur and Beit Lid into the Judean hills, where enemy rear-guards were holding the high ground protecting Samaria. This was attacked simultaneously by the 51st from the south and the 53rd from the north-west. The enemy surrendered after a short resistance, and this ended the fighting of the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the Regiment in the First World War.

For a few days they were employed partly on outpost duty and partly salvaging the area round Samaria, where the Turks had abandoned quantities of rifles, ammunition and equipment of all sorts. The Mesudieh plain was dotted all over with shell dumps. Thereafter the 28th Brigade marched northward through Haifa, Tyre and Sidon, till by the end of November it reached northern Syria in the Tripoli—Homs—Aleppo area. Meanwhile, the Armistice of 11th November 1918, had brought the war to an end. From now on the 51st and 53rd were employed on separate peacetime tasks, and remained for a time as units in an Army of Occupation. In this volume, therefore, we must revert once more to the individual stories of these two Battalions, whose fortunes in the 28th Frontier Force Brigade we have followed through the First World War.

Their stories will be resumed in later chapters describing the Battalion's lives in the 'tween-wars period from 1919 to 1939.

CHAPTER VII

THE 2ND AND 3RD BATTALIONS GUIDES INFANTRY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Formation of the 2nd Guides—Palestine, 1918—Post-war Services of the 2nd Guides in Syria, Egypt and Palestine—The 3rd Battalion, Formation and Early Days—The Third Afghan War—Waziristan, 1919-20—Return to Mardan and Disbandment.

The Formation of the 2nd Guides

THE 2nd Battalion Guides Infantry was raised at Mardan as a War Battalion on 15th January 1917 as follows:

- “A” *Company*.—Two platoons Dogras from 1st Guides and 55th Coke’s Rifles, one platoon Yuzufzais from 1st Guides; one platoon P.Ms. from the 52nd Sikhs.
- “B” *Company*.—Two platoons P.Ms. from 1st Guides, 52nd Sikhs F.F., 54th Sikhs and 55th Rifles; two platoons Gurkhas from 1st Guides and 2/5th Gurkha Rifles.
- “C” *Company*.—Two platoons P.Ms. from 1st Guides, 52nd Sikhs F.F., 54th Sikhs and 55th Rifles; two platoons Gurkhas from 2/5th Gurkha Rifles.
- “D” *Company*.—Two platoons Khattaks from 1st Guides; two platoons Sikhs from 1st Guides, 52nd Sikhs and 55th Coke’s Rifles F.F.

The Battalion moved to Malakand two months later, where its first Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Bogle, assumed command. The next eleven months were spent training, and on 10th February the Battalion mobilized for active service. It did not leave however, till 28th May 1918, when it sailed from Bombay for Egypt.

The following officers accompanied it: Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Bogle; Major F. K. Hensley; Captains C. W. Molony and A. L. W. Neave; Lieutenants L. V. Dart, M.C., C. R. Hughes and A. H. Kemm; Second-Lieutenants C. H. Mitchell, V. Fox-Strangways, W. H. Goulstone, S. G. S. Rose and I. A. Thew. Lieutenant Sher Singh, I.M.S., was Medical Officer.

Major R. C. G. Pollock, 52nd Sikhs, was left in command of the Depot.

Palestine, 1918

On arrival in Egypt the Battalion spent a month training and equipping at Tel-el-Kebir before moving to the front to join the 180th Brigade of the 60th (London) Division of General Allenby's Army on 3rd July 1918.

The Army was holding a line east and west across Palestine from the sea north of Jaffa to the Jordan Valley; and the situation with the events that had led up to it have been described in Chapters V and VI.*

Between 17th and 25th July the Battalion took over a sector of the front from the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers near Jiljilieh at the western edge of the Judæan hills, and for some time life was uneventful. But preparations for the big offensive, which was to end the war with Turkey, were now in hand; and between 13th and 15th August the battalion sector was handed over to the 2nd/30th Punjabis. The 60th Division was withdrawn a month later and moved with great secrecy to the extreme left on the coast,† the 180th Brigade being hidden in the olive groves of Sarona.

The 60th Division's role in the big attack of 19th September was to break through on the coast with the 7th Division (led by the 1st Guides) on its right, thus clearing the way for the Desert Mounted Corps to gallop through and disrupt the enemy's rear and communications. On 17th September the Battalion took over the extreme left of the line (its flank on the seashore) from the 56th Rifles, F.F., and made reconnaissances preparatory to the attack.

The Battalion's objectives were three lines of Turkish trenches on sandy hillocks falling almost sheer to the sea. The barrage opened at 4.30 a.m., and "B" and "D" Companies led the assault on the first objective.

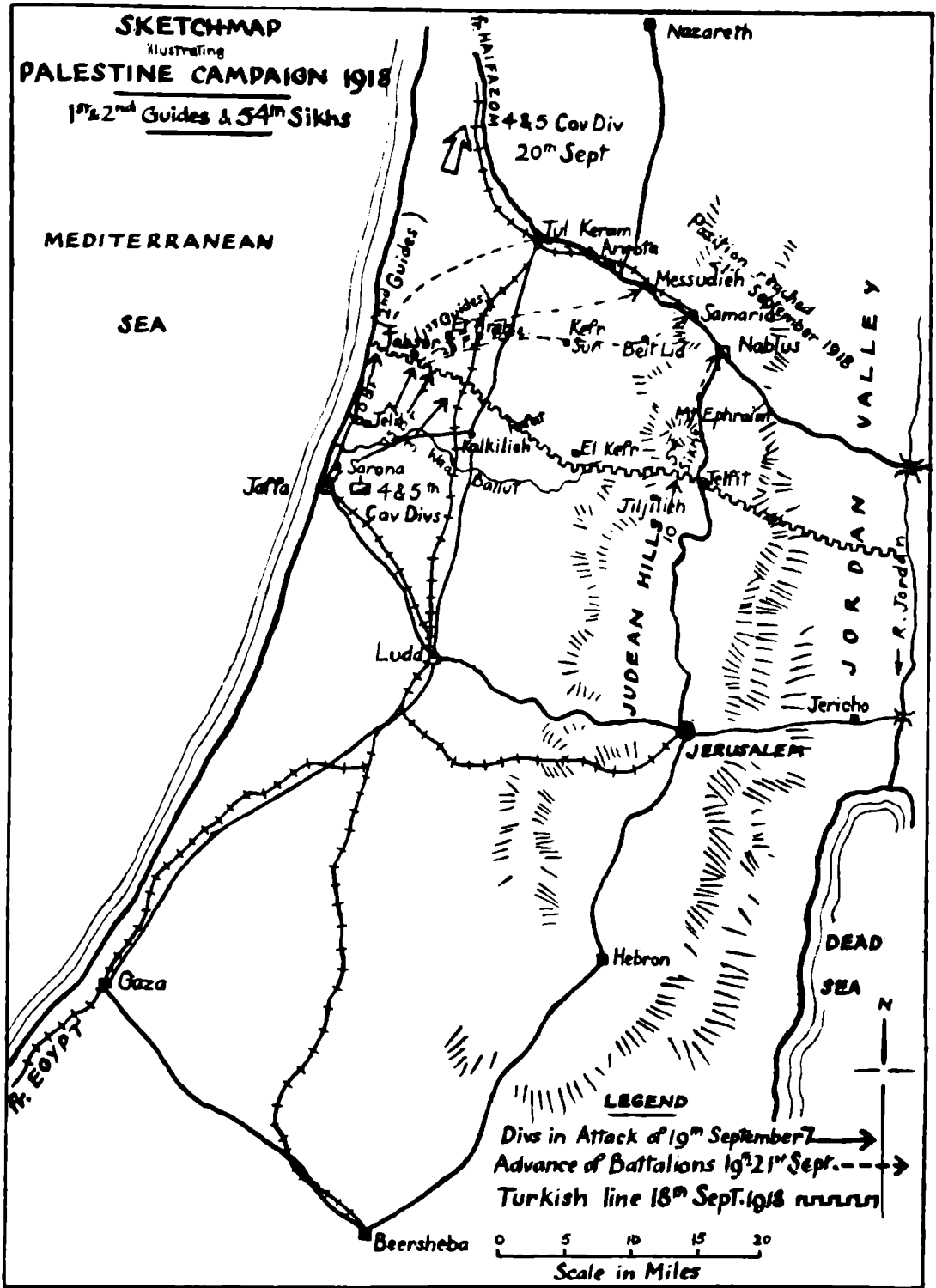
The Turks appeared quite aware that an attack was impending and put down an immediate artillery concentration on the very nullah where Battalion Headquarters was located. This caused the sides of the nullah to collapse on to the crowd of mules and personnel there, killing seven mules, destroying much equipment and causing a number of casualties.

As the attack commenced, "D" Company suffered severely, losing 56 men during the initial advance. "C" Company, under Captain Molony, coming up filled the gaps, and together with "B" Company, closely followed by "A," charged through the wire into the Turkish trenches. The first objective was quickly captured by Zero + 10.

On the right "D" and "C" Companies now went on to the second objective without a pause, but "B" and "A" Companies were momentarily checked by a deep ravine and enemy wire. Approaching the second objective, Captain Kemm was wounded in the neck, but refused to give up. Here also poor Captain Neave was killed in a gallant bayonet charge. His death was a great loss to the

* See page 117.

† The successful hoodwinking of the Turks in regard to this concentration and the point of attack are described on page 118.



Battalion, having been its keen and popular adjutant ever since it was raised.

“C” and “A” Companies now taking the lead, the third (and final) battalion objective was taken by Zero + 70 minutes, and the 2/19th London Regiment passed through to carry on the advance. Little or no further opposition was now met, and the 179th Brigade, followed by the cavalry, went through into the open country.

The 2nd Guides captured 250 prisoners during the battle (including 30 Germans), also five machine-guns and three trench mortars. Their losses were Captain A. L. W. Neave and 17 rank and file killed; 6 died of wounds; Captain A. H. Kemm, 3 J.C.Os. and 109 rank and file wounded; and 10 men missing.

On the 20th the Brigade moved towards Tul Keram and on the 21st marched up a valley strewn with dead Turks and animals, the result of an air attack. Next day the Battalion paraded for an inspection by the Divisional Commander, who offered his hearty congratulations, saying that it was the capture of the first three positions without a check that enabled the cavalry to pass through and prevent the Turks forming a rear-guard. This indeed was no less than the truth, and the 2nd Guides had good reason to be proud of their share in the achievement.

Post-war services of the 2nd Guides in Syria, Egypt and Palestine, 1919-22

The Division did not take part in the long pursuit to Syria described above in the narrative of the 1st Guides, but moved south again, and on the 26th camped near El Jebil, ten miles north of Jaffa. Here it remained doing salvage work till 16th November, when it moved to Alexandria.

On 20th November 1918, the following well-deserved awards were announced:

Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Bogle, the D.S.O.

Captains C. W. Molony and A. H. Kemm, the M.C.

Subadar Fauja Singh, a bar to the I.D.S.M., and the same decoration to five rank and file.

The Battalion remained at Alexandria for the next four months. At the end of March 1919, unrest in Egypt involved the Battalion in Internal Security duties, and four detachments varying from 50 to 135 were sent off in aid of the civil power.

This however did not last long, and on 2nd April the Battalion moved to Syria by sea and was brigaded with the 1st Guides in a summer camp near Tripoli. They were now in the 21st Brigade of the 7th Division, about whom much has been written earlier in this volume, and the two Battalions were able to see a good deal of each other, for they were located at camps only ten miles apart.

The summer and autumn passed uneventfully, and on 13th December the Battalion moved by sea back to Egypt, remaining there on garrison duty in

detachments up the Nile till April 1920, when it was moved back to Cairo and remained there till the spring of 1921. It then moved back to Palestine and was located at Roshpina, north of the Sea of Galilee, with detachments at Nazareth, Beisan and Semakh.

Lieutenant-Colonel Bogle now went on leave pending retirement. He had served 27 years in the Guides and had trained and commanded the 2nd Battalion throughout its active service. The best wishes of all ranks went with him.

On 8th August 1921, Lieutenant-Colonel Hector Campbell, D.S.O., M.V.O., arrived from the 1st Guides where he had been in temporary command and assumed command of the 2nd Guides. He was to be the first Commandant of the 10th Training Battalion when the 2nd Guides assumed that role under the new organization.*

In the meantime however, the Battalion had a further eight months to spend overseas, the last four being served in the Cairo area, as disturbances had once more broken out in Egypt.

Finally, in April 1922, the 2nd Guides at last returned to Mardan, and on 10th May the Battalion assumed its new role as Training Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment.

It had won golden opinions from all during its service overseas and many were the appreciative messages it received.

It had well earned the privilege of permanent retention as a Regular unit in the Indian Army under the new organization, and its story is continued in Chapter X.

The 3rd Battalion Guides Infantry, Formation and Early Days

The 3rd Guides was raised at Mardan on 22nd October 1917, by Lieutenant-Colonel W. Villiers-Stuart of the 1/5th Gurkha Rifles. The nucleus was 7 J.C.Os. and 30 rank and file from the 1st Guides Depot and 6 J.C.Os. and 30 other ranks from the 2nd Battalion depot. Thirty more old soldiers returned from overseas were added later.

The composition was a half-company each of Sikhs and Dogras and one company each of Gurkhas, Pathans and P.Ms.

On 15th March 1918, Major J. Clementi arrived from the Guides Cavalry and took over command from Lieutenant-Colonel Villiers-Stuart. The Battalion remained in Mardan training for the next twelve months. Thus it was never given a chance to fight in the First World War, but its opportunities came in the Third Afghan War, which broke out in the following year, and later in the severe fighting of the Waziristan campaign of 1920.

The Third Afghan War arose after the murder in Afghanistan on 22nd

* See Chapter X, The Regimental Centre.

February 1919, of the Amir Habibullah. He had been a firm friend of the Government of British India. His son Amanullah, who had made himself unpopular by his attempts to introduce Western customs, sought to divert attention and pander to the war party in Afghanistan (who had placed him on the throne) by an invasion of India. Here he hoped to find support from political malcontents in the country and turbulent border tribesmen whose leaders he summoned to Kabul.

On 5th May 1919, the Field Army, organized in two forces, the North-West Frontier Force and the Baluchistan Force, was mobilized; and within forty-eight hours of receiving orders on the 6th the 3rd Guides entrained for Kohat. The following officers accompanied it: Lieutenant-Colonel J. Clementi, commanding; Major D. Bainbridge, second-in-command; Captain C. W. Free, adjutant; Lieutenant H. R. M. Jeffries, quartermaster; Captain Pritchard and Lieutenant Robins ("A" Company), Captain Jameson and Lieutenant Bourke ("B" Company), Captain Knight and Lieutenant Fraser ("C" Company), and Captain Ferguson and Lieutenant Harrison ("D" Company).

From Kohat the Battalion moved on to Thal (Kurram) on 15th May, and after three days spent in making the perimeter camp there marched on to Parachinar, where it formed part of the 60th Mobile Brigade.

The Third Afghan War

The general situation now was that while our main forces were advancing via the Khyber on Dakka, the Brigade in Parachinar was given the task of dealing with any Afghan concentrations in the Peiwar Kotal area. These amounted to two enemy battalions on the Kotal and three more with artillery in support at Ali Khel. While the Kurram Militia watched these from Ali Mangal at the foot of the pass, the main threat to the Kurram developed from another direction.

The Afghan Commander in Khost, General Nadir Khan,* advanced from Matun down the Kaitu on Spinwam and Thal, thereby intercepting the communications of the Brigade in Parachinar. By 27th May his force of a brigade of Afghan regulars with two 3.8-inch German howitzers (brought on elephants) and a large following of tribesmen reached Thal city and besieged the fort. Nadir Khan's guns outranged the mountain artillery in the fort and set fire to the buildings, but the Afghans launched no attack.

The Kohat Brigade under Brigadier-General Dyer, advancing meanwhile, arrived on 1st June, attacked and defeated Nadir Khan and relieved the garrison of Thal. The Afghan force retired to Matun and remained there.

While this was happening, the Battalion in Parachinar took part in a highly successful raid on the Afghan post of Amir Thana on the border. Operating

* He became Amir of Afghanistan in 1929.

on the flank of the attack, "A" Company and the Kurram Militia put to flight a band of 150 tribesmen, inflicting 20 casualties without loss. The Afghan post surrendered.

June was now spent in reconnaissances with a view to the capture of the Peiwar and an advance into Afghanistan, but air attack on Jellalabad and Kabul brought about an Afghan capitulation early in July 1919, and the war came to an end. The unrest, however, stirred up among the tribes by the war persisted for a while in Kurram, and the Battalion went out on 29th July with a column to deal with an Orakzai lashkar near Sadda and salvage an aeroplane that had forced-landed in the area. This was successfully accomplished in intense heat, the enemy retiring without fighting when shelled by the artillery.

Waziristan, 1919-20

In September the 3rd Guides were moved to Tank, via Darya Khan and Dera Ismail Khan, arriving at the end of the month. Here the insubordination of the tribes of Waziristan caused by the Afghan War was the forerunner of the major campaign of 1920 and the ultimate occupation of the country by the establishment of cantonments at Razmak and Mirali.

The Battalion was soon in action. A mixed company was called out to intercept some raiders on 1st October, and six days later another under Captain Ferguson joined a column sent out to Kaur Bridge to bury dead and rescue wounded from an action there the previous day. When this task was complete and the withdrawal began, the flank and rear-guards composed of Bhopal Lancers and 109th Infantry were ambushed, causing heavy casualties. The Lancers retired, leaving the flank of the column exposed, and Captain Ferguson's company had to hold off the enemy and cover the withdrawal of the column. Captain Ferguson, leading the company very gallantly, was twice wounded and finally killed in this action, bayonets having to be used at one stage of the fight.

The 3rd Guides suffered heavily in this savage encounter, losing Captain Ferguson and two men killed, 22 wounded and 26 missing believed killed.

Operations were now for some days prevented by a series of severe dust storms, but on 24th October a column under Colonel Clementi, with the whole Battalion, the 2/102nd Grenadiers and two mountain guns, returned to Kaur Bridge and recovered and buried the bodies of all who had been killed in the above action. A jirgah was now held, at which the Battalion furnished the customary guard of honour; but the Mahsuds continued obdurate and large-scale operations had to be undertaken.

Accordingly, by 13th December 1919, the Derajat Column of the strength of a Division was concentrated in the Tank-Jandola area preparatory to the advance up the Tank Zam. Meanwhile, the Battalion was not again engaged in operations until 11th December, when, as part of a column to protect road

building for the projected advance, it became involved in a sharp rear-guard action when the withdrawal was closely followed up by Mahsuds. The retiring rear party at one stage became outflanked, and Second-Lieutenant N. D. Douglas and one sepoy were killed; whereupon Captain Knight immediately counter-attacked with such men as he could collect and recovered Douglas's body.

Further, a piquet was also ambushed while withdrawing and the J.C.O. in command and four sepoy were killed. Eventually, with assistance from two companies of the 2/76th Punjabis, the rear-guard finally reached camp by 6 p.m. The Battalion lost Second-Lieutenant Douglas, one J.C.O. and five men killed, eight men wounded and one missing.

The 3rd Guides were again called out the next day to accompany the 68th Brigade with two mountain guns in the task of securing the Sarkai Ridge as a site for a permanent piquet. The Battalion, however, was not seriously involved on this occasion.

In January the advance of the Derajat Column commenced. The capture of the Ahnai Tangi* and the battle of Asa Khan with the severe fighting that now took place broke the tribal resistance, but at the very heavy cost of 382 casualties. It was a severe campaign with continuous sniping, fought in difficult country in severe weather conditions.

The 3rd Battalion rejoined the Derajat Column on 28th January and took part in the capture and piqueting of the Berari Tangi, but serious resistance was not offered here and the Battalion suffered only five men wounded by rifle fire.

The Battalion now took its share of the protective tasks, but the Derajat Column had no further major engagements. It reached Piazza Raghza early in February, where a further jirgah was held and the Mahsuds were told that Makin and Kaniguram would be destroyed and punitive measures would continue until all fines had been paid and rifles handed in.

On 15th February the 43rd Brigade group commenced operations leading up to the destruction of Makin, the 3rd Guides being employed with the rear-guard to piquet the large village of Marobi. The work continued till the 29th, by when 51 fortified towers and 450 important houses had been destroyed.

The next move was on Kaniguram from camp at Dwa Toi, where the Brigade had withdrawn; and on 2nd March the 3rd Guides and 3/11th Sikhs, supported by mountain artillery, moved out with Pioneers and Sappers and Miners to establish permanent piquets on the Kaniguram road. The operations were heavily interfered with by continuous sniping, but the piquets were successfully established. The Battalion lost 15 (killed and wounded) on this day.

The advance to Ladha *en route* to Kaniguram was successfully com-

* These actions are described in *The History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, the companion volume to this History.

pleted, the Battalion doing advanced guard most efficiently but losing eight men wounded.

The Battalion remained at Ladha doing the very dangerous task of providing the road and camp piquets throughout April, and on 3rd May left the Derajat Column. On its departure General Skeen, the commander, personally bade farewell in a speech complimenting the Battalion on its work with the Column.

Return to Mardan and Disbandment

The 3rd Guides did not at once leave Waziristan, but were engaged in convoy and other protective tasks in the Jandola area till 14th August 1920, when it left for Mardan, arriving there on the 24th.

Of the Battalion's last days there is little to record. The Battalion was allowed to waste away as men were demobilized or transferred to other battalions, and finally disbandment took place on 2nd August 1921.

Although the 3rd Guides came into existence too late to take part in the First World War, they fought with valour and efficiency in the severe post-war campaign in Waziristan, worthily upholding the traditions of their Corps and the Frontier Force.

CHAPTER VIII

THE 52ND SIKHS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Drafts to maintain Linked Battalions—Action on the Dande Plain, Waziristan—Mesopotamia, 1918—Kurdistan and Iraq—The Mazurkha Gorge.

Drafts to maintain Linked Battalions

ON the outbreak of the First World War, to the intense disappointment of all ranks, the 52nd Sikhs were detailed for the protection of the North-West Frontier.

As in the case of the Guides and the 54th (see Chapters V and IX) it soon became apparent that the Battalion would be called upon to keep up to strength its linked battalions, the 59th Scinde Rifles, F.F., which had proceeded to France with the Lahore Division, and the 56th, which went to Egypt in November 1914. The first draft for the 59th Rifles left the Battalion on 24th October 1914. It consisted of Captain F. S. Hore and Jemadar Mangal Singh, with four sepoy as orderlies. Neither of these officers survived the war. Captain Hore was mentioned in despatches for gallantry in the field, and was killed in action in France on 12th March 1915. Jemadar Mangal Singh received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal and promotion to Subadar. He was wounded on 26th April 1915, and died at his home on 8th June 1916 as a result of his wound. Of the four sepoy comprising this draft, Sunder Singh was killed in 1917 with the 59th Rifles, having gained the Indian Distinguished Service Medal and promotion to naik, and Shibbu was killed in France with the 59th Rifles in 1915. This draft was followed by one 75 strong, under Subadar Chattar Singh.

Between October 1914 and the end of 1917, the cream of the Battalion had been sent away overseas to reinforce these linked battalions, a very large majority going to the 59th.

The narrative of these two Battalions in the First World War are fully recorded in *The History of the Frontier Force Rifles*; and since in no case did a sub-unit of the Battalion become incorporated in either of them intact, as did the Guides Company in the 57th Wilde's Rifles, no portion of the story of these reinforcements finds a place here.

The extent, however, to which the Battalion contributed merits recording and the following figures are of interest.

The drafts dispatched between 24th October 1914 and December 1917 when the Battalion at last received orders for active service, were as follows:

Officers	..	..	..	..	..	..	14
J.C.Os.	..	..	..	..	..	..	10
Non-Commissioned Officers	..	..	..	..	..	..	49
Sepoys	..	..	..	..	..	..	645

Of these nearly 50 per cent. became casualties :

Officers.—Killed: Captain P. S. Hore, with 59th Rifles; Lieutenant L. B. Burgess, I.A.R.O., with 59th Rifles; Lieutenant G. D. Mackay, I.A.R.O., with 56th Rifles; Lieutenant R. M. D'Ombraïn, I.A.R.O., with 53rd Sikhs; Lieutenant L. G. Owen, I.A.R.O., with 116th Mahrattas. Wounded: Major C. G. Ames, with Imperial Service Troops; Captain J. R. Wynter, with 59th Rifles; Captain J. G. B. Gordon, with 59th Rifles; Lieutenant W. I. P. Feltham, with 56th Rifles; Lieutenant H. D'A. Bannerman, with 129th Baluchis; Lieutenant St. J. A. Shelverton, I.A.R.O., with 59th Rifles.

J.C.Os. (all with 59th Rifles).—Killed: Subadar Rakam Din. Wounded: Subadar Chattar Singh; Subadar Bachittar Singh; Subadar Bahadur Shah (twice); Jemadar Mangal Singh; Jemadar Sahnu (shell-shock).

Other Ranks.—Killed 78; died 8; wounded 227.

Needless to say, since no form of National Service or conscription was introduced into British India (in either World War) and all military service was voluntary, the most intense and comprehensive recruiting campaign was instituted and the Battalion pursued this most energetically. A measure of its success may be gathered from the following message from the Adjutant-General in July 1915: "I am directed to request that you will convey to the 52nd Sikhs, F.F., His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief's great appreciation of the manner in which it has responded to the calls made upon it for drafts to its linked battalions. With wide conception of the true situation, which necessarily entails sacrifices by individual units for the good of the whole army, this battalion has given of its best, notwithstanding the fact that by doing so, it has possibly lessened for a period its own efficiency."

At the same time the strain on the Battalion and the difficulties to be overcome increased and are well described thus in its records: "Towards the end of 1915, less than 300 men, out of a total strength of 1,200, had between three and ten years' service. The flower of the Battalion had gone, and what remained was composed largely of old soldiers and recruits. Continuous service in posts and on columns made any form of training difficult, indeed for considerable periods impossible. The standard of the recruits began in time to deteriorate, as the drain on manpower increased. Outpost and guard duties were severe. The insanitary condition of posts, the bad water and scarcity of fresh meat and vegetables affected the health of the men, and malaria was prevalent. The heavy

demands for non-commissioned officers overseas entailed the promotion of immature and inexperienced men in every rank.”

This in fact was the picture in all Battalions that remained in India, and was even more marked in the Second World War, when training became more complicated with the arrival of universal mechanization and a multiplicity of weapons.

To return to the story of the Battalion's doings, it suffered severely in August and September 1914, in a cholera epidemic in Bannu and the Tochi, losing two officers who died of the disease—Captain A. Marjoribanks and Lieutenant L. B. Irwin.

Action on the Dande Plain, Waziristan

As has been remarked in an earlier chapter, the outbreak of war and the withdrawal of troops from India gravely impaired the peace of tribal territory. The Battalion was now in Bannu and the Tochi, and on 9th December a lashkar of Zadrans, joined by the tribes living to the north of Miranshah, attacked that station, the headquarters of the North Waziristan Militia (now called the Tochi Scouts).

The Bannu Movable Column, which included 200 rifles of the 52nd Sikhs, was dispatched to the scene, and arrived on 14th December 1914, to find that the tribesmen had withdrawn. The Battalion was immediately concentrated at Miranshah, where it joined the Emergency Column. A depot was left at Bannu.

During January there was continual unrest, and lashkars of various strength were on the move over the Macha Madda Khel country, Southern Khost and the tract between Khost and the Tochi Road, west of Miranshah. The North Waziristan Militia encountered one of these lashkars in the neighbourhood of Spina Khaisora, and in the action which followed Captain Jotham of the 51st Sikhs was killed, afterwards being awarded posthumously the Victoria Cross for extreme gallantry.*

The Battalion, as part of the Bannu Movable Column, was constantly moving out from Miranshah, but as the political intelligence was generally faulty and always belated, the Column failed to encounter any tribal concentration during these excursions.

On 26th March 1915, however, the Battalion took part in a very successful engagement with a tribal lashkar of Khostwals, Zadrans and Wazirs on the hills skirting the Dande Plain (north of Miranshah). This resulted in the total rout of the enemy. What happened was as follows. On the morning of 25th March, whilst the Battalion was on parade near camp, a report was received from a piquet, about 2,000 yards north of camp, that a lashkar was collecting on all

* See Appendix IX.

sides and was engaged in building sangars. A detachment of the 10th Jats was sent out to withdraw this piquet, and this was successfully accomplished. Throughout the day the tribesmen, emboldened by this withdrawal, collected and increased in numbers on the hills around the Dande plain, and the construction of the sangars continued. At nightfall their fires, which in one direction were as close as 1,000 yards from the camp, illuminated the country around and disclosed a semi-circular position stretching around the northern portion of the plain.

The Force at Miranshah now mustered the 25th Cavalry, F.F., two infantry Battalions—the 52nd Sikhs and the 10th Jats—the 29th Mountain Battery and the North Waziristan Militia, the whole under Brigadier-General V. B. Fane. He decided to attack the lashkar the next day and divided the force into three Columns.

Column "A."—One section 29th Mountain Battery; 100 rifles 52nd Sikhs, F.F. (escort to guns); North Waziristan Militia. This Column assembled in the Militia Fort and moved out the same night (25th/26th) to a position in the hills about two and a half miles north of the road Miranshah-Datta Khel, in rear of the lashkar, thus getting astride of the enemy's line of retreat without being observed by them.

Column "B."—One section 29th Mountain Battery; Headquarters and two companies 10th Jats; three companies 52nd Sikhs, F.F. (less the escort found for Column "A"). This Column was detailed to carry out the frontal attack on the enemy position.

Column "C" (in Reserve).—One section 29th Mountain Battery; two companies 10th Jats; Headquarters and one company 52nd Sikhs, F.F.

The following morning, 26th March, Column "B" advanced to the attack. The 52nd Sikhs moved against the enemy's main sangars to the north-west of the camp. The 10th Jats were on the left of the 52nd Sikhs, whilst the Cavalry operated wide on the right. Under cover of an accurate fire from the mountain guns, Column "B" advanced rapidly and seized the first objective without loss. The 10th Jats remained in possession of the hill to the west and covered the further advance of the 52nd Sikhs, who pressed on in close touch with the retiring tribesmen and inflicted heavy casualties on them. This pursuit by the Battalion drove the enemy on to the concealed position held by Column "A," which opened heavy fire from close range.

The combined pressure of Column "A," the three companies of the 52nd in Column "B" and the 25th Cavalry turned the retreat of the enemy into a disorderly rout, and they only escaped complete annihilation by taking refuge in deep dalas and broken country across the border.

The strength of the tribesmen was estimated at 5,000. Their loss amounted to about 1,000, of which between 200 and 300 were killed. The total casualties to the force were one officer 25th Cavalry, killed and two sepoy wounded.

Some first-line transport animals were also hit. The Battalion sustained no loss.

The success of the action was mainly attributed to the rapid and vigorous advance and untiring pursuit of the three companies of the Battalion in Column "B," which drove the enemy in disorder against the position held by Column "A." Two tribal standards which were captured during the day are now in the Officers' Mess of the 2nd Sikhs (now 4th Battalion).

This action is a good example of a well-planned and vigorously executed Frontier operation, the salutary effects of which lasted throughout the rest of the First World War, as these particular tribes gave no further trouble during that time. When their turbulence both before and afterwards, particularly in the days of Faqir of Ipi and the early period of the Second World War, is remembered, this was no mean achievement.

The Battalion remained at Miranshah until October 1915, being occupied during April and May in the construction of a new entrenched camp, which was then somewhat sardonically styled "Profaneabad," after its originator, Major-General Fane. The Battalion received the thanks of this officer for the hard work it had carried out on the construction of this camp in intense heat and discomfort.

The 52nd remained in the Bannu area till the summer of 1917, when it moved to Peshawar. Shortly before the move it had to deal (as part of the Movable Column) on two occasions with small gangs of Mahsud raiders. Bannu had for some time been harassed by such parties, who had always escaped. On 13th January 1917, the Movable Column was called out with Captain Grylls in command. It consisted of a squadron 25th Cavalry, F.F., one section 30th Mountain Battery, one company 52nd Sikhs, and 100 Frontier Constabulary.

Seven Mahsud raiders were located in a cave on the left bank of the Kurram river, opposite Kurram Garhi. Observation was difficult, as the cave could only be seen from the edge of the right bank of the river, where observers came under accurate fire from the trapped but unseen Mahsuds in the cave. The mouth of the cave was shelled and engaged by rifle fire, but without effect on the desperate men at bay within. Finally, a large head of dry jowar was placed in the mouth of the cave and ignited, and the raiders were smoked out like ferrets. All were shot down as they rushed out. No raider escaped.

One sepoy in the Battalion was slightly wounded during the day.

A similar successful action against a gang of nineteen Mahsud raiders took place on 15th March. The composition of the Movable Column was similar to that on the first occasion. Major C. R. Wilkinson, 52nd Sikhs, was in command. Once again the raiders were located in caves near Bannu. A lesson was learnt from the last affair, and bombs were carried. The raiders were successfully bombed out of the caves, and all were captured.

Five months after the Battalion's arrival in Peshawar, it received orders for active service overseas.

Mesopotamia, 1918

The 52nd sailed for Basra from Karachi on 14th December 1917, and arrived there on the 21st, with a strength of 13 officers, 18 J.C.Os., 1,041 rank and file and 75 followers.

The following officers accompanied the Battalion :

Lieutenant-Colonel C. P. Wynter

Major C. R. Wilkinson

Captain W. M. Grylls

*Captain P. Grant (Guides)

Captain H. C. S. Minchin

Captain C. E. Stuart-Prince (59th Rifles)

Lieutenant W. F. Campbell

Lieutenant A. M. Lewis

Lieutenant H. C. S. Heath

Lieutenant W. A. Lyon

Lieutenant C. W. G. Thorpe

Lieutenant T. T. Scott, I.A.R.O. (I.C.S.)

Lieutenant N. Maitra, I.M.S.

The Battalion arrived at Basra on the early morning of 21st December, where it transferred to barges and was towed upstream to Nahr Umar, which was reached the following day. Chapter VI has told the story of the Mesopotamian Campaign up to the end of 1917, when the Meerut and Lahore Divisions left that theatre for Palestine after the Turks had been driven north of Tekrit and our position consolidated.

The victorious British Indian forces in their advance from Kut to Baghdad and beyond had been commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Maude, but this able leader was struck down with cholera and died in Baghdad during November 1917, after drinking a cup of native milk that he was too courteous to refuse. † He was succeeded by Lieutenant-General Sir W. Marshall, the commander of the 13th Division.

The 52nd joined the 54th Indian Infantry Brigade in the 10th Indian Division which was then forming under the command of Major-General Fanshawe. It was put to work at Azizieh on construction of the Kut-Baghdad railway, a task it performed till mid-February 1918. During this period it suffered greatly from cold and lack of the 'ghi' ration.

On 15th February the Battalion moved to Baghdad for training till 9th March, when the Division moved to Baled. Here the Battalion was on outpost duty. The Division had relieved the 3rd Lahore Division (which went to Palestine) in the 1st Corps.

The forces in Mesopotamia were now organized in two Army Corps, the 1st and the 3rd.

* Killed when commanding the Guides in Waziristan in 1937 (Chapter XI).

† *History of the Great War*, Buchan, p. 72.

At the beginning of May 1918 the 3rd Corps commenced its advance from Kizil Robat on Kirkuk. The 18th Division was ordered to neutralize the Turkish forces on the Tigris, and to prevent them sending reinforcements to the Kirkuk area. The 54th Brigade constituted Column "C," which was ordered to concentrate on the right bank of the River Adhaim to advance up the Tigris.

On 2nd May the Battalion (less "D" Company which had been detached for road work) joined Column "C." "D" Company rejoined the following morning at 4.30 a.m. after a march of twenty miles. An hour later they moved off with the Column to Mifragi, a distance of fifteen miles. They completed the day in excellent spirits, having marched thirty-five miles without an appreciable halt. On the 4th the Column reached Samara.

The 52nd Sikhs, together with the 106th Hazara Pioneers and No. 2 Company, Sappers and Miners, were now ordered to push ahead to Mohammed el Hassan, north of Tekrit. Leaving early on the morning of the 5th, they reached this place the following day, halting at Qantara for the night 5th/6th. On the 7th a defensive position was taken up at Mohammed el Hassan, covering Tekrit, and reconnoitring patrols were sent out. Column "C" arrived the same day. Heavy rain had fallen during the advance, and the men were on half rations.

The combined advance of the 17th and 18th Divisions up the Tigris had the desired effect of distracting the attention of the Turks from the operations of the 3rd Corps. On 15th May, its mission being accomplished, Column "C" withdrew to Daur, and reached Samara on the 17th.

Operations were now suspended for the hot weather. The Battalion moved into an excellent hot weather camp at Samara on 2nd May. It was well situated on a ridge high above the river-bed, open to the breeze and generally cool and free from dust. This camp was occupied until the beginning of October 1918. Whilst there, in spite of heavy duties, convoys, working parties and detachments, much valuable training was carried on.

Early in October, preparations were made for an advance on Mosul, and it was necessary first to drive the Turks from the strong position they held in the Fatha Gorge, thirty-five miles north of the British railhead at Tekrit.

This position was one of great natural strength on a range of hills through which the Tigris cuts a gap. The Battalion was the spear point of a flank attack by the 54th Brigade, along the hills on to the Turkish left, while the 53rd Brigade made a frontal assault.

The enemy, however, evacuated the position and it was found unoccupied by the advancing troops.

Plans were now completed for the round-up of the shaken Turkish forces, the majority of which were located on the right bank of the Tigris, in the Humr-Ain Dibs-Balalij area, whilst to the east of the Tigris a small hostile force held

the north bank of the Lesser Zab river. The 17th Division now moved up the right bank of the Tigris against the bulk of the Turkish Army. On the 25th October the 7th Cavalry Brigade crossed the Lesser Zab, the enemy having withdrawn. On the same day the 53rd Brigade advanced to the Lesser Zab and established a bridgehead.

At 8 a.m. on the 25th the 52nd Sikhs left Fatha with the 54th Brigade, and bivouacked near the Artillery, about six miles south of the Lesser Zab, on the left bank of the Tigris, when the operations of the 17th Division on the right bank were clearly discernible, the troops being observed to be under a heavy and accurate fire.

On the 26th the Battalion in Brigade crossed the Lesser Zab. Several shells fell among "D" Company, two platoons of which formed the advanced guard, but no casualties were sustained.

On the same day, the 11th Cavalry Brigade, under Brigadier-General R. A. Cassells,* crossed the Tigris and established itself facing south at Huwaish, thus effectively cutting off the Turkish force from Mosul.

By the following morning the Turks opposing the 17th Division had withdrawn north to the vicinity of Sherqat. On the afternoon of the 28th October the 17th Division drove the enemy out of a position south of Sherqat, and continued the pursuit during the night.

At midnight 29th/30th the Battalion, with the 54th Brigade, marched at very short notice a distance of twenty-three miles, from the bridgehead on the Lesser Zab to a point on the left bank of the Tigris opposite Sherqat, which was reached at 10 a.m.

The end had come. The enemy on the right bank, pursued by the 17th Division was in a hopeless situation. The passage across the Tigris was barred by the 53rd Brigade, with the 54th Brigade in reserve, while two Cavalry Brigades blocked the road back to Mosul. To the west lay the desert.

At 6.30 a.m. on the 30th October 1918, a flag of truce was sent in by the enemy, and during the morning information was received that the Turks had surrendered.

The 54th Brigade was now to form the infantry of a flying column with two Cavalry Brigades to capture Mosul, but on 1st November the news of the armistice with Turkey was received and the column advanced by easy stages and occupied Mosul, which the Turks had evacuated on the 9th and 10th.

As the Battalion moved into billets in the Mosul school, the news of the Armistice with Germany was received.

In addition to the officers who embarked with the Battalion, the following also saw service with the 52nd Sikhs during the campaign :

* Later General Sir Robert Cassells, K.C.B., Commander-in-Chief in India.

Major F. H. James, M.C. (104th Rifles)
 Captain F. M. Moore*
 Captain R. G. Woodward, M.C.
 Captain H. D'A. Bannerman
 Lieutenant O. Andersson
 Lieutenant E. St. M. Brett (51st Sikhs, F.F.)
 Lieutenant J. Watson

Kurdistan and Iraq

The Battalion soon settled comfortably in Mosul. During November 1918, a good river-side billet had been allotted as an Officers' Mess and quarters, which were retained throughout the lengthy stay of the Battalion in Mosul.† Electric lights and fans were installed. In January 1919, the men moved into the old Turkish barracks.

During the winter the Battalion provided a number of detachments at important towns and on the line of communication.

In March Major-General Fanshawe, on handing over command, issued an order thanking all ranks for their continuous good work, and congratulating them on the part they had taken in the brilliant finish of the campaign.

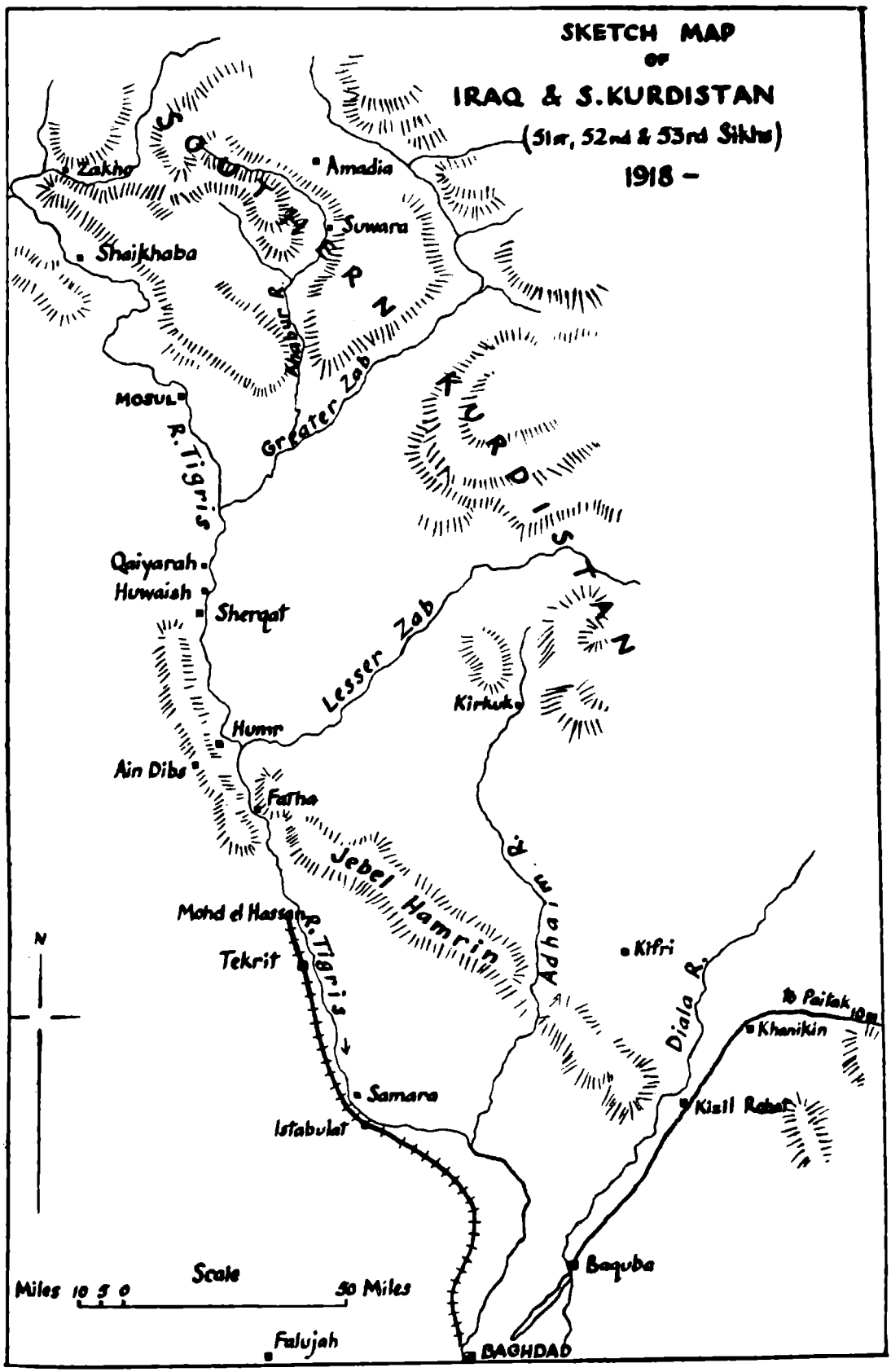
Meanwhile, unrest amongst the Kurds along the Mesopotamian frontier, fostered by Turkish propaganda, became acute, and aimed at Kurdish independence. In April 1919, Captain Pearson, the Assistant Political Officer at Zakho, was murdered and a small convoy was attacked, suffering some loss. In July the situation deteriorated, and on the night of 14th/15th July the gendarmes at Amadia, in Kurdistan, about sixty miles north of Mosul, mutinied. They massacred their Commanding Officer (Captain McDonald), the Assistant Political agent (Captain Wylly), the Political Clerk (Sergeant Troup) and an Indian signaller, and looted the Treasury and all Government stores. On the 16th Lieutenant-Colonel Leachman, the Political Officer, on approaching Amadia with an escort of the 1/39th Garhwalis, was attacked and forced to withdraw with some casualties fighting a rearguard action. Christian villages in the Amadia valley were then looted, and the line of communication was also raided.

A column under Brigadier-General Nightingale was at once formed to undertake punitive measures against the recalcitrant Kurdish tribes inhabiting the country between the Greater Zab and the Khabur rivers. This column, designated "Nightcol," concentrated at Suwara, and by the 30th July consisted of:

* Major-General F. M. Moore, C.S.I., C.I.E. (See Chapter XXIII and Appendix VIII).

† The street leading out of the main thoroughfare, Cassels Street, to this billet was named Sikh Street after the 52nd Sikhs.

SKETCH MAP
 OF
 IRAQ & S. KURDISTAN
 (51st, 52nd & 53rd Sighs)
 1918 -



34th Mountain Battery (less one section):
Two sections No. 8 Company, Sappers and Miners;
Two companies 1/39th Garhwal Rifles;
52nd Sikhs, F.F.;
1/7th Gurkha Rifles;
No. 238 Machine Gun Company (less one section);
Ancillary detachments.

A similar column, termed "Lumbcol," under Lieutenant-Colonel F. G. E. Lumb, D.S.O., M.C., 1/39th Garhwal Rifles, concentrated at Zakho for operations in that neighbourhood.

Before continuing with the description of the operations which now followed, and in which the Battalion suffered heavy losses, the reader should understand the nature of the country. About sixty miles north of Mosul, the bare plains of Mesopotamia give way to the mountain ranges of Kurdistan, which rise from 5,000 to 9,000 feet. The foothills are covered with vines and the higher slopes with dense mountain oak as far as the snow line. Snow remains in many places throughout the summer. Between these tangled masses of hills lie fertile valleys where water is plentiful, crops are abundant and fruit grows almost wild. Roads are non-existent, and all operations were consequently based on pack mule transport. Villages are usually situated in gorges, tucked under high hills, which had to be piqueted before the villages could be occupied. Even the posting of piquets failed to prevent the incessant sniping from the jungle of mountain oak on the hillsides, where the ideal cover afforded ample protection.

On 31st July 1919, at 9 p.m., the column left camp for a night march against a village in the Amadia hills which was the home of two notables, Sheikh Bahaddin and Raof, his brother, and was considered the centre of all hostile propaganda in the district. The night march was a trying one. Owing to the thickly wooded broken hilly country, each unit became separated in the dark which caused much delay. Some hours late, the column concentrated at the appointed place at about 5 a.m. The Battalion was the first to deploy for the attack, which was done on arrival without any halt for rest or preparation. "A" Company, under Lieutenant Beckerson, moving at great speed, climbed to the top of the Sher Amadia Range, north-east of Amadia, and cut off the villagers' line of retreat, while "B" Company, under Captain Lewis, closed the tracks through the lower foothills to the east. The 1/7th Gurkha Rifles ringed the village to the west. In spite of the initial delay, the village was completely surprised, and Sheikh Bahaddin was captured, though Raof was found to have left the previous day. Their residences were demolished, and 50 rifles, 900 head of sheep and goats, and 50 mule-loads of grain were confiscated. Sixteen Kurdish snipers were killed among the rocks, where they were firing on our troops. Nightcol sustained no loss.

After an abortive expedition on 2nd August, the result of incorrect reports by local intelligence personnel, the column moved to Bebadi, which was reached on the 6th, and here a halt was made. Bebadi lies about two miles from Amadia town, at the mouth of a gorge in the Sher Amadia Range.

The Mazurkha Gorge

Throughout the neighbourhood all was reported quiet. The 1/7th Gurkhas had moved along the Sher Amadia range on the 6th and had seen nothing. On the 7th the Brigade Intelligence Officer had reconnoitred up the Bebadi Gorge to the top of the Sher Amadia, without incident. On 8th August the following column left camp before day-break to make a reconnaissance of the Mazurkha Gorge farther to the north-east.

Commander: Major J. D. Shepherd, M.C., R.E.

Troops: One section, Sappers and Miners; one section 34th Mountain Battery (Captain Sims and Lieutenant Dobbs); "B" Company,* 52nd Sikhs, F.F. (Captain A. M. Lewis); Medical Detachment (Captain Matthewson, R.A.M.C.).

-The Mazurkha Gorge is a narrow, precipitous, winding cleft in the Sher Amadia hills, opposite Amadia town, commanded on each side by almost inaccessible hills rising to about 2,000 feet. The bed of the gorge consists of a very steep, rough surface, strewn with huge boulders and, in places, barely a hundred yards wide. It ascends sharply for about 1,300 feet to its northern extremity, where the gorge opens out into steep, grassy slopes, partially covered with scrub, which rise for another 1,300 feet to the crest of the Sher Amadia Range, two miles away. The cliffs on each side of the gorge are honeycombed with caves, which form ideal cover for snipers. The ascent of the gorge takes about forty-five minutes, and the climb to the crest of the Sher Amadia about two hours.

Owing to the political reports that Rashid Beg and his gang were away in another area, the strength of the small column sent out made no provision for the piqueting of the precipitous heights above the gorge—a liberty which any Frontier Force commander would surely have regarded with horror. And he would have been justified, for at about 7 a.m. (so much for the political reports), Rashid Beg and his followers ambushed Major Shepherd's force within the gorge. The two leading platoons, Nos. 5 and 6, were shot down by large bodies of Kurds from the front and from both flanks. Major Shepherd, Captain Lewis, Lieutenant Dobbs and Jemadar Abdulla were killed with this party. Captain Matthewson saved himself by remaining hidden in a cave till rescued at dusk.

* This company was composed half of Dogras and half of Pathans.

The two rear platoons, Nos. 7 and 8, under Jemadar Sahnu, and the guns, under Captain Sims, R.A., managed to extricate themselves from the gorge with loss, and occupied a covering position immediately commanding the entrance to the defile. Owing to casualties amongst the mules and the resultant loss of parts, neither of the guns could be brought into action.*

The firing was heard by General Nightingale in Amadia town and he advised Lieutenant-Colonel Wynter to proceed to the Mazurkha Gorge with all speed with one company 52nd Sikhs, one section 34th Mountain Battery and two guns of No. 238 Machine-Gun Company. This force left camp forthwith, and arrived at the position held by Jemadar Sahnu at about 10 a.m. The remainder of Major Shepherd's column was not visible, and there was complete silence from the gorge.

Reinforcements followed and the western heights were piqueted, but those on the eastern side proved inaccessible and enemy snipers there were partially subdued by artillery fire.

At about 4.30 p.m. "D" Company, under Captain Heath, rushed the mouth of the gorge and advanced to a spot where the bodies of Major Shepherd, Captain Lewis, Lieutenant Dobbs, Jemadar Abdulla and many men of Nos. 5 and 6 Platoons were found. Owing to the lateness of the hour and the return of the Kurds to the scene, the company then withdrew with some difficulty, on account of the heavy sniping from the eastern heights. The company suffered some casualties in the withdrawal, including Subadar Sansar Chand, who was twice wounded but behaved with great gallantry and refused to be attended to. The last bounds of the withdrawal were made under cover of darkness, a few severely wounded men having to be left in the gorge as they could not be evacuated.

The force remained in observation throughout the night. The following morning two platoons of "D" Company under Captain Heath, with Lieutenants Wilder and Bayliss, again moved up the gorge, and found that the enemy had disappeared. By evening the place was cleared of wounded and dead, and the force withdrew to Bebadi Camp, leaving a strong piquet on the heights commanding the gorge.

The Battalion sustained the following casualties in this action:

Killed.—Officers : Captain A. M. Lewis. J.C.Os.: Jemadar Abdulla.
Indian other ranks, 28. Animals, 3.

Wounded.—J.C.Os. : Subadar Sansar Chand (twice); Jemadar Rasila.
Indian other ranks, 42.

As might be expected, a success like this was followed up by the enemy, and Suwara, where the hospital with our wounded was located, was now suddenly attacked on 14th August by a force of about 1,000 Kurds. H.Q. and

* One gun was temporarily out of action for some days, but its lost parts were all subsequently found in the Sher Amadia hills.

two companies of the Battalion were dispatched post-haste to its assistance, and left at 10 a.m. The distance of seventeen miles had to be covered cross-country in fighting formation as the ground was broken and offered much cover to snipers. However, no enemy were encountered, and by evening, when the Battalion arrived, the Kurds had withdrawn.

During the attack on Suwara the Kurds had occupied two important camp piquets and had penetrated the camp up to the guns of a Mountain Battery, causing 89 casualties, of whom 19 were killed. The men wounded in the action in the Mazurkha Gorge were under a heavy fire in the hospital tents, and nine were again wounded whilst lying helpless. The column returned to Bebadî Camp on the 18th August 1919.

From this time on until the end of the year the Battalion was engaged as part of one or other column of all arms, in punitive operations against the hostile Kurdish leaders. These small expeditions were conducted much after the fashion of similar affairs on the North-West Frontier of India, and were uniformly successful with only very few casualties. The villages and houses of the chief hostile leaders were destroyed and by the end of the year their submission was enforced.

On 14th September Major-General R. A. Cassels, now commanding the 18th Division, visited the Battalion and congratulated it on its share in the recent operations.

Active operations ended early in December, and the Battalion withdrew to Mosul by New Year's Day, 1920.

Thus ended a somewhat arduous tour in South Kurdistan, which had lasted for five months. During this period officers had been allowed a kit of only 20 lb., J.C.Os. 10 lb., and other ranks 6 lb. Short rations were a common occurrence, but these were supplemented by local supplies in the form of fine grapes and other fruit and vegetables, which were plentiful, and fish bombed in the Kurdistan rivers. The health of all ranks was excellent.

During the campaign over 500 rifles and guns, over 1,000 sheep and goats, and over 3½ tons of grain had been confiscated by Nightcol. Order had been re-established, and the arrest or flight of the hostile Kurdish leaders had been effected.

The Battalion had sustained the following casualties:

Killed.—Officer, 1; J.C.O., 1; Indian other ranks, 28.

Drowned.—Indian other rank, 1.

Wounded.—J.C.Os., 2; Indian other ranks, 46 (including one attached mule leader).

In this wild and inhospitable region, many expeditions have met with disaster. The two Turkish attempts to occupy Kurdistan had on each occasion ended with the annihilation of the invaders, whilst a Russian force which had

entered Kurdistan from the direction of Lake Van had been destroyed in the Amadia area. In such circumstances, the successful outcome of these operations in Kurdistan, and the first safe return of an expedition from that country, may justly be considered a matter of great credit to the commanders and troops concerned. The fact that the enterprise did not attract the public attention it deserved can only be attributed to the lack of interest displayed at that time in fighting of any kind by a war-weary world. The First World War, just ended, had sickened everybody of it.

The Battalion remained in Iraq and took part in occasional further active duties till April 1921. It was not affected by the Iraqi Rebellion of 1920.

In April 1921, the 52nd Sikhs concentrated at Mosul and entrained for Baghdad, where the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in Iraq inspected the Battalion and congratulated all ranks on their work and record during their service in the country.

The Battalion eventually embarked at Basra on 16th June for Karachi, and arrived at the Depot at Jullundur on 6th July 1921.

CHAPTER IX

THE 54TH SIKHS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Waziristan, 1917—Palestine, 1918—The 54th in the Final Battle, 1918—The 54th in the Near East and Black Sea, 1919-21—Egypt and the Return to India.

Waziristan, 1917

DURING the first three years of the First World War the 54th were kept, like the other Battalions of the Regiment (except the 51st and 53rd), doing watch and ward on the North-West Frontier. The Battalion was on the Samana in 1914 and 1915, and was back in Kohat in March 1916. Here it carried out the usual very necessary training that all Battalions did after being split up into detachments in outposts such as those on the Samana.

Moreover, during those early years of the First World War the Battalion, like all others left in India, was called on continually for reinforcements. It sent of its best to maintain up to strength the Frontier Force Battalions that were fighting in the field overseas.

Early in 1917 the first serious trouble for many years began to show itself in Waziristan—trouble that was to increase only two years later into a major campaign* that cost the Government of India dear in lives and treasure. The 54th Sikhs received orders for Waziristan in May 1917, and arrived at Tank on 6th May. They were assigned to L. of C. protection in conditions of extreme heat and discomfort without alleviations of any kind. To quote a slogan of the time, "There is a war on," and that meant that nothing except overseas war theatres received much consideration, including Waziristan!

Before long however, the Battalion acted as advanced guard to a column of brigade strength advancing on Wana. After reaching Dargai Oba in late May, the Battalion was again employed on protective duties, piqueting various sections of the route to Wana, till 19th June.

On this date a piquet at Barwand of No. 3 Company was attacked most of the night by about 100 Mahsuds, who used dead ground to get to close quarters before the piquet had time to build their sangar. It lost its commander, Subadar Hukm Dad, wounded and Naik Feroze Khan, the Regimental big drummer, killed, but drove off the Mahsuds.

* See Chapter VII: Story of the 3rd Bn. Guides Infantry.

This fight became famous in the Punjab, as the men were P.Ms., and the Governor, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, who toured the Province to help recruiting, held up the incident as an example to all in his speeches.

Except for this very creditable affair, and a few casualties incurred on Brigade Columns, the next three weeks were uneventful.

On 12th July a Mahsud jirgah agreed to terms, and hostilities ended. The Battalion remained in Southern Waziristan till 8th September 1917, when it moved to Mardan.

The following December it mobilized, and on 17th February 1918, embarked on H.T. *Jeddah* for Egypt.

Palestine, 1918

On arrival there the 54th spent a month at Tel-el-Kebir training, while Colonel Woodward and Major Ruck made periodical visits to the front in Palestine.

On 17th March the Battalion moved up and joined the 29th Brigade, 10th Division, at Nebi Saleh below Mount Ephraim.* The 10th Divisional line here lay through the uplands of Judea—a very different country to the flat and undulating coastal plain farther west—where the other Frontier Force Battalions were in the 3rd, 7th and 60th Divisions. (See Chapters V, VI and VII.)

The Judean uplands are a series of low rocky hills covered with olive trees and scrub; and here the defence had every advantage. Moreover, in this area the enemy commander, Liman von Sanders, had located the German and Austrian units under his command.

A period of static warfare for the Battalion now ensued, but on 12th August the Battalion took part in an operation with the Leinster Regiment and the 101st Grenadiers that, although called a raid, was in fact an attack with limited objectives to take the commanding position known as the Gharabeh Ridge, withdrawing again thereafter. It was completely successful and the whole of the Turkish 33rd Regiment was identified.

The action was as follows. The attack was in two wings: the 54th and two companies of the Leinsters formed the right attack, while the 101st Grenadiers and the other two companies of the Leinsters carried out the left attack. The 60th Division on the right flank co-operated by a demonstration to attract the enemy's attention.

The Divisional Artillery provided support to such good purpose that the enemy on most of the front of attack were demoralized, and casualties were comparatively light as a result.

The Battalion's role amounted to the post of honour, in that it was detailed to attack a feature known as El Burj (significantly called "the Tower," as it

* See p. 117 for the general situation in Palestine at this time.

towered over and commanded the entire Gharabeh Ridge). The plan was for the 54th to capture this feature and strong-point, and pass two companies of the Leinsters through the gap they had made in the wire. The 54th were then to move to the left and mop up any enemy in the trenches on that flank.

In the event the pace of the Battalion's advance was too fast for the Leinsters to keep up, and the latter had afterwards to be sought and redirected on to their objective. This was done by Captain L. E. Dennys,* the Adjutant—a difficult and very courageous performance.

It was a pitch-dark night, and the Battalion advance was over unknown ground to a distance of 1,500 yards. It then had to assault a position 800 yards in extent, which was strongly wired and entrenched.

Three companies led: left, Sikhs under Captain Taylor; centre, Pathans and Dogras under Lieutenant Beauchamp; right, P.Ms. under Captain Matheson. One company P.Ms. under Captain Weeks was in reserve. Moving rapidly, close under our own bombardment, the men charged across the enemy wire (which the guns had effectively cut) almost without a halt, and before our bombardment lifted.

Zero was at 9.50 p.m., and fifteen minutes after the advance commenced the enemy put down ten rounds of 5.9-inch howitzer fire and opened a cross-barrage with machine-guns from Gharabeh Ridge itself. Fortunately, however, this went high for the most part, and caused only two or three casualties.

All objectives were taken by the Battalion by 10.30 p.m.—i.e., forty minutes after the advance started. Casualties were light except in the right company, which lost a platoon commander (Jemadar Nur Ahmed) killed and 14 rank and file killed and wounded. This was thought to be because the enemy on this flank had suffered less from our shell fire and were thus able to put up more of a fight.

The Battalion withdrew at midnight, bringing in all casualties (except one dead), and were unmolested. The total of losses was one J.C.O. and three other ranks killed and 38 wounded.

Some interesting remarks were made on the lessons gleaned from this operation. These commented on such things as the value of rope-soled boots in rocky country, which enabled deployment at night without being heard; the satisfactory pattern of ladder used for crossing the enemy wire; the usefulness of white tapes for marking out of roads; and the fact that the stars and the bursts of our own shells were better guides of direction at night than compass bearings. This last-named method of using artillery fire as direction guide had been evolved in France and was very effectively utilized in the offensive battles

* Major-General L. E. Dennys, M.C., who tragically lost his life in a plane crash at Chungking while Liaison Officer with the Chinese General Chiang Kai-Shek in the Second World War.

during the closing stages of the war. The success of the inter-communication arrangements forward of attack headquarters was also noted. Equally their absence between Battalion Headquarters and attack headquarters (till very late), owing to the speed at which attack headquarters moved forward, was a serious shortcoming.

Among many awards for this operation, Captains Dennys and Matheson both received the Military Cross, Havildar Maida Khan was awarded the I.O.M., 2nd Class, and I.D.S.Ms. were given to Subadar-Major Janus Khan, Subadar Bhikham Singh and Sepoy Lachman.

In their report on this raid the 10th Division remarked that "the 54th Sikhs deployed with great speed and precision, and advanced with great determination and dash."

The 54th in the Final Battle, 1918

After this operation the Battalion took its turn in the front line, eking out the tedium of static warfare for a further six weeks. During this period, except for a company raid by Dennys's company on 7th September (which the Turks did not wait to see), nothing of importance occurred till 19th September, when the final battle in Palestine in 1918 finished the war with Turkey.

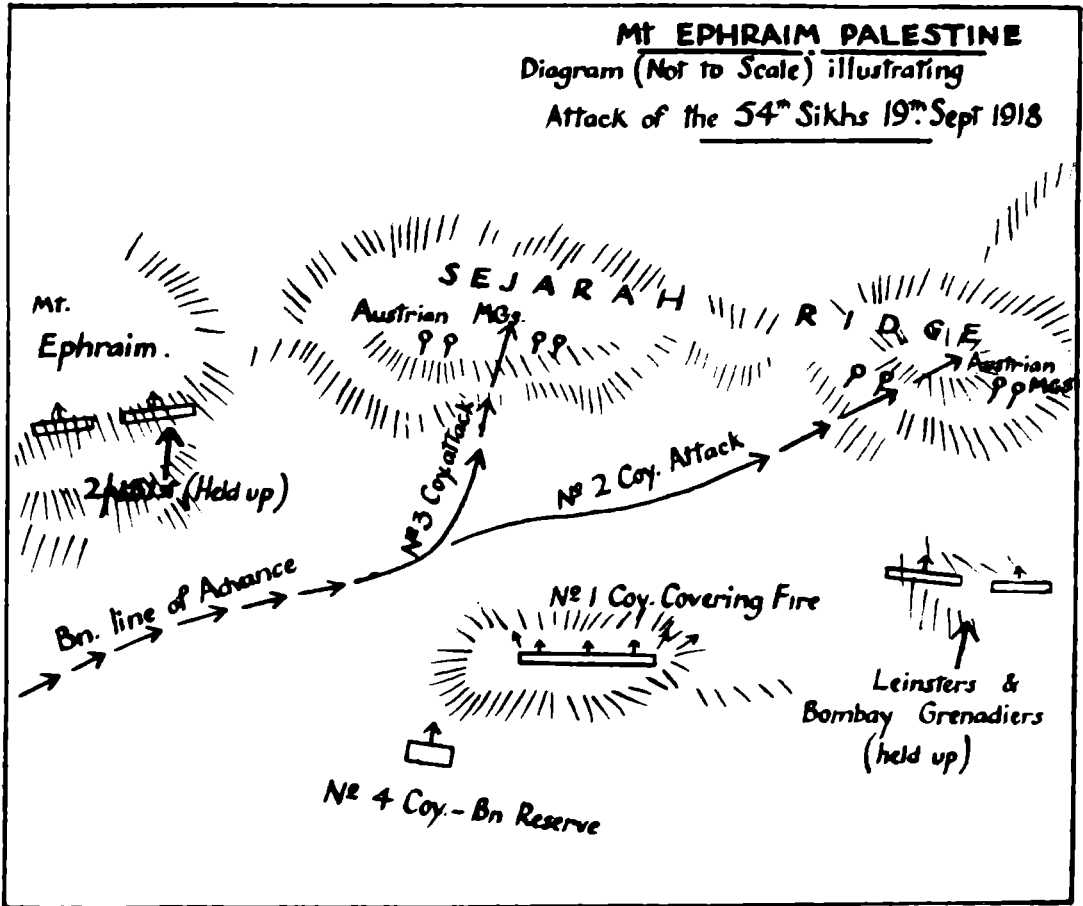
The strategic situation leading up to this battle, and the measures taken by General Allenby to prepare for the attack on a grand scale, followed by the break-through by his cavalry, have already been described (Chapter V, p. 118). The role assigned to the 20th Corps of 10th and 53rd Division in the plan was to hold down the enemy in the uplands of Judea and close the roads leading to the Jordan Valley* while the decisive blow was struck in the coastal sector, thus trapping the Turkish Seventh and Eighth Armies.

The 10th Division was accordingly directed on Nablus, and as might be expected, its attack was met with strong opposition from the Turkish Seventh Army, which had a considerable proportion of German units.

On Zero day, 19th September 1918, the 54th concentrated at Mezrah and was to climb over Furka (Mount Ephraim) by a track leading up the Wadi Deir. This however was found to be barraged by the enemy, and was in addition both a difficult climb in the dark and impracticable for laden camels (which formed the transport). The Commanding Officer therefore, having obtained permission, took the Battalion up the western shoulder of Mount Ephraim by Karawa. Arriving at Ain Badran by daylight on the 20th, it was found that the Brigade had been stopped by a resolute rear-guard of German and Austrian machine-gun units who were holding a position on the Sejarah Ridge.

At 11.15 a.m. the situation was explained to the Commanding Officer by the Brigade Major, who added that the Division was anxious to push on.

* *History of the Great War*, Buchan, Vol. IV, p. 356.



The Battalion went in straightway to the attack and seized the position without a check, although 110 men were hit in fifteen minutes during the advance. Among these was Captain Dennys, who was badly wounded in the thigh, also a Subadar, Bhikham Singh, who refused to go back until his company had secured the position. He was awarded a Military Cross and Dennys a bar to his M.C.

The latter was carried out of action by his orderly Sharif under heavy machine-gun fire, while Bhikham Singh was hit in the arm and leg and also lost an eye. He wrote from Cairo imploring the Commanding Officer to get him back to the Battalion, saying "one eye and one arm are enough for me to serve the Sirkar with."

After the capture of the Sejarah Ridge, the Battalion moved on at midnight, reaching Nablus at 2 p.m. on the 21st.

The German and Austrian machine-guns who had opposed the Battalion were captured at Nablus, and paid an unsolicited tribute to the Battalion's performance the day before. They claimed to have used their machine-guns

with great effect, but said that nothing would have stopped the last attack made against them—which was in fact the Battalion's onslaught.

The Divisional Commander, General Longley, now rode up with his congratulations on the Battalion's performance, and they were well enough deserved. The men had been under arms consecutively for forty-three hours and had moved between twenty-five to thirty miles, much of it in the dark, including a 1,500 ft. climb over Mount Ephraim, followed by a stiff attack on an enemy position. They were carrying a heavy load of ammunition and kit, had had no sleep, and not a single man fell out. Many of the last draft which had joined the Battalion only three weeks earlier were young lads between seventeen and twenty.

The 54th in the Near East and Black Sea, 1919-21

Thus ended the 54th Sikhs' career in the First World War. Albeit short, its achievements speak for themselves. They fully maintained the great traditions set for them by their predecessors (in both the leaders and rank and file of the Battalion) and by their sister Battalions of the Frontier Force who had gone earlier into the field.

The defeat and destruction of the Turco-German forces in Palestine was so complete that fighting in respect of those units not actually engaged in the pursuit and round-up (which were mostly cavalry) ceased. While other Battalions, as we have seen, made long marches up into Syria, the 54th was withdrawn to Egypt, where for a time it was in camp at Cairo. Here the only event of interest during 1919 was a big ceremonial parade for General Allenby in January. Egypt, it will be remembered, was unsettled at that time, with rioting and general internal unrest. The Battalion divided its time between internal garrison and security duties and guarding prisoners of war, of which tens of thousands had been brought to Egypt after the final surrender in Palestine. Training in mountain warfare was also carried out when opportunity offered during this period.

In March 1920, the Battalion was still at Maadi, twelve miles from Cairo, when it received orders to join the Black Sea Force. Embarking at Alexandria on 15th March in the s.s. *Answald*, they passed Rhodes on the 17th, the Dardanelles and Sea of Marmora on the 18th, and arrived in Constantinople on the 19th. On the 20th the Battalion went into billets in the Palace of Justice at Scutari. Three days later two companies of the Battalion were ordered to join "Bates's Force" at Broken Bridge, Lefksh, fifty miles south of Ismid. The companies entrained at Haider Pasha at 4 p.m. on the 24th, arrived at Ismid at 9 p.m. and Broken Bridge at 4 a.m. After only one day, during which there was some sniping from the Turks, the Lefksh Bridge was blown up and the two companies returned to Scutari.

The occasion will be remembered as one when a clash between Allied forces and the Turks organized by Mustafa Kemal was narrowly averted by the tact of the British Commander, General Harington.

On 13th May the Battalion was ordered to Batoum, on the east coast of the Black Sea, and arrived there on the 16th after a quiet sea voyage in the s.s. *Rio Pardo*. The reason was a crisis in Georgia, which, however, came to nothing, and the Battalion came back to Scutari by 30th May. The return voyage was done in H.M.S. *Royal Sovereign*; and as a result of the Battalion's time in the Black Sea a strong *entente* grew up between it and the men of the battleship. At one time or another nearly every man in the Battalion went on board.

Between 10th and 18th June two companies were sent to Shile by sea (it was forty-five miles away overland), and on the latter date moved to Dodulu, where a defensive line (the Record says "of a comic opera sort") was being held against Mustafa Kemal's Nationalist Turks.

For the next six weeks there was little to record other than minor incidents, such as the dispatch of Captain Carter to find a missing patrol of Gunners up the Bosphorus, the rescue of one Captain Galpin when his Circassian Infantry deserted *en masse*, and a search in the Mayor's house in Scutari (once the Turkish headquarters in the war) for arms and ammunition: 200 rifles and 50,000 rounds of ammunition were found and dumped in the Bosphorus on this occasion.

An unusual and interesting experience for officers and J.C.Os. was on 30th July 1920 when they went out with the Mediterranean Fleet on gunnery practice in the Black Sea. Capital ships were out, and the Battalion was distributed among H.M.Ss. *Empress of India*, *Marlborough*, *Ajax* and *Benbow*. Double salvos of 13.5-inch guns were fired, *Marlborough* doing the best shooting.

From this time till October only local amenities such as sports and rifle meetings are recorded, and in these the Battalion gave of its best, winning more than its share of the prizes.

On 21st October 1920 the Battalion embarked for Egypt, where it arrived at Beni Suef on the 27th and took over local guards and duties from the Guides Infantry.

Egypt and the Return to India

After a further six weeks that were quite uneventful in Egypt, the Battalion at last left to return to India. Spending Christmas Day 1920 at Suez, it embarked on 11th January on the *Answald* for Bombay—the same steamer that had taken the Battalion to the Black Sea nine months earlier.

During the night of the 21st in the Indian Ocean the ship passed through a belt of snow-white sea—a rare phenomenon which scientists say is caused

by large masses of "minutiæ." It was an entertaining reflection that the Battalion, having passed through the Red Sea and the Black Sea, now on its final voyage home passed through a white sea that it took two or three hours to clear!

Arriving at Bombay on 23rd January 1921, the Battalion reached Jullundur, the Group Centre, on the 27th at 4 p.m., and received a joyous welcome home.

CHAPTER X

THE REGIMENTAL CENTRE, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT

The Inception of the Training Battalion—The Reorganization of the Indian Army, 1922—The Frontier Force Memorial at Kohat—The Training Battalion at the Outbreak of the Second World War—Expansion as a Regimental Centre—The Raising of War Battalions and the Development of Training with Modern Equipment—Some Administrative Stories—Demobilization after the Second World War and Resettlement in Civil Life.

The Inception of the Training Battalion

It has been remarked in earlier chapters how in the First World War the problem of maintaining active battalions in the field showed up the weakness of the basic organization of the regiments of the Indian Army once they were called on to fight in a modern full-scale war. First, sister battalions, and then any battalions with the same classes of men, were drained to provide reinforcements until they themselves were "bled white," and a general lowering of standards resulted. If anything was required to convince the Government and its military advisers of this, the Waziristan operations of 1919 and 1920 provided it, and by 1922 a scheme of reorganization was introduced.

Its chief innovation was the creation of a training battalion to serve each group of three, four or five active battalions. These groups were then termed "Regiments," and each whole group was thus welded together to bring into being a new regimental spirit and tradition for the future.

The function of the training battalion was, shortly, to serve the active battalions of its regiment, provide recruits trained up to a certain minimum standard, and co-ordinate all matters pertaining to the regiment such as uniform, badges, reunions, etc. That it should be elastic and capable of expansion in war was a fundamental object of the scheme, and how magnificently it succeeded in this respect was one of the major lessons of the Second World War. At the start, however, all was not plain sailing. How, indeed, could such a thing be expected? The idea itself was in a great measure revolutionary, and involved the building up of a regimental spirit into which the battalions had to merge their individual outlook and to some extent their traditions.

In the cases of many regiments one of the regular battalions had to sacrifice all future prospects for itself of service in the field in order to assume the role of training battalion, but in the two "Piffer" Regiments this at least

was spared to the Battalions that had won such grand names and records for themselves on the North-West Frontier and in the First World War. Two war-raised Battalions, the 2nd Battalion the Guides Infantry and the 2nd Battalion 56th Rifles, were available and filled the posts of Training Battalions to the two Regiments. The story of the latter in its role of Training Battalion, and ultimately Regimental Centre, of the Frontier Force Rifles has been told in Chapter VIII and Appendix IX of the History of that Regiment. The history of the former during and up to the end of the First World War has been recorded in Chapter VII above. It was indeed a matter of pride and satisfaction that this war-raised Battalion of the Guides that had acquitted itself so well in the field under conditions of modern warfare should after all be retained permanently and not suffer disbandment and disappearance, in company with so many other similar formations, with the coming of peace in 1920.

At first the Training Battalion was located at Mardan with the rest of the Corps of Guides, and for five years after assuming the role of Training Battalion to the Group it retained in its title the style ("Q.V.O. Corps of Guides"), but this was dropped in 1927.

The Reorganization of the Indian Army, 1922

As with all other training battalions introduced into the Indian Army in the reorganization of 1922, its title was the 10th Battalion of the Regiment, and the Regular Battalions were given the titles of 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Battalions. The Regiment itself received the title 12th Frontier Force Regiment, and the blank numbers left between the 5th and 10th Battalions were for allocating, in the event of war, to war-raised battalions as the Army expanded.* The first numbers above the 10th Battalion—i.e., the 11th, 12th, etc., Battalions—were earmarked for Territorial Battalions on the lines of the part-time Territorial formations of Britain. Chapter XXVI tells the story of the Territorial Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment.

Little did anyone then implementing the scheme (and many indeed were the misgivings felt and expressed!) guess how soon it would be put to the supreme test of another World War, or how triumphantly it would stand up to it.

The allocation of titles to Battalions in the Regiment came easily. Only in the case of the Guides Infantry was the new order regarded somewhat askance, and could one be surprised? Anyone reading their story in this volume so far cannot fail to appreciate how such a corps as the Guides treasured its name and traditions and how sensitive it would be in regard to any innovation that threatened to cut across them. But fears, if any, were groundless. The Guides Infantry have never been asked to part with either their traditions as a Corps or their association with the Guides Cavalry. They themselves have fully entered into and fostered the Regimental spirit of the Frontier Force

* This in due course happened in 1940-42, *vide* Chapters XXII to XXV.

Regiment into which they were incorporated as the 5th Battalion (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides) in 1922. In this the Guides Infantry offered to accept the number and title of 5th Battalion in the Regiment in order that the other four Battalions could resume the original numbers that had been theirs almost from birth—viz., 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th (Sikhs) Frontier Force Regiment.

The Training Battalion had five training companies, one for each active battalion, and each with its own cadre of officers, J.C.Os. and instructional staff provided by the active battalion concerned. There was close liaison between the active unit and the affiliated training company, and this did much to keep alive battalion tradition.

As has been remarked, the Training Battalion, while taking its shape and losing its identity as the 2nd Battalion Guides Infantry, was located in Mardan, but on 29th April 1929, it moved to Sialkot. This became its home for some twenty years; and here in the Second World War it expanded into a Regimental Centre with battalions instead of companies affiliated to the active battalions of the Regiment and training their reinforcements. The title has been retained, and after the inception of the State of Pakistan the Regimental Centre moved to Abbottabad, which became the Centre for both "Piffer" Regiments.

With the reorganization of the Pakistan Army in 1956, all Piffer Battalions were organized in one Regiment, "The Frontier Force Regiment," and are now served by the one Regimental Centre in Abbotabad. The Battalions were re-numbered, and details are given in the final Chapter of this Volume and in Appendix XI.

The work of the 10th Battalion in 1940-43 and its expansion into a Regimental Centre in the Second World War were its greatest achievements, but before telling that story the doings of the years from 1922 to 1939 require to be outlined, though they contain little of interest.

One of the earliest measures to be instituted which tended to breed a Regimental spirit was the Annual Commanding Officers' Conference, attended by all active battalion commanders and presided over by Colonel Hector Campbell,* the first Commandant. The agenda dealt with such matters as organization of recruiting, transfers between active battalions and their training companies, and the strength of trained personnel in the latter. The Training Battalion was feeling its way and soon such matters were established routine. As the years went on these conferences dealt with purely family matters, such as fixtures for competitions, reunions, etc., and adjustments of items of uniform.

For the rest, the Training Battalion's life had little to record beyond alterations in training, visits by general officers, etc., measures to improve amenities in the lines and other matters, all of which were common to all

* Brigadier Hector Campbell, C.B., D.S.O., M.V.O.

training battalions and would be a wearisome recital even if there was room for them in a volume such as this.

The Frontier Force Memorial at Kohat

There was an outstanding event, however, common indeed to all "Piffer" units, which took place in 1924. The War Memorial of the Frontier Force was unveiled in Kohat, and the familiar obelisk with its surrounding tablets has been a shrine where parade services have been held annually on Remembrance Day ever since.

Two unveiling ceremonies have been performed. The first, to commemorate the fallen in the First World War, was by General Sir William Birdwood, acting Commander-in-Chief in India, on 23rd October 1924. Speaking in Urdu and English, he said that units of the Punjab Frontier Force had fought in every theatre of the First World War and lost 171 officers, 122 non-commissioned officers and 3,425 men. He added: "These figures speak for themselves, and no eloquence of mine or of anyone else can do justice to what they tell us. We know that it was not strategy nor tactics nor leadership that gained us the victory, but the spirit of sacrifice; and it is to that spirit of sacrifice which inspired these officers and men of the Frontier Force to pay the supreme price that this monument is raised."

General Birdwood also unveiled in St. Augustine's Church, Kohat, memorial tablets bearing the names of the British officers of the Frontier Force who had given their lives for their country. After the fire which destroyed St. Augustine's Church, and the closing of most of the Christian churches in North-West India and Pakistan in 1947, these memorials were brought to England and placed in a chapel in St. Luke's Church, Chelsea, dedicated to the P.F.F.

The second unveiling was on 14th April 1955, when plaques commemorating the fallen in the Second World War* were unveiled, nearly ten years after the war's conclusion. It was carried out by General Nasir Ali Khan, the Chief of Staff of the Pakistan Army, who was deputising for the Commander-in-Chief. The latter had been called away suddenly to Karachi.

The day was perfect and the ceremony conformed as far as possible to that of the first unveiling in 1924. Arriving by jeep with motor-cyclist outriders, the Chief of Staff was received by Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J., M.B.E., M.C., the Colonel of the Frontier Force Regiment. After receiving a General Salute and inspecting the guards of honour, the Chief of Staff took up a position facing the memorial, and Major-General Hayaud Din gave an address which included the following:

". . . They fought and fell wherever duty took them, away from their homes and people. They lie in three continents, in the deserts of Africa, moun-

* For comparison with the First World War figures given above see Appendix VII.

tains and valleys of Europe, plains of Iraq and Iran, hills of the North-West Frontier, and the jungles of Burma and Malaya. Some even have no graves.

“The object of a memorial like this is to remind everyone of the spirit of sacrifice which these men possessed. If we follow their example, I am sure no problem will be too difficult to solve and no obstacle too high to overcome. . . . I hope and pray that this memorial will perpetuate for all time to come the spirit of the Frontier Force, which is service and sacrifice for the country.”

The Chief of Staff made a brief speech in which he said: “Those who gave their lives may be physically dead, but spiritually they will never die. They will live as long as we follow their example.”

He then pulled a cord bringing down the Pakistan flag which was covering the memorial. The inscription facing the Mall has the following words added to it: “World War II, 1939-45.”

The parade ended with a march past along the Mall. The ceremony was attended by a large number of spectators, “Piffers” and others, who had arrived the day before. Unfortunately, representatives of the 5th Royal Gurkhas and Indian “Piffer” Batteries who had been invited through the Governments of Pakistan and India were prevented at the last minute from coming.

*The Training Battalion at the Outbreak of the Second World War
and its First Expansion*

The actual outbreak of war in 1939 caused little change, and the surprise felt at no immediate measures being taken for expansion (or even to prepare for it) was universal. It was not till the fierce German onslaught in Europe in 1940, and the disasters that followed it, had galvanized into activity the Allied Governments who for nine precious months had shut their eyes to the danger, that the inevitable and belated rush to expand and train began.

It is perhaps idle to speculate how much could have been done, and how improvisation, money and even lives could have been saved had those lost nine months been utilized in an all-out drive to expand, equip and train. The lesson however is clear, and since because of its implications for those responsible it will not be recorded in official histories, let those who read this volume mark it well. *Si vis pacem para bellum.*

Every kind of difficulty was now met as a result of the procrastination. The first stage of expansion raised the strength of the 10th Battalion from 700 Indian rank and file to over 1,500, but with no increase in the officer establishment. A number of officers, however, began to arrive from the Indian Army Reserve and United Kingdom. Few of the former and none of the latter had any knowledge of the language.

At the same time drafts of instructors began to be received from active battalions to cope with the expansion. Here it seems that a difference has to

be recorded from the experience of the Training Battalion of the Frontier Force Rifles at the same period. While in the latter it was said that the active battalions “generously” resisted the natural inclination to retain their best N.C.Os. and J.C.Os., in the 10th/12th the drafts of instructors varied considerably, few being really suitable. The point surely merits comment here since it is fundamental to the success of the whole Army organization, and the adverb “generously” was surely misapplied. Indeed, an active battalion was doing no more than serve its own best interests by sending good men to train its recruits—particularly in war time!

The Training Centre (as it was now called) of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment met the emergency in the only way it could—by “getting down” to training its own selected recruits and making “recruit instructors” of them. They did a three months’ instructor’s course, followed by a year as a recruit instructor. The plan* was a success and paid handsome dividends, both to the Centre and ultimately to active battalions, since they received a steady stream of young potential N.C.Os. It was copied by other centres.

Expansion as a Regimental Centre

A second stage of expansion was ordered on 15th September 1941. This entailed the doubling of each existing company and the addition of a duty company to Centre Headquarters. The five double companies thus formed had each an authorized strength of about 550 I.O.Rs. and the duty company about 200.

The establishment of Officers and Junior Commissioned Officers was:

TRAINING CENTRE HEADQUARTERS	<i>Officers</i>	<i>J.C.Os.</i>
Commandant (Lieutenant-Colonel)	1	
Second-in-Command (Major)	1	
Adjutant (Captain)	1	
Quartermaster (Lieutenant or Captain) ..	1	
P.T. Officer (Lieutenant)	1	
Records and Accounts Officer (Captain) ..	1	
Subadar-Major		1
Jemadar-Adjutant		1
Head Clerk (Jemadar)		1
Four Platoon Commanders, Duty Company		4
Total ..	6	7

* Albeit it was nothing new, as it was practised in Depots in the First World War, to the author’s personal experience.

FIVE DOUBLE COMPANIES (each)

	Officers	J.C.Os.
Double Company Commander (Captain) ..	1	
Adjutant and Quartermaster (Lieutenant) ..	1	
Company Commanders (Captains)	2	
Jemadar-Adjutant		1
Platoon Commanders (Subadar or Jemadar)		8
	—	—
Total (4 x 5)	20	
Total (9 x 5)		45
	—	—
Grand Total	26	52

The *actual* average monthly strength in the Centre from the start of the second stage expansion until the end of the war with Japan was:

Officers (including J.C.Os.)	73
Indian other ranks (excluding followers)	4,811

The peak strength of 5,959 Indian other ranks was reached in September 1942, and that of 113 officers and J.C.Os. in January 1943.

The Commandants of the Training Centre during the period of the war and the demobilization period were:

Up to April 1943: Lieutenant-Colonel E. A. Stead, M.C.

From April 1943, to January 1946: Colonel J. E. Redding.

From January 1946, to August 1947: Colonel P. T. Clarke, C.B.E.

In 1942 the appointment of double-company commander was upgraded to Major's rank and two new appointments were sanctioned in Training Centre Headquarters, that of Training Adjutant and Assistant Quartermaster. In filling these appointments the existing adjutant became Training Adjutant, the Jemadar Head Clerk (Nand Lall) became Office Adjutant with the rank of Captain, and the Quartermaster Clerk (Khadim Hussain) became Assistant Quartermaster with the rank of Lieutenant.

The appointment of Commandant was not upgraded to the rank of Colonel until May 1943, and that of Second-in-Command to Lieutenant-Colonel not until August 1943.

Apart from those officers filling appointments in Training Centre Headquarters and the five double-company commanders, all officers were available for draft and their posting was carried out by the Centre to fill demands in numbers from General Headquarters.

The actual period that these officers remained with the Centre averaged about three months, and only about 50 per cent. were posted to Battalions of the Regiment.

The Raising of War Battalions and the Development of Training with Modern Equipment

The Training Centre now became responsible for the initial start of some new Battalions of the Regiment raised during the war, the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and Machine-Gun Battalions. The Afridi Battalion and 25th Garrison Battalion were raised independently, the Afridi Battalion's Training Company being added to the Centre in 1942.

The stories of all these Battalions are to be found elsewhere in this volume. They provide inspiring reading, particularly when it is remembered that the Training Centre had no framework on which to raise them and had to improvise everything—even (as recorded above) the instructors to train the recruits.

The facilities for the training of recruits were now gradually improved, until by the end of 1942 the assault courses, obstacle courses and battle training grounds were probably better than those in any other Centre. Likewise the driving tracks were progressively improved and eventually were a real test of skill in driving over hilly and rough ground.

The Pipe Band was expanded to a strength of 100, until it became not only a centre of attraction, but a source of pride to all ranks and played its part in fostering *esprit de corps*.

The Pipe and Brass Band beat "Retreat" every Saturday evening and the vast majority of the strength of over 4,000 turned out as spectators. It was always a thrilling event.

Incidentally, a "Dhol" and "Surnai" Band was also formed.

One of the objects of expanding the Pipe Band and forming the Dhol and Surnai Band was to provide a nucleus (or reinforcements) for active battalions, of trained musicians.

The Training Centre not only supplied its own Battalions with reinforcements, but began to send large drafts to the Supply and Mechanical Transport and other Corps. Besides this it was called upon to train large numbers of Madrassis (about 200-300) for the Madras Regiment, and men for the Ajmer Regiment. The Madrassis presented an entirely novel administrative problem on arrival. It was decreed by General Headquarters that they should be weaned from their normal rice diet, but at the same time the Training Centre was informed that this had often been tried in the past without success. It had to be essayed and it is no small tribute to the Centre to record that success was achieved. The start was made with a little less than the daily ration of rice plus half a chupatti each. The hard work made the Madrassis hungry, and the chupatti was devoured. By degrees the proportion of rice was gradually eliminated, and in the end they confessed to liking the atta diet and found it more sustaining.

Incidentally, the tale might have been different had they not been so far from their homes and amidst an alien population. They distinguished them-

selves on arrival by knocking out a Pathan havildar with the leg of a charpoy. He had been a little rude to one of them, and they set about him like a swarm of bees.

The powers-that-be were not always as helpful as they might have been, and a peace-time mentality seemed to exist in some quarters until late in 1942. For instance: from the start of the first major expansion in 1940 until early in 1942 the disciplinary powers of the Commandant and of Company Commanders remained exactly as they were in peace time. When the peace-time companies became double companies, the powers of double-company commanders were no higher than those of a company commander, and all cases considered worthy of rigorous imprisonment or summary court-martial had to be brought before the Commandant for disposal.

It was not unusual for up to seven summary courts-martial to be held in a week and for even three to be held on the same day. When this was represented to the Deputy Adjutant-General in October 1941, at a Training Centre Commanding Officers' Conference in New Delhi, it was stated by a law officer that the appointment of double-company commander did not exist as far as the Indian Army Act was concerned and that therefore double-company commanders possessed no powers at all, and that it would take at least six months for a Bill amending the Act to be passed through the Legislative Assembly. It was not until early in 1942 that the difficulty was overcome by calling the existing double companies battalions and promoting their commanders to the rank of Major.

With the vast expansion that took place it was obviously impracticable to continue to maintain the peace-time system under which each active battalion had an affiliated company in the Training Battalion, from which it got its drafts and with which all its trained personnel at the Centre served.

Now all drafts when called for had to be sent from the double company/battalion which could supply sufficient quantities of the finished article, and officers and V.C.Os. had of necessity to be pooled. The case was put up to General Headquarters and an Indian Army Order was almost immediately published abolishing affiliated companies for the duration of the war. Within a month, however, this order was cancelled, no doubt on the representation of individuals who did not themselves have to deal with the problem. In actual practice the affiliated company system was never resumed. It was, as has been shown, wholly impracticable.

Some Administrative Stories

The Centre always had a flourishing vegetable garden. With difficulty permission was obtained to increase it by taking up about half an acre of cantonment waste land. Almost nightly this was extended by ploughing and fencing in a few more square yards, until the acreage of the new garden was

greater than that of the old peace-time one, and a sufficient supply of vegetables obtained for over 4,000 men. The encroachment was never officially noticed.

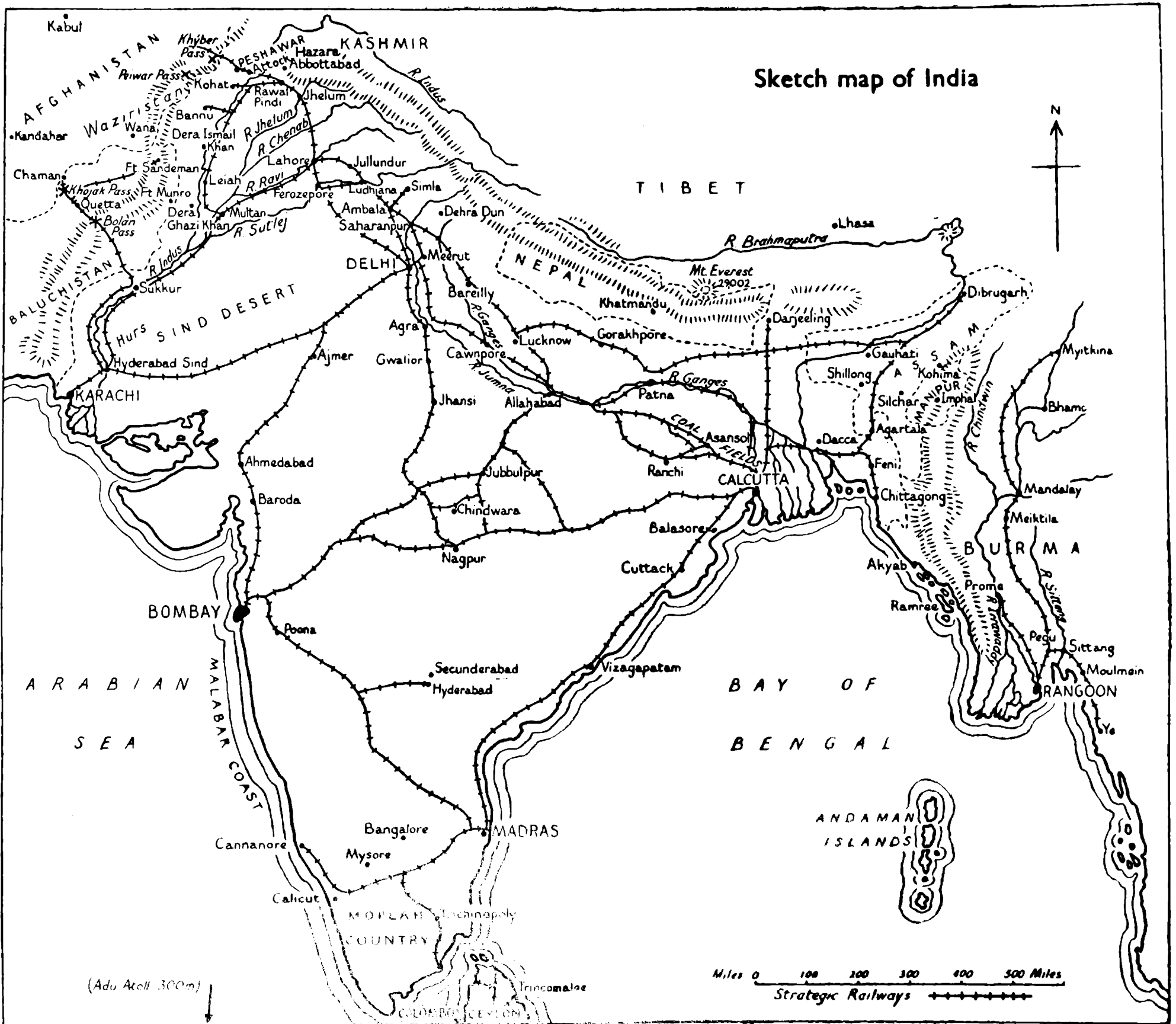
In 1941 an enemy threat from the direction of the Caucasus was seriously anticipated, and it was ordered that all newly built lines were to be staggered and spread over a vast area of country in view of possible air attack. The fact that in open country it was impossible to conceal barracks for over 4,000 men, and that administrative problems and training efficiency would be impaired considerably, at first seemed to matter little. After some pleading the Centre was allowed to design the layout of its new lines to suit itself.

The old and new lines completely surrounded the old Cavalry Brigade parade ground, and that, together with two polo grounds (they were in fact the famed polo grounds of the Sialkot Cavalry Brigade), was used for all training other than field work. With this layout only two quarter guards were necessary, and in consequence duties for the duty company could be kept comparatively light. The Bells of Arms of four Battalions were located on either flank of the new quarter guard with their stores immediately in rear. Other training centres, including that of the 16th Punjab Regiment in the same station, were not so lucky, and our Centre's layout was much envied.

In 1942 a somewhat unusual psychological problem arose to affect the Centre. An Artificial Limb Centre was formed in Sialkot and was attached to the Indian Military Hospital adjacent to the Training Centre lines. A constant stream of limbless men passed through this centre, and it took some time and correspondence before the High Command could be made to realize that such a centre could have a bad effect on the morale of young recruits, and that its close proximity to a training centre was the worst possible place for its location. The fact that the Artificial Limb Centre (the only one of its kind in India) was doing outstandingly good work seemed to blind the authorities to all other aspects of its existence. Ultimately the Artificial Limb Centre was moved to Poona.

Demobilization and Resettlement

The end of the Second World War came with the capitulation of Japan on 15th August 1945, and with it the work of the Regimental Centre went into reverse. Demobilization and a return to a peace-time footing became the work of the day, and a special reorganization had to be undertaken in the Centre to deal with it. An "Attached Section" was formed to which came all men for dispatch to the Demobilization Centre, which was organized as a subsidiary unit of the Regimental Centre. Much work was necessary in classifying the men, inspecting and completing their kits, and paying them. Those suffering from wounds, disease or other disabilities had to be examined and classified before going on to a Medical Board.



The first to be released were recruits, then re-employed pensioners and low-category men, and finally came the general release and disbandment of Battalions to bring the Regiment to its interim post-war establishment.

The total number who passed through the Demobilization Centre, including officers, J.C.Os. and N.C.Os., by 1st April 1947 (a period of one year and seven and a half months), exceeded 14,000. The credit for this achievement and the smoothness with which it was carried out must go to the Commandant of the Demobilization Centre and his staff; and also to the efforts of the civil Resettlement Officer, who worked in conjunction with the Employment Exchanges to get the men employment in civil life.

These activities in fact concluded the task of the Regimental Centre in the Second World War. The problems that arose with the coming of independence and the division of the Indian continent into the separate countries of Pakistan and India are outside the scope of this volume. Suffice it to place on record that the system evolved from the lessons of the First World War that has been described above came triumphantly through the administratively even greater ordeal of the Second. For not only did the Training Battalion serve the needs of the Regiment in peace, but coped with the enormous demands of its more numerous active battalions in war, while at the same time expanding itself into a huge organization of the strength of several battalions.

As has been remarked above the two Regimental Centres of the Frontier Force Rifles and Frontier Force Regiment amalgamated in 1956 and the active battalions of both have been organized into one Regiment—the Frontier Force Regiment, with one Regimental Centre. Details of this reorganization and the new titles of battalions, together with their old ones, are given in Chapter XXX, and Appendix X.

CHAPTER XI

THE GUIDES INFANTRY (5TH BATTALION FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT, Q.V.O. CORPS OF GUIDES), 1919-39

The Reorganization of 1922—The Guides in the Red Shirt Disturbances—The Chitral Relief, 1932, and the Loe Agra and Mohmand Expeditions, 1933 and 1935—Wucha Jawar—The Khaisora, November 1936—The Shahur Tangi, April 1937—The Sherawangi Narai and Death of Lieutenant-Colonel Grant—Last Days at Razmak—Last years in Mardan.

The Reorganization of 1922

THE 1st Guides returned to Mardan from Syria in December 1920, and thereafter for three years they remained peacefully in their old home. Even the turbulent spirits of Mohmand Swat and Buner did not disturb them during this period, but not so the powers-that-be. They inflicted a disturbance on the Guides that was hardly unexpected, quite unavoidable, and the logical outcome of the lessons learnt in the First World War.

Chapter X above has described the inauguration of the Training Battalion system in the Indian Army, and with it the absorption of the 2nd Battalion of the Guides Infantry into the role of Training Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment. It meant also the absorption of the original Infantry of the Corps of Guides into the Frontier Force Regiment as one of its Battalions, while the Cavalry of the Corps became a separate Regiment of the Indian Cavalry with a number—the 10th (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides) Cavalry, F.F.

That this was a shattering upheaval to the Corps could not be denied by anyone then serving with it, and its impact can readily be imagined by anyone who has read the chapters of this volume that have been written above. Needless to say, all was accepted loyally. It was an inevitable outcome of the march of events and the demands of modern war. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new," had once more to be accepted, and a new future carved out to match the past.

In the renumbering of Battalions that took place under the reorganization, the Guides Infantry offered to take the 5th Battalion title—i.e., the number five—so as to allow the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Sikhs to retain their old numbers. Thus they became the 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides).

By the end of 1923 the changes had come fully into effect, and the new

organization was working smoothly—all “corners” having been rubbed off. It is fair to repeat here that this organization stood the even greater test of the Second World War with the huge problems of expansion that it brought. As the Administrative Staff Officer chiefly responsible in 1940 and 1941 for assisting the Training Battalion to deal with these problems in the Frontier Force Regiment, the writer can pay an unreserved tribute to the organization, its sound foundations and flexible components. It exists to this day in Pakistan and India.

In February 1924, the 5th Battalion (as for the moment we will call them, though the writer prefers hereafter to adhere to the Guides as their best-known and treasured name) was ordered to Aden.

It was a “peace” station which Indian battalions were assigned to in rotation, but the hinterland of Yemen was in a somewhat disturbed state at this time. One of the units there with British officers was a battalion recruited from the local Arabs, called the Yemen Infantry. A detachment of this battalion formed the garrison of Perim Island (at the entrance to the Red Sea).

On 3rd September 1924, Lieutenant Lawrence, commanding this detachment, was stabbed to death by the guard of his unit.

As a result of this outrage, the Guides took over the garrison of Perim and also of Kamaran, an island 150 miles to the north, on the coast of Yemen. The Yemen battalion was disbanded, five of the eight murderers being brought to justice.

The Guides Infantry left Aden in February 1926, and arrived back in Mardan twelve days later.

That summer the Battalion once more acted as protective troops for the “Chitral Relief”—the biennial change-over of the garrison of Chitral. This garrison had been maintained ever since the murder of the ruler in 1895 and the resultant expedition described in Chapter IV.

The relief went off without incident and the Battalion, having left Mardan on 10th September, were back in Dargai by 12th October. Here, before the relief started Lieutenant Godfrey Meynell joined the Battalion. Nine years later he was to gain the Victoria Cross (see p. 179).

The Guides in the Red Shirt Disturbances

Three years after this, peaceful times in the Peshawar plain and Yusafzai came to an end once more with the outbreak of what were known as the “Red Shirt” disturbances. As more than one Battalion of the Regiment were involved in the fighting that followed, the reader must understand how they came about.

In Chapter V above mention has been made of the effect on Muslims generally of Turkey’s participation on the wrong side in the First World War, particularly as the head of the Ottoman Empire was revered as the *Khilafat ul Islam*—the religious leader of all Muslims. When the end of that war left

Mustafa Kemal with modern ideas and outlook in charge of a reduced Turkey and he made disavowal of all claims to the Khilafat, the situation all over the Muslim world became ripe for intrigue and trouble. Nowhere was this more so than in India, where various religious societies were formed and where there were plenty of agitators, by no means all Muslim, ready to use any political situation to embarrass the Government. The first manifestation of trouble was the rebellion by Muslim Moplahs in Madras which resulted in a campaign to restore order, and later the introduction of the Sarda Act (sponsored by Indians to ameliorate marriage customs) was the signal for a campaign of misrepresentation. When this resulted in the story being circulated that the Act was designed to enable both Hindu and Muslim girls to be examined by white doctors, the effect can be imagined.

When agitators found their schemes to foment trouble were allowed to go unchecked they began to act openly, and so it was that in 1930 a movement started in Northern India called the *Khuda-i-Khitmatgaran* (Servants of God). Professing at first to be purely religious and public-spirited, they soon found themselves able to declare openly their rebellious nature. They dyed their clothing red (hence the name Red Shirts), and it was not till their leaders started touring the Frontier Province, organizing meetings and arming their followers, that belated action was taken by the Government. The leaders were simultaneously arrested, and immediately trouble broke out, with rioting, in the chief cities of the Frontier. The outbreak at Peshawar, with bloodshed and open rebellion, resulted in the city being in the hands of the Red Shirts for a considerable time. An invasion of the Peshawar Valley by Afridis from Tirah also occurred—an absolutely unprecedented piece of daring insolence! The flame of rebellion spread like a forest fire over the Frontier Province, aided by the presence of a superfluity of unemployed young men with military tastes, but for whom there was no room in the armed forces. It was not till 1931, with the firmer hand of Lord Willingdon at the wheel of the ship of state, that the trouble was finally stamped out. In the meantime troops had been called on to carry out the most unpopular task that can fall to the lot of a soldier—that of dealing with disorders among an armed population (among whom friend and foe were indistinguishable), aided by an armed hostile tribal influx looking for adventure and loot!

Such was the stage and character of the drama of 1930-31 known as the Red Shirt Disturbances. In the pages that follow, the part played by the Guides (the only Battalion of the Regiment at all involved) is described.

Before the Red Shirt troubles became acute, the Guides Infantry in December 1929, were in Mardan and received orders to go to the Khyber. They did not move till January 1930, when they went by train to Shagai and took over the Khyber posts from the 3rd Battalion Bombay Grenadiers. Incidents of unrest were now occurring. On the night of 25th February Lieutenant

Hawkes, R.E., the Assistant Garrison Engineer, was murdered at Landi Kotal. On 9th April the Guides Infantry were moved there, and on 20th April a further outrage occurred in the Khyber when the Manager of the Imperial Bank in Peshawar and an assistant, who were visiting the Khyber, were shot dead by a Mohmand Khassadar. The latter himself was shot by Shinwari Khassadars, so the motive for this murder was never established; but only three days later the serious outbreak referred to above occurred in Peshawar city, and the Red Shirt movement began to raise its head in the Khyber area also.

Afridis now attacked some of the Khassadar posts, and reports of a *lashkar* advancing on the military posts in the Khyber were received. This, however, never eventuated. Possibly the Afridis realized that more fruitful results from their point of view were on offer in the Peshawar plain! At all events a second Afridi inroad on Peshawar was made on 9th and 10th August, but the Guides Infantry were not involved.

While the Battalion was in the Khyber in 1930 and 1931, the rebellion in Peshawar and other cities, the two invasions by Afridis and the final campaign in the Khajuri and Aka Khel plains west of Peshawar were all tackled by the Peshawar, Risalpur and reinforced Nowshera Brigades.

In these operations the only Frontier Force Battalion involved was the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles. A full account, therefore, of the circumstances under which the invasions were undertaken—and indeed so rashly pursued—by the Afridis and the manner in which they were defeated and counter-measures inflicted is given in the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XI.

It is necessary, however, here to make clear the changes in the administrative situation that were imposed on the Afridis at the final jirgah where they made their submission, because they introduced a new Frontier bordering on Afridi territory with new posts to guard it, and the Guides Infantry from the Khyber and Jamrud were the first Battalion to take over and hold these posts after peace had been made.

Before the Red Shirt disturbances and the Afridi invasions that followed, the administrative border verging on Afridi territory did not include the large expanse of grazing ground a few miles west of Peshawar and east of the Afridi mountain fastnesses of Tirah. This grazing area was known as the Khajuri and Aka Khel plains, and had from time immemorial been the winter resort of Afridis and their families escaping from the severe winter snows of Tirah. Unlike Ghilzais and other nomad tribes who, depositing their arms at the Frontier, moved miles into India with their flocks, the Afridis had been able to rest on their own soil with arms intact a few miles from a great Indian city.

The peace terms now imposed on the Afridi jirgahs for their treachery brought the Khajuri and Aka Khel plains under the Government's administration and placed the frontier along the foothills with a line of posts to guard it.

The terms were not only effectively punitive, but rendered a repetition of Afridi aggression impossible. The jirgahs objected, but had no alternative but to acquiesce or keep out of their winter camping grounds to sojourn in the snow.

When the Guides Infantry marched into the Khajuri plain on 15th April 1931, posts there were already under construction. The Guides were only there for three months, during which nothing more eventful than occasional sniping by malcontents occurred to break the monotony of life in the fierce heat of May, June and July in that region.

On 16th July the Battalion returned to the Khyber for the rest of the year, and on 16th February 1932, orders came to return to Mardan. The two years away had been years of hard work with few of the excitements experienced by others in the Peshawar plain.

The Chitral Relief of 1932, the Loe Agra 1933, and Mohmand Expeditions, 1933 and 1935

The years 1932-35 were restless in the tribal mountains north of the Peshawar plain, and the Mohmand campaign in the summer of 1935 was to give the Guides Infantry a day of fighting that in ferocity and the odds encountered equalled anything in the history of the Corps. But of that more anon.

When the biennial Chitral Relief came round in 1932, the wave of restlessness that the Red Shirt and Afridi disturbances had caused had hardly died out. It was anticipated that trouble, particularly from the Bajauris, would occur during the relief, and, if not actual attacks on the column, certainly sniping and attempts to ambush or harass protective troops were to be expected.

Accordingly in September 1932, the three Battalions of the Nowshera Brigade—i.e., the Guides Infantry, 2/9th Gurkhas and 1/11th Sikh Regiment—were all ordered out as protective troops with two extra Battalions, the 5/10th Baluch Regiment and the 3/14th Punjab Regiment, as reinforcements.

When the columns reached the danger zone of Bajaur at Bandagai on 13th September, the Bajauris maintained a considerable fire from across the Panjkora River and the camp had to be securely piqueted. One of the piquets of the 1/11th Sikhs was heavily attacked that night. On the 14th, in order to counter these activities, Lieutenant Meynell (later to die winning the V.C. in Mohmand in 1935) took out a party to lay a *Chapao* (ambush) and “bagged” five Bajauris who were on their way to snipe the camp. For this he received the Military Cross.

By the 16th the outward-bound column was clear, and the Brigade, who had piqueted them through on their way, withdrew to camp to wait for the returning column from Chitral. “A” Company of the Guides, however, who remained for camp piquets, had some severe fighting that night. Captain Barlow was in command of it, and drove off all the attacks. The story is as follows.

That night at about eleven o'clock, lured on by an "idiot boy" act, there was a sudden fierce attack by a force of some 120 tribesmen. A party of 25 rushed No. 1 Platoon, who were in low cover, from the scrub bush near by. After killing seven men at point-blank range and another with the bayonet, the platoon then withdrew to the main sangar twenty-five yards away, having two of their number killed and three wounded outside the entrance. Constant enemy rushes now followed from the scrub, which was so close that on more than one occasion the attackers got within five yards of the sangar wall. No. 4 Platoon was also attacked and all of them fought practically hand-to-hand with rifle, bayonet and grenade. It was 2.45 a.m. before the frustrated enemy withdrew. At dawn a strong patrol discovered in front of the position a standard, twenty-six corpses, a sword and several rounds of ammunition. A prisoner was also taken who proved to be a "wanted" Bunerwal murderer who was later duly hanged.

While all this was going on in "A" Company's post, the Brigade camp was heavily fired into and "Guides' piquet" was attacked several times. The next day was a day of rest and cleaning up, but "Guides' piquet" with No. 7 Platoon was again repeatedly attacked on the night of the 17th, and No. 2 Platoon, who then took over, were also attacked on the night of the 18th.

Three immediate awards—one bar to the Military Cross, one I.O.M. and one I.D.S.M. were won as a result of this action.

In this fighting the Guides' casualties were five killed and eleven wounded, one of whom died later. In addition to the twenty-six dead tribesmen found in front of the position, the Political Agent reported that at least seven more had been killed and fifty wounded, many of them by hand grenades.

The Brigade Commander had, in view of the night sniping, selected a site for a new camp in which nullahs would give some cover to the animals, and the Brigade moved to this on the 19th. The tribesmen had had their *élan* considerably damped, and the new camp was quieter. The Brigade made various exploratory tours, returning to the camp at night. On 11th October the relief column returned with the relieved Battalion and were duly piqueted and protected as they marched through the edge of the disturbed area. There was some firing, but there were women and children to be seen in the villages, which meant that no large-scale attack was likely. Everything was now closed down and the troops back by the 16th October.

Mohmand, 1933

As the story concerns almost exclusively the Mohmand tribes for the next three years, the reader must now understand the somewhat peculiar geographical and political conditions that at this time (and for the rest of the period of British rule) obtained among the tribes grouped under the above name.

When the Durand Line was delimited between the Indian tribal areas and

Afghanistan in 1892, the portion north of the Kabul river that would mark out the frontier between the Mohmand tribal areas and Afghan territory was, for various reasons, left unfinished. Instead, only a "Presumptive Line" was agreed between the Indian and Afghan Governments; and this was all that divided the Mohmand clans that lived on the Afghan side from those on the Indian side of the border. This situation, as may easily be imagined, made it easy for elements hostile to the Government of India (with or without Afghan encouragement) to cause trouble. They frequently did so.

Moreover, the Mohmands in Indian tribal territory between Bajaur and the Afghan border were subdivided into numerous clans, and these again into two main groups, the northern and southern. Of these two groups, the southern (called the "assured" tribes) were granted Government allowances and provided Khassadars to keep the peace near the Indian borders of tribal territory. It is not surprising that the northern clans were jealous, and much of the trouble in the years we are about to record arose from this cause and the corollary that these clans were also fertile ground for agitators and firebrands.

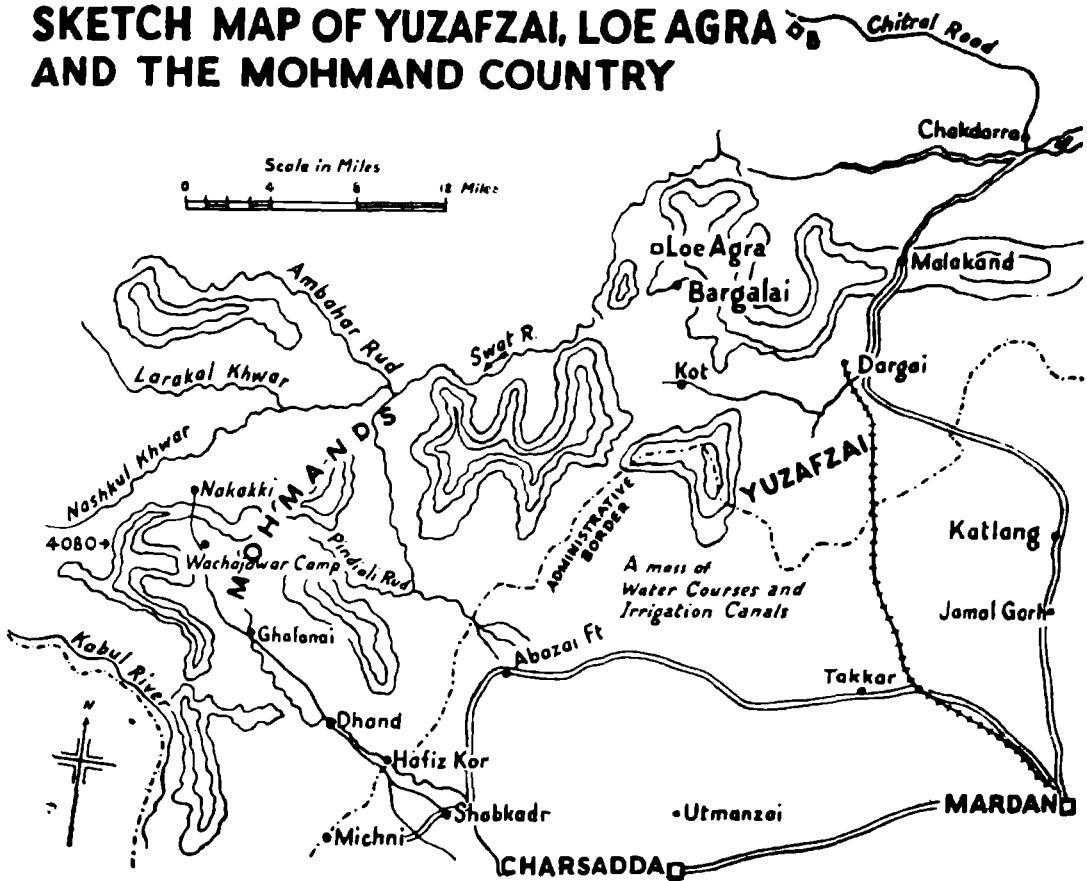
In 1933 the northern and southern tribes were in a state of disagreement, the direct outcome of Khilafat and Red Shirt troubles. The Nahakki range far up the Gandab valley was the general dividing line between the two factions. A firebrand of long standing, the Haji of Turangzai, and his sons were the principal disturbers of the peace, the grievance being mainly that the "lower" Mohmands furnished Khassadars to keep the peace. To support the Red Shirts, the Haji and his supporters commenced to raid the Halimzai (one of the assured tribes) in March 1932.

The existence of only a "Presumptive Border" (and not a real one) hampered any Air Force reprisal; but in July 1932, the Halimzai appealed for protection, and the Indian Government issued, with some effect, a proclamation that they would support the Halimzai against any invasion of their territory. But in July 1933, an "upper" Mohmand was murdered by a "lower" Mohmand. This was an excellent excuse to invade the Halimzai and to try to detach the "lower" Mohmands from the Government. The Halimzai eventually expelled the invaders, but had several villages burnt. The "upper" Mohmands now collected considerable lashkars. The Indian Government decided to send a force and to make a motor road to the Halimzai territory, but stated that they had no intention of permanently occupying any trans-border territory.

The Peshawar Brigade under Brigadier C. Auchinleck* headed the expedition, with the Nowshera Brigade following up to protect the line of communication. The former reached Ghalanai on 1st August, having been joined by the Guides Infantry at Pir Qila on 27th July. There was practically no fighting, but a certain amount of sniping occurred.

* Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, G.C.B., G.C.I.E., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E.

SKETCH MAP OF YUZAFZAI, LOE AGRA AND THE MOHMAND COUNTRY



The principal operation so far as the Guides were concerned was the occupation of the Khazana Sar Ridge. Lashkars were reported to be thereon and behind it. This operation involved a climb of 2,300 feet, but only a few shots were fired and the tribesmen had evidently thought better of it.

The Afghan Government now agreed to air action on and beyond the "Presumptive Border" against recalcitrant Mohmands, and the northern tribes submitted.

The Guides Infantry accordingly remained on the work of making the road that the terms dictated to the Mohmands had stipulated should be built through their territory. Moreover, reconnaissances farther north became also possible as far as and over the Nahakki Pass—all of which, with the road most important of all, became vital factors in pursuing the severe campaign of 1935 in which the Guides met with such desperate fighting.

By 5th October the Guides Infantry had completed their work on the road and were back in Mardan.

Loe Agra, 1934-35

Trouble, however, was not at an end, and in August next year it broke out in Loe Agra, a valley near the head works of the Upper Swat Canal. As the canal water was of vital importance to thousands of cultivators in the Peshawar plain, any sort of trouble in this area had to be dealt with forthwith. The originator of it was once more a Khilafatist firebrand from Bajaur called the Faqir of Alingar, and he came pretending that his business was partly religious but he brought a lashkar of Bajauris and started fomenting anti-Government feeling. The Government of India were slow in moving, but eventually early in 1935 took the matter in hand. In February 1935, the Nowshera Brigade under Brigadier the Hon. H. R. L. G. Alexander* was ordered out and moved on Loe Agra with the Guides Infantry as advanced guard. Little opposition was encountered from the Bajauris, and though they held a commanding height above Loe Agra, on which a piquet had to be established, the Guides took this with the loss of only one man killed and two wounded. A post was established at Agra village, sixty local levies were installed, and the Brigade returned to Nowshera by the beginning of March.

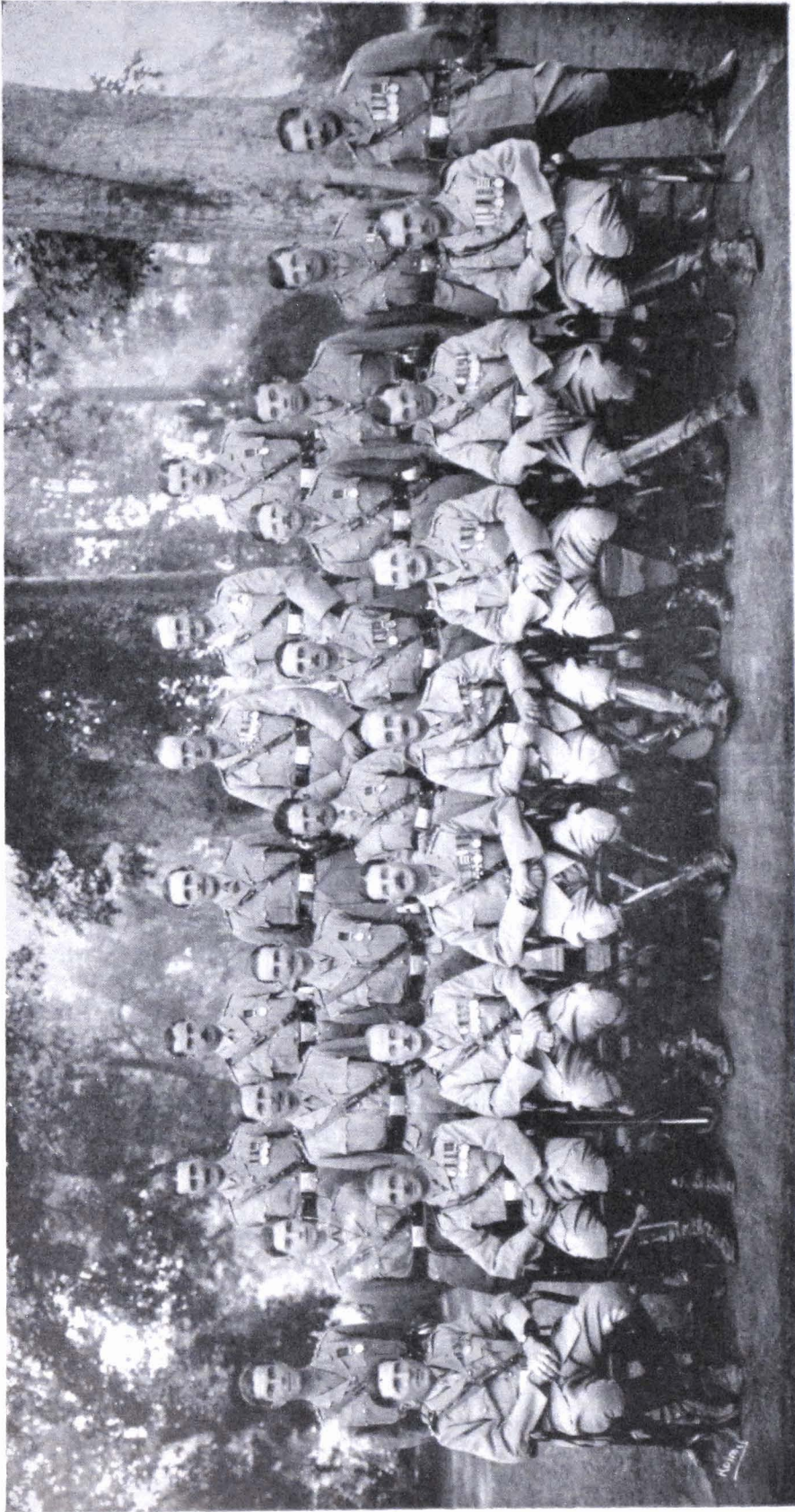
A recrudescence of trouble, however, was foreseen, and a flying column from the Brigade was earmarked to be ready, but the Guides were not part of it. The trouble was not long in coming, for the Faqir was reported to be returning to Loe Agra on 5th March, and the column went out. Again, without any fighting of note and only a successful night ambush of snipers to record, Loe Agra was occupied and the Faqir driven off north of the Swat river.

The Brigade, without its British Battalion† (the 2nd Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment), now remained in the area, and in April some fierce fighting occurred round the main piquet, called Qila Hari held by a Company of the 3/2nd Punjab Regiment. By 5th April a strong Bajauri lashkar had concentrated, and determined attacks on this company and its strong piquet were made which at times resulted in hand-to-hand fighting. All attacks were beaten off, however, with the loss of two killed (including a Subadar died of wounds) and seven wounded. The confirmed enemy casualties were 28 killed and a number wounded. On 8th April the Guides took over Qila Hari piquet and preparations were made for a full-scale attack by the Brigade to drive off the lashkar. This was launched on 11th April, with the Guides (less the piquet company) leading the left column of attack. It was completely successful, and was followed next day by operations to clear the remains of the lashkar from the passes to the north, the Guides again leading the left wing of the advance.

After this the Bajauri jirgah submitted and the lashkar dispersed, though

* Field-Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis, K.G., P.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., C.S.I., D.S.O., M.C.

† Brigades in British India consisted of one British and three Indian Battalions.



THE GUIDES, DECEMBER 1934

Back row.—Capt. W. A. Gimson; Capt. E. K. Wood; Lieut. G. D. Garforth Bles; Major W. J. C. Duncan; Capt. L. M. Barlow; Lieut. A. P. S. Rendall.
Centre row.—Capt. P. R. Macnamara; Lieut. G. M. St rover; Lieut. W. Elliott Lockhart; Lieut. R. A. H. Plunkett; Capt. D. G. Egerton; Major S. B. Good; Lieut. C. H. Campbell; Lieut. G. J. Hamilton; Capt. G. Meynell; Capt. G. F. Taylor.
Front row.—Capt. C. P. J. Prioleau; Major J. E. Redding; Lieut.-Colonel A. V. Hammond; Lieut.-Colonel N. H. Prendergast; Lieut.-Colonel W. H. Blood; Major P. Grant; Major J. H. Gradidge; Major L. R. Knight.

the Faqir continued to intrigue and impede negotiations as much as he could.

It was now decided to bring the Loe Agra area under full political control, with a fortified Levy post built there to hold eight platoons of Frontier Constabulary. In addition, a metalled road would be built to Loe Agra from Kot, the nearest road head.

Thus ended the Loe Agra episode of 1935, and the troops were back in cantonments by 5th May, except the Guides who remained in Loe Agra till 12th June.

Mohmand, 1935

While the above events were taking place in Loe Agra, unrest was once more being stirred up farther west in the Gandab valley of the Lower Mohmand Territory by the Haji of Turangzai and his sons.

Matters did not take a serious turn till 14th August, when, after a full jirgah among themselves of Mohmand tribesmen, they decided to destroy the road that had been built as part of the terms imposed after the uprising in 1933. The work of destruction was commenced the same night, and the Peshawar Mobile Column was immediately ordered out.

By the next day 2,000 tribesmen were at work damaging the road far down near the Indian border, and the proceedings were being covered by a strong tribal body sent out to oppose any advance of troops from Peshawar. The Peshawar Column arrived at Michni on the 15th. The next day it moved to Pir Qila, half-way between Michni and Shabkadr, in case an incursion into British India was intended. In the meantime many lashkars were joining the intruders, basing themselves on the Pindiali country. The various lashkars were now heavily bombed and warning notices dropped on all concerned. This continued for four days while the military arrangements were being developed. The Nowshera Brigade was next called up and arrived at Subhan Khwar, north-east of Pir Qila, on the 21st. It was now known that not only the "upper" and "lower" Mohmands were in the lashkars, but also numbers of the Afghan Mohmands. On the 18th and 20th the camp at Pir Qila was fired into. As the operations now promised to be considerable, the force was styled "Mohforce," and Brigadier Auchinleck, temporarily commanding the Peshawar district, assumed command.

The campaign that followed would probably never have been necessary had the operations in this tribal area in 1933 dealt the Mohmands an exemplary lesson. It has often been said that tribesmen on the North-West Frontier have to be shown corpses before they really understand. In 1933 they saw none among their number, and were ready to take liberties as a result in 1935. While the expedition in most respects followed traditional patterns without unduly severe fighting, it concluded with an episode in which the Guides Infantry, much depleted in numbers, met alone and unsupported the full

strength of the Mohmand lashkars. In a battle displaying gallantry and devotion up to the Corps' highest traditions, the Battalion fought the tribesmen to a standstill, inflicting terrible slaughter while carrying out the task demanded of them. The story of the campaign is as follows:

The advance up the road was opposed by the tribesmen without much effect other than to delay the Brigade's arrival in camp. As far as Dand, the Guides, who had their share of the fighting to do, lost one I.O.R. killed and Lieutenant A. C. S. Moore and seven I.O.Rs. wounded; the enemy lost 40 killed and 54 wounded. Here on 23rd August a pleasing incident is related of a company of the Duke of Wellington's who were holding a piquet above Dand, and who could not withdraw two of their sections. A company of Guides under Lieutenant Rendall* was sent to their aid, and when leaving gave up all their ammunition save five rounds per man, carried the British wounded down, and then came up again with more ammunition, an act of camaraderie handsomely acclaimed in a letter from the O.C. the Duke's.

The advance to Ghalanai on 25th August was not seriously interfered with, the tribesmen having been severely handled so far; and for some days repair by troops of the damaged road went on while targets of hostile Mohmand villages were bombed from the air. The Guides Infantry had remained at Dand, but were brought up to Ghalanai on 3rd September. They received one I.O.M. and three I.D.S.Ms. as immediate awards for fighting on 23rd August.

A proclamation was now issued to the tribes that how far the troops would advance depended on the tribes' behaviour, but it produced no result. Accordingly, plans for proceeding over the Nahakki Pass and extending the road now went ahead. The Air Force and the political control were now put under the military authorities and what might be a major campaign catered for. Moreover, Mohforce was separated from the Peshawar divisional command.

The Nowshera Brigade advanced to Katsai, some four miles beyond Ghalanai in the Gandab valley, on 11th September without any special incident save that the camp at Katsai was heavily fired into that night. The 2nd Brigade from Rawalpindi and the 3rd from Jhelum were on their way up now to provide defence for the daily lengthening line of communication. From the 12th to the 14th the troops carried out reconnaissances with no particular incidents.

The next few days were also spent in local reconnaissances while the water supply by pipe line (no small undertaking) was brought up to the camp.

On 17th September the advance over the Nahakki Pass was made, the Guides and 3rd Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment securing the high ground on both sides of the pass. There was no opposition, and that evening the Peshawar Brigade were encamped on the north side of the Nahakki Ridge, with the Nowshera Brigade in Wucha Jawar camp on the south side.

* Who had been awarded a M.C. in the Loe Agra operations.

The Desperate Action of the Guides Infantry, 29th September 1935

For ten days hard work was done on road-building over the Nahakki Pass—a road which finally broke into the country of the Upper Mohmands and rendered them vulnerable to swift punishment. The criterion of its effect is seen in the fact that for twenty years afterwards the need for such punishment never arose.

But to return to the story. The immediate need was now to deliver a forthright blow to the lashkars of Upper Mohmands (some of whom had come from Afghanistan) and the Bajauris that were known to be somewhere to the north-west. It had been surprising, if not in fact disappointing, that the tribesmen had not rallied to the defence of the Nahakki Pass, for that would have afforded opportunity to strike effectively.

However, the plan now was as follows. The object given was to inflict the maximum loss on the enemy in the area between Pt. 2450 and Muzi Kor, and in the valley west of Wucha Jawar. To this end the Peshawar Brigade was to clear up the area in the Kamalai plain in the neighbourhood of Muzi Kor, whilst the Nowshera Brigade assisted this operation by holding the ridge south of, and the spur west of Muzi Kor. The Nowshera Brigade was also to occupy the heights south of the main Wucha Jawar valley, its left being protected by the 3rd Infantry Brigade, which was to hold a line across the valley leading to the Khapak Kandao. They had followed up the advance and were now at Ghalanai. The nature of these orders should be noted, as they led to the weak handling of the Nowshera Brigade which resulted in the Guides' desperate single-handed battle. They will be discussed later.

Moreover, it may also be remarked *en passant* that the Government omitted to compile for the information of (and study by) officers any history of Frontier operations (except that of the second Afghan War of 1879-80) prior to 1919. As a result, the experience in this area of the Mohmand Expedition of 1908 was probably not recalled by anyone at the Headquarters of the force at this time. This experience was that the tribesmen collected in strength in the area immediately west of Pt. 4080, in numerous caves, but refused battle when threatened from the north-east. Had this been remembered, it is improbable that the Peshawar Brigade would have been directed wide out on the Kamalai plain or that the advance on and capture of Pt. 4080 would have been entrusted to one weak battalion with inadequate support. That Battalion was in fact the Guides Infantry at a total strength of 370—or little more than the equivalent of two companies.

They were with the Nowshera Brigade at Wucha Jawar camp, and just at this juncture Brigadier Alexander went down with fever and had to hand over command of the Brigade to the senior Battalion Commander, who happened to be the C.O. of the 1st Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment.

The detailed task that now fell to the Nowshera Brigade was as follows:

With the 3rd Light Battery R.A., and the 2nd Light Tank Company (less two sections) under its command, it was to secure Pt. 3838, the spur to the north of it, Pt. 4080, and a hill 600 yards to the south-west by 6 a.m., and to be responsible for protecting the left flank of the Peshawar Brigade.

The Brigade moved at 2 a.m. so as to be in their positions by 6 a.m.; their right battalion, the 2/15th Punjabis, were to hold Pt. 3838, a mile and a half west of the Nahakki Pass, and to work along the spur already referred to that ran north towards Muzi Kor. The Guides were to move up the valley and climb on to the ridge west of Pt. 3838 and then seize Pt. 4080.

The 3/2nd Punjabis were to hold a line across the Wucha Jawar valley, a mile and a half west of the camp, thus forming a strong support in rear of the Guides and 2/15th.

Nowshera Brigade Headquarters, however, made the mistake of taking up its position on top of the Nahakki Ridge near Force Headquarters, thus taking the risk of not being able to keep touch with their units operating along the same ridge should any rocky features intervene. In point of fact, this precisely is what happened, and it had the result (as we shall see) of leaving the Guides isolated to fight alone a gallant but hopeless battle against the entire enemy lashkar. The following is what occurred. In view of its importance and the fact that the tribes were so hard hit that they submitted immediately afterwards, it is worth while giving it in some detail.

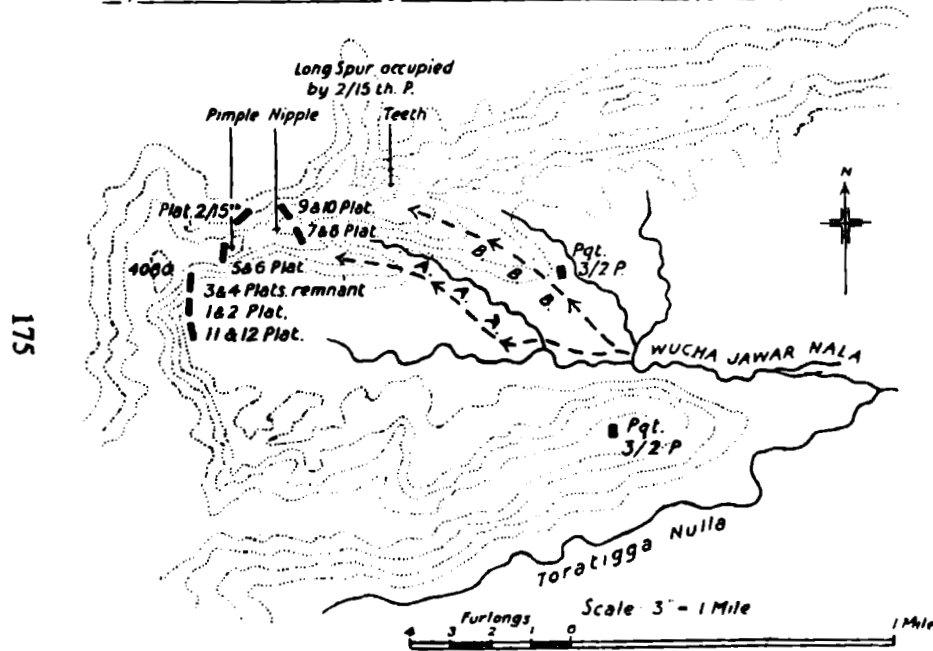
The task given to the Guides Infantry was that the Battalion, less three machine-gun sections, should move westward up the Wucha Jawar valley and secure the high ground at and east of Pt. 4080 by 5.40 a.m. They were then to protect the left flank of the 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment and prevent any enemy movement northwards from Pt. 4203.

The advance to Pt. 4080 was to be carried out in four phases. The first covered the approach march from camp to the foot of the spur leading to the high ground. To simplify the narrative, identification names given on the day of action to certain prominent places on the hills in this area will now be used in the account which follows. These were (see sketch map): High ground above-mentioned, "Teeth"; a rocky pinnacle east of Pt. 4080, "Nipple"; a small rocky feature about 300 yards west of "Nipple," "Pimple." The second phase was the capture of "Teeth," the third capture of "Nipple," and last the capture of Pt. 4080.

The Battalion, commanded by Major S. B. Good, left camp at 2 a.m. and the foot of the spur was reached at 4 a.m. From this point all automatic weapons and ammunition had to be man-handled.

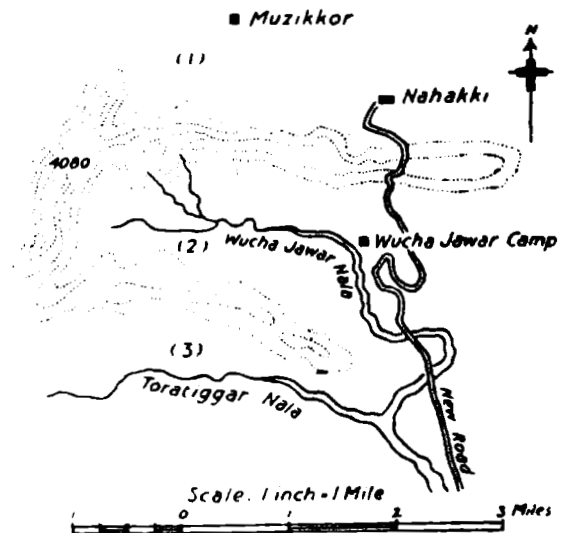
"Teeth" was seized by "B" Company under Lieutenant G. J. Hamilton at 5.20 a.m. without opposition. The remainder of the Battalion then moved round in the valley to the west of this spur and, with "C" Company as advanced guard, moved up a spur leading direct to "Nipple." "Nipple" was reached at

Hand Sketch showing the attack of The Guides Infantry on Hill 4080
Sept. 29th 1935 reached by Platoons 3 & 4 but subsequently driven off.



B. B. B. Original advance of B Coy
A. A. A. Advance of A & C Coys (C leading)

The Operations of Mohforce on 29th. Oct. 35



- (1) Area of Peshawar Brigade
(2) Area of Nowshera Brigade
Duke of Wellingtons Regt
3/2nd Punjab Regt.
5/12th FF Regt (Guides Infantry)
2/15th Punjab Regt.
(3) Area held by the 3rd Infantry Brigade

5.45 a.m., one enemy who succeeded in firing one shot being surprised and captured.

On arrival, Major Good halted the Battalion temporarily to make his final plan and to allow companies, which had strung out owing to the difficulties of the ascent (which in many places had allowed an advance in single file only), to close up.

The approach to Pt. 4080 from "Teeth" was along a narrow ridge overlooked by Pt. 4080. That point itself was very rugged and its sides dropped steeply, particularly on the east and west, thus providing a great deal of dead ground. To the south there were clumps of rocks affording cover to enemy creeping up to the point from that direction. On the hillside on the west of the point were a number of caves.

The plan formed was to leave two platoons (Nos. 9 and 10) of "C" Company and one section of machine guns to hold "Nipple" and to give supporting fire, whilst "C" Company, less two platoons, closely followed by "A" Company under Lieutenant A. P. S. Rendall, advanced to capture Pt. 4080. The Regimental Aid Post was to be established at "Nipple."

The troops moved forward at 5.50 a.m., when it was just beginning to get light, and almost immediately were fired on from a small eminence immediately south of Pt. 4080 and from the northern slopes of that point. After advancing about 300 yards, "C" Company (less two platoons) was halted and ordered to take up positions to give additional covering fire on to the final objective. "A" Company, less two platoons, was ordered to push on to Pt. 4080.

At this point the enemy fire was not excessive and gave little indication that the objective was held in strength.

The route from "Nipple" to Pt. 4080 consisted of a long col, which for the most part was so narrow that men could move in single file only. As daylight increased, the fire of the enemy, whose numbers swelled rapidly as parties came up from caves on the western face of the hill where they had been sleeping, grew in intensity and accuracy.

The two platoons of "A" Company pressed forward and with great difficulty reached the highest point of the eastern face of Pt. 4080. Here they were held up at 6.15 a.m. by the fire of enemy occupying several small spurs on the top of the feature. They consolidated what they had won and gave what covering support they could to the remaining two platoons (Nos. 1 and 2) of the company which were following up with Major Good. When the two rear platoons reached the west side of the col, about 7 a.m., they were ordered into a position just to the south and in rear of the leading ones, to try to keep down the fire from the small eminence south of Pt. 4080, which was getting hotter every moment.

Battalion Headquarters had now established themselves on the east face

of Pt. 4080, and Captain G. Meynell, the Adjutant, went forward to the leading two platoons to ascertain the situation.

It was now much lighter, and the enemy fire was increasing and causing casualties.

Seeing that he could not get forward to gain the crest with his present strength, Major Good now sent for the two platoons of "C" Company (Nos. 11 and 12) which had been halted on the col to give covering fire. These platoons advanced and reached the foot of Pt. 4080, but they were unable to get up to the front position owing to the heavy and accurate fire, which prevented them from scaling the cliff face now that it was broad daylight. They took up a position on the left of Nos. 1 and 2 Platoons, facing south-west.

In the meantime Captain Meynell had reached the two forward platoons. Lieutenant Rendall had been killed, and the platoons were engaged in a terrific struggle. Captain Meynell took command of these two platoons. To all intents and purposes they were isolated and almost surrounded by large numbers of tribesmen who, owing to the broken nature of the hill-top, had been able to creep up to within a few yards of the troops unseen.

Major Good, realizing the serious situation of his Battalion, tried to get in touch with the artillery forward observer, Lieutenant J. N. D. Tyler, of the 3rd Light Battery. Lieutenant Tyler and several of his men had been wounded, and the remainder could not get into communication with their battery. Second-Lieutenant R. E. T. Keelan, artillery forward observer, 15th Medium Battery, had also been wounded. Battalion Headquarters then tried to get in touch with 3rd Light Battery by using a helio which had no stand, but this was a failure. Owing to the configuration of the ground, visual signalling to any formation headquarters was an impossibility. Brigade Headquarters were at a point farther back along the same ridge with mountain features intervening. However, a signaller with a shutter got into communication with "B" Company on "Teeth," and two platoons were ordered forward. Lieutenant Hamilton received this message at 7.30 a.m. and immediately set out with Nos. 6 and 8 Platoons for "Nipple."

Communication was also established with the 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment, and a message stating that the Battalion was heavily engaged, had twenty-five casualties and wanted help, was started. Only the first few words were actually sent as the signaller was shot almost immediately.

Lieutenant Hamilton was with his leading platoon, No. 6, as it reached "Nipple"; the other platoon, No. 8, which had farther to go, being still behind. Hastily getting from Captain F. J. Doherty, I.M.S., the Medical Officer with the Battalion Regimental Aid Post, a rough idea of what was happening in front, and realizing that the position on Pt. 4080 was desperate, he decided to push forward at once with No. 6 Platoon. Shortly after leaving the south side of "Nipple," he and five of his men were hit, but his platoon managed to reach

“Pimple,” from which position they at once commenced a heavy fire on the enemy. Lieutenant Hamilton succeeded in joining them there.

All this time Captain Meynell and the forward platoons were engaged in a desperate struggle on Pt. 4080. They were practically surrounded. Major Good with the four platoons not far behind were holding their own with the greatest difficulty. The enemy in considerably increased numbers were closing in and hand grenades and stones were being thrown freely.

Owing to the numbers and determination of the enemy the result was inevitable. At about 8 a.m. the enemy rushed over and round the hill-top, and after a few minutes of most severe hand-to-hand fighting the remnants of the two leading platoons were overwhelmed. Only a few wounded succeeded in getting back to Major Good's position.

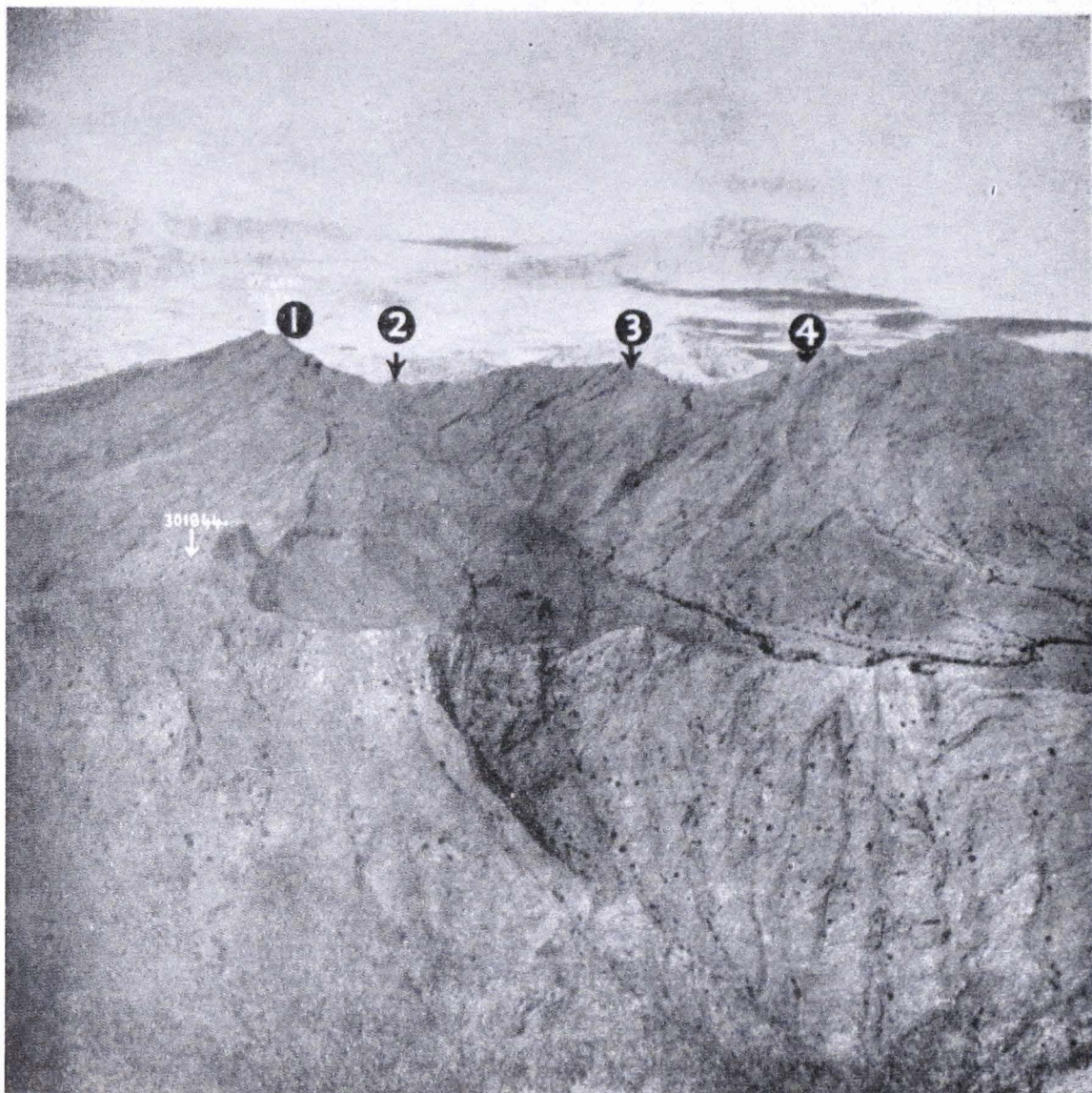
The enemy were now directly overlooking the four rearward platoons and the troops on the col. Major Good, himself wounded, realizing that his position was hopeless, collected everyone he could and ordered a withdrawal down the nullah running south to the Wucha Jawar valley.

In the meantime Lieutenant Hamilton's small party on “Pimple” had been reinforced by another platoon (No. 5) of “B” Company and by a platoon of the 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment which had come up from that Battalion. The two remaining platoons, Nos. 7 and 8, which had originally been on and near “Teeth,” had come forward to “Nipple.” From their positions they poured out a fierce covering fire which, with the fire of machine guns and rifles from “Nipple,” prevented the enemy from following up the troops in front, and greatly assisted their withdrawal.

Lieutenant Hamilton decided to consolidate and hold his position, and sent two messages to “Nipple” to be transmitted, one by signal and the other by runner, to Brigade Headquarters, asking for more men and ammunition. Neither of these messages reached its destination.

At 9.15 a.m. another artillery forward observer arrived at “Nipple” and an hour later shelling and air bombing of Pt. 4080 commenced. The forward platoons at “Pimple” were then withdrawn to “Nipple” until all the wounded had been safely evacuated.

Lieutenant Hamilton, who had carried on for two and a half hours after being severely wounded, was evacuated at 10 a.m. As he was going down the hill he was met by Lieutenant C. G. Campbell of the Battalion who had arrived at Wucha Jawar camp two hours before, and was able to explain the position to him. Lieutenant Campbell took command of the remainder of the Battalion and carried out its withdrawal. The withdrawal was not seriously followed up. This was partly owing to the effective artillery fire on the ridges from Pt. 4080 to Pt. 4203, and to the fire from light tanks in the valley which had now arrived at the foot of the spur below Pt. 4080; but it was also due to



HILL 4080 FROM THE AIR

- 1 = Hill 4080
- 2 = "Pimple"
- 3 = "Nipple"
- 4 = "Teeth"

The Attack of the Guides on Hill 4080, 29 September 1935

the severe handling and heavy losses the tribesmen had sustained at the hands of the Battalion.

The six platoons most heavily engaged in this desperate fight against overwhelming odds lost heavily. Of four British officers, five J.C.Os. and 130 other ranks, only one J.C.O. and 32 other ranks came out unharmed.

The total casualties were 2 British officers killed and 2 wounded, 2 J.C.Os. killed and 2 wounded, and 19 Indian ranks killed, 37 wounded and 38 injured, and 8 missing. The injuries were chiefly due to falls on the precipitous rocks.

Of the total verified enemy losses on 29th September, amounting to 144, of which about half were killed, the bulk were sustained in this action.

For gallantry on this day Captain G. Meynell, M.C., was awarded the V.C. (posthumously), Lieutenant G. J. Hamilton received the Distinguished Service Order, one Jemadar was granted the Indian Order of Merit, 2nd Class, and five awards of the Indian Distinguished Service Medal were made to Indian other ranks of the Battalion. In addition there were several mentioned in despatches. Lieutenant J. N. D. Tyler, R.A., was awarded the Military Cross, and Captain F. J. Doherty, I.M.S., the Distinguished Service Order.

The reader will doubtless ask how it came about that although messages could not be sent back, Brigade Headquarters failed to help the Guides. Why, when the firing was heard, was no reinforcement rushed to the sound of the battle?

The story at Nowshera Brigade and Mohmand Force Headquarters (they were close together) is as follows: They were both established on the ridge a little distance to the west of Pt. 3838 at about 6.40 a.m. Brigade Headquarters immediately got into communication with three of its battalions, 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment, 3rd Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment, and 2nd Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, but all attempts to communicate with the Guides failed. The sound of firing from the direction of Pt. 4080 was heard for a few minutes at about 8 a.m. Shortly afterwards a report was received from the Commander, Royal Artillery, which had emanated from the O.C. 3rd Light Battery, that the latter officer was not sure whether Pt. 4080 was held by the Guides or by the enemy. It was therefore impossible to open artillery fire on Pt. 4080 until the situation was clear. The Brigade Commander went forward to the Headquarters, 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment, where he was told that it was believed that the Guides had gained their objective, Pt. 4080, but had been driven off it again. After sending a message to the Battalion asking them to report the situation and instructing them to make no attempt to recapture Pt. 4080, he returned to his own Headquarters. Here a message timed 9.39 a.m. was received from the Battalion saying that Pt. 4080 was held by the enemy. This was reported to the Force Commander. Arrangements were then made to bring the fire of the field and medium batteries on to the hill and heavy

shelling commenced. Under cover of this, the remnants of the Guides on the col were able to withdraw from their forward position.

In the meantime the Peshawar Brigade had completed its task in the Kamalai plain, and orders had been issued for the withdrawal of the Brigade to commence at 10 a.m.

At 9.50 a.m. the Nowshera Brigade Commander asked Mohmand Force Headquarters to make the whole of the 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment available to extricate the Guides. It will be recollected that the 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment was allotted a role to protect the left of Peshawar Brigade. Peshawar Brigade was therefore informed of what was known and was told that the company of the 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment on the spur protecting the left flank of the 1st Battalion 4th Bombay Grenadiers would be withdrawn, and the spur neutralized as far as possible by fire. The Peshawar Brigade Commander accelerated the withdrawal of his forward infantry, thereby removing one commitment of Nowshera Brigade and enabling that Brigade to focus all its attention and energies on the withdrawal of the Guides. In addition to this, to help in covering the withdrawal of the rest of the Guides, the Nowshera Brigade Commander ordered up a company and a machine-gun section of the 2nd Battalion The Duke of Wellington's Regiment. Owing to the intense artillery fire which had now started on to Pts. 4080 and 4203, assisted by the bombing of the reverse slopes by the R.A.F. reconnaissance sortie, the Guides were able to commence their withdrawal without further assistance other than that of the light tanks above mentioned.

The situation was now well in hand and the withdrawal was not pressed. Though several attempts to follow up were made, these were rapidly checked by artillery fire. All units of the Nowshera Brigade were back in camp by 4.30 p.m.

The casualties incurred by Mohmand Force during 29th September were as follows.

British Officers.—Killed (2): Captain G. Meynell, M.C., 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides); Lieutenant A. P. S. Rendall, M.C., 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides). Wounded (4): Lieutenant J. N. D. Tyler, R.A.; Lieutenant R. E. T. Keelan, R.A.; Major S. B. Good, O.B.E., 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides); Lieutenant G. J. Hamilton, 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides).

J.C.Os.—Killed, 2; wounded, 2. All of the 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides).

British Other Ranks.—Killed, 1; wounded, 1. 3rd Light Battery, R.A.

Indian Other Ranks.—Killed: 19 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides); 1 3rd Light Battery, R.A.



CAPTAIN GODFREY MEYNELL, V.C., M.C.

Missing: 8 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides). Wounded: 1 3rd Light Battery, R.A.; 1 18th Cavalry Regiment; 39 5th Battalion 12 Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides); 1 2nd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment.

In addition, one J.C.O. and 38 Indian other ranks were injured, mainly by falls.

As already remarked, enemy losses to the number of 144, of whom about half were killed, were definitely confirmed.

End of the Mohmand Campaign of 1935 and Some Reflections on the Fighting of 29th September

It had not been possible on 29th September to bring in the bodies of the officers and men who had been killed in the foremost position on Pt. 4080, and a certain number of men of the Guides were, it was known, alive in the hands of the tribesmen. It was necessary therefore to take steps to procure their release and to bring in any dead or wounded.

Previously, on 28th September some Halimzai Maliks had gone to Lakai to meet the jirgah which had collected there on its way to see the political authorities. Urgent messages were now sent to these Halimzai Maliks and to the Musa Khel Maliks who were bringing in the jirgah that, instead of coming to Nahakki, they should go at once to the Khwaezai country and arrange to bring in any dead or wounded and secure the release of any prisoners who had fallen into the hands of the lashkar.

They set out from Lakai immediately, and on the morning of 30th September a message was received that their efforts had been successful and that the lashkar had agreed to the removal of the dead and wounded.

With the help of these Maliks and of Khassadars, during the next three days one wounded and five other men and the bodies of Captain Meynell, Lieutenant Rendall, one British other rank and twenty-one Indian other ranks were brought in.

On 1st October a fully representative jirgah of all Mohmand tribes came in and was given the following (fairly lenient) terms by the Political Agent:

- (a) That lashkars were to be dispersed without delay and that all tribal hostilities were to cease;
- (b) That the military road to the camp in Kamalai was to be completed without interference or molestation;
- (c) That the tribes were to undertake to maintain friendly relations with the Government and with the friends of the Government and to be responsible for unlawful actions of outlaws, bad characters and their accomplices against the Government or the friends of the Government; and

- (d) That Government would be freed from the restrictions on its liberty of action imposed by the Ghalanai agreement. At the same time, in view of the punishment already inflicted on the rebellious tribes by land and air action, the Government would not demand any fine or any hostages, provided that these terms were fully carried out by the tribes.

The jirgah asked several questions about the road and suggested that the work on it should stop at once. The Political Agent made it quite clear that Government intended to complete the road to such specifications as were considered necessary, and that if resistance was offered force would be used.

The jirgah then accepted these conditions, and on the morning of 3rd October the members dispersed to their various villages to take steps to put them into effect.

For some time the tribesmen had been showing definite signs of wishing to come in and tender their submission. The action of 29th September undoubtedly caused the Upper Mohmands to make up their minds. In the course of it they had suffered many casualties, and they feared further retaliation from the troops together with the bombing of their villages. Other reasons which combined to bring a desire for peace were that they had received the Proclamation of His Excellency the Governor and had seen the road being made to Nahakki. They were afraid that the next move would be a road in the direction of the Khapak Pass or to Zanawar China. They were tired of the Haji and his sons, and they did not want to be deprived of the privilege of using the territory beyond the administrative border as they liked.

The Force remained on in the Nahakki area till the road was completed, carrying out reconnaissances to the north. There was no interference. Late in October a retirement to the Peshawar plain was carried out, the Brigades "leap-frogging" each other through Ghalanai and down the Gandab valley. On 4th November the Force dispersed and the Guides Infantry returned to Mardan.

Thus ended the Mohmand campaign of 1935, but before leaving it, the extraordinary circumstances that led to the exposure of the Guides Infantry to the fight described above are worth considering as they have lessons for those who may engage in future campaigns on the North-West Frontier.

The following remarks are taken from the Official History. They were written by Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck seven years later when he was Commander-in-Chief in India.

The blow aimed on 29th September 1935, was a direct one, and drew opposition accordingly; but it might have administered heavier punishment than it did at far less cost had the importance of the high ground at Pt. 4080 been realized and this been singled out as an objective. The full strength and fire power of the Nowshera Brigade might have been brought to bear on the

enemy at the head of the Wucha Jawar valley and on Pt. 4080.

The object of the operation was defined as twofold, i.e. the destruction of a village, and the infliction of maximum losses on hostiles between Pt. 2450 and Muzi Kor, and also in the valley west of Wucha Jawar.

In the Mohmand Force plan, the Nowshera Brigade was given the role of securing the high ground north and south of the Wucha Jawar valley and a spur running north from the former, thereby protecting the left flank of the Peshawar Brigade.

In giving effect to this plan the Nowshera Brigade Commander dispatched his units in divergent directions from the start, and moved his own Headquarters separately to Pt. 3838. Touch was lost from the outset owing to the fact that units and Headquarters followed divergent routes instead of moving concentrated up to the last possible moment, and then diverging.

Moreover, the result of this divergence of routes was seen not only in the loss of touch between units, but in the lack of mutual support on the critical ridge. An alternative method for the Nowshera Brigade to have adopted in carrying out their task would have been to leap-frog two of its Battalions along the ridge. This would have greatly increased the force of the blow at Pt. 4080, where opposition might have been expected and the feature recognized as a likely one for tribesmen in that area to hold in strength.

Additionally, it would seem that an underestimate was made of the difficult nature of the ground on the Pt. 4080 ridge, and the fact was ignored that, leave and furlough being open, battalions were not working at full strength. Under such circumstances the task given to the 5th Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (The Guides) was beyond its powers to carry out. It had to fight the action with depleted numbers from the start; and as the battle developed, found itself involved without adequate support or communications against a numerically much superior enemy, on very difficult ground.

In this crisis the question may be asked as to what if any assistance could have been rendered by the Peshawar Brigade from the north as soon as the true nature of the enemy opposition at Pt. 4080 became apparent. It is quite likely that successful intervention from this quarter might have been staged, but here the loss of touch and consequent lack of knowledge of the situation at Mohmand Force Headquarters had an adverse effect. Any orders for such intervention would have to be given by the Force Commander, and he did not know what was happening.

The above analysis of the operations of 29th September 1935, goes to show how the development of an operation may rest on the clear and full understanding by subordinate commanders of the object to be attained. If the role of the Nowshera Brigade on 29th September 1935, had been given as a purely protective one on the left of the Peshawar Brigade (and nothing said

about inflicting loss on the enemy in the Wucha Jawar valley), the securing of the ridges west of Wucha Jawar need not have involved an advance to Pt. 4080. In this case the tribesmen's strength on this feature would still have been discovered, and with a better chance of striking at them advantageously and with maximum strength and fire support.

If, on the other hand, a definite role had been laid down in advance on the left flank of the Peshawar Brigade and to strike the enemy wherever met up to the limit of Pt. 4080, the Nowshera Brigade might have been handled differently and been moved concentrated. In this case also there would have been better prospects of dealing the enemy heavier punishment at far less cost.

The Guides in Waziristan, 1936-38

The transfer of the Guides Infantry to Razmak early in 1936 was to break new ground for them on the North-West Frontier.

This volume has already given the reader some idea, from the part played by other Battalions of the Regiment in the various past campaigns against Mahsuds and Wazirs, of the nature of the Waziristan countryside and its inhabitants.

The operations there of 1922-23, however, have not been described, since no Battalion of the Regiment was employed. Moreover, before the reader can understand fully the situation that existed in Waziristan when the Guides Infantry went there in 1936, some outline of these operations should be understood. They were undertaken with the specific object of driving a semi-circular metalled road right through the heart of Waziristan from the Tochi to the Tank Zam, and of establishing on the 7,000 ft. plateau of Razmak on the Mahsud-Wazir boundary a fortified camp to accommodate a Brigade Group.

Thus, it was confidently hoped, would this turbulent corner of tribal territory be permanently kept in order if not actually pacified. Indeed, the policy presented both the advantages of offering to tribesmen increased peaceful employment either on the road (in guarding or upkeep) or in the many openings for supply to Razmak, and then of holding an overwhelming threat of retribution ready at the very heart of the country. Indeed Makin, the one well-populated and fertile centre of the Mahsud tribes, was brought within comfortable range of 6-inch howitzers from Razmak Post itself.

Such was the plan and the policy, and in 1922, with the severe fighting of the "Derajat Column" (see Chapter VII) still recent, the tribes were hardly quiescent, and numerous posts in the Tochi and South Waziristan were still held by troops. The announcement of the above policy and plans, as may be imagined, was not hailed with joy by the tribes. The Mahsuds in particular flew to arms and in characteristic fashion signified their displeasure by ambushing (in another tribe's area) and murdering an officer—Lieutenant Dickson, R.E.—who was engaged on road work.

The putting through of the road and establishing of Razmak had now to be combined with punishment of the Mahsuds. The Razmak Force consisted of a full-scale Divisional Group of three Brigades, with two Gurkha Battalions as reserve. Road construction commenced in July 1922, from the Tochi, and by 4th January 1923, reached Razani without opposition. It was all Wazir country. The forcing of the Razmak Narai in a blinding snowstorm with little Mahsud opposition on 23rd January brought the Force on to the plateau. The decision had already been taken to destroy Makin (the Government were in no mood to placate and the Mahsuds needed a lesson), and this was carried out in February. After this the Mahsuds submitted unconditionally and accepted terms at a full jirgah. It remained now to complete the road programme and build Razmak and other smaller protective posts on road routes. The road programme included, besides the main semi-circular metalled road, various fair-weather subsidiary roads—notably Jandola-Sarwekai and Mirali-Spinwam-Thal (Kurram); and ultimately Razmak was also linked with Wana by a fair-weather road through Ladha, Kaniguram and the Sherawangi Pass.

In the end the Waziristan picture settled down with posts and communications as shown in the map. It became a Military District with three Brigades—Bannu, Wana and Razmak itself—and though these Brigades had outposts to protect (i.e., important points such as Mir Ali, Damdil and Manzai), most of the security was in the hands of the Militias. These Frontier Corps, Pathan bodies themselves, had large and well-equipped headquarters—the Tochi Scouts at Miranshah and the South Waziristan Scouts at Jandola—and small posts scattered everywhere. They co-operated as scouts or indeed as mobile troops in mountain country whenever columns went out from any of the Brigades, as they regularly did.

In this state Waziristan gradually settled down and except for very minor troubles, even during the Red Shirt period, became more and more peaceful. Mahsuds were enlisted as lorry-drivers in the R.I.A.S.C., and a company of them was formed in the 4th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles (Wildes). By 1933 movement with safety was possible almost anywhere. Promotion examinations and Brigade manœuvres were held unmolested in the tribal territory. The writer even recollects when, in command of his Battalion (the 5th Frontier Force Rifles) going out on a final exercise before the Battalion left Waziristan on relief, the local tribesmen in the villages spread tables with the inevitable tea and hard-boiled eggs for the officers as a farewell gesture! And these were Wazirs of the Daur tribe. It may fairly be claimed that the policy had succeeded to a remarkable degree. Nevertheless, only three years later, Waziristan was once more plunged in strife and ruthless anti-Government rebellion at the bidding of one more implacably hostile fanatic—the later famous Faqir of Ipi. And so it remained till the onset of the Second World War, and the problems

of independence which followed it pushed Waziristan and the problems of its pacification once again into the background.

In early 1936 then, when the Guides Infantry came to Razmak, Waziristan was peaceful, but the germs of discord were already in being, and it required only mishandling of a civil problem, followed by misdirection of a military measure that was instituted as a result, to give the Faqir his chance, and he took it with both hands.

In the initial operation and the fighting that followed, the Guides were involved during their whole tour of duty in the District. The story is as follows :

The civil problem referred to above was the abduction of a Hindu girl in Bannu and was known as the "Islam Bibi Case." The girl was taken away by a young Muslim student, but was recovered. She was stated in the meantime to have become a Muslim and given the name of Islam Bibi. This raised the question as to which community should have the custody of her, and communal excitement arose in Bannu. The courts decided first that the girl should be given to the Muslim community, but on appeal this was reversed and she was handed over to the Hindus.

Excitement at once spread to the tribal areas, and the Dauris of the Tochi threatened to march on Bannu, but under political pressure they dispersed and it was thought that the trouble was over. Their leader, however, Mirza Ali Khan, a Faqir from the village of Ipi in the Tochi valley, removed himself to Sham in the Shaktu area, laying at the same time a curse on the Dauris and their neighbours the Tori Khel for their defection. However, in May 1936, he returned to Biche Kashkai in the Khaisora valley, built a mosque and commenced to foment trouble.

In early autumn he openly assumed the role of champion of Islam, claiming miraculous powers and calling on the neighbouring tribes to rally round him. In this he was assisted by fortuitous renewal of interest in the Islam Bibi case. Political pressure was again exerted, particularly on the Dauris and Tori Khel, to control the Faqir's activities.

The Maliks admitted their responsibility, but professed themselves unable to control the Faqir and the malcontents who had now flocked to him. They asked for Government help under existing agreements and the despatch of a column into the Khaisora was suggested. The Maliks, however, could not give any assurance that the column would be entirely unopposed.

The Khaisora, November 1936

Finally it was decided that on 25th November the Razmak and Bannu Columns (the latter called Tocol, short for Tochi Column) should march through the Khaisora valley. Razcol was to start from Damdil and Tocol from Mir Ali, meeting at Biche Kashkai that night, and both returning to their starting-points the next day. Razcol was to move along the Khaisora valley,

WAZIRISTAN

Kharve

Miram Shah

To Thal

BANNU

Tochi R.

Mir Ali

Datta Khel

Lwargi Narai

Jaler Algod

Sein

Mami Rogha

Damdil

Zerpezai

Gardai

Razani

Dakai Kalai

Bichche Kashkai

SHAM PLAIN

Razmak Narai

RAZMAK

Engamal Narai

Makin

Marai Narai

Tauda China

Piazha Raghza

Durand Line

Administrative Border

Asman Manza

Lodha

Baddar Algod

Kanigurani

Sorarogha

Sharawangi Narai

Ahmadwam

Khaisora R.

Torwam

Kotkai

WANA

Jandola

Miles 5 10 15 20

Shahur Tangi

Sarwekai

Manzai

while Tocol advanced south from Mir Ali through Hassu Khel, Imar de Kila and the Jaler Algad. The columns concentrated at Damdil and Mir Ali respectively on 24th November.

Real fighting had not occurred in Waziristan for years. The Tori Khel did not appear hostile, and serious opposition was not expected. Indeed, it was felt that a march in such strength through the disturbed area might strengthen the hands of the local Maliks and check hostile propaganda altogether.

Nevertheless, the plan, even regarded as a peaceful demonstration, took unjustifiable liberties, and the price to be paid continued for many years afterwards. For the disaster that followed placed on a pedestal an implacably hostile anti-Government fanatic who never ceased to foment trouble and profit by it—the Faqir of Ipi. Let us follow the story.

The only Battalion of the Regiment* involved in the operation was the Guides Infantry in the Razmak Brigade. It was new country for them, and the beginning of a tour of duty punctuated by constant fighting columns that lasted all the time the Battalion remained in Razmak.

On 25th November the route followed by the Brigade led down the Khaisora valley—a boulder-strewn river-bed of the roughest kind, overlooked on both sides by high scrub-covered hills. These formed a tangi at Zerpezai, about half-way to Biche Kashkai, where the river-bed was only fifty yards wide and the exits commanded by dominating features.

For the first hour the advanced guard and piqueting troops were provided by the 6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles with six platoons of Tochi Scouts on the flanks. On approaching the above tangi, however, the Guides took over advanced guard and it was at the same time reported that the tangi was occupied. This proved to be true and hostile fire was encountered from the high ground overlooking it. Supported by their machine-gun company and a mountain battery, the Guides gained their objectives, driving off the opposition with little loss; but it was now clear that it was to be no peace-time promenade, and with fighting to do the task set and the distance to be covered to camp at Biche Kashkai were too great. The Guides were not seriously engaged when withdrawing during the later stages of the day, but it was dark before all the Brigade reached camp, and casualties were suffered as a result—notably Major Jack Secombe of the 6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles, who with two of his men was cut off in the darkness and all three killed.

If the Razmak Brigade (Razcol) had a struggle to reach Biche Kashkai that night, the column from Mir Ali (Tocol) was in still greater trouble. A weaker force both in strength and fire power (it had no artillery), and allotted an even greater distance to cover, the enemy opposition inflicted losses and delayed its advance so much that the column was forced to halt and bivouac at dusk four miles short of Biche Kashkai. Even so, had the commander been

* The 6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles also participated.

content to remain there that night, serious consequences would doubtless have been avoided. As it was, however, he attempted to reach Biche Kashkai by renewing the advance after dark. Enemy parties were vigilant and opened fire, throwing the column into confusion and stampeding the animals. Numbers of these made off in the darkness and their valuable loads were not only lost to the troops, but fell into the hands of the Faqir's following, thus enormously raising that firebrand's prestige.

However, none of the Frontier Force Regiment was involved in this regrettable affair, and the story is only told to show how the spark was ignited that set Waziristan aflame for the remaining years before the Second World War burst on the world. It made the remainder of the Guides' period in Waziristan a strenuous one, and was to cost the Battalion its Commanding Officer, killed in action by a sniper's bullet.

Tocol were helped into Biche Kashkai on the morning of 26th November by the Guides, 1/9th Gurkhas and a mountain battery, the two former piqueting the heights for the remainder of the way. The plan, however, had been merely for a two days' "column march," and only rations for two days were carried. Air supply had not yet been developed, and though the R.A.F. had helped Tocol with air action and ammunition "drops," the columns could not be maintained, and they both moved to Mir Ali next day. The march was harassed by tribesmen and the Guides were rear-guard during the difficult opening phase of the march. It was completed without further difficulty, but the whole affair had been a severe shock to the Army, the Politicals and the Government. Two officers and 19 rank and file had been killed, and 4 officers and 87 rank and file wounded. Further, the Tochi Scouts had lost 7 killed and 16 wounded. The Faqir's prestige had been enhanced and some 200 Mahsuds now joined him.

In this connection an effort to try and detach his following and restore the Maliks' prestige by leaflets dropped from the air was very astutely turned to his own advantage by the Faqir of Ipi's foresight. Having some previous knowledge of this type of propaganda, he explained to his followers that they need not fear the advent of planes as his magical powers would now turn their high explosive bombs to harmless paper. As few tribesmen could read, the ruse paid him handsome dividends.

The Government now took prompt action. The Tori Khel and other participants were to be punished and the Faqir expelled. General Sir John Coleridge, commanding the Northern Army, was given both military and political control, and reinforcements of two mountain batteries, the 2nd Rawalpindi Infantry Brigade, two Sapper companies and a wing of the R.A.F. were placed at his disposal.

A motor road from Mir Ali through the Khaisora was to be made and definite action taken to prevent the trouble spreading. Razcol (plus two batta-

lions) was to be a striking force, with the 2nd Brigade in support at Mir Ali and the Bannu Brigade guarding the line of communication to Bannu.

The weather delayed road-making, but work started (and the new organization came into being) on 5th December. Destruction of towers and dwellings of hostile Wazirs was carried out at the same time, but the Faqir and his followers failed to concentrate and oppose the troops, so that no really punishing blow could be dealt. All this time the Guides, except for taking their share of protective duties to cover the road-making, experienced no particular incident. Sporadic fighting, however, occurred as the tribesmen, thanks to the 25th November's mule stampede, had now plenty of ammunition.

They did not, however, escape these operations without loss, some twenty being reported killed.

For a short time action against the Faqir was confined to ineffectual air bombing of a mosque and dwelling where he was reported to be hiding, but on 8th January 1937, Razcol again entered the Khaisora to deal with some villages harbouring recalcitrants by night bombardment. This enterprise (which brought the Guides no fighting) was successful in that the Tori Khel submitted and, with political control reverting to the Frontier Government, it was hoped that normal conditions would now supervene.

It was however a vain hope, and this time the Mahsuds also joined in. The attempt to return to what had come to be regarded as "normal conditions," with road protection entrusted to Khassadars and dealings with tribal Maliks through political agents relied on to ensure good behaviour, broke down. Muhammad Aslam Wazir and Muhammad Aslam Mahsud, the respective Assistant Political Agents (known as "Grand Slam" and "Small Slam"), began to lose their hold and Ipi started a campaign of murder and sabotage on the roads. In February 1937, Captain J. C. Keogh, 1st Sikhs (serving with the South Waziristan Scouts), was ambushed between Ladha and Jandola, and Lieutenant R. N. Beatty of Hodson's Horse, acting as Political Officer, was attacked in the Tochi. Both were mortally wounded and their orderlies killed. The latter was robbed of Rs.32,000 of political funds that he was taking to Razmak. Sporadic attacks and hostilities became widespread, roads, telegraphs and bridges being interfered with and posts sniped at night. On the night of 20th March a piquet of the 2nd Battalion 5th Royal Gurkhas, F.F., was heavily attacked, but after desperate fighting was held. When rescued only four of the eight men could stand and 31 enemy lay dead around the post.

Towards the end of March political negotiations with the Faqir of Ipi obtained agreement to cease hostilities, and it was now hoped that under pressure from the air he and his followers had had enough, but this undertaking was merely a ruse to cover still more treachery. Only a few days later, on 29th March, the up convoy of lorries to Razmak that was being protected

by the Abbottabad Brigade at Damdil on its way through that area was attacked in strength and an all-day battle ensued. The attack on the convoy failed and no lorries were lost, but heavy casualties were suffered on both sides. The Gurkhas lost 34 killed and 44 wounded and the tribesmen's reported dead amounted to 94, with numerous wounded.

The Shahur Tangi, 9th April 1937

This, however, proved no deterrent, and only eleven days later, on 9th April, another lorry convoy (bound for Wana) was attacked in Mahsud country in the infamous Shahur Tangi—the scene twenty years earlier of the ambush of a camel convoy and a savage fight that followed. But whereas the camel convoy in 1917, moving along the river-bed before the road had been built, was well handled and the protecting troops dealt faithfully with the marauders, the lorry convoy in April 1937, trusting on political advice to Khassadar protection on the heights, carried in vehicles only a covering party of a half-company of infantry and an escort of a section of armoured cars.

Disaster followed. The lorries moved in three blocks, one armoured car leading, two in the intervals and one in the rear. The infantry was similarly spaced out and placed in lorries near the armoured cars.

A tragic feature of the convoy was that it carried, besides 72 leave details, a number of officers, some returning from leave and others from attending a promotion examination, all on their way to Wana from Manzai.

A detailed and vivid account of what happened is given in *The Official History of Operations on the North-West Frontier*, and is well worth reading. Suffice it here to say that as the convoy of 49 lorries and two private cars was on its way through the defile at 7.45 a.m., with the rearmost vehicles just entering the gorge at the eastern end, fire was opened on it simultaneously by Mahsuds hidden in gullies and behind rocks overlooking the road along its entire length through the tangi. Drivers were the first to be killed and their lorries splayed all over the road, blocking it completely. The road was so covered by fire at short range that very soon any movement by those still alive was impossible. The armoured cars were useless as their machine guns could not be elevated sufficiently to fire at the attackers high above them. Although help, from light tanks followed by scouts and infantry from Sarwekai began to arrive the same afternoon, it was too weak to dislodge the Mahsuds, who were still in position at dusk.

By next morning further reinforcement, including a Battalion from Bannu (the 2/11th), arrived, and by noon the enemy had made off, leaving the tragic scene to be cleared up. Needless to say, many lorries had been "looted" (one was burnt out), and though the tribesmen suffered several casualties they seized a quantity of stores, etc., that were doubtless of great value to them.

The casualties in the convoy were: killed, 7 officers, 45 British and Indian ranks and civilian drivers; wounded, 5 officers, 2 J.C.Os., 43 British and Indian ranks and civilian drivers. Among the killed was Second-Lieutenant G. N. Scott of the 3rd Battalion of the Regiment, and among the wounded the commander of the convoy, who was hit three times. The figures show that few indeed escaped, and some of the officers lying wounded were murdered after nightfall.

The ambush had been organized by a Mahsud outlaw and lieutenant of the Faqir's, by name Khonia Khel—readily translated by the troops into “Bloody Bill.”

This tragic affair caused a wave of excitement to spread through the tribes of Waziristan, and the Government once more took strong action, placing both military and political control in the hands of Sir John Coleridge.

The policy now was to penetrate every doubtful valley, making roads where necessary, and above all to seize the Faqir himself or, failing that, to drive him out of Waziristan. The new operations were to bring back the Guides Infantry on to the scene.

The first steps were to clear up the situation in the Khaisora, and strong reinforcements from India were brought up with several air squadrons. No Battalion of the Regiment was however included, and the Razmak Brigade with the Guides were not involved. No description, therefore, will be given here. The Official History provides it in full, including the subsequent surprise attack on and destruction of the Faqir's stronghold, Aرسال Kot, from which it was said the Faqir himself only escaped in a *burka*.*

During these operations, which lasted throughout May, the Guides were not included as part of the striking or raiding forces, but formed part of a brigade of three battalions and a mountain battery, called “Grant Col.” This formation under Colonel Pat Grant of the Guides Infantry was employed in protecting the line of communication.

The Sherawangi Narai and Death of Lieutenant-Colonel Grant

The next major enterprise on which the Battalion was engaged was a tragic one, for in the course of it the commandant, Colonel Grant, was killed. It started with the setting out of Razcol and Tocol from Razmak on 7th June on an expedition through Mahsud country through Ladha to join hands with the Wana Brigade Column (Wanacol) at Torwam. On 23rd June the column was opposed by a Mahsud lashkar on the heavily wooded Sherawangi Narai, and the Guides were leading as advanced guard. Colonel Grant ordered two

* Female garment veiling the whole head and body.

companies to take a big spur some 300 yards ahead, and himself went forward on to a wooded ridge to watch their progress. What happened is best described by Major Redding, who was Second-in-Command with the Battalion.

“Having given out his orders Pat Grant, together with Jemadar Arjan Singh (O.C. Machine-guns) and their runners, stood on the slope of a tree-covered spur to watch the progress of the attack. A good deal of enemy fire was concentrated on the spur, and at about 1000 hours an orderly came running to Major Redding to say that the Colonel had been hit. Redding and his orderly ran down the slope about fifty yards and found Jemadar Arjan Singh and his orderly carrying Pat to the reverse side of the slope. The M.O. was sent for and Pat, still conscious, was made as comfortable as possible. He asked only for a drink of water. Redding stayed with him till the M.O. and a stretcher arrived, and it was obvious by then that Pat was dying. He was taken down the road to an ambulance, but passed away shortly afterwards.”

One bullet had hit Colonel Grant in the chest and another had slightly wounded Jemadar Arjan Singh. The R.A.F. flew Pat Grant's body to Mardan, where he rests with many other Guides in the little cemetery by the church.

The opposition on the Sherawangi Narai was soon overcome, and by 24th June both Tocol and Razcol were in perimeter camp at Torwam. On 28th June Wanacol arrived, completing the division of three brigades.

After a punitive excursion next day in which the Guides saw no fighting, the brigades split up. Razcol moving to Asman Manza, near Kaniguram, a magnificent camp on an elevated plateau requiring only two piquets for protection.

Last Days at Razmak

Razcol remained at Asman Manza (which might be translated “the plateau in the sky”) till 8th August, when it set out to return to Razmak. On the last march into the camp the Guides formed the advanced guard and had to drive hostile Mahsuds off a commanding feature known as Crag Piquet. This was done efficiently and without loss, two of the companies employed being commanded by Captain Elliott Lockhart of the Guides Cavalry. This incident is perhaps of interest as being the last occasion on which an officer of the Guides Cavalry served with the Infantry on active service. He was attached at his own request and spent several months with the Battalion.

On 28th August General Marshall, who had commanded the Razmak Brigade during the Khaisora and subsequent operations, left for England and wrote the Officer Commanding the Guides a farewell letter :

“Before leaving the Razmak Brigade, I must send you this line to say how very proud and pleased I am to have the privilege of having your

battalion in my command. You have throughout all these operations fully lived up to your great reputation, and I need hardly tell you that I had nothing but the fullest confidence that whatever you were called upon to do would be well and truly done and in the most efficient manner.

“In saying good-bye to you, I feel I am doing so to personal friends, whose friendship I value most highly. I would like you to let your British and Indian officers and all ranks know how very grateful I am to them, and how much I appreciate the very fine work they have done whilst with me here.

“The very best of luck to you all, and may you soon have a rest from many years of war.

J. S. MARSHALL.”

The Guides' time with Wazirforce was now drawing to a close, but before their return to Mardan, which was due in November, they were called on for one more task. Once again it was carried out in characteristically efficient fashion and earned the congratulations of the Divisional Commander. It is of interest also as an example of an operation commenced at night to forestall the vigilance of the tribal enemy.

Towards the end of September a Mahsud lashkar collected in the area of the Sirdar Algar to the north-west of Razmak and commenced damaging the Razmak water supply. The Bannu Brigade, reinforced by the Guides and 1/3rd Gurkhas, were ordered to deal with this, and the Brigadier decided on an advance by night to surprise the enemy if possible.

The Guides at this time had one company holding Alexandra Ridge post (protecting Razmak on the east), so that a company of the 2nd Battalion 14th Punjab Regiment (20th Brownlow's Punjabis, and old friends) was attached for the operation.

The Battalion led the night advance, commencing at 1 a.m. on 27th September, with the 1/3rd Gurkhas on their right. The enemy were vigilant and opened a heavy fire in the dark from a commanding feature known as Ridgeway. As it was clear that there was no hope of surprise and that further advance in the dark would mean heavy casualties, an attack at dawn was ordered, supported by artillery and machine guns. A concerted plan was made, and the attack, which the Mahsuds opposed strongly, went in at 7.30 a.m.

With the support of artillery and the Battalion's own machine guns, the whole ridge was captured in twenty minutes, and the running tribesmen were heavily punished by the machine guns of both the Guides and the Gurkhas. The enemy's casualties were later reported to be twenty-five killed and a number wounded. The Guides had five slightly wounded.

This successful affair effectively discouraged further interference with Razmak's water supply. It was the last operation for the Guides in Waziristan.

The remainder of the time in Razmak was uneventful. On 5th October Major K. A. Garrett of the 1st Battalion arrived as the new Commandant in succession to Colonel Grant, and in November the Battalion left Waziristan, arriving back in Mardan on 27th November 1937.

Last Years in Mardan

Though they did not know it, the return of the Guides Infantry to Mardan in November, 1937, was to herald their final period there before it was abandoned as their home, shortly before the coming of the Second World War. It was fitting that both the cavalry and infantry should be there together at this time in the old home of the Corps, and that it should also be a period when they could indulge for a while in the traditional hospitality of "weeks," sports meetings and other peace-time activities.

When this has been said, exigencies of space forbid detailed record of such matters, which are nevertheless to be found in the Guides' own History.

One or two administrative changes, however, need to be mentioned. One was the decision to give up the brass band and replace it with a full-strength pipe band. Although the Battalion already had a small pipe band, in this the Battalion did no more than follow what, one after another, other battalions of the Indian Army had done under pressure of the ever-mounting cost of maintenance of a brass band. Moreover, the pipes were agreed to be universally more to the taste of the rank and file, particularly as the *sarnai*, their own instrument, is reminiscent (*pace* all Scots!) of the note of the bagpipe, while the brass instrument is not. The institution of a full-scale pipe band required a suitable scale and style of uniform, and this was evolved after careful consideration. It included two points of interest. First, the facings and buttons as witness of the history of the Corps; and second, the adoption of a tartan, as had become the practice in many other Indian regiments. In this respect the Guides asked for and obtained (after some years) sanction to wear the Royal Stuart tartan—a concession which, by an Order issued in 1923, had been reserved to the special permission of the King.

In 1938 the Battalion reorganized its companies to conform to the new organization introduced for infantry battalions in both British and Indian Armies—i.e., a headquarters company and four rifle companies of three platoons each, instead of a headquarters company and three rifle companies of four platoons each. As has been recorded elsewhere, some battalions reorganized into class companies, but in the case of the Guides the organization adopted was one of class platoons. The total strength of the Battalion remained the same.

Following on this the Battalion suffered a loss that it could not help feeling very much. The Khattaks were largely eliminated from the Battalion and transferred to the 4th Battalion. It is not necessary to dwell on the effect of such a decision on a unit of an army that depends on voluntary recruitment and for a hundred years has established connections with certain clans, not to say certain villages and even families. Many other units were similarly affected, but the feelings engendered at the time were soon to be swamped by the far greater recruiting upheaval that came soon after with the Second World War. All ranks, however, felt them very acutely at the time.

The immediate cause of the change affecting the Khattaks was the limited field of their recruitment and the requirements of the Militias as well as of the Frontier regiments of the Indian Army. The attempt to use Mahsuds and Wazirs in Militias had not proved a success. They were liable to fits of misdemeanour, desertion and dangerous insubordination, and more reliable clans had to be found from among the Pashtoo-speaking population of the Frontier. Thus the Khattak in his limited numbers had to meet the needs of the Militias as well as the Regular Army, and as a result a revised distribution of the manpower of the clan for the latter was inevitable.

It was a party of 50 Khattaks under Jemadar Spin Gul with a havildar and two naiks that marched out on transfer to the 4th Sikhs, and the Guides received from them a like number of Yusufzais.

At this time also certain minor changes of interest were introduced in the matter of uniform, the chief being the reintroduction of the old Review Order uniform with the red kammaband worn under the belt, with the end hanging down level with the coat just under the bayonet.

Finally in May 1939, came at last the order that Mardan was to be given up. Ever since the Indian Army reorganization of 1922, when the Guides Infantry had become the 5th Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment,* and the Guides Cavalry had been given a number (10th Guides Cavalry) and a place among the regular Cavalry regiments, one had wondered how long the Commander-in-Chief would find it possible to retain Mardan as a regular active unit's station, since it had long outworn its usefulness as a Frontier post. The fact that the order was delayed for over sixteen years is the measure of consideration shown to a famous Corps. The Guides' own volume remarks that the rest of the Indian Army chuckled at the final demise of Mardan as the home of the Guides. I venture to deprecate any such statement. The feeling was universally one of sympathy for an inevitable break with the past and the loss of a unique monument thereto.

Private property and buildings were suitably disposed of and proper arrangements made for care of the church and immovable memorials. For the

* See Chapter X, The Regimental Centre.

rest, it became after the Second World War the home of the P.A.S.C. School, who have kept it in the best possible order.

The Guides Infantry were transferred in March 1940 to the posts on the Khajuri plain (Peshawar border) and the Cavalry to Quetta. In September came the Second World War.

CHAPTER XII

THE 51ST SIKHS (1ST BATTALION P.W.O. SIKHS, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT), 1919-39

In Occupation of Enemy Territory, 1919-20—Jerusalem, 1920—Return to India; Peace-time Duties in India and Service in Waziristan, 1920-39.

In Occupation of Enemy Territory, 1919-20

WHEN the fighting in Palestine ceased with the destruction of the Turkish armies and the subsequent surrender in Turkey, the Battalion marched north with the 7th Division through Haifa, Tyre, Sidon and Beirout to Homs and Hama. From Hama it was railed on to Jerablus, arriving on 19th January 1919.

The battalions and formations of General Allenby's army that were now given the task of occupying enemy territory became split up, and the story of the 28th Frontier Force Brigade therefore ceases at this point, and the narrative of the 51st Sikhs (as it then still was called) will now be resumed individually.

Various awards for the recent campaign were published in 1919, among which were a bar to the I.D.S.M. for Subadar Akbar Khan; the Military Cross to Lieutenant A. G. Scotland; the Distinguished Service Order and C.M.G. to Lieutenant-Colonel P. L. Beddy.

On 20th March the Battalion was moved by rail from Jerablus to Tel Abiad and marched on (three miles) to Urfa.

The Mutessarif (local Turkish Governor of Urfa: 166,000 Kurds, Arabs and Armenians) had denounced the "unwarranted occupation" by the British so the welcome of the Regiment was not a cordial one.

This official from the start was determined to obstruct the "occupation" as much as possible, denying all knowledge of the additional Armistice terms. He was a staunch member of the Young Turk Party and famous as the perpetrator of Armenian massacres and deportations.

The removal of the Turkish troops on the Battalion's arrival, therefore proved a difficulty. This had on previous occasions provided "Gilbertian" incidents. At each place occupied, the local Turkish commander was faced

with the necessity of protesting against our occupation or getting into trouble with his own higher authorities. At Jerablus his protest had been backed by the plea that his men were not soldiers but only gendarmes. A field gun and eleven machine guns were then confiscated from his command as unnecessary encumbrances for policemen, after which he sorrowfully removed his detachment lest a worse thing might befall them!

Later, when Colonel Beddy was taking "C" Company to occupy Arab Punar, the approach of the train had been checked by the removal of a rail close to Seruj station. The local Turkish commander at that place advanced with outstretched hand to meet Colonel Beddy when the train—after the rail had been replaced—arrived in the station. Greatly to his surprise, the hand was ignored, and he himself was sent back to Aleppo for trial.

Now once again at Urfa, the Battalion was met by a Turkish Bimbashi of Cavalry, who refused to remove his 500 Cavalry without orders from Constantinople. He was given twenty-four hours to quit, and next morning his Cavalry camp was deserted, except for a rear-guard of about twenty men. Four days later the Turkish subaltern of this rear-guard was warned that if he did not go he would be put in the regimental quarter-guard. He then removed his party.

The Battalion, however, received a very real welcome from the little Roman Catholic community. Priests and nuns of the French Latin Church and the Assyrian Catholic Church had worked together for the destitute of Urfa throughout the war.

Armenian panics in the city were a common occurrence for some time and often necessitated the dispatch of piquets and patrols of the Regiment through the streets before confidence was restored. Utterly groundless rumours were sufficient to start these panics in an already terror-stricken Christian community. Subsequent careful inquiry into the cause of one such panic revealed the fact that two Armenian women, on seeing a covered cart entering the city, spread the rumour that the Mussalmans were bringing arms into the city and that a massacre was imminent.

During the month Colonel Beddy urgently represented to H.Q. Desert Mounted Corps at Aleppo the necessity for the removal of Nurset Bey, the Mutessariff of Urfa, on the grounds that the lawlessness and unsettled state of the province were largely due to him, that he was pursuing a steady policy of obstruction to the British, and that he had a black reputation for massacres of Armenians. He was duly removed and, with the establishment of better relations with the local government, confidence was gradually restored.

In June 1919, the Battalion was engaged in a brush with tribal raiders of the Siyara tribe from the east, and a mobile detachment went out in lorries, supported by a light armoured motor patrol. The raiders were reported to be attacking and looting a village eight miles south of Urfa, and the detachment made a detour to cut off the raiders. In an action which followed, the tribe

suffered severely, while the only casualty to the detachment was one man slightly wounded. The leader of the tribe subsequently gave himself up.

The effect of the affair was immediate. Tribal warfare ceased, brigandage largely diminished, traffic was opened along all roads, and market prices fell by 30 per cent.

Our recent enemies abstained from giving further trouble, and chiefs of many neighbouring Kurdish tribes came in to pay their respects to the British at Urfa. Even the local Turkish government swallowed its jealousy and made a show of gratitude.

On 3rd July the following representatives of the Battalion left for England to take part in the peace celebrations: Subadar-Major Kesar Singh; Havildar Khan Khel, I.O.M., I.D.S.M.; Sepoy Mangat Ram; Sweeper Budhu.

On arrival in England all representatives were camped in the India Peace Contingent Camp at Hampton Court, which was under the command of Brigadier-General Costello, V.C., with Major Mackenzie, D.S.O., of the Battalion as his principal staff officer.

On 2nd August, the whole contingent marched through the streets of London, where it had an enthusiastic reception, to Buckingham Palace. It was then reviewed and addressed by His Majesty King George V on the lawn in the rear of the Palace, and the ceremony ended with a march past, after which officers and men broke off and had tea in the gardens before marching back to Waterloo Station.

The Battalion remained on in Urfa till the beginning of December, during which time the local Turkish authorities were in a very difficult position. The population were chafing at the delay in announcing the decision of the Peace Conference. Disturbing rumours reached them that Syria was to be handed over to the French, Palestine to the Jews, and Smyrna to the Greeks (all in fact true). Meanwhile the national movement under Mustapha Kemal was spreading in the unoccupied districts. However, in October the limits of the different mandated territories were settled by the peace conference and arrangements were made during the month for the Battalion to hand over to French troops at the end of the month, and on 1st November Urfa was evacuated and taken over by French Infantry and Algerian Tirailleurs. The disaster that later befell these unfortunate French troops is no part of this story, but is nevertheless some criterion of the tact and efficiency with which the Battalion comported itself in a difficult and highly inflammable area.

On being relieved at Urfa, the Battalion moved by rail to Rayak and thence by road and sea via Port Said to Kantara, where it arrived on 4th December. Early in January 1920, while daily expecting orders to embark for India, it was suddenly ordered to Jerusalem, where it arrived by rail to relieve the 59th Scinde Rifles, F.F., on 8th January.

Jerusalem, 1920

Very severe weather was experienced in Jerusalem in February 1920, and during the second week a blizzard unprecedented in severity swept over the Judean hills, accompanied by heavy falls of snow which blocked the railway for many days.

The inhabitants of Jerusalem shut themselves up in their houses and made no attempts to clear the streets, which were covered to a depth of 39 inches.

During this time the Battalion's camp became impossible. A French convent was found between the camp and the city which had an empty wing in which British troops had at one time been billeted. The nuns expressed willingness to allow the Battalion to occupy this wing pending the decision of certain city dignitaries, and the Regiment moved in. A few days later, however, on emerging from the snow the Roman Catholic authorities in Jerusalem came to the conclusion that a dreadful sacrilege had been perpetrated, and while representations were made to Cairo, Paris and Rome, the Battalion was ordered out at two hours' notice. It moved to an unoccupied convent (the Greek Convent of the Cross), about two miles south-west of the city. Here the Battalion was very overcrowded, so as soon as the weather improved two companies moved back to the original camp.

The next two months passed without incident, but at the beginning of April the terms of the Balfour Declaration were published, whereby Britain accepted the mandate for Palestine with the definite intention of making it a home for the Jews. It will be recollected that this was the result of an official bargain with Weizmann, the Zionist leader, in return for his formula for the high explosive, T.N.T. The modern state of Israel is the present-day outcome of that decision, and the fact that the 51st Sikhs were called on to handle the immediate trouble that arose is an item of unusual interest in their history. The story is told in the Battalion Records as follows :

On 4th April, Easter Sunday, serious rioting broke out in Jerusalem City, starting with an attack on the Jews by a procession of Hebron Muslims on their annual pilgrimage through Jerusalem to Ain Musa in the Jordan Valley.

The Internal Security Scheme was at once put into operation, the 51st Sikhs being placed at the disposal of the civil authorities to reinforce the police and keep order inside the city.

The work of restoring order was considerably hampered by the panic among the Zionists, who started groundless rumours, made incoherent and misleading complaints, and whose guides were totally unreliable.

The police also proved to be untrustworthy, and the situation was further complicated by the presence in Jerusalem of numerous demobilized Jewish

soldiers in uniform who, where possible, retaliated on the Muslims. In the evening "D" Company went into the city and was quartered in David's Tower.

About 180 casualties had occurred among Jews and Muslims during the day.

Both "A" and "D" Companies sent out patrols through the city throughout the night, which passed quietly.

Early on 5th April (Easter Monday), at the request of the Military Governor, all troops were withdrawn from the city with the exception of two platoons which were left at David's Tower in case of trouble.

At 8.30 a.m. the Battalion was requested by the Military Governor's Staff to provide an escort for the Hebronites from the police barracks to the Mosque of Omar, where they were to be allowed to pray before departure to Ain Musa. This request was granted and the procession started through the narrow streets, shouting, chanting and waving banners.

The streets were very narrow and, with shops open and normal business in progress, it was impossible to move more than two or three abreast.

Arrived at the cross-roads in the centre of the city, the procession broke up in all directions down the numerous alleyways and the Jew hunt started again. The escort of the Regiment did all it could to keep the situation in hand. A number of arrests were made, the previous piquets were established, and patrols were sent round to stop fighting. Three men of the Regiment were stabbed while escorting a wounded Jew.

Martial law was then proclaimed and the police were withdrawn from the city and disarmed, as were also numerous Jews in British uniforms.

The Brigade Commander, Colonel Beddy, then issued proclamations that all inhabitants must be within doors between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m., that the carrying of sticks and arms was prohibited, as also the assembly in the streets of more than four people.

"B" and "C" Companies were marched to the city and placed on duty there to keep order. Complaints of murder, rape, loot and incendiarism poured into Battalion Headquarters from Jews, Muslims and shopkeepers, but the disturbances gradually subsided.

On the 8th the returning Hebronites were disarmed on the Jericho Road, and on the 9th their standard was escorted from the Mosque round to the Bethlehem Road and they were sent on their way.

The Greek Easter comes some days after the Christian one, and the Administration asked the Brigade Commander to cancel the curfew order for that night for the vigil of the Holy Fire.

The Greek quarter was accordingly isolated by troops. All went well till 3 a.m. on the 11th, when the police reported an uproar in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A patrol was sent to the spot, where Copt and Syriac priests were found belabouring one another with chairs. Order was restored. This fight

is an annual occurrence over the custody of a certain cross in the Church and has gone on for centuries.

It is probably, however, the only occasion when troops from the Punjab Frontier have been called on to stop a fight in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre!

The remainder of the Battalion's time in Palestine was uneventful, and in the following August the Battalion was ordered back to India, arriving in Jullundur on 1st September 1920.

Return to India; Peace-time Duties in India and Service in Waziristan, 1920-39

On its return to India from Palestine in 1920 the 1st Sikhs were stationed in Kohat, whence they proceeded to Waziristan shortly after the operations for the establishment of Razmak in 1923 had been completed.

No operations took place during the Battalion's stay in Waziristan, though much discomfort, and even hardship, was experienced due to a very severe winter. Snow many feet deep lay on the Razmak Narai.

On leaving Waziristan the Battalion went to Jhansi in Central India, where it was commanded by Colonel "Alf" Mahon, formerly of Coke's Rifles. Its stay in Jhansi was unmarked by any event of major importance and followed the usual routine familiar in cantonment life.

In 1926 Subadar-Major Chanda Singh was selected as one of the King's Indian Orderly officers and was on duty in England during the summer of that year.

In 1927 the Battalion was again ordered to Razmak and remained there till the spring of 1929, now under the command of Colonel "Breezy" Bruce, late of the 3rd Sikhs. Though it was several years since the Battalion had served in tribal territory and a large percentage of its strength had been enlisted during its period in Jhansi, its skill and special efficiency for Frontier service had not been allowed to rust, and it achieved a deservedly high reputation during this tour of duty in Waziristan.

The two years spent there did not include any active operations other than the normal road-opening and protective duties. There were also the periodical Razmak Brigade columns, lasting from three to ten days and covering the country in both Mahsud and Wazir territory.

From Razmak the Battalion went to Lahore and remained there till early 1933. Here Lieutenant-Colonel Burrows was appointed Commandant and took over on the Battalion's arrival. The tour of duty in Lahore was uneventful, the only occasion of importance being the presentation of colours by the Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood, in 1930. At this parade, and indeed during its whole tour of duty at the Punjab capital, the Battalion's bearing was noticed for its smartness.

During this period the former class company organization was changed to one which comprised class platoons in the rifle companies. Battalion Head-

quarter and the Machine-Gun Company remained with a mixed class composition. The change was found necessary for the purposes of the Battalion's role at this time, which was one of Internal Security. As at that time there were four platoons in each company, the allotment of one platoon to each class was simple, and the reorganization presented no difficulty.

In the spring of 1933 the Battalion returned to the Frontier, this time to Wana in South Waziristan, the two years spent there following the same pattern as the period in Razmak in 1927-29. Here, however, the columns in more than one instance met with opposition.

Shah Alam Raghza, the scene of a brisk action by the 1st Sikhs in 1881, was visited by the Battalion on one of these columns, and on this occasion the Adjutant, Captain A. Lawrenson, picked up on the hillside the pouch-belt ornament of a J.C.O. of the 1st Sikhs, which was evidently lost on the 1881 operation. It is now in the Mess silver of the Battalion.

The Battalion left Wana for Saugor (once more in Central India) on 3rd November 1934.

During its period in Wana Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. A. Empson had been Commandant. He completed his tour in the appointment at Saugor on 7th July 1936, when he was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel R. M. M. Lockhart, M.C., who had been Military Attaché to the Embassy at Kabul since December 1933.

The year 1935 passed uneventfully at Saugor, the usual inspections by the General officers of the District and Command being made, and complimentary messages on the turn-out and bearing of the Battalion being received. Another item of interest during this year was the appointment of Lieutenant C. W. Pearson of the Battalion to duty with a company of the 5/14th Punjab Regiment, who had been ordered as Legation Guard to Addis Ababa during the Italian-Abyssinian War.

Some sharp fighting took place, and the company was mainly responsible for the safeguarding of the Legation personnel and refugees. During one of these actions, Lieutenant Pearson rendered conspicuously good service and was awarded the Military Cross.

In January 1936, King George V died, and was succeeded by Edward Prince of Wales, who became Edward VIII. As he was in fact Colonel-in-Chief of the Battalion, a revised procedure for drinking the Royal Toast in the Mess was adopted as follows:

The President: "Mr. Vice, the King Emperor."

Mr. Vice: "Gentleman, our Colonel-in-Chief, the King."

In 1937 the Battalion was selected to provide the guards in Simla for Their Excellencies the Viceroy and Commander-in-Chief; and a party of 2 officers, 3 J.C.Os. and 115 rank and file left for Simla in April.

This party carried out the above duty to the great satisfaction of all concerned and in particular that of the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow. So much so, indeed, that in October 1937, on the conclusion of the duty, the Viceroy presented the Battalion with a very fine Pipe Banner in Viceregal blue with His Excellency's arms emblazoned on it. It has ever since been carried by the Pipe-Major on all ceremonial occasions and guest nights. From April to October of this year Lieutenant-Colonel Lockhart temporarily commanded the Jubbulpore Brigade, with the rank of Brigadier. Major L. E. MacGregor, O.B.E., commanded the Battalion in his absence.

In March 1938, the Battalion was ordered back to Waziristan and entrained for Manzai, whence they had come three and a half to four years earlier. But it was a different Waziristan from the one they had left in 1934. The Faqir of Ipi had raised both the Wazir and Mahsud against the Government, and fighting to restore order and security was still going on.

The Battalion arrived at Manzai on 26th March 1938, and its mobile column was called out (six rifle platoons and one machine-gun platoon) to assist the South Waziristan Scouts, who were in difficulties on Dargai Sar, near Splitoi. The column successfully extricated them.

No further operations took place during the summer of 1938, but the Battalion Mobile Column was again called out near Murtaza from 9th to 11th September. An appreciative letter was received from the Brigade Commander after this affair.

On 4th November the Battalion was moved from Manzai to Bannu, where it provided detachments at Saidgi and Gambila and was responsible for guarding trains on the narrow-gauge railway between Mari Indus and Bannu.

The rest of the year was uneventful.

On 1st January 1939, Lieutenant-Colonel Lockhart was promoted Colonel and four weeks later was appointed Deputy Director of Staff Duties at Army Headquarters at New Delhi. Major MacGregor assumed command of the Battalion.

In February a new organization for infantry was introduced and the Battalion was reorganized to conform. It provided for four rifle companies of three platoons each, instead of the old three rifle companies of four platoons with a medium machine-gun company. The rifle companies were given increased fire power with light machine-guns, and the former medium machine-gun company was incorporated as a platoon in the H.Q. company.

This enabled the rifle companies to become class companies again, which was a change welcomed by all. Under the new organization, "A" Company were Sikhs, "B" Company Punjabi Muslims, "C" Company Pathans and "D" Company Dogras. In the H.Q. Company there were 25 per cent. of each class.

In August 1939, the Battalion undertook the melancholy duty of providing the firing party at the funeral of Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. May of the 2nd Battalion, who was murdered by tribesmen on the road between Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu. Colonel May was an outstanding officer, beloved by all, and a great loss to the Regiment.

On 3rd September came the outbreak of the Second World War.

CHAPTER XIII

THE 52ND SIKHS (2ND BATTALION SIKHS, 12TH FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT) 1919-1939

Jullundur and Waziristan, 1921-24—Kohat District, 1925-32—Jubbulpore, 1932-35—Baluchistan, 1935-37—Lansdowne, 1937-39—Waziristan, 1939.

Jullundur and Waziristan, 1921-24

THE Indian Army reorganization which took place a year after the Battalion returned from Iraq changed its title to "The 2nd Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Sikhs)." * In this record it will therefore now be referred to accordingly as the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment or 2nd Sikhs.

It remained in Jullundur till 1924. During that interval it provided some detachments in aid of the civil power in 1923; but nothing happened, and the time was usefully spent in reorganization and training.

On 18th March 1924, the Battalion left Jullundur for Razmak where it was posted to the 7th Brigade.

During the summer of 1924, part of the Razmak garrison was camped at Tauda China during work on the circular road, Bannu-Razmak-Jandola, and the whole time of the garrisons there and at Razmak was taken up on security duties. On 17th July, whilst employed on convoy protective duties between Razmak and Tauda China, a piquet of the 2nd Sikhs was fired on by a party of Mahsuds. The piquet and the remainder of the company supporting it immediately attacked and cleared the enemy from his position. In doing so, Subadar Waryam Singh and two men were wounded, the former severely. For his fine leadership on this occasion, Subadar Waryam Singh received the Indian Distinguished Service Medal.

It will be recollected that at this time the plan for the pacification of Waziristan, described in Chapter XI, was being implemented, and the construction of roads was the main object of all military activities. Thus the Battalion spent from July to September 1924, at Tauda China, protecting the construction of the main Razmak-Jandola road; and again, after two months back in Razmak, it went to Aka Khel in November while the Sorarogha-Piazha road was being built. The Battalion remained engaged on these protective duties until 29th March 1925, when it returned to Razmak. On 16th October 1925, the Battalion moved to Kohat.

* See Chapter X.

Kohat District, 1925-32

The Battalion remained in the Kohat District from October 1925, to March 1932. During this period the effect of the Red Shirt activities was felt in the Kurram, and in such an inflammable area it was clearly necessary to nip them in the bud. Accordingly on 17th May, the Thal detachment, reinforced by one company of the 5th Frontier Force Rifles from Kohat, all under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel W. M. Grylls, surrounded the village of Thal. The attitude of the villagers was truculent. A procession headed by a Congress flag was led out of the village in defiance of orders. This, however, was speedily broken up and there was no further trouble in the Kurram.

The situation elsewhere on the Frontier generally now deteriorated and was at its worst on the Peshawar plain. It has been described in Chapter XI. Although the measures described above kept Thal in order, the tribes from Tirah to the north became restless and a prolonged affair occurred in the vicinity of Kharlachi, which spread to the Peiwar Kotal area.

The 2nd Battalion, with artillery, two armoured cars, Kurram Militia and local chighas, was sent out under Lieutenant-Colonel Grylls to meet the threat.

But the tribesmen, who were in occupation of the hills flanking the Peiwar Kotal, lost heart at this display of force and rapidly dispersed.

Troops were withdrawn on 24th September, and the Battalion marched back to Parachinar. On 5th October the 2nd Sikhs left Parachinar and marched back to Thal.

The Battalion now moved to Hangu and the Samana Ridge posts. It helped to deal with a final Red Shirt demonstration at Hangu on Christmas morning 1931; and three days later, when a mob approached the city from the west, the Battalion advanced to deal with it and the mob threw down their red uniforms and belts which were burned at once.

Jubbulpore, 1932-35

In March 1932, the Battalion was transferred to Jubbulpore. This was the first occasion the Battalion had served in India south of the Punjab since its stay at Moradabad near Delhi just after the Mutiny. The move was an unpopular one, as the men found themselves in a foreign country, a thousand miles from their homes. The expense of the railway journey rendered leave almost prohibitive.

In March 1932, Subadar-Major Sansar Chand, I.D.S.M., sailed for England, having had the honour to be selected as one of His Majesty's Indian Orderly Officers. This was the first occasion that an Indian Officer of the 2nd Sikhs had received this distinction. He returned in August, having been awarded the medal of the Royal Victorian Order by His Majesty.

The Battalion had not been in Jubbulpore a year when trouble in Southern Afghanistan began to attract tribesmen from Waziristan to go in search of loot. Measures were taken to intercept them and reinforcements were required in Waziristan for the purpose. On 2nd March 1933, the Battalion was ordered to go at a moment's notice. It was an awkward moment as one-third of the Battalion was away on annual leave. Lieutenant-Colonel Grylls was on his way to attend a Commanding Officers' Conference at the Training Battalion at Sialkot, the Adjutant was in Mhow on duty, and the Quartermaster had just gone to the United Kingdom on furlough. Moreover, the whole of the Brigade Staff was at Secunderabad on a Staff Exercise. However, the move was made without incident, the C.O. arriving back in time to accompany the Battalion.

In Waziristan the Battalion formed part of a cordon from Arawali in the Kurram, through Thal and Spinwam to Datta Khel in the Tochi. This proved a sufficient deterrent. Political pressure was also exerted and the tribal movement ceased without troops going into action. The 2nd Battalion were back in Jubbulpore by 10th April.

Until November 1935, the Battalion remained in Jubbulpore, Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. A. Pearson succeeding Lieutenant-Colonel W. M. Grylls as Commandant when the latter retired on 20th February 1934. On 2nd November the Battalion moved to Chaman, where it arrived on the 5th, and where it was to stay for the next two years.

Baluchistan, 1935-37

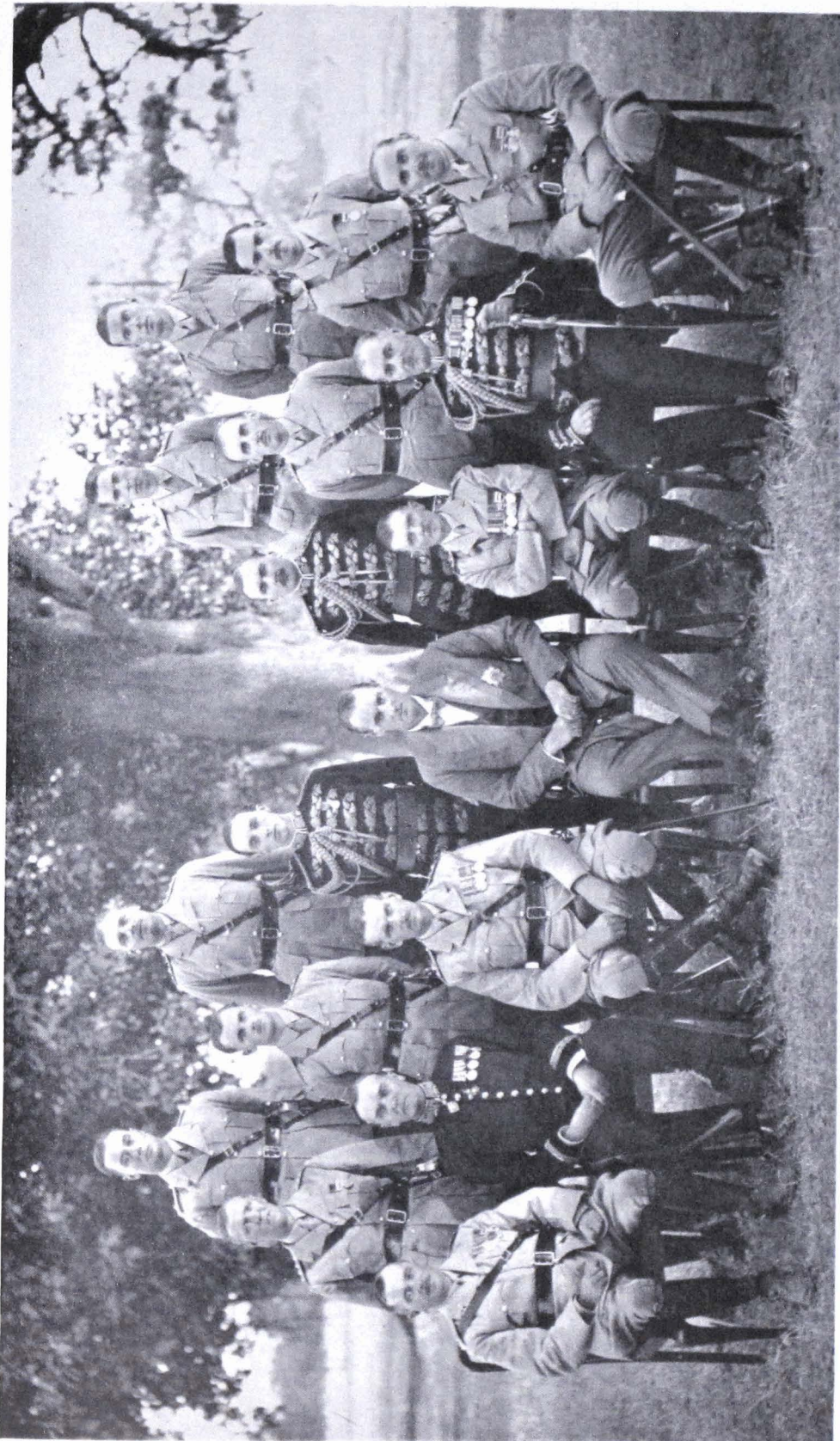
During these years the 2nd Sikhs took part in no warlike activities, but, as at Jubbulpore, were able to concentrate on training and sports to good effect, so that on leaving the command both the Baluchistan Hockey and Athletic Cups and Western Command Hockey Cup had to be handed back.

During the stay of the Battalion at Chaman, Subadar-Major and Honorary Lieutenant Makhmad Jan, S.B., O.B.I., represented the 2nd Sikhs at the coronation of King George VI. Makhmad Jan's son, Sepoy Sakhi Jan, accompanied him as orderly.

In April 1937, the 2nd Sikhs received a visit from the Colonel of the Battalion, Major-General Sir Arthur W. H. M. Moens, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O. This was to be his last contact with the Battalion, as shortly after his visit he contracted the illness from which he was soon to die. His successor as Colonel of the Battalion, Lieutenant-General Sir Bertrand R. Moberly, K.C.I.E., C.B., D.S.O., was appointed on 9th June 1939.

Captain H. W. D. McDonald succeeded Captain C. P. Murray as Adjutant on 17th July 1937.

On 8th November 1937, the Battalion left Chaman for Lansdowne in Garhwal, and not, as had been hoped, for Waziristan to take part in the war against the Faqir of Ipi, which had started in the previous November.



2nd SIKHS COLOUR PRESENTATION GROUP, BAREILLY, 7th FEBRUARY 1939

Back row.—2/Lieut. T. R. Johnson; Lieut. R. A. Nicholls; Lieut. I. R. Grimwood; Lieut. R. J. F. Milanes.
Middle row.—Capt. G. H. Eustace; Lieut. J. M. Ricketts; Capt. M. G. Kerr (A.D.C. to H.E.); Capt. W. A. G. Burns (A.D.C. to H.E.); Capt. R. C. Dent;
 Capt. H. W. D. McDonald (Adjutant).
Front row.—Major C. R. Hughes; Major J. G. Laithwaite (Private Secretary to H.E.); Bt. Lieut.-Colonel F. M. Moore; H.E. The Viceroy Lord Linlithgow; Lieut.-Colonel H. C. S. Minchin (C.O.); Lieut.-Colonel C. G. Toogood (Military Secretary to H.E.); Major Sir Benjamin D. G. Broomhead.

Though the Battalion left Chaman in November it was not to reach Lansdowne till the following March, two months being spent in a brigade training camp at Fatehpur, below the Sewaliks, and the remainder of the cold weather in camp at Roorkee. Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. S. Minchin succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. A. Pearson as Commandant on 20th February 1938, while the Battalion was in the latter place.

Lansdowne, 1937-39

The time spent *en route* was not begrudged as Lansdowne turned out to be a tiny station perched on top of a high ridge in heavy pinewoods. It was so unpopular with other ranks that, though family quarters were provided, no family would stay for more than a few weeks.

While in Lansdowne, like all the other battalions, the 2nd Sikhs adopted the new organization of four rifle companies of three platoons each. The former "D" (Support) Company was equipped with eight Vickers machine guns and became the Support Platoon of H.Q. Company. Rifle companies again became one class companies, i.e. "A" Company Dogras, "B" Company P.Ms., "C" Company Pathans, and "D" Company Sikhs.

On 2nd October 1938, the 2nd Sikhs left Lansdowne to spend the cold weather training in the plains, and marched into Bareilly, arriving just before Christmas. Here on 7th February 1939, His Excellency The Marquess of Linlithgow, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, dined in the Officers' Mess, and was entertained to a Khattak dance.

The parade itself was undoubtedly of a very high standard, the Military Secretary to the Viceroy stating that it was "outstandingly the best" of the seventeen similar parades he had witnessed. The following letter was received by the Commander-in-Chief.

MY DEAR COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF,

I must tell you how greatly I was impressed by the parade which I recently witnessed in Bareilly. It was on the occasion when I presented New Colours to the 2nd Battalion 12th Frontier Force Regiment on the 7th February. The parade was excellent in every way, and I am pleased to have been able to make the presentation to this Battalion in person, having had the request sent to me from the late Colonel of the Regiment, General Sir Arthur Moens.

I would like you to pass a message of appreciation from me to the appropriate quarters please.

LINLITHGOW.*

* The Marquess of Linlithgow, besides serving in the First World War, was a Territorial Soldier of great keenness—his remarks were, therefore, not entirely "routine."

Waziristan, 1939

By special permission the old Colours were retained by the Battalion and are now framed and to be seen in the Mess alongside the original Colours of the 2nd Sikhs.

A few days before the presentation parade the Battalion received warning orders that it would not return to Lansdowne but would proceed to Waziristan as an independent battalion. It arrived in Bannu on 3rd April 1939, and was lorried up to Dosalli. Considerable discomfort was caused by the Battalion having been ordered to move on field service summer scale, whereas on arrival Dosalli was found to be under snow; but warm clothing was soon forthcoming and the Battalion settled down to a period of dull if arduous duties.

By this time the situation in North Waziristan had become quieter. Following his successful attack on Tocol in November 1936,* in which he had gained considerable loot, the Faqir of Ipi had managed to raise all the tribes of Waziristan, both Mahsud and Wazir, and severe fighting had taken place throughout 1937.

There was still an active division in Waziristan in addition to the permanent garrisons, and the almost daily convoys required for the maintenance of these troops were regularly attacked and interfered with.

The year before, a new road had been built, branching off from the main Bannu-Razmak road at Dosalli and running up over the Iblanke Narai to Gariom on the Sham plain.

The Battalion duties were to piquet and protect a sector of the main Bannu-Razmak road and also, whenever snow conditions permitted, to run mulepack supply convoys over the Narai to Gariom.

After about six weeks of these duties the 2nd Sikhs marched down to join the 2nd (Rawalpindi) Brigade at Damdil. With this Brigade the Battalion marched to Mirali, acting as rear-guard to the column. Little serious opposition was encountered, but two most uncomfortable nights were spent at Thal, where the camp was heavily and continuously sniped, though the 2nd Sikhs sustained no casualties. During the halt at Thal (in Tochi) a composite company of P.Ms. and Pathans under Lieutenant Grimwood was established in the village of Spulga, some four miles down the Tochi valley, this company being left in occupation of the village to blockade certain prominent hostiles from their houses and to seize their crops and cattle. This company eventually rejoined the Battalion in Mirali a month later, having had little to contend with other than light sniping and the regular planting of cigarette-tin bombs.

From Mirali the 2nd Sikhs accompanied the 2nd Brigade on a column along the Spinwam road, the chief purpose of which was to repair or bypass the bridges destroyed by hostiles (mainly by the use of dud aeroplane bombs).

* See Chapter XI.

On returning to Mirali the 2nd Brigade was withdrawn to Rawalpindi and the 2nd Sikhs was left there alone with the 1st Battalion Mahratta Light Infantry, whom they relieved of outpost duties. The work was gruelling and unexciting and continued throughout the hot weather with duties so heavy that other ranks were only getting one night in five in bed.

On 10th August the tragic death of Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. May occurred. At this period he was D.A.Q.M.G., Waziristan District, and while motoring from Dera Ismail Khan to Bannu his car was ambushed not far from Naurang Serai and he, his orderly, and his bearer were killed.

The outbreak of the Second World War on 3rd September 1939, found the Battalion in the same area as it had been in in 1914, having taken over the same posts from the same battalion. This was a curious coincidence indeed, and many were the gloomy forecasts that history would repeat itself and that for a further three years no move could be expected and no chance would occur to take part in the major war.

In late September orders were received to relieve the 4th Sikhs in Fort Salop, and though the move did not appear to bring the Battalion any nearer to joining an overseas formation it was welcomed by all.

Accordingly the Battalion left Mirali on 4th October, arriving in Fort Salop three days later, having been royally entertained by the 1st Sikhs in Bannu *en route*.

CHAPTER XIV

THE 53RD SIKHS (3RD ROYAL BATTALION SIKHS, 12TH FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT), 1919-40

Minor Frontier Tasks, 1921-27—Kohat: the Bosti Khel Outlaws and Kidnapping of Miss Molly Ellis, 1923—Calcutta, 1927-30—The Frontier, 1930-38; Wana, 1936-38—Baroda and Secunderabad, 1939-40.

Minor Frontier Tasks, 1921-27

AFTER their return from the Middle East, the 53rd Sikhs arrived in Jullundur on 26th August 1920, and were received with an address of welcome from the Deputy Commissioner.

After absorbing the Depot all ranks went on two months' leave, and thereafter the task of demobilizing and mustering out surplus personnel occupied a further six weeks before the Battalion was ready to return to the Frontier. In all, some 360 surplus Indian ranks were either mustered out or transferred to other units. Among the transfer was a complete platoon of forty-three Yusufzais, with a J.C.O., sent to the Guides Infantry.

The Battalion marched to Kohat on 7th December 1920, and in April went to Parchinar, where it remained till October. In the meantime, on February 1st Lieutenant-Colonel C. A. Milward* was appointed Commandant, but was to remain seconded while General Staff Officer, 1st Grade, of the 17th Indian Division in Mesopotamia. He joined and took over command of the Battalion on 11th January 1921. As the Battalion's most distinguished officer of the First World War era, he had unusually wide and varied experience in the field. He died in retirement in December 1951.

While the Battalion was in Parachinar, the reorganization of the Indian Army came into effect (see Chapter X), and it became the 3rd Battalion (Sikhs) of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment, reverting in fact to its title of the early days of the Punjab Frontier Force, 3rd Sikhs.

The 3rd Sikhs fell into line with this reorganization easily enough and the records give no hint of trouble or difficulty. The Battalion was constituted as follows:

* The late Major-General Sir Clement Milward, K.C.I.E., C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

- H.Q. Company .. A proportion of all classes enlisted by the Battalion.
“A” Company .. Sikhs.
“B” Company .. Khattaks.
“C” Company .. Dogras.
“D” Company .. P.Ms.

The Battalion returned to Kohat in October 1921 but at Thal, while on the way, was called on to assist in a minor operation to surround the villages of Biland Khel and Char Khel, to round up outlaws and destroy the latter village. The affair was satisfactorily carried out by a mixed force in which 300 Kurram Militia, 150 of the 29th Punjabis, the 1st Battalion 6th Gurkha Rifles, one company of the 1st Sikhs, a pack battery, a company of Sappers and Miners and two companies of the 3rd Sikhs were included. So satisfactorily, indeed, that congratulatory messages were received from the Divisional and Army Commanders and from the Commander-in-Chief (Lord Rawlinson) himself. The Battalion had four men wounded.

Soon after arrival in Kohat in December 1921 the Battalion's services were suddenly required in the Tochi, and it was moved to Datta Khel in M.T. Here during the winter the Battalion carried out protective duties, but no fighting ensued.

At the end of February 1922 a settlement was made with the Madda Khel Wazirs, and regular forces were withdrawn from the Tochi Valley after installing Tochi Scouts in the Fort at Datta Khel. Although large numbers of Ahmedzai Wazirs collected to follow up the withdrawal, it was in fact achieved without a shot being fired—a tribute to the efficient work of the Battalion as rear-guard.

Before returning to Kohat, one more minor assignment was carried out by the Battalion. It formed part of a column of all arms sent on 11th March into the Bhitanni country south-west of Bannu to exact punishment from various Bhitanni outlaws who had attacked and routed a force of Constabulary in the preceding autumn near the villages of Kotabagh and Bazdi Khel. The work was done without incident after arduous piqueting and marching for four days. During this time the Battalion covered seventy-five miles across countryside that was difficult and often precipitous. No men fell out, but a few that were footsore had to be sent on by train from Naurang.

The Battalion returned to Kohat in M.T. on 16th March 1921.

Kohat : the Bosti Khel Outlaws and Kidnapping of Miss Molly Ellis, 1923

The year 1922 passed in Kohat without incident; but early in 1923 the Battalion was called on to help the Frontier Constabulary in a raid on the Bosti Khel section of the Kohat Pass Afridis. These, under the leadership of one Ajab, had been implicated in the theft one month earlier of forty-six police

rifles from the Kohat city Thana. The hidden rifles were located in three villages in the pass one mile west of the Kotal post.

The raid was a complete surprise and success; thirty-three of the stolen rifles were found and a lot of other stolen property, including clothes of the late Colonel Foulkes, R.A.M.C., who, with his wife, was murdered in Kohat in 1921.

Unfortunately Ajab and his gang had been absent from the villages when the raid took place and avoided capture. They realized, however, that the discovery of Colonel Foulkes's incriminating clothes established their guilt in that peculiarly cruel and savage murder, and that unless they moved quickly they would very soon be captured and delivered to justice. They resolved on another raid on Kohat, the residential quarter of which was still unprotected by wire. This time the object was to kidnap a sufficiently valuable hostage with which to bargain for their lives. They chanced on the bungalow of Colonel Ellis, G.S.O., 1st Grade, of the Kohat District. He was away on tour, and his wife and daughter were asleep in the same bedroom when the gang entered at dead of night. They murdered Mrs. Ellis with knives and carried off her daughter Molly as she was, without even shoes on her feet.

On the alarm next morning, the Battalion with the rest of the Kohat garrison (and local village chighas*) dashed out, scouring the country towards the Kohat Pass and the mountains of Tirah. The gang, however, evaded all interception and pursuit and, moving by night while lying up by day, reached the refuge of a hostile Mullah in central Tirah. From here, outrageous terms were demanded by Ajab for Molly Ellis's release. Fortunately, however, a mission sent by the Governor and led by another lady whose husband had been murdered by an outlaw, and who was a Medical Missionary (Mrs. Starr), succeeded in causing the gang to quarrel with the Mullah, who immediately secured the release of Miss Ellis.

As a result of this affair, reprisals were undertaken against certain villages in the Kohat Pass, and on 22nd May the Battalion formed part of a force holding a position east and west of the Kohat Pass Kotal, while the villages were burnt under tribal arrangements. Miss Ellis was brought to safety and the gang fled to Ningrahar. All through the hot weather of 1923 extra precautions had to be taken in Kohat, involving heavy duties. †

The end of the Ajab gang did not come till 1924. When taking refuge in Afghanistan they resisted Afghan troops sent to arrest them. They were all killed in the affray that followed.

* Armed emergency parties.

† Ajab and his gang attempted a further abduction at Parachinar in the following November, and tried to carry off Mrs. Watts, wife of Captain Watts, 1st Battalion of the Regiment, who was then serving with the Kurram Militia. The attempt failed, but both Captain Watts and his wife were murdered, to the great sorrow of the Regiment, as he was a fine officer and universally popular.

On 13th April 1923, the Battalion Brass Memorial Tablet to officers who gave their lives in the Great War was unveiled by the Lord Bishop of Lahore in Kohat Church. All officers of the garrison were present.

The Battalion War Memorial in memory of 20 British officers, 16 J.C.Os. and 241 Indian rank and file, which was subscribed for by all ranks, was unveiled on parade on 23rd March, and was thereafter installed in the quarter guard of the Battalion.

On the same day the first presentation of the "Sannaiyat Memorial Banner" for the champion platoon of the Battalion took place. This banner was presented for annual competition by Major C. I. Shepherd, D.S.O.

The following were the privileges given to the winning platoon of the Sannaiyat banner :

- (a) The holder of the Sannaiyat banner would be regarded as best platoon of the year.
- (b) Members of the platoon would wear the best platoon badge in uniform.
- (c) On guards of honour or on battalion ceremonial parades the best platoon would furnish the guard for the Regimental Colour.
- (d) The banner would be carried on regimental ceremonial parades by the platoon.
- (e) On return to Cantonments from service manœuvres, the platoon would march in at the head of the Battalion.
- (f) Guards for high personages, such as H.E. the Commander-in-Chief, the G.O.C.-in-Chief, Northern Command, etc., would be provided by this platoon.
- (g) From its ranks would be chosen men for specially sought-after jobs.
- (h) From 15th April to 15th September, five days' extra leave would be given to each member of the platoon in addition to the normal leave.

On 12th October Colonel C. A. Milward, C.I.E., D.S.O., relinquished command of the Battalion on appointment as G.S.O.1, Waziristan Force.

On 13th October, Lieut.-Colonel C. Kirkpatrick, C.B.E., formerly Guides Infantry, joined the Battalion on appointment as Commandant Colonel Kirkpatrick later commanded the Kohat Brigade and as Major-General retired after commanding the Sind District.

On 9th September 1924, serious communal riots suddenly broke out in Kohat City. Tension which had existed for some time between Hindus and Muslims resulted in street fighting.

Combined with this, fires, the result of incendiarism, started in various parts of the city. For five days the 3rd Sikhs sent daily parties to the assistance

of the civil power in the city, whilst maintaining extra guards and precautions in Kohat Cantonment itself. These were of company strength or more.

The civil casualties during the riots amounted to :

Policemen, 6 injured.

Hindus, 20 killed, 24 seriously wounded, 62 minor injuries.

Muslims, 11 killed, 6 seriously wounded, 17 minor injuries.

About a quarter of the main city was destroyed by fire. The troops had no casualties.

The behaviour of the men of the 3rd Sikhs was excellent under most trying circumstances, and the C.O. received a letter of thanks from the G.O.C., Kohat District.

On 23rd October, shortly after the return of conditions in Kohat to normal, the Frontier Force Memorial was unveiled there, and the Battalion, together with Wilde's Rifles (4th Battalion, Frontier Force Rifles, the other Frontier Force Battalion in Kohat), paraded at full strength. These two Battalions formed two sides of a hollow square, the third side facing the Memorial being filled by the Colour parties and representative parties of other Frontier Force units.

The ceremony was most impressive and worthy of the occasion. It is described, with extracts from the speech of Sir William Birdwood, the acting Commander-in-Chief in India, in the narrative of the Regimental Centre (Chapter X).

This brought the tour of the Battalion in the Kohat District on this occasion to an end, and on 29th October the Battalion was transferred to Fort Sandeman in Baluchistan (Zhob), arriving on 14th November 1924.

The period spent in the Zhob was uneventful, and in 1926 the Battalion received orders for Alipore (Calcutta), with detachments at Gyantse and Yatung in Tibet. The move was carried out in February 1927, and the Battalion arrived in Alipore on the 21st.

Calcutta, 1927-30

Service in East India was an entirely novel experience for the men, and came as the result of a roster scheme for the Indian Army, whereby every battalion was called on to take its share of watch and ward on the North-West Frontier. The scheme brought each battalion to one or other Frontier station for two years, with a period of four years in India intervening between each visit to the Frontier. Such places as Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu and Quetta were not, however, regarded as Frontier locations for the purposes of the scheme.

In Calcutta the Battalion found itself called on for guard and escort duties of the somewhat spectacular type, and the first of these took place very soon after its arrival.

One platoon of "A" Company, under Subadar Mangal Singh, I.D.S.M., was detailed as escort to the Political Agent at the installation of the Maharajah of Bhutan during March and April.

The fact that in such duties the Battalion rose to the occasion suitably was evidenced by the record of the District and Army Commanders' remarks for the year in its Review Report. Both of these Generals commented on the Battalion's smartness and excellence of turn-out.

In September 1928, the Battalion received orders to reduce the peace strength to 20 J.C.Os. and 715 Indian ranks in anticipation of a new organization to be introduced in 1929. This organization was the result of a policy, doubtless dictated by financial stringency, whereby machine-gun units were incorporated in battalions and not maintained as separate units. Each battalion was accordingly to have three rifle companies and one machine-gun company.

Needless to say, this gave rise to various internal problems of training, promotion among Indian ranks and class organization. Of these only the last was susceptible of being dealt with in more than one fundamental way, and since the solution adopted in the 3rd Sikhs was somewhat original it is worth recording. The reader will realize that as there were four classes in the Battalion and (now) only three rifle companies, the organization by class companies could no longer be adhered to.

The allotment decided on was :

"A" Company :

- No. 1 Platoon .. Manjha Jat Sikhs.
- No. 2 Platoon .. Malwa Jat Sikhs.
- No. 3 Platoon .. Malwa Jat Sikhs.
- No. 4 Platoon .. Dogras.

"B" Company :

- No. 5 Platoon .. Dogras.
- No. 6 Platoon .. Dogras.
- No. 7 Platoon .. P.Ms.
- No. 8 Platoon .. P.Ms.

"C" Company :

- No. 9 Platoon .. P.Ms.
- No. 10 Platoon .. Khattaks (Bangi Khels).
- No. 11 Platoon .. Khattaks (Others).
- No. 12 Platoon .. Orakzais.

The machine-gun company was to consist of all classes in the same proportion as above except they had no Orakzais.

No reasons for this somewhat unusual allotment appear in the Battalion records, but doubtless the small number of Orakzais in the Battalion accounted for the Pathan machine-gun section not including any of them. For the rest,

an alternative allotment and one that was followed in many other Frontier Force battalions (and regiments with similar class composition) was to include in each rifle company one platoon of each of the four classes. Similarly, the four sections of the machine-gun company were each manned by one of the four classes.

During the visit of His Excellency the Viceroy to Calcutta in December 1928, the Battalion furnished daily guards on his residence at Belvedere. At the conclusion of his visit His Excellency sent for Lieutenant-Colonel C. I. Shepherd, D.S.O., and Honorary Lieutenant (Subadar-Major) Fateh Mahomed, I.O.M., Bahadur. After complimenting them on the smartness of the Battalion, he presented to the former an inscribed silver cigarette box for the Officers' Mess, and to the latter a silver-mounted malacca walking-stick.

Calcutta has an unsavoury reputation for rioting, and during the hot weather the Battalion remained in a continuous state of readiness to turn out in aid of the civil power; detachments from the Battalion were stationed for short periods at Howrah Station, Kharakpur and Barisal. No detachment, however, was involved in any clash with rioters.

Return to the Frontier, 1930-38

It was with no regrets that the Battalion bade farewell to Alipore on 15th October 1930, and entrained for Thal in the Kohat District. It arrived in Kohat on the 19th and Thal on 21st October.

The behaviour of all ranks of the Battalion had indeed been exemplary throughout its time at Calcutta, and there was probably more than a touch of ordinary sincerity in the farewell message sent by Sir John Shea, the Army Commander, on its departure. It read as follows :

“Will you please tell the Battalion how deeply I regret that they are leaving my command and that I shall always remember with pride and pleasure the fact of how thoroughly they maintained their high reputation while serving under me in that very difficult place, Alipore.”

The Battalion now occupied the new Fort in Thal, relieving the 2nd Sikhs there, and on 6th November His Excellency Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood presented new Colours to the Battalion on the Thal landing ground.

These Colours replaced those presented to the Battalion by Lord Kitchener at Bannu in January 1903, and the new Regimental Colour was for the first time white, in accordance with the new facings of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment.

The site chosen for the parade was appropriate, as from his position at the saluting base His Excellency could see the heights above Dargai, where the Battalion had so distinguished itself in 1897 (see Chapter IV).

The next nine months in Thal were uneventful, and the Battalion record remarks that the first half of 1931 was spent “in training and recovering from the enervating effects of four years in Calcutta.”

In September 1931 the Battalion moved to Kohat in relief of the 6th Royal Battalion, Frontier Force Rifles, who took its place in Thal. At this time the effects of the Red Shirt* activities were being felt in the Kohat District, and on 29th December 1931 the Battalion "flag marched" through the Khattak (Barak) country, visiting Banda Daud Shah, Karak and Latambar. It was "at call" to aid the civil power in that area in arresting Red Shirt leaders. The march, however, passed off without incident.

In December Lieutenant-Colonel C. I. Shepherd, D.S.O., retired and was succeeded in command by Lieutenant-Colonel H. Macartney.

The year 1932 was spent in Kohat uneventfully, but in February 1933 the Battalion took part in the Wazir cordon† established to prevent tribal incursions into Afghanistan. There was a small engagement with Wazirs, but the cordon had the desired effect without entailing any fighting of consequence.

In November 1934 Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Finnis,‡ M.C., succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Macartney on the latter's retirement, as Commandant. In the same month Brigadier-General C. H. Davies, C.B., D.S.O., became Colonel of the Battalion in succession to Major-General Sir Charles Melliss, V.C., G.C.M.G., K.C.B. The latter only survived another eighteen months and, to the great regret of all ranks, news of his death was received in 1936. He had been Commandant of the Battalion from 1906 to 1910, and Colonel from 1921 to 1934.

The years 1934-35 were uneventful, though the latter will always be remembered as the year in which His Majesty King George V was pleased to confer on the Battalion the title of Royal. It will be so designated in this History although such titles were dropped by the Government of Pakistan.

Wana, 1936-38

In 1936 the Battalion was transferred to Wana where, with the disturbed conditions that followed the uprising of the Faqir of Ipi,§ it was to become involved for the next two years in a series of minor columns in South Waziristan.

Before these commenced, however, a further change in Commandants took place, Lieutenant-Colonel Finnis being promoted Colonel and appointed Instructor at the Senior Officers' School. He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel P. A. Meade, O.B.E., M.C.

A further note of interest concerning an officer at this time was the appointment of Major E. N. Goddard,|| O.B.E., M.C., as a Member of the Royal

* See Chapter XI.

† See Chapter XIII.

‡ The late Lieutenant-General Sir H. Finnis, K.C.B., M.C., G.O.C.-in-Chief, Northern Command, in India, during the Second World War.

§ See Chapter XI.

|| Lieutenant-General Sir Eric Goddard, K.B.E., C.B., C.I.E., M.V.O., M.C.

Victorian Order. This officer's achievements in the retreat from Burma in the Second World War are recorded in Chapter XX.

In April of 1937 the Battalion lost a young officer, Second-Lieutenant G. L. Scott (who had recently joined), in the tragic ambush of the Wana convoy in the Shahur Tangi.*

The first of the columns above mentioned, in the period 1937-39,† occurred in June 1937, when the Battalion accompanied the Wana Column to destroy the Kote of Shere Ali, a prominent lieutenant of the Faqir of Ipi, near Tiarza. The task was very thoroughly accomplished without opposition, and the Wana Column later joined the Razmak and Tochi Columns at Torwam. It returned to Wana next month. The Battalion records remark that, in spite of intense heat and trying conditions throughout, no man of the Battalion fell out.

In September 1937 a lashkar damaged telegraph poles and attacked a Khassadar post near Karab Kot. A small mobile column of all arms with "C" Company went out, and moving very fast, attacked the lashkar before they could form, killing 18 and wounding 20 without loss. The lashkar scattered to their homes.

Other columns took place during the Battalion's tour in Wana, and the Battalion was generally given the exacting role of rear-guard on threatening occasions. No important actions however developed and the Mahsuds and Wazirs were afforded no chance to give trouble.

The Battalion left Wana for Baroda in February 1938 and received warmly appreciative messages on its departure for its work in Waziristan. The following were mentioned in despatches by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief for services rendered during the Waziristan operations, 1936-37:

Lieutenant-Colonel P. A. Meade, O.B.E., M.C.

Major N. Hugh Jones, M.C.

Major H. R. Officer (D.A.A. & Q.M.G., Wazir Force).

Lieutenant E. G. D. Heard.

Subadar-Major and Honorary Lieutenant Gurdial Singh, I.D.S.M.

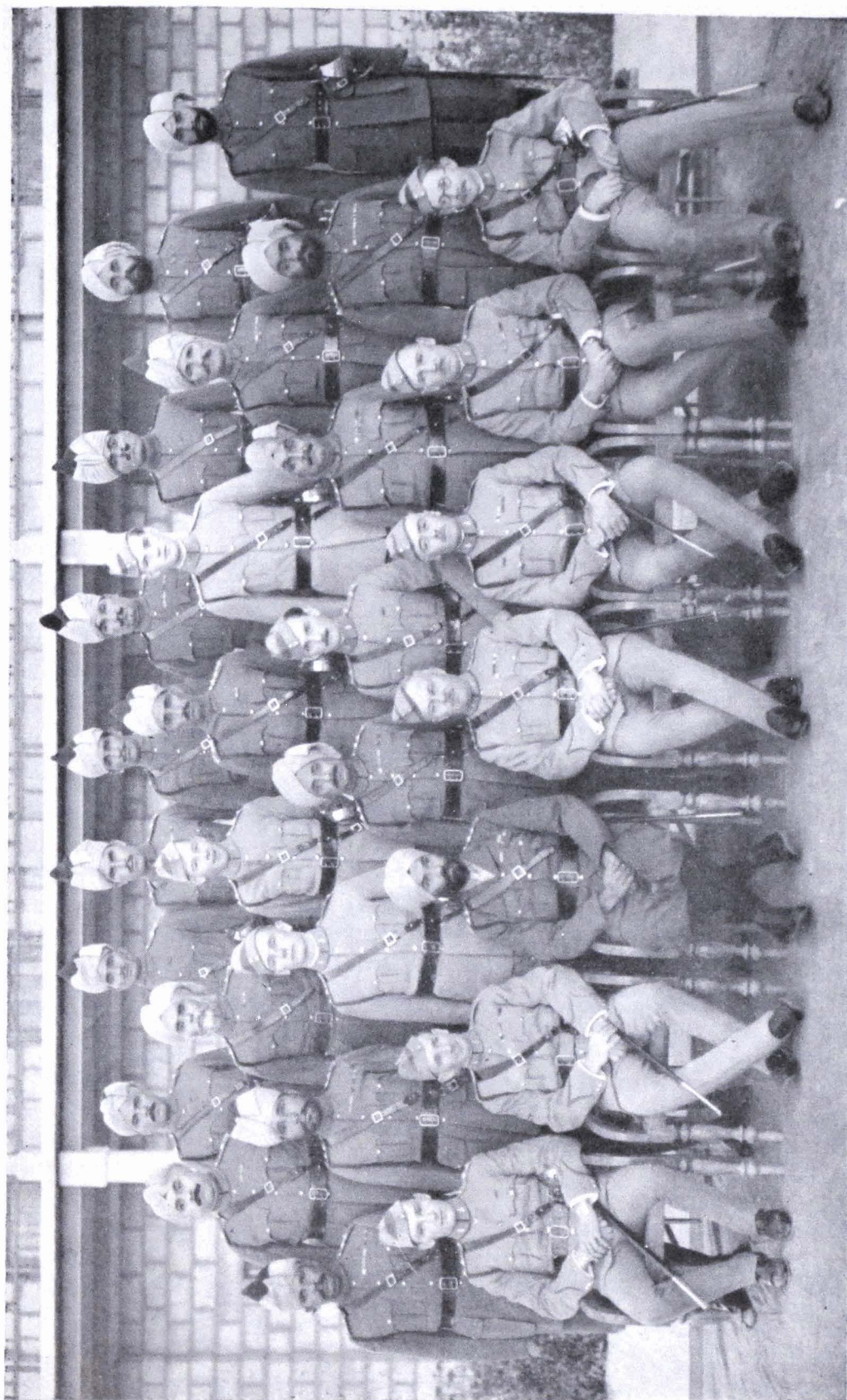
Subadar-Major Ali Khan.

Baroda and Secunderabad, 1939-40

Baroda was quiet and uneventful and there was very little scope for training. Early in 1939, however, modernization of equipment commenced and ten selected N.C.Os. were sent to Kirkee to be trained as instructors in M.T. driving and maintenance. By December, the Second World War having meanwhile broken out, seventy sepoy were trained as drivers.

* See Chapter XI.

† A general account of these operations and the situation in Waziristan that gave rise to them is given in Chapter XI.



OFFICERS, 3rd ROYAL BATTALION SIKHS, WANA, 1937

Fourth Row.—Jem. Sher Mohd; Jem. Mohd Sharif; Jem. Gul Ahmed Khan; Jem. Khan Mir;
Third Row.—Jem. Jagan Nath (Head Clerk); Jem. Prem Singh; 2/Lieut. L. A. J. Edwards-Stuart; Sub.
Second Row.—Sub. Chaudhri Khan; Sub. Ali Khan; Lieut. E. G. D. Heard; Sub. Indar Singh; Lieut. J. L.'A. Bell; Sub. Bindar Singh; Sub. Naringian Singh.
Front Row.—Lieut. E. B. C. Wall; Major A. E. Cumming, M.C.; Sub.-Major Gurdial Singh, I.D.S.M.; Lieut.-Colonel P. A. Meade, O.B.E., M.C.; Major N. Hugh-Jones, M.C.; Major W. E. Dean; Lieut. R. B. Reford.

In July of this year Major J. A. Blood was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and appointed Commandant in succession to Lieutenant-Colonel Meade, who went to command the Kitchener College, Nowgong.

On the outbreak of war all ranks were recalled from leave and furlough, and on 20th September 1939, the Battalion moved to Secunderabad to join the 9th Infantry Brigade under Brigadier A. G. O. M. Mayne, D.S.O.* Under him the Battalion was later to fight the victorious campaign in Sudan, Eritrea and Abyssinia that is described in Chapter XVI.

Collective training started at once and was continued until Christmas, companies going to camp for ten days each. A reorganization to a provisional war establishment was now carried out. Every section was armed with the L.M.G., the support platoon (Vickers Guns) was motorized, a pioneer section was formed, and all motor transport drivers were transferred to H.Q. Company. The first-line transport was to consist of 40 15-cwt. and 30-cwt. trucks, but up to the end of 1939 only a quarter of these had been received. In December orders were received to send 50 per cent. of the Battalion on leave and furlough immediately after battalion training.

The 9th Infantry Brigade was now clearly earmarked for an early assignment overseas, and during the first month of 1940, the Battalion continued training intensively on its new organization and with its new equipment and M.T.

In September 1940, the call came and the Battalion embarked for the Sudan. It was the beginning of a campaign that was to last for five years in Africa, Middle East and Europe, and bring in its train every experience known to war from victory to disaster and ultimately to final triumph. The story is told in the pages that follow (Chapters XVI and XVII).

* The late General Sir Mosley Mayne, G.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

CHAPTER XV

THE 54TH SIKHS (4TH BATTALION SIKHS 12TH FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT), 1919-40

Return from the Black Sea and First Post-War Years—Mardan and Ambala, 1924-28—Waziristan and the Red Shirt Disturbances, 1929-31—Nationalization—The Ahmedzai Salient, 1940.

Return from the Black Sea and First Post-War Years

The 54th Sikhs disembarked at Bombay on 23rd January 1921, over 1,000 strong with six officers. The following landed with the Battalion:

Lieutenant-Colonel O. L. Ruck, D.S.O.

Major A. Lethbridge.

Captain F. S. Meeks.

Captain H. C. Elphick.

Captain W. D. Edward.

Lieutenant F. E. Fear.

After railing to Jullundur, where it arrived on 27th January, it absorbed the Depot—a further 304 all ranks, with four officers. The Battalion's immediate task was the demobilization (or disposal elsewhere) of surplus personnel, and on 27th April 177 men with four J.C.Os.—all P.Ms.—were transferred to the 47th D.C.O. Sikhs. By the end of May 390 of all ranks had been demobilized.

The final stages of this demobilization were complicated by a fire which broke out in the Record Office and burnt some of the personnel ledgers. As a result the detailed movements throughout the war of the men whose accounts had been destroyed had to be reconstructed from their date of mobilization; but in the end the task was satisfactorily completed and final payments made.

In the meantime, the role of the Battalion was internal security and it provided detachments at Hoshiarpur and Amritsar—the latter a storm centre of Sikh political intrigue that had culminated in the outbreak at the Jallianwalla Bagh the previous year.

The year 1921 however was uneventful, and the Battalion was moved by train on 2nd November to Jamrud. Here the aftermath of the Third Afghan War had left the Khyber Pass area with many commitments compared with the days before the First World War. The broad-gauge railway had been extended through the Pass to Landi Kotal, and to facilitate supplies an overhead rope-

way (with winding stations) had been constructed. The task of the Battalion at Jamrud therefore, was watch and ward over the sector of the Khyber Pass communications between Peshawar and Shagai at the entrance to the Pass. The following outposts were taken over by the Battalion: The winding stations at Changi and Bagiari, and Fort Maude and Guides Piquet.

A familiar sight in these days early in the morning or in the late afternoon was the Commanding Officer, Colonel Ruck, standing up in the back of an ancient Model T Ford as it bumped along one of the tracks, having a shot at partridges etc. which occasionally got up from the crops or bushes.

On 4th March 1922, Lieutenant-Colonel W. F. C. Gilchrist, M.V.O., was appointed Commandant. Lieutenant-Colonel O. L. Ruck, whom he relieved, had led the Battalion through its magnificent campaign against the German enemy in the Judean hills of Palestine that has been described in Chapter IX. He retired on pension later in the year, and the best wishes of all ranks in the Battalion went with him.

On 24th April 1922, the Battalion was moved farther up the Pass. Jamrud being given up. It now had Headquarters at Ali Masjid and held posts at Zintara Winding Station, pill-box and pumping station, Ali Masjid Fort and pumping station, Kumar Ridge, Pinnacle Point, and Tower Hill.

With the reorganization of the Indian Army at the end of 1922, which incorporated the Training Battalion system,* the Battalion was designated the 4th Battalion (Sikhs) 12th Frontier Force Regiment, and this title was taken into use from 1st December.

At the end of this year the first Inspection Report after the Battalion's return from overseas recorded the Battalion's complete grip of its traditional standards of efficiency.

The Brigade Commander wrote: "A good and well-trained Battalion. Excellent tone and *esprit de corps*. Fit in all respects for full services. Aably commanded."

The Peshawar District Commander, Major-General Sir Andrew Skeen, remarked: "A fine Battalion, well trained and aably commanded. Fit for service in all respects."

At the end of February 1923, with the continued reduction of forces in the Khyber Pass consequent on the stabilization of peaceful relations with Afghanistan, the Battalion took over the whole of the Ali Masjid sector of the Khyber Pass (including Shagai) and came under the Landi Kotal Brigade.

The summer passed without incident, the only matter of note being the permission received from the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders in September to adopt for the Battalion their march past, "Scotland For Ever."

* See Chapter X, The Regimental Centre.

Mardan and Ambala, 1924-28

By this time the Khyber was beginning to pall, and everyone was looking forward to a change of station. On 20th December the Battalion was relieved by the 3rd Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment, and marched to Mardan to take over from the Guides Infantry, who were moving to Aden. This was the first occasion in peace-time when the Guides had left their home of seventy-seven years' standing and handed it over to another Battalion. It was indeed part of the inevitable and very necessary change to a "new order" that came as a sequel to the reorganization of 1922, and it was fitting that the Guides should be relieved by a sister battalion of the same newly constituted Regiment.

The first half of 1924 was uneventful, the Battalion taking part in normal peace-time training activities which this year included inter-brigade manœuvres on the plain between Attock and Lawrencepur. The Battalion as part of the Nowshera Brigade opposed the Abbottabad Brigade (Gurkhas), and as the first fairly large scale manœuvres to be held in Northern India since the end of the First World War, the exercise proved instructive in the study of warfare with comparatively modern equipment and transport.

The year 1924 was one in which the periodical relief of the Chitral Garrison took place. The Nowshera Brigade provided the normal escorting force for the relieving garrison on the way up, and for the relieved garrison on the way down. The column left Mardan on 9th September and reached Mirkanni on 26th September, halting there till the downward column with the relieved battalion 4/14th Punjab Regiment arrived. The Battalion was employed in the usual protective role and the whole operation was completed without untoward incident other than a little camp sniping at Warai on both marches.

The Battalion was back in Mardan by 17th October.

In February 1925, T.R.H. The Duke and Duchess of Connaught visited the North-West Frontier and lunched in the Officers' Mess of the Battalion at Mardan. All the officers and their wives, and all the J.C.Os. were presented to them.

On 1st February 1926, Lieutenant-Colonel B. G. Channer was transferred to command the 10th Battalion, and Lieutenant-Colonel G. H. Russell, C.I.E., D.S.O., from the 4/10th Baluch Regiment (attached Frontier Corps), took over Command.

The Battalion remained in Mardan till February 1926, when it was transferred to Ambala. After arrival, battalion training was carried out at Chandigarh in the foothills below Simla—the site now of the new capital of the East Punjab Province of India.

Ambala was the location of the Training Battalion and Headquarters of

the 15th Punjab Regiment, and its Territorial Battalion* was embodied for training in the spring of 1927. The 4th Sikhs were asked to provide instructors for the period, and did so. The instructors carried out their duties with the efficiency that was expected of them, but also appear to have appreciated that teaching Territorials was not quite the same thing as teaching regular recruits and accorded them suitable handling.

The result in the shape of a marked advance in the Territorial Battalion's efficiency came to the notice of the Lahore District Commander, and the following letter was received :

"I am directed by the G.O.C. to say how pleased he is with the instructors which the 4/12th F.F. Regiment placed at the disposal of the O.C. 11/15th P.R. for the period of their training. They are keen, smart and tactful in dealing with the squads. The G.O.C. considers that the great progress which the 11/15th P.R. have made this year is very largely due to the excellent instructors which it received from the 4/12th F.F. Regiment."

In January 1928, Major B. H. Matheson, M.C., was selected as an instructor at the Staff College, Camberley, with the rank of local Lieutenant-Colonel. This was an unusual achievement in those days for an Indian Army officer.

The Battalion remained in Ambala till the autumn of 1928, when it was due under the relief scheme for a return to the North-West Frontier. It left by train for Bannu on 26th October and from there marched up the Razmak road to Damdil, where it was stationed for road protection duties in relief of the 1st Battalion 11th Sikh Regiment.

Waziristan and the Red Shirt Disturbances, 1929-31

Waziristan was gradually settling into the peaceful decade that preceded the uprising of the Faqir of Ipi, and in a year Damdil was given up as a station, road protection being taken over by khassadars. The Battalion moved to Razmak on 30th October 1929, and shortly afterwards Lieutenant-Colonel S. R. Shirley, M.C., took over command.

However in 1930, the Red Shirt† disturbances of that year pervaded the North-West Province and caused some temporary unrest in Waziristan. The post of Datta Khel held by Tochi Scouts was besieged by a tribal lashkar. Air attack by the R.A.F. failed to disperse them, and on 14th May the Razmak Column with the 4th Battalion was called out. This threat was sufficient to disperse the lashkar and no fighting took place.

Next month the trouble spread to the Mahsuds in South Waziristan, who stopped work on the new Tauda China—Ladha road which was to link Wana with Razmak over the Sherawangi Narai. They also besieged Sorarogha Post,

* See Chapter XXVI, narrative of the 11/14th Battalion in the Second World War.

† See Chapter XI.

held by the South Waziristan Scouts. The R.A.F. again failed to deal with them and the Razmak Column moved out to Ladha at two hours' notice on 10th July. The advance along the line of the new road directly threatened the villages of the Mahsuds attacking Sorarogha (the garrison of which had meanwhile beaten off all attacks) and caused their hurried return to fight the column.

The advance was opposed on 12th July in the hills two miles south of Tauda China, and the Battalion was for a time sharply engaged. The enemy received a severe beating, thirty being reported killed, chiefly by the Battalion's machine-gun fire which took them by surprise, but also in close combat with forward platoons of the Battalion, which acted with vigour in difficult, broken and scrub-covered country.

The column moved to Ladha via Dwa Toi on 22nd July, and after visiting Kaniguram (the Mahsud religious centre) returned to Razmak. The Mahsuds surrendered on 10th August. Other than some ineffective camp sniping there was no further hostile activity, and this put an end to the trouble in Waziristan caused by Red Shirt propaganda.

The Battalion's casualties in the fighting on 12th July amounted to two rank and file killed and six wounded.

For gallantry on this occasion Captain D. J. Bryceson was awarded the Military Cross, and Havildar Pahlwan Khan the I.D.S.M.

On 6th December 1930, the 4th Sikhs left Waziristan on completion of their two years' tour. They marched to Kohat by the new Mir Ali-Thal road and the Miranzai valley, arriving on 17th December.

During 1931, while the Battalion was stationed in Kohat, the Red Shirts continued to affect the Peshawar and Kohat Districts, and on 26th December at the end of that year the 4th Sikhs were called out to deal with gangs of them advancing on Kohat by the Bannu road. A few rounds of ball had to be fired before a truculent crowd could be made to disperse. During this year the Order of British India, 1st Class, was awarded, with the title of Sardar Bahadur, to Subadar-Major and Honorary Captain Bhikham Singh, M.C., I.D.S.M., A.D.C., to His Excellency the Viceroy.

While all the annual reports on the Battalion for the years since the first Inspection Report after the First World War recorded above had been uniformly appreciative of its efficiency and high standard, the report made in this year of its work during its Waziristan tour is worth recording. The Commander of the Razmak Brigade wrote :

“A very fine battalion which I am sorry to lose out of the Brigade. It has a fine spirit and is well commanded and trained by Lieutenant-Colonel S. R. Shirley assisted by a capable body of B.Os. J.C.Os. are well trained and take their share of responsibility. The Battalion was put to the practical test on

12th July this year (1930) and came through it well. Steady on parade and quick on the hillside.”

This was supported by the remarks of the Commanders of the Waziristan and Kohat Districts, and the Army Commander added: “I have read these excellent reports with much satisfaction. The Battalion is a very good one.”

Nationalization

A change was now ordered that considerably affected the whole future of the Battalion. A further step towards nationalization of the Fighting Forces of the Indian Continent was taken, and one battalion in each Regiment was selected for complete nationalization. The 4th Sikhs was the battalion selected in the 12th Frontier Force Regiment. No more British officers would be posted to it. The existing ones would complete their service. All new officers posted to the Battalion would be Indians educated at Sandhurst, and after 1936, at the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun. All set themselves loyally to ensure that the Battalion's old traditions and high standards would be maintained during this great change, which even then was recognized as a fundamental step forward on the road to national independence.

From 22nd September to 17th October 1932, the Battalion was ordered to Peshawar for garrison duty to replace certain units of the Peshawar Infantry Brigade that were absent conducting the Chitral Relief that was taking place. Otherwise the year 1932 had nothing to record.

On 1st January Major L. E. Dennys, M.C., was promoted Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel, and on 2nd April rejoined the Battalion from the appointment of Liaison Officer, North-West Frontier Intelligence Bureau.

On 6th March the first young officers from Sandhurst to be posted to the Battalion under the nationalization scheme arrived. They were Second-Lieutenants M. Hayaud Din, K. M. Sheikh and Sardar Har Narain Singh. All three achieved distinction and rose to high rank in their careers. Hayaud Din* and Sheikh† commanded the 9th and 8th Battalions of the Regiment respectively in the Second World War, the former being decorated with H.J., M.B.E., the French Legion of Honour and M.C., and was mentioned three times in despatches. Both became General Officers in the Pakistan Army, and Sardar Har Narain Singh a Brigadier in the Indian Army.

The year 1933 passed without incident till March, when trouble broke out in the tribal areas of Afghanistan in Khost.‡ The insurrection against the Afghanistan Government in Kabul attracted large numbers of Wazirs and Mahsuds across into Afghan territory in the hope of loot, and the Battalion took part in the operations to prevent this movement by the formation of a

* See Chapter XXV.

† See Chapter XXIV.

‡ See Chapter XIII, narrative of 2nd Sikhs.

cordon in the Kurram and Tochi valleys. The Battalion sent a detachment to Arawali in the Kurram which remained from October 1933 till March 1934. The whole Battalion then concentrated at Thal on 8th March and marched as part of the Kohat Brigade via Mir Ali to Degan in the Tochi.

The cordon measures combined with the Royal Air Force proved a wholesome deterrent; the tribesmen returned to their homes and the Kohat Brigade marched back to Kohat, arriving on 3rd April.

This year's Inspection Report on the Battalion, being the first since complete nationalization was ordered, received the following endorsement by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Robert Cassels, "An excellent report and one that may be expected from a Battalion with such high standards."

In January 1934, Lieutenant-Colonel S. R. Shirley, M.C., was appointed A.A. and Q.M.G. of the Waziristan District, and Lieutenant-Colonel C. N. Buist from the 10th Battalion succeeded him as Commandant. Major P. A. Meade, M.B.E., M.C., from the 3rd Battalion joined him as Second-in-Command.

One of the first results of the nationalization of battalions was the abolition of the Viceroy's Commissioned Officers* (now known as the J.C.O. or Junior Commissioned Officer) in the nationalizing battalions. Platoons which were formerly commanded by J.C.Os. were to be commanded by officers direct—the establishment of the latter being increased to correspond, thus bringing their number to approximately the same as that of the officer ranks of British battalions. One result of this was that no promotion to J.C.Os. rank remained for the rank and file of nationalizing battalions—obviously a very serious matter and a great loss to the prospects of the men. To meet this situation the Commanding Officers of the battalions of the Regiment decided at their Annual Conference at the 10th Battalion Headquarters in March 1934, that one out of every five vacancies for promotion in the other battalions of the Regiment should be given to the 4th Battalion.

On 4th October the Battalion moved to Hangu and the Samana, providing the usual posts at Fort Lockhart (one rifle company), Gulistan (one platoon) and Sangar (18 rank and file).

A year later on 7th October 1935, Hangu was given up as a station and the Samana and Arawali posts were provided by one of the battalions quartered in Thal. The 4th Battalion was the first to take over this responsibility, and during the winter months only Battalion Headquarters Wing, the Support Company and one rifle company were in Thal Fort.

During October of this year Captain A. H. Marshall and ten I.O.Rs. of the 4th Sikhs joined the 5th Battalion (Guides Infantry) in Mohmand as reinforcements after that battalion's desperate action at Wucha Jawar. †

* This policy was later found to be unsuccessful and the J.C.O. was reintroduced.

† See Chapter XI, narrative of the Guides Infantry.

In November of this year various changes in command took place. Major P. A. Meade, M.B.E., M.C., was transferred to command the 3rd Battalion, and Lieutenant-Colonel C. N. Buist to command the Training Battalion. Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. Ogilvy was transferred from command of the latter to command the 4th Sikhs.

Further appointments and promotions in 1936 were as follows: 29th May, Colonel (Temporary Brigadier) S. R. Shirley, M.C., to be Colonel of the Battalion, and on 1st July Major F. Buckley* to be Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel.

On 24th January 1936, the Battalion left the Kohat District on transfer and arrived in Ferozepore, where it spent the years 1936 and 1937. During this period it provided a detachment of one company at Fort Govindgarh, Amritsar. This company was always welcomed by the Sikhs.

The process of nationalization proceeded satisfactorily, and this was evidenced not only by the continued excellence of the reports of all who inspected it, but by the Battalion's performance in the Second World War, the story of which follows hereafter.

In November 1937, the Battalion returned to the Frontier and was quartered at Fort Salop on the Khajuri plain, with a company at Jamrud. It was back in its haunts of 1921-22.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh-Jones now succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Ogilvie as Commandant.

In August 1938, with the war clouds of the Second World War now gathering on the horizon, yet another reorganization was ordered. This introduced four rifle companies each of three platoons, each of two rifle sections, and one light machine-gun section. This was in place of three rifle companies each of four platoons, each of three rifle sections and a light machine-gun section. The Support Company was abolished and the eight medium machine guns (Vickers .303) were organized into a "carrier platoon" incorporated in the H.Q. Wing.

The new organization did not interfere with the class platoons in companies which were retained as before. At the same time, in order to equalize as far as possible the class composition of Pathans of all Battalions of the Regiment, an exchange was ordered with the 5th Battalion (Guides Infantry) of Yusufzais for Khattaks. The Yusufzai Platoon, 52 strong, under Subadar Farid Khan, was transferred to the Guides, while their Khattak Platoon, of like strength, under Subadar Spin Gul, came to the 4th Sikhs. However, all these adjustments of sub-classes of Pathans went by the board during and after the Second World War, as then Pathans were sent to battalions irrespective of their tribe or district. Moreover, this practice has been maintained in the Pakistan Army of today.

* Major-General F. Buckley, C.I.E.

The Ahmedzai Salient, 1940

Early in 1939 the Battalion moved to Rawalpindi, and had barely been there a year when it was called on in April 1940, to take part in the operations to deal with hostile gangs in the Ahmedzai salient.*

The Battalion's share in the proceedings was insignificant, and with the clearing of the salient it was ordered up the Tochi to Datta Khel, where a column with the code name of "Barcol" was out to deal with a gang of the Faqir of Ipi's followers in that area. It only lasted a few days, the hostile gang dispersing to their homes. The Battalion was back in Rawalpindi at the end of May.

The fighting in both these affairs had amounted to no more than long-range sniping, and the Battalion's casualties had been one man and one mule wounded.

By now the storm of the Second World War had burst in Europe in all its violence, and these skirmishes faded into insignificance. Expansion, the raising of new war battalions and training with modern equipment occupied the minds and absorbed the energies of everyone to the exclusion of all else. Not for long however, was the Battalion to be able to devote its energies to these preparations before the call came and it mobilized for active service.

* For a description of these minor operations see the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XII.

CHAPTER XVI

THE 3RD ROYAL BATTALION IN SUDAN, ERITREA, ABYSSINIA, AND THE WESTERN DESERT, IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Sudan and East Africa, 1940-41—Gazelle Force—The Advance on Eritrea—The Battle of Keren—Amba Alagi—Egypt, Iraq and Cyprus, July 1941, to April 1942—The Western Desert and After, 1942-43—The El Adem Box—"B" Echelon and the Reconstitution of the Battalion.

The Sudan and East Africa, 1940-41

THE Battalion sailed from Bombay in September 1940, in a convoy taking Indian units that were to form in the Sudan a new war unit—the 5th Indian Division. Their destination was Port Sudan, and they had their first experience of air bombardment (albeit a completely ineffective one) while still crossing the Indian Ocean. A flight of four or five Italian planes, based on Abyssinia, attacked the convoy with bombs, but anti-aircraft fire from the ships kept them at a height and they failed to score a hit or cause any damage.

As the Battalion was about to take part in the first successful campaign of the Second World War, and one in which the lion's share of the work was done by what are now Pakistani and Indian troops, but were then organized in the 4th and 5th (British) "Indian" Divisions, it is perhaps desirable to remind the reader of the general war picture in Egypt and East Africa at this time and the strategy and plan of campaign employed.

Abyssinia had been conquered by the Italian dictator Mussolini's forces in 1935, and the Negus, or Emperor, had fled into exile in England. Mussolini garrisoned Abyssinia strongly, and when Italy joined Germany in the Second World War the country was held by some 250,000 troops, Italian and native, well supported by artillery and equipped with up-to-date arms and accessories, including a few tanks. There was also a strong Italian Air Force (Regia Aeronautica) which in the main held command of the air up to 1940. The entire enemy forces were under the command of the Duke of Aosta, a man of world-wide repute as an able leader and administrator and who had achieved fame also as a mountaineer.

The British forces in the Middle East were under the command of General Sir Archibald Wavell,* a man who, for his handling of the campaigns that now followed, deserves of historians a name second to none among the great captains of the British Empire.

* The late Earl Wavell of Winchester and Cyrenaica, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., D.S.O.

When war broke out with Italy he had, facing Marshal Graziani's army of 215,000 in Libya, two armoured brigades of the 7th Armoured Division, the 4th Indian Division (less one brigade), one brigade and elements of the New Zealand Division and fourteen battalions of British infantry—a total of 36,000 men. Defending the Sudan were three British battalions and the Sudan Defence Force, supplemented by Police and Levies, numbering some 9,000; and in Kenya, covering the tremendous arc of 850 miles from the Indian Ocean to Lake Rudolf, two brigades of the King's African Rifles, approximately 8,500 strong. In November he was reinforced by the 5th Indian Division in the Sudan, and in Kenya by approximately one division of West and South African troops. Meanwhile British Somaliland, with a garrison of little more than a brigade, had fallen in August to overwhelming enemy strength.

Yet within six months (December 1940 to May 1941) General Wavell first attacked the leading Italian troops at Sidi Barrani. He followed this with the capture of Sollum, Bardia and Tobruk, overrunning the whole of Libya and Cyrenaica. He took 130,000 prisoners and 845 guns. After Sidi Barrani General Wavell took the bold step of transferring the 4th Indian Division to the Sudan, which with the 5th Indian Division defeated the Italians at Keren, resulting in the virtual eclipse of the Northern Italian Army. The surrender of Asmara and Eritrea soon followed, and six weeks later the Duke of Aosta capitulated at Amba Alagi. In the south General Cunningham began his spectacular advance which was to bring about the recapture of British Somaliland, the fall of Addis Ababa and the return of the Emperor to his own capital.

Such is the outline of the campaign in which the 3rd Royal Battalion was about to take part. The Battalion was on its way to join the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 5th Indian Division when this story opens.

Landing at Port Sudan on 15th September 1940, the Battalion was railed to Gedaref, where it formed part of the defensive forces at that time protecting the western border of the Sudan against Italian advances from Abyssinia.

Indeed, the military situation in the Sudan when the 5th Indian Division arrived there in September 1940, was not encouraging. Hitherto the defence of the vast empty interior of the country and the protection of its 1,200-mile frontier with Italian East Africa had been in the hands of only three British battalions and the Sudan Defence Force, who were outnumbered by the Italians by about five to one. In guns, in aircraft and in general military equipment the advantage was uniformly with the enemy. Two factors were in favour of the British: their sea power enabled them to isolate the Italians in this theatre from all other Axis territory; and there was a great potential "fifth column" of "patriots," hostile to the Italians, inside Abyssinia. But it would be some time before the enemy, who had built up great stocks of war material before they declared war, began to feel the effects of the naval blockade; and the

Abyssinian "patriots" were still unorganized and cautious as long as Italian prestige remained high. The enemy's morale was good, even among most of the native troops who made up two-thirds of his strength on this front. Since June, when Italy had entered the war, the fighting here had not unnaturally been in the enemy's favour. Early in July light British forces had been forced to retire from their frontier posts in Kassala, Gallabat and Kurmuk by enemy troops who outnumbered them by ten to one. Campaigning in the Sudan had then been brought to a standstill by the rains rendering the rivers unfordable and the cotton soil roads only intermittently passable to vehicles, so the Italians had turned their attention to the successful conquest of British Somaliland. The campaigning season would not properly reopen until the end of the rains in October or November; but already, at the time of the Division's arrival, the enemy were expected to attempt to establish bridgeheads cross the Atbara river in preparation for a full-scale offensive in the northern Sudan when the river fords became passable again. The situation was therefore sufficiently serious, but the morale of the Empire troops was high and the Sudan Defence Force had already wrested the initiative from the enemy in frontier patrolling.

The Division was quickly deployed to meet the expected attack. The 9th Brigade* was given a front of 120 miles between Sofi and Sarsareib. This was along the line of the River Atbara, which here forms a natural frontier for the Sudan some forty or fifty miles behind the actual political boundary. The general role of the Brigade was to hold the river line and carry out offensive patrolling beyond it. There were two specially vulnerable points in the sector: to the north, the Butana bridge, by which the railway from Kassala crosses the Atbara; and to the south, the large native town of Gedaref, lying some thirty miles west of the river, to which the 3rd Sikhs were directed on disembarkation. They moved by train through the hot sandy wastes of the Upper Sudan. At Khartoum there was a short halt and the officers were introduced to General Wavell, Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, who was on the platform: General Wavell had known the Battalion in Peshawar in 1908, and he still remembered them well. South of Khartoum the landscape changed from desert to savannah country, and on the evening of 15th September the Battalion arrived at Gedaref, their destination.

The country round Gedaref is undulating, scrub-covered, cotton soil. At this time of year the waters of the Atbara ran deep and swift, but in the dry weather there was a ford at Showak. About fifty miles up from Showak as the crow flies is Um Hagar; and at Um Hagar there was a permanent Italian garrison of some 3,000 men which threatened both Gedaref and the vital railway to the Butana bridge which passed through Showak.

* The 5th Indian Division was now in process of forming into three brigades (the 9th, 10th and 29th): the new 9th Brigade consisted of the 2nd Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment, the 3rd/5th Mahratta L.I. and the 3rd Sikhs.

Within a day or two of its arrival in Gedaref the Sikh Company moved forward under Major Moss to Showak to guard against this threat. The country here is a remote and inhospitable wilderness of spear-grass, thorn bushes and trees, becoming denser from west to east; but it is also some of the finest shooting country in the world. Elephants, giraffes, ostriches, large monkeys and every variety of big and small game live in the bush; while in the Atbara and its tributaries lurk crocodiles and hippopotami. Movement in the area was difficult even on foot: patrols discarded both hose-tops, which caught in the spear-grass, and pagris, which caught in the thorn bushes.

For some weeks the Battalion remained in the Gedaref-Showak area, and had occasional brushes with enemy patrols. Life was rather monotonous: the weather was oppressively hot, and nobody received any private mail for two months. Mercifully there was some variety in diet: eggs and goats could be bought locally and the wilderness abounded in gazelle, guinea-fowl and duck. Many officers had sporting guns with them, but their use was restricted by authority. On one occasion Colonel Blood was surprised to receive a signal from Brigade that "Hippopotami may now be shot in the Atbara." Before action could be taken, however, the correction, "for NOW read NOT repeat NOT," came through.

Gazelle Force

The Italian High Command, by their exaggerated caution during October, had encouraged the British commanders to take the initiative. At first this took the form of long-range mobile patrolling to harass the enemy and raise British prestige, and it was for this purpose that Gazelle Force was brought into being. Gazelle Force at this time consisted of Skinner's Horse, three motor machine-gun companies of the Sudan Defence Force, and artillery. The column was entirely motorized and under command of Colonel Messervy*—a Cavalry officer and previously G.S.O.1 of the Division, whose place was taken by Colonel D. Russell, Frontier Force Rifles, afterwards Commander of the 8th Indian Division. It was allotted as its special patrol area the broad expanses of hard, motorable desert from which the broken hills of the Sudanese frontier rise abruptly about thirty miles north-east of Kassala. By the end of October, Gazelle Force's activities had enticed the Italian 101st Colonial Battalion and a pack battery across the border into the hilly area of Tehamiyam Wells, where it was now proposed to attack them. To this end "A" Company of the 3rd Sikhs were ordered on 4th November to join Gazelle Force at Jebel Haladeid. The 3rd Sikhs had been personally selected for this special task by the Divisional Commander. Ever since they had been in his Brigade at Wana in 1937,

* General Sir Frank Messervy, K.C.S.I., K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O.

General Heath had been a close friend of the Battalion, and he had been pleased to get his son into it. Subsequently, when an extra battalion was required for the 10th Brigade's operations at Gallabat, the General again chose the 3rd Sikhs. Major Moss, Lieutenant Philips, "A" Company and detachments of signallers and machine-gunners moved north in motor transport on the same day and reached Gazelle Force Headquarters in the evening. On arrival, Major Moss was given command of a wing of the Force, which was to be known as Southern Force and which included the company of the 3rd Sikhs and "A" Squadron of Skinner's Horse.

Southern Force's first raid on Tehamiyam Wells, on 5th November, failed to gain contact with the enemy. That night, however, Skinner's Horse stumbled across an enemy camel convoy in the area and drove its escort of about a hundred and fifty Colonial troops into the hills. Next morning, therefore, Southern Force, under the orders of Colonel Scott of Skinner's Horse, sought out and attacked this large party at Jebel Tendelai. The enemy were ensconced in good positions on the rocky hillsides, and had been strongly reinforced during the night. Supported by machine guns, two platoons of Sikhs pushed forward soon after nine o'clock to attack them from the right flank. Hitherto unlocated enemy machine guns on the main Tendelai ridge came into action against this advance and the reserve platoon was thrown in to silence these. Italian aircraft attempted to intervene in the battle, but they dropped their bombs in the rear of their own troops. The main attack was pressed home with great determination, and by one o'clock it had succeeded in securing the lower slopes of the hills and capturing a large number of enemy; but the reserve platoon was still hotly engaged among the rocks and bushes on Tendelai ridge. It was important that a decision should be forced before nightfall, so Subedar Bela Singh was sent forward to take charge there. Under his leadership the stubborn enemy resistance was broken and by half-past four the platoon had captured the ridge, taking nine more prisoners and putting the remainder of the enemy to flight. This was the first time in the war that any part of the 3rd Sikhs had been seriously engaged. For the loss of only three men wounded, "A" Company had killed twelve of the enemy, taken 263 prisoners and captured a considerable amount of equipment, including three heavy machine guns. Colonel Messervy signalled to Major Moss that it was "splendid work," and the Sikhs thought so too.

On 7th November Gazelle Force Headquarters was attacked three times by Italian aircraft and, although little damage was done, it was thought advisable to move next day to the vicinity of Khor Yodrud, eleven miles away. Here the enemy's 101st Colonial Battalion was located. "A" Company were again called on to attack, and for this operation two companies of the 3rd Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment were placed under Major Moss. The enemy, however, were too securely entrenched, and the operation was called off after

twelve hours' fighting in intense heat. The Company lost two killed and six wounded. The latter were all brought back after successfully disengaging.

The enemy withdrew next day, leaving many shallow graves and twenty-six boxes of ammunition. This ended the Battalion's association with Gazelle Force, and Major Moss's detachment rejoined the Battalion at Showak on 14th November. For these two actions with Gazelle Force Major Moss was mentioned in despatches and Subedar Bela Singh was awarded the I.D.S.M.

The Battalion's two months' stay in the Showak sector came to an end a fortnight after "A" Company's return. Although there had been few stirring incidents, it had been valuable as a period of preparation. It had seen the formation in the Battalion of two important new platoons, authorized by an interim war establishment in September: a Bren-gun carrier platoon and a three-inch mortar platoon. The first of these, consisting of four armoured carriers, had been formed by Lieutenant Scott and trained in Gedaref. The second, armed with two mortars, had been raised by the Adjutant and put under command of Jemadar Mohd Sharif: their training had been done, through the medium of interpreters, by an instructor from the West Yorkshire Regiment. To the Battalion in general the period had afforded an opportunity to become acclimatized and to complete its training under realistic conditions. Moreover, all ranks had learnt track discipline and camouflage to such effect that the large Showak camp was never discovered by the enemy although they had complete command of the air.

While the above actions were being fought, the 10th Infantry Brigade, under Brigadier Slim,* supported by a field regiment of Artillery, a squadron of tanks and the R.A.F., launched the first British offensive of the Second World War. They attacked Gallabat and Metemma, surprising the enemy and driving him out of the former, but not the latter, place. The object was to open the caravan route to the Abyssinian patriots, and though this was not achieved, the news of the battle had a heartening effect on the Abyssinians.

Throughout November and December 1940, the enemy was being harried and kept on his toes, and the Battalion was fully employed in these activities. Everything possible was also being done to undermine the enemy's morale and to lower his prestige. Great emphasis was again laid on the patrolling which was carried out in the nullahs at night: a grim game of hide and seek, for which grenades were carried with the pins out. A safer, if less orthodox, method of making the Italians uncomfortable was the beating on drums of the Emperor of Abyssinia's special call to his supporters behind the enemy lines; this was done every night from Jebel Um Zereiba, where the 3rd Sikhs had an outpost. A propaganda idea of even greater originality, the display

* Field-Marshal Viscount Slim, K.G., G.C.B., G.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., later the only Indian Army officer ever to become Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

of the Lion of Judah in neon lights, was only dropped because the forward troops deprecated the erection of such a tempting target for the Italian artillery. The gunners were active on both sides; but in the air the Italians were almost unopposed, and their bombers were very troublesome.

Royal Air Force fighters were not available and anti-aircraft defences consisted of a few, constantly jamming, captured Breda guns. These were eked out with anti-tank rifles, Vickers machine guns and even some eighteen-pounder field guns, dug down to give them elevation. With such weapons nobody was successful in winning the five pounds reward which had been offered for shooting down one of the fat Caproni bombers. As a result of the bombing and shelling, two men were killed and Jemadar Karam Illahi and eight men wounded. Just before the New Year the 3rd Sikhs were relieved by the Mah-rattas and brought back into reserve for a fortnight. It was a so-called rest period, during which everybody was kept busy with administration, training and casual operational tasks. For the first time the Adjutant was faced with the problem of readjusting class composition—a problem which was to recur again and again during rest periods throughout the war. On this occasion it was not battle casualties which had to be replaced, but the ravages of an outbreak of scabies, brought on by the acute shortage of water for washing: this had reduced the Sikh Company's strength by a third and the reinforcements available did not include enough Sikhs to replace them.

The Advance on Eritrea

While the 5th Indian Division was thus actively engaged on the Sudan border, the 4th Indian Division with the 7th Armoured Division (later world famous for its exploits throughout North Africa and Europe as "the Desert Rats") carried out General Wavell's offensive mentioned above and destroyed two Italian divisions that were threatening the western approaches to Egypt. Sidi Barrani was captured, the threat to Egypt removed, and the 4th Indian Division released for use against Abyssinia.

This Division, with the "I" tanks of a Royal Tank Regiment and a battery of six-inch howitzers, was moved to the Sudan and began arriving opposite Kassala early in January 1941. Originally this advance on Eritrea was merely with a view to securing the safety of the Sudan, but the success achieved over the Italian forces in the Western Desert made a more ambitious plan feasible, with results we have now to record. The offensive was to commence against Kassala on 19th January and was expected to cause a general Italian retreat, including a withdrawal in the south from Gallabat to Gondar. The policy of very active patrolling on the Gallabat front aimed at gaining the earliest possible information of enemy preparations for such a withdrawal, and the Battalion found itself again extremely busy with patrols on this front.

On the 20th, as expected, there were reports of the enemy withdrawing from Gallabat and Metemma, and that afternoon the 3rd Sikhs were ordered to advance immediately and cut the Gallabat-Gondar road, but it was then discovered that the reports of enemy withdrawal had been premature. The Brigade Commander therefore ordered Colonel Blood to retire to his original positions early next morning. By now on the Kassala front the enemy were already in full retreat and from the 22nd the 3rd Sikhs were placed at two hours' notice to move forward again.

At last, after a trying ten days of enemy air-bombing, on 31st January the order to advance was given. But the enemy had slipped away. Lieutenant Scott and the 3rd Sikhs Carrier Platoon, with the Brigade Mobile Column, at once set off in pursuit, and for the next week it was they who were mainly engaged in following up the Italians along the narrow, third-class road which winds through the hills to Gondar. Administrative difficulties made the employment of a larger force impossible and the rest of the Battalion remained at Metemma, salvaging enemy equipment and patrolling far to the north and south along the Frontier road. The progress of the mobile column was slow. The road was a Sapper's nightmare of mines and demolitions, and it took four days to cover the fifty miles from Metemma to the outskirts of Wahni, despite the tireless efforts of all concerned and the Sappers in particular. The Sapper Commander, Lieutenant Bhagat, won the Victoria Cross for clearing no fewer than twenty-one minefields from this fifty-mile stretch of road. Both he and Lieutenant Scott had a narrow escape when the carrier in which they were leading the column was wrecked by a mine which killed the Dogra driver.

On 4th February the advanced guard got to within three-quarters of a mile of Wahni, but finding further progress barred by a demolition which was under fire from pack guns and machine guns, they returned to their previous night's camp, where the main body of the mobile column joined them the same day. Plans were now made for an attack on Wahni which took place at seven o'clock on the morning of the 7th, but the enemy had withdrawn the previous night and there was no opposition. After its capture there was a sudden alarm when it seemed as if an enemy counter-attack was developing against "D" Company, but the "enemy" were discovered to be a number of large monkeys moving about in the long grass, and all was quiet at Wahni by the time Colonel Blood arrived there in the afternoon with a tactical Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company.

It had never been intended that the 9th Brigade should fight its way to Gondar. In the face of extreme administrative difficulties and the overriding strategic importance of the Eritrean offensive in the north, the Gondar road operations had only been undertaken in order to establish closer contact with the Abyssinian patriots. Now, with the capture of Wahni, this object was considered to have been attained and the time had come for the Brigade to with-

draw, leaving only a battalion group as a holding force at Wahni. Orders were issued accordingly, and the 3rd Sikhs found themselves selected to remain at Wahni. Detachments of gunners, sappers, machine gunners, signal and medical were put under Colonel Blood's command, and the whole force was given the name of Glum Group. On 8th February the mobile column handed over to the 3rd Sikhs at Wahni and withdrew to Metemma, and two days later the whole Brigade, less Glum Group, moved north to Gedaref for a short period of mountain warfare training prior to rejoining the Division in Eritrea. Glum Group, now under the direct orders of Headquarters, Troops in the Sudan, Khartoum, was left to itself for the next month with instructions to continue patrolling down the road and to hold Wahni as a rallying point for the Abyssinian patriots.

The Wahni garrison continued the slow work of clearing the road eastwards. As many as 123 box mines were removed from the verges of one kilometre of the road. It took the Dogras until 17th February to progress only seventeen miles beyond Wahni, and it was not until early in March that a patrol reached kilo 74, thirty-five miles east of Wahni, and glimpsed the Chilga escarpment where a full Italian brigade was believed to be in position. One or two enemy stragglers were made prisoner, but the few Italian patrols encountered withdrew before they could be brought to action. Patrolling was also carried out to the north and south of the road. One such patrol, from "B" Company, brought in fourteen sick and wounded Italians from Metiba, twenty miles to the south on the Gubba road; another discovered the burnt-out wreckage of a Caproni bomber in the hills north of the Gandwa crossing, and all units which had been at Gallabat at once claimed the five pounds reward for having shot it down. The records are silent as to whether it was paid and to whom.

In other circumstances the 3rd Sikhs might have enjoyed their month as Glum Group. Brigadier Mayne, who visited the Battalion for the last time on 20th February before handing over to Brigadier Messervy, wrote lyrically in an official report, of the Amanit area. It "would make an ideal Brigade Camp or even Hill Station. Water facilities are excellent and there is a wooded plateau where one can picture golf being played on a sporting six-hole links. Mountaineering, good small and big game shooting, and mixed bathing in a choice of two rivers would afford added attractions." But such amenities had perforce to remain only potential, and the Battalion was not content to remain in such an operational backwater at a time when, at Keren in the north, the 4th and 5th Divisions were preparing for decisive battle. Nevertheless it certainly looked, during the first week of March, as if this was to be their fate. The 9th Brigade moved up on to the Keren road. The 3rd Sikhs were ordered to send their machine-gun and mortar platoons to join them, and three officers were to be taken for Brigade Headquarters staff: the Battalion was being "bled" for the

Keren battle, but would not take part in it as a unit. At such a gloomy juncture the Battalion could ill afford to lose Colonel Blood, but he was required back in India to raise the new 9th Battalion of the Regiment and he left on 2nd March. He had occupied a very special place in the affections of his officers and men, and all felt at his going the loss of an old and trusted personal friend. Major Dean now became Commandant and Major Moss, having handed over the Sikh Company to Lieutenant Philips, took over as Second-in-Command.

The 3rd Sikhs had already resigned themselves to an indefinite stay on the Gondar road when suddenly, on the night of 6th March, a signal arrived ordering them to move north to Gedaref for onward despatch to rejoin the 9th Brigade. One company, however, was to be left at Wahni, and Lieutenant Philips was detailed to remain there with "A" Company and detachments of H.Q. Company.

The Battalion was ordered at all costs to reach the Keren concentration area by the evening of the 13th, and a rush move by road and rail to cover the 300 miles to the Kassala area followed.

On arrival at Tessenei the Colonel learnt that the battle was about to begin and that the other reconnaissance parties of the Brigade had already been up at Keren for two days; so he and the Adjutant pushed on at once, leaving instructions for Major Moss to bring forward the Battalion. By the evening of the 13th, as ordered, the 3rd Sikhs had arrived in the Keren bivouac area at kilo 113. After seven days of continuous travel they now found themselves with barely thirty-six hours in which to make all preparations for the great assault that was to begin at dawn on 15th March.

The Battle of Keren, March 1941

Some 140 miles into Eritrea an invader from the west is confronted with an escarpment of mountains (see illustration) defining the western extremities of the upland region in which Asmara, the capital, is situated. These natural ramparts are of great strength. The Dongolaas gorge provides the only gateway, and both road and railway come together here to worm their way up to the town of Keren, which lies on a high plateau immediately behind the mountain range. Two great bastions guard the entrance to the gorge: on the right stands Mount Dologorodoc, 1,500 feet above the valley bottom and crowned by a fort; on the left, Mount Sanchil towers another thousand feet higher and commands the whole area. Other peaks, varying in height between these two, stretch away in an unbroken line far to the north and south. The mountains are rocky, strewn with huge boulders and so precipitous that in many places both hands and feet are required for climbing. The advantages which such country offered to a defender had been improved in every possible way by the Italians. The road in the gorge had been effectively blocked by extensive demolitions.

KEREN

ZEBAN

FALESTOH

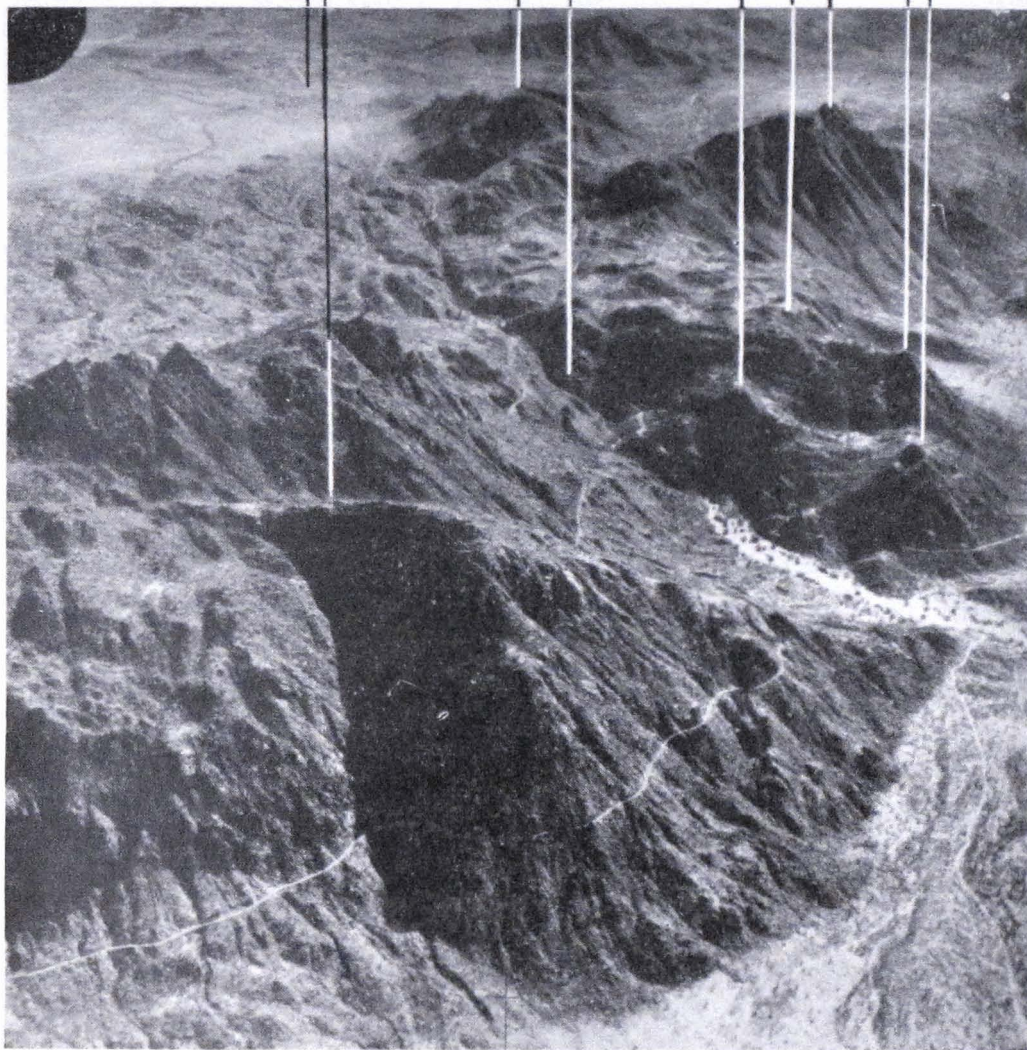
DOLOGORODOC
FORT

ROAD BLOCK

PIMPLE

CAMERON
RIDGE

PINNACLE



KEREN

(An Operational Air Photograph)

Sangars and trenches had been constructed on the heights and barbed wire put down to protect them. Observation posts on the peaks enabled the defenders' numerous pack artillery and 81-mm. mortars to cover all approaches with accurate fire. The positions were held by thirty-nine enemy battalions, comprising the bulk of their Eritrean forces and the major portion of their central, strategic reserve.

The Keren defences were confidently believed by the Italians to be impregnable, and so they had proved during the six weeks of desperate fighting that had preceded the 3rd Sikhs' arrival, and in which the 4th Indian Division had obtained an insecure foothold on the lower slopes of Sanchil. Two major assaults had failed. The third, which had now been in preparation for a month, was to be launched with the combined strength of the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions, but the defenders still outnumbered them by more than two to one. Like its predecessors, the attack was to be frontal: indeed none other was possible; but even the area for frontal attack was restricted to the vicinity of the road by the lack of mule transport. The 4th Division was to attempt once more the capture of Sanchil: the 5th Division, on their right, were then to follow up with the seizure of Dologorodoc and the higher features behind it. The attackers enjoyed but one material advantage: the Royal Air Force had now been able to establish local air superiority over the battlefield.

Early on 14th March the officers of the 3rd Sikhs collected round a huge sand-table on which the plan for the next day's battle was explained to them. The massed guns of both divisions, firing sometimes at the rate of ten thousand shells an hour, were to soften the enemy defences for the 4th Division's new attempt on Sanchil. As soon as Sanchil was secured, the 9th Brigade was to lead off the 5th Division's attack with the capture of Dologorodoc by the Highland Light Infantry, who were on loan from the 10th Brigade. The Mahrattas, West Yorks and 3rd Sikhs would then go through to take Falestoh, Zeban and points 1501 and 1560. Finally, the break-through would be exploited by the remainder of the 5th Division. The 9th Brigade's supplies would come forward by truck to kilo 102 and thence by Bren carrier to kilo 97, just under Dologorodoc. Each battalion was to detail one company as porters to man-handle its supplies up from "Carrier Head"; the 3rd Sikhs, with "A" Company still on the Gondar road, would therefore enter the battle with only two rifle companies available for fighting.

Operational and administrative preparations kept all ranks very busy for the remainder of that day, but by ten o'clock at night all was ready and the Battalion moved forward to the assembly area in bright moonlight. There were five hours to wait and the men tried to sleep. By five o'clock it was becoming light enough to see the enemy positions on Sanchil and Flat Top, away to the north-west of it. At six o'clock the whole artillery suddenly burst into life. The 4th Division's attack had started.

While they waited the men made tea and the officers ate a breakfast which was to be their last hot meal for thirteen days. But the plan of battle began to go wrong from the start. Perhaps too much had been expected from the artillery preparations: the gunners did not know exactly where the enemy's positions were and the broken nature of the target area rendered any but direct hits largely ineffective. By half-past nine Sanchil was still uncaptured, but it was hoped that the enemy there would be too preoccupied to interfere with the H.L.I. attack on Dologorodoc, which was accordingly put into motion. Contrary to expectations, this advance was met by heavy flanking fire from machine guns on Sanchil as soon as it reached the Dongolaas nullah, and within an hour all hope of further advance on the objective in daylight had had to be abandoned. Meanwhile, however, Captain Raw, in charge of twenty Bren carriers, was bringing forward the brigade supplies of water and ammunition from "Truck Head" to "Carrier Head." He was unaware of the failure to capture Dologorodoc. The shelling and machine-gun fire which was directed on to his convoy from the hills surprised him, but it was not until he arrived at "Carrier Head" that he realized what had happened. There followed a frantic five minutes, with the carriers trying to turn round on a narrow strip of road while machine-gun fire plunged down on them from enemy positions only two hundred yards up the hillside. Standing up to shout instructions to the other carriers, and with his own carrier on fire, Captain Raw sped off back down the road. Only eight carriers arrived back with him at "Truck Head." He collected a Bren gun—arms had not been taken by the convoy—and returned to extricate the remaining carriers. This he succeeded in doing, getting them away with the loss of only two men killed and four wounded. The enemy also suffered casualties: several of them were brought tumbling down the hillside by Captain Raw himself with the Bren gun.* Italian situation reports, which were subsequently captured, magnified this incident into a full-scale tank attack on their positions.

There was now a long pause. The Brigadier made a new plan for the capture of Dologorodoc and fresh orders were given out that afternoon. Before the main feature could be attacked it was necessary to secure Pimple and Pinnacle, two lesser hills, each about a thousand feet high, which together formed an apron in front of Dologorodoc. The Mahrattas were to attack them, and their movement was timed so that they would begin their assault on Pinnacle and Pimple as darkness fell. The 3rd Sikhs were ordered to cross the Dongolaas nullah after dusk and to assist the Mahrattas in the final stages of their attack. Lieutenant-Colonel Dean now had only five platoons available: "A" Company was on the Gondar road, "D" Company was portering for the Battalion, and one platoon of "B" Company was portering for the Commander, Royal Artillery.

* Captain Raw was awarded the M.C.

The Mahrattas came under shell fire even before crossing their starting line. The 3rd Sikhs were therefore ordered to cross the nullah to their assistance at six o'clock, before dusk. In doing so they reawakened the machine guns on Sanchil, but suffered no casualties. In the twilight at the bottom of the hill they joined the Mahrattas, who were advancing with their right forward company directed on Pimple and their left forward company on Pinnacle. The guns had ceased firing. Silently all began to climb together and the gathering darkness swallowed them. The ascent was steep and it was some time before a sudden noise of battle announced to those below that the attackers had reached the enemy's position. It was close-quarter fighting, with the Italians rolling grenades down the hillside and the sepoy's making laborious progress with the bayonet. The left Mahratta company, supported by the Dogras of "C" Company, had captured Pinnacle by ten o'clock; but on the right the attack on Pimple was held up after reaching the saddle between the two hills. Colonel Reid* of the Mahrattas and Colonel Dean arrived on the saddle to find that the leading companies had already made two attacks on Pimple, but had been counter-attacked three times.

After a moonlight reconnaissance it was decided to employ the five platoons of the 3rd Sikhs in an attack on Pimple, supported by artillery fire. The West Yorks were to come forward and be ready to seize the fort itself as soon as Pimple had been secured. At "Zero" hour, half-past two in the morning of the 16th, the artillery opened fire and the Dogras under Captain Curtis, followed by Major Macleod with his two Pathan platoons, began to climb again. They reached the summit just as the shelling stopped and, shouting their battle cries above the noise of the small-arms fire, rushed in to capture the positions and their occupants with the bayonet. At the same moment the head of the West Yorks arrived at the saddle and preparations were made for an immediate advance on the fort; but before this was ready the Italians threw in a fourth counter-attack on Pimple and Pinnacle. The enemy showed great determination and lost many men in this counter-attack, but did not succeed in recapturing either position. The West Yorks then attacked the fort at the same time as the enemy counter-attackers were withdrawing to it and, just as dawn was breaking, succeeded in capturing it.

Brigadier Messervy, now in command of the Brigade, was very pleased with the night's work: the capture of Dologorodoc was so far the only major success achieved by the Army's attack. The enemy had also appreciated the tactical importance of the feature, for its defence had been entrusted to the 11th Regiment of Savoy Grenadiers, flower of their East African Army, and their subsequent attempts at retaking it were made with a reckless disregard for casualties which proved a most important, if not decisive, factor in their

* Major-General D. W. Reid, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

ultimate defeat at Keren. For the remainder of 16th March however, the Italians contented themselves with heavy concentrations of fire designed to hamper the Brigade's consolidation of the ground gained. The forward companies were subjected to relentless artillery bombardment, while the lines of communication forward of "Truck Head," and particularly the carrier unloading point at kilo 98, were harassed by mortar, machine-gun and artillery fire directed from observation posts on Sanchil to the west and Sphinx to the east. This fire, and the nature of the ground over which supplies had to be portered from "Carrier Head," made it impossible to bring forward anything but the most urgent necessities: blankets and greatcoats were a luxury which it was hard to do without, for in spite of the extreme heat in the daytime the rocks became uncomfortably cold as soon as the sun had gone down. The Battalion's casualties during the first twenty-four hours of the battle had been seven killed and seven wounded.

The 9th Brigade's success was to be exploited on the 17th by a further advance to Falestoh Col and Zeban. The 29th Brigade, having passed through Dologorodoc during the night, launched this attack at dawn, but by the evening could only achieve positions in the low hills just north and north-east of the fort. Pimple was held on this day by "C" Company only; "D" Company was portering for the Battalion, while "B" Company was helping to carry the 29th Brigade's supplies up the fifteen hundred feet to the fort. The enemy artillery and mortars were again very active and the Battalion lost six killed and eleven wounded. Among the former was Subadar Zaman Shah, a particularly fine Orakzai, who was killed while supervising the unloading of supplies, in the open under fire, at "Carrier Head." The Italian Air Force also joined in the battle on this day, and Battalion Headquarters on Pinnacle and the Dogras on Pimple had a grand-stand view of a dog-fight between a Gladiator and an Italian C.R.42 fighter plane which took place very low in the valley to the south-east of Pimple, at about the same altitude as the spectators: the men cheered like a football crowd when the enemy plane eventually crashed in the valley below.

There was little change in the situation during the 18th, but that night the Battalion was ordered to take over the positions in which the 3/2nd Punjab Regiment, 29th Brigade, were established to the north and east of the fort. These positions were completely overlooked by Sanchil and Falestoh, and were sniped by small-arms fire from three sides at a range of six hundred yards and upwards. The relief took place after dark; but the Italians seemed to be well aware of what was going on, and the Battalion was extraordinarily fortunate in having no more than four men hit. Captain Atal's company of the 6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles was in position on the Battalion's left flank and came under command.*

* See *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XIX, pp. 290 and 291.

With daylight on 20th March, the Battalion tried with some Italian shovels found on the ground to improve its position on the parched and stony wilderness which was to be its home for the next eight days. Every movement during daylight attracted enemy fire, generally at a range which made reply impossible except by artillery: Subadar Mohd Sharif's mortar platoon did their best, but they were always under observation and almost always outranged. Yet, whatever the 3rd Sikhs may have thought of these positions, the enemy was soon to demonstrate very convincingly how much he coveted them. The first enemy attack came within a few hours and was driven back, but left parties in the broken ground on the left of the Battalion's front, with some machine guns in advanced positions under cover. After dark fighting patrols were sent out to attack these outposts with grenades. Their attacks were successful. The enemy suffered casualties and thirteen men of the 4th Colonial Battalion were brought in as prisoners.

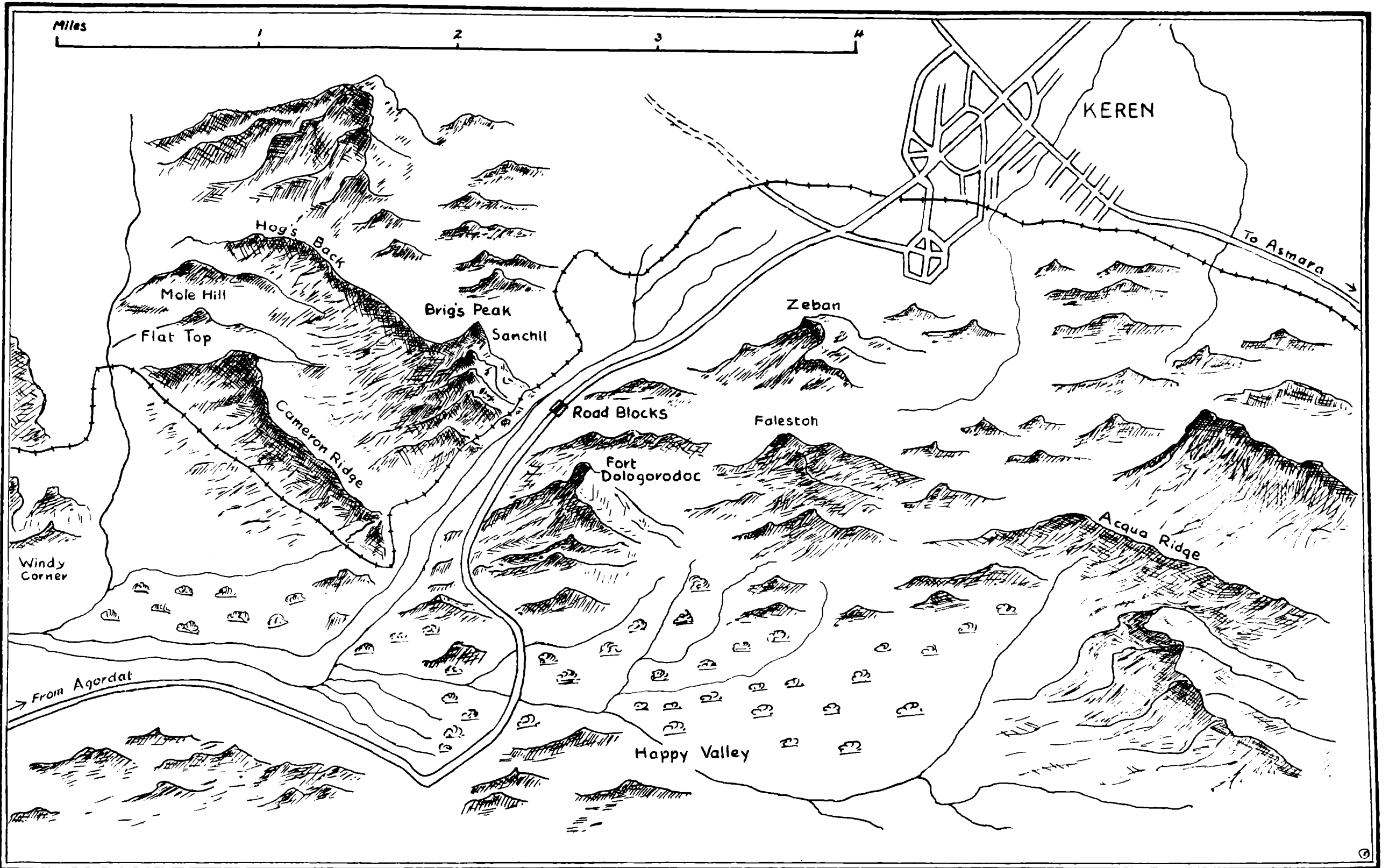
Just before dawn on the 21st, after a preparatory shelling, the enemy attacked the 6th Royal Frontier Force Rifles on "Jayal's Bump," a small feature less than a hundred yards from Battalion Headquarters. The 59th stood fast, and as the light improved the raiders found themselves exposed to fire from Battalion Headquarters, "C" Company and part of "D" Company firing to their rear. During this fight the Commanding Officer controlled personally the fire of the companies by whistle. It was just before dawn and he was able to shout across to Captain Atal's company the progress of the attackers who were concentrating against the 59th. This controlled fire forced the enemy to withdraw, leaving behind a medium machine gun which they had mounted only eighty yards from Colonel Dean's Headquarters. A number of survivors of the raid surrendered immediately. All belonged to the "Tipo" Battalion, a unit with a good fighting reputation, which had been in support of the Savoy Grenadiers at Fort Dologorodoc. During the period covered by these two attacks the Battalion had one man killed and eleven wounded.

Events during the following thirty-six hours were confined to routine shelling, sniping and patrolling. Then on the night of the 22nd the Italians launched a third and much more serious attack on the 3rd Sikhs' defences. At ten o'clock, after a violent artillery bombardment lasting one and a half hours, four Italian medium tanks in complete darkness cut in along the road between "B" and "D" Companies, wheeled to their left, and opened fire on the Pathans' positions from the rear. At the same time the enemy infantry, at least a battalion strong had come to grips with the forward sections in confused, close-quarter fighting along the whole front. "B" Company, sandwiched between the attacking infantry and the tanks which they were now meeting in action for the first time and at point-blank range, were in a desperate position. But they never wavered. Major Macleod himself killed two of the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting; Havildar Mir Hassan, in spite of two grenade wounds, was in his

element; Naik An Mir and Lance-Naik Abdul Qadir were outstanding; and one and all, the Pathans stood firm.

The Dogras likewise were staunch, although a party of enemy got within five yards of one of their light machine-gun posts before Sepoys Chattar Singh and Jagat Ram in charge of the gun stopped them, killing or wounding ten of their number. All round and inside the defences fighting continued. The tanks were proving quite impervious to anti-tank rifle fire, and Colonel Dean therefore sent off Captain Raw with two sections to bomb their tracks; but they were forestalled by the Pathans and Havildar Chhaju Ram's Dogra platoon, who now forced the tanks to withdraw hurriedly with one of their number on tow. Eventually, at a quarter to three in the morning, the enemy infantry also broke off the fight and retired. Someone raised a cheer and in a moment the whole Battalion had joined in: it went on for several minutes, each company giving its own cry. The enemy were afterwards identified from their dead as the 85th Colonial Battalion, fresh troops who had only arrived from Asmara the previous night; they had suffered heavily. An Italian report of the engagement which was subsequently captured admitted to having had two tanks damaged and about one hundred men put out of action, including one officer killed and several wounded. The 3rd Sikhs' casualties were only three killed and eighteen wounded. The following awards were made for gallantry in this action: Major Macleod, the D.S.O. (to which he was later to add a bar in Burma); Havildar Chhaju Ram, who had already distinguished himself in long-range patrolling at Metemma, the I.O.M.; Havildar Mir Hassan, the I.O.M. Sepoy Chattar Singh, who here distinguished himself for the first time, remained with the Battalion to acquire a great fighting reputation in Italy in 1944; he is a good example of the man who repeatedly just fails to qualify for an immediate award and yet cannot be put in for a periodical one, because the quota of these is so small.

The Dologorodoc sector now relapsed into position warfare until the night of the 24th and attention was focused on the Battalion's lines of communication. The Quartermaster had at his disposal trucks for the first stage, armoured carriers for the dangerous stage and mules for the final climb. But from "Mule Head" to the Battalion positions everything had to be carried up over five hundred yards of completely open ground and in full view of the enemy by those few men who could be spared at any one time from the defences. Every round of ammunition, every mouthful of food, every drop of water required during a hot and dusty eight days was man-handled forward in this way. Supplies were cut to the very minimum consistent with safety. In daylight the loaded men scrambled forward along a route of deep shale, keeping an interval of 150 yards between each man. After dark, such a difficult route could not be used, and carrying parties ran the gauntlet of the much-shelled road which led directly from the fort to the front line. The responsibility for organizing



these forward communications fell upon the Adjutant, Captain Heard, and his Jemadar Adjutant, Acting-Subadar Khan Mir: to their efficiency and their example under fire, no less than to the general high morale of the Battalion, must be attributed the cheerful fortitude with which the tired and thirsty men accepted the extra dangers and extra fatigue of this endless portering. Captain Heard was rewarded with the M.C. and Subadar Khan Mir with the I.D.S.M.

For the night of the 24th a further large-scale advance had been planned. The 4th Division in their repeated frontal attacks on Sanchil had gained an enhanced fighting reputation, but very little else, in return for crippling losses. It had therefore been decided that the 9th and 10th Brigades of the 5th Division should capture the high ground on either side of the Dongolaas Gorge and thus enable the Sappers to repair the road demolition which had so far prevented the tanks from playing an active part in the battle. For the 9th Brigade, operating east of the gorge, this entailed an extension of the 3rd Sikhs' salient, to the north by the Mahrattas and westwards by the West Yorks. The 3rd Sikhs were to remain in their old positions except for a short step forward by one platoon of "D" Company to secure a small feature on the extreme right flank of the general advance.

This plan once more met determined resistance, chiefly owing to the attack falling on an enemy battalion that was itself about to take the offensive, but it succeeded nevertheless. The Mahrattas won their objectives with great bravery, and the "D" Company platoon under Havildar Khushal Khan, meeting fierce resistance, had to take their objective with the bayonet. The 3rd Sikhs had lost, in the previous night's shelling and the P.M. platoon's attack, five killed and fourteen wounded. Havildar Khushal Khan was outstanding throughout the Keren battle until he later received wounds from which he died in hospital on 2nd April. He was awarded a posthumous I.O.M.

West of the gorge the 10th Brigade's attack had been less costly but equally successful, so the Engineers could begin work on the road. The end of the battle was now in sight. Once the demolition had been repaired, Fletcher Force, consisting of tanks and carriers and including the 3rd Sikhs Carrier Platoon, would break through into the plain in front of Keren town. While the demolition was under repair the Battalion experienced some particularly heavy bombardment, and on the morning of the 26th they and the Mahrattas met and repulsed yet another counter-attack: it was the last at Keren.

The Sappers had now completed their work. On the 27th Fletcher Force and the 29th Brigade attacked according to plan. But the enemy had retired the previous night, leaving only light patrols. White flags appeared on Sanchil the same morning and its garrison, after a magnificent thirteen days' resistance, surrendered. The "invincible" Keren defences had been won.

Of the Battle of Keren, and its effect on the precarious Allied situation in March 1941, the best appraisal is that of Sir Compton Mackenzie, who writes as follows :

“It must be stressed that the Indian and British soldiers who won that tremendous victory against odds won it at a period in the war when equipment was at its lowest; and if the difficulties of the attackers are added to the vital results achieved by overcoming those difficulties at that date, the fall of Keren can claim to be considered one of the truly decisive battles of the world.

“Although there was still some hard fighting before the Italian Empire in East Africa finally collapsed, the fall of Keren, followed almost immediately by the capture of Massawa, freed the Red Sea for the American ships bringing the precious munitions of war to aid the struggle for North Africa. ‘If’ is an arid conjecture and the speculation it prompts is usually fruitless. Nevertheless one can affirm that if Keren had held out, our position in 1941, desperate enough, would have been disastrous, and the sane world owes an inestimable debt to the men who thwarted that ominous contingency.”*

After spending the morning of the 27th in salvaging enemy equipment, including fourteen pack guns from in front of their own positions, the 3rd Sikhs moved in the afternoon to some wells on the main Keren road. An attack by Savoia bombers that evening passed almost unnoticed in the joy of having enough water to wash with, and more than enough to drink, for the first time for thirteen days. Next day found them bivouacked just outside Keren town, removing a fortnight’s growth of beard. Among the officers, Major Macleod’s beard was the finest in size, but the Colonel’s neat, grey “torpedo” was unsurpassed for elegance and had drawn complimentary reference from the Divisional Commander himself.

At 5 a.m. on the 30th the 3rd Sikhs began to move up to the front again, and on 31st March at a cost of only three casualties they captured White Rock Ridge, the key to Ad Teclesan. In this action they took 200 prisoners and a complete pack battery. The enemy’s morale had now collapsed. At first light next morning, 1st April, the advance on Ad Teclesan was resumed and very soon met a white flag under which the Italian envoys were coming forward to offer the formal capitulation of Asmara. After a night in Ad Teclesan, the Battalion moved forward again, in captured Italian transport, and entered Asmara. It was 2nd April. One phase of the Abyssinian campaign had ended.

Keren now ranks as a Battle Honour. No embroidery of the facts is necessary in asserting that it was a great feat of arms. It was recognized and welcomed as such at the time by an English-speaking world which was sorely in need of encouragement.

* *Eastern Epic*, p. 64.

The 3rd Royal Battalion were able to feel that the efforts they had made, the hardship they had endured and the casualties they had suffered, during fourteen memorable days, had not been in vain. The Battalion's total casualties in the Battle of Keren had been: one J.C.O., twenty-three other ranks and one follower killed; one J.C.O., seventy-nine other ranks and one follower wounded. It was a misfortune that these casualties included a high proportion of former bandsmen: any possibility of re-raising the pipe band had now to be deferred until after the war.

Amba Alagi

With a population of more than 70,000 Italians, Asmara was a European city: large, up to date, sophisticated. The war had created a boom for its night clubs without yet draining the stocks of luxuries from its modern shops. Its climate was delightful. After months of campaigning and camp life in the wilds under a burning sun, the 3rd Royal Battalion had almost forgotten that such places existed. They moved into some comfortable Italian barracks, and for the next three weeks gave themselves up to the enjoyment of Asmara's varied amenities. Of course, there were guards to be provided and duties to be performed; there was training to be done and reorganization to be completed after the losses at Keren. These tasks were done: but it was not of them that men talked in recalling, years afterwards, their experiences in Asmara. For a little while here the war seemed far away. News arrived of the capture of Addis Ababa by General Cunningham's African Division; Massawa (the Italian port on the Red Sea) fell to a mixed force of the 4th and 5th Divisions; two hundred miles to the south the Italians were reported to have turned at last and to be standing at bay on the Amba Alagi heights. But, for the present, who cared?

Yet Asmara was only one of many new and improbable experiences through which the 3rd Sikhs had passed since landing at Port Sudan. In the intervening six months so much had altered. The field force as a whole had left behind it the stage of uncertainty; of living from hand to mouth by guess and by God; of learning new lessons every day. Things were settling down; staff work was better; mail was coming through more regularly; even the N.A.A.F.I. was beginning to operate now. The Battalion had changed, too. Some of the most firmly held peace-time theories about training and administration had been quite discredited in battle, while others had been found to be of the utmost value. The Battalion had become a self-assured, efficient fighting machine; modified both in outlook and organization, yet retaining almost unimpaired its original personnel and its thorough peace-time grounding. The campaigning had brought about a new comradeship, not only between all ranks inside the Battalion but also with other units in the formation: the sepoy were particularly friendly with the "Jocks"; the 3rd Sikhs officers were

always in and out of the Mahrattas' Mess, and the Battalion as a whole had already established at Keren that complete trust in their supporting Gunners which is so often "half the battle."*

The rest period in Asmara ended abruptly on the evening of 23rd April with the simultaneous arrival of "A" Company from Wahni and orders from Brigade for the Battalion to move at seven o'clock next morning. They were to come under command of the 29th Brigade and take over responsibility for the long lines of communication between Asmara and the Amba Alagi battle area.

By the 26th the Battalion was stretched out over 240 miles of road and was now engaged simultaneously on mule-leading for the forward battalions, running two prisoner-of-war collecting posts, providing the personal escort for General Mayne, † operating a traffic control post and protecting the observation post of a battery of medium guns on the top of a hill which it took three hours to climb. As April drew to a close it appeared improbable that the 3rd Sikhs would take any active part in the impending attack on Amba Alagi. On the 30th, however, "B" Company were ordered to join Fletcher Force on the left flank of the battle which was about to begin.

Here again for a moment the reader must understand the general strategic situation in the theatre of operations under General Wavell. This indeed had deteriorated, in spite of the conquest remarked above of Cyrenaica, owing to two factors. The first was the War Cabinet's decision to withdraw vital forces from the Western Desert in the futile attempt to stem an enemy drive into Greece; and the second, the arrival in the Western Desert of a German Commander (with armoured German reinforcements) named General Erwin Rommel.

Of the latter we shall hear more, but in the meantime General Wavell was already hard pressed in Libya, and in dire need of the Indian and African Divisions still in Abyssinia. It was therefore no idle sacrifice for the Duke of Aosta to fight it out to the last ditch at Amba Alagi, and this is what he was now prepared to do. To General Mayne at the same time was given the task of dealing with Amba Alagi with the 5th Indian Division, while the 4th Indian Division were now moved post-haste to the Western Desert.

Amba Alagi indeed had been well chosen by the Italians as the scene of their last stand. This eleven-thousand-foot mountain covering the Toselli Pass and the peaks on either side outdid even the heights of Keren in natural defensive strength. Held by a force of between 4,000 and 6,000 Italians and 2,000

* Colonel Dean was responsible for the award of the M.C. to Captain Esmond White, R.A., for his outstanding work as F.O.O. with the Battalion during the Keren battle.

† General Mayne had assumed command of the 5th Indian Division in Asmara on the promotion and departure of General Heath. The 9th Brigade had also changed hands, Brigadier Fletcher replacing Brigadier Messervy.

native troops, plentifully supplied with provisions and all the materials of war, and commanded in person by the Duke of Aosta, Italian Viceroy of Abyssinia, Amba Alagi itself could be compared to a castle keep, which is easily defensible even after all other parts of the fortifications have been lost. It could be assailed only in two ways: either by frontal attack, up precipitous slopes in the teeth of machine-gun fire, or by advancing from other high ground along knife-edge ridges which were protected by barbed wire and covered by well-dug-in machine-gun posts. Faced with these alternatives, General Mayne, who (as remarked above) only had the 5th Indian Division at his disposal, had decided to use part of his scanty strength in creating a diversion on the left flank. That role was allotted to Fletcher Force.

This Force, named after its commander, Brigadier Fletcher, consisted of Skinner's Horse, 51st (Middle East) Commando, "B" Company of the 3rd Sikhs and detachments of artillery, engineers and the machine-gun company of the Sudan Defence Force. The intention was to seize the Falaga Pass in the hope that the enemy would be led to expect a full-scale attempt to turn the Amba Alagi defences on this flank. So far the force had met with no opposition except for shelling directed from enemy observation posts on Tongue, an eleven-thousand-foot peak which dominated the whole area and formed the hub of the Italian defences covering the Falaga Pass. The first stage was the capture by the Commandos, of Commando Hill unaided on the night of 30th April, and "B" Company were called forward to strengthen the position next day. The view at the top of this perpendicular climb was anything but rewarding: fifteen hundred yards away enemy pack guns on Tongue looked down over open sights, and the slopes in the middle distance were occupied by very alert Italian machine gunners. An enemy counter-attack was not long in developing a few hours later, but was beaten off with small-arms fire by Jemadar Shandi Gul's platoon. The enemy, however, was well placed to control Commando Hill by fire from Tongue, and "B" Company were forced to withdraw their forward posts some distance next morning, after having had four men killed and two wounded during twenty-four hours of steady shelling and mortaring.

Fletcher Force had at all costs to maintain continuous pressure on the enemy, for the main attack on Amba Alagi was now impending. Brigadier Fletcher therefore decided that the Commandos should attempt the capture of the Falaga Pass itself that night (3rd/4th May). There were risks, but recent heavy desertions among the enemy's Colonial troops held out hope that the defenders would be weak both in numbers and morale.

"B" Company was to "secure Tongue" in order to protect the Commandos' right flank and rear, but as the north face of Tongue was a vertical cliff which even Pathans would have found unscalable the Company only had to push forward on to a spur running up to Tongue.

But there was no weakness in the enemy. "B" Company were subjected to intense mortaring and the position became untenable. An immediate withdrawal was ordered that night. But meanwhile the enemy, in the hope of cutting off the Commandos' retreat, were pressing forward towards Commando Hill from the direction of Tongue. This was precisely the danger which had been foreseen when "B" Company had been ordered to "secure Tongue." Major Mcleod could only spare Havildar Mir Hassan's platoon to hold up the enemy thrust; but this platoon, heavily outnumbered and outflanked, held off the enemy in a night-long battle till the Commandos had reached safety.

In the darkness no man could see what his neighbour did, but all did their duty. One sepoy who was killed was found next morning with six enemy dead in front of him. Havildar Mir Hassan, though shot through the arm early in the action, continued to command his men with skill and coolness. The final withdrawal, over five hundred yards of open ground, was carried out in perfect order. The platoon had lost two men killed and seven wounded, a third of their strength; but the threat of much greater loss had been averted.

For this action Havildar Mir Hassan, a typical Pathan, was given the I.D.S.M., which was his second award for gallantry within six weeks.

Fletcher Force's activities were being successful in diverting some of the enemy's strength to his right flank, so it was decided to maintain pressure on the Falaga Pass in order to keep the enemy divided during the main attack which had now been begun by the 29th Brigade on Amba Alagi, over the hills from the north-west. The remainder of the 3rd Sikhs was therefore ordered to reinforce "B" Company under Brigadier Fletcher's command. "D" Company could not be spared from Decamere, but Battalion Headquarters and "A," "C" and H.Q. Companies had arrived in the Falaga Pass area by the morning of 6th May, and that day was spent in redeploying the units there. Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company relieved two squadrons of Skinner's Horse on Wireless Hill; "A" Company took over Furze Hill, an advanced position which the cavalry had occupied without opposition the previous day; "B" Company was relieved on Commando Hill and brought into reserve at the bottom of Wireless Hill.

The morning of the 8th was devoted by each side to harassing the other. British gunners, prevented by the nature of the ground from engaging the enemy on Tongue, also gave their undivided attention to Rump, a further small hillock covering the pass. By two o'clock that afternoon the Italians there had had enough. In fact, the pass itself was ripe to fall, and plans were made to attack it that night. After dark there was to be a combined assault on Pack Battery Ridge, key to the pass, by the 3rd Sikhs and the Commandos, who were already in an advanced position, then, at dawn on the following morning, the 3rd Sikhs would attack Tongue from the south-west, the only direction from

which it could be climbed. "A" Company was to remain, as a firm base, in its present positions.

By now the weather had broken, and when the advance began, at half past seven that night, an icy wind was driving rain into the men's faces. By midnight the 3rd Sikhs and Commandos had occupied Pack Battery Ridge without opposition. The rain persisted until just before dawn and the Italians must have spent the night under shelter, on the assumption that nobody would be foolhardy enough to attack them in such weather. As dawn broke the Battalion were amazed to see a party of enemy calmly making coffee only two hundred yards away; these Italians surrendered without a murmur, only requesting that they might first be allowed to finish their coffee. Since they were surrounded by "C" Company and the Commandos, this was allowed, and shortly afterwards Colonel Dean and his Headquarters were approached with the offer of a warm drink. One hundred and twenty Italians then surrendered. Meanwhile "B" Company were climbing Tongue from the enemy's rear. On all sides the Italians were emerging from their dug-outs to sun themselves after the night's rain; "B" Company's advance seemed to cause no surprise and the Italians may have mistaken them for their own troops moving forward from what they still believed to be their own back areas; by the time that they discovered their mistake it was too late, for the Pathans had quietly occupied Tongue and taken prisoner all its defenders. Tongue had been completely taken over—it would be misleading to speak of its capture—by nine o'clock that morning (9th May). A slight delay had been caused through the courtesy of the Orakzai Platoon, who had found an Italian officer in bed and had waited for him to dress, pack his suitcase and have it loaded on to a mule, before marching him and his mule away.

The capture of the pass was followed by a period of reconnaissances, during which parties of Italians surrendered and much valuable material was captured. But the Battalion had now been in action, with only three companies, for six days; they were due for a rest, and on the afternoon of the 10th they were relieved by a company of the 3rd Battalion Royal Garhwal Rifles.

The Italians held out for another week, but the net was being drawn ever more tightly round Amba Alagi. To the north, units of the 5th Indian Division were still battering at the front gate of the Italian citadel. To the south, Pienaar's South African Brigade and a large force of Abyssinian patriots were now only a few miles from the back gate. To the east, Fletcher Force was probing forward from Tongue. The 3rd Sikhs remained in reserve at Pack Battery Ridge for the next four days. Two other tasks which fell to the Battalion were to establish contact with General Cunningham's African forces and with Abyssinian patriots. The former was done successfully by a platoon of Sikhs under Lieutenant Philips, and the patrol, going on foot, was away for three days. Liaison with the Abyssinian patriots was less successful; the latter

mistook the patrol for Italians, and one Sikh and several patriots were killed before the ensuing fight could be stopped. The platoon arrived back on the 13th, and "D" Company rejoined from Decamere on the same day.

The whole Battalion, except for the Mortar Platoon which was in support of the Garhwalis, were now given two days' real rest before being called forward again for the final attack. Some V.C.Os. and men took the opportunity to visit the artillery gun positions; they were allowed to fire the guns and claimed to have blown up an enemy ammunition dump on Amba Alagi. This proved to be the 3rd Sikhs' parting shot in the battle, for although they were warned on the 16th to move forward again next day, the Italians were already asking for terms of surrender and an armistice was arranged. The negotiations were carried out by Colonel Russell, and a slight delay in final surrender was caused by patriots murdering the Italian envoys just below their own positions, but all hostilities ceased on the 17th.

The enemy formally surrendered the next day. They were allowed "the honours of war" and marched out under arms. It was an interesting spectacle, and 10 per cent. of each unit were allowed to watch, while the remainder took over the Amba Alagi positions and kept off the patriots, who did not understand armistices. The Italians came marching down the road, to the tune "Flowers of the Forest" played by South African pipers, past General Mayne, who took the salute. Farther down the route were drawn up guards of honour from each unit which had been engaged, including one, of a J.C.O. and twenty-five mixed other ranks, from the 3rd Sikhs. Finally the long column entered the prisoner-of-war cage where the Pathans of "B" Company took over their arms. The whole Italian General Staff, and the Duke of Aosta himself, were among the prisoners. A few isolated pockets of enemy resistance remained, but the fall of Amba Alagi had virtually ended the East African campaign. The 3rd Sikhs were specially thanked by the Divisional Commander for the part they had played in the battle; their total casualties had been six killed and thirty-four wounded, and they had captured 250 prisoners, thirty or forty machine guns and seven pack guns.

The 5th Indian Division now returned to Asmara. On 20th May Colonel Dean and a small escort took five enemy generals up to Adi Ugri. The Duke of Aosta, escorted by General Platt, was in the same party, and his portable radiogramophone remained in the 3rd Sikhs mess for years afterwards as a souvenir. By 27th May the whole Battalion, except for "A" Company, had concentrated in their former barracks at Asmara for five weeks of guards and duties, training and administration, while arrangements were being made to move the Division by sea to Egypt and the Western Desert.

On 27th June 1941, the move to the port of Massawa began, and on 4th July the Battalion moved down to the port and embarked on the Dutch ship *Dempo*. The sudden change from Asmara's temperate climate to the hot-

house atmosphere of Massawa in July brought several men down with heat stroke during embarkation, and it was a relief when the ship put out to sea on 6th July.

Egypt, Iraq and Cyprus: July 1941 to April 1942

The 3rd Sikhs disembarked at Suez on 10th July 1941 five days after General Auchinleck had taken over command in the Middle East from General Wavell. As has been remarked in the last chapter, the Allied situation in the Near East had deteriorated, and the reader should be reminded here for a moment of the position of the forces before continuing with the story of the 3rd Sikhs. The capture by the enemy of Greece in April, and Crete in May, had given German air power bases from which to challenge British naval supremacy in the Mediterranean. In June Germany had invaded Russia and her armies were now rapidly advancing in a direction which would bring them ultimately to the Caucasus, northern gateway to the Middle East. German air and land forces under General Rommel had come to the assistance of the Italians in North Africa and had recently rolled back General Wavell's army from Benghazi to the Egyptian frontier. Malta and Cyprus were threatened with the fate of Crete, and the whole of the Middle East was in a state of ferment which had already resulted in Rashid Ali's attempt at a pro-German revolution in Iraq* and the outbreak of hostilities between the British and the Vichy French in Syria. With so many commitments, the inadequate strength of the British Commonwealth in the Middle East had to be continually regrouped so that none should be wasted. We shall see in this chapter how this affected the 3rd Sikhs.

From Suez† the Battalion moved at once by train to Tahag and they remained there, first in Camp 36 Tahag, and later in Camp 24 Qassassin, for a month. Tahag and Qassassin, lying in the desert between Cairo and the Suez Canal, were adjoining areas in which huge tented camps had sprung up to accommodate units and formations in transit to, from or within the Middle East theatre. They were a temporary resting-place, a training area and a base for re-equipment, and they now served the 3rd Sikhs and the 5th Indian Division in all these capacities. As soon as the men had provided themselves with slit trenches and settled into their tents, which were "dug-down" and pitched in irregular patterns fifty yards apart as a precaution against air attack, training in Desert Warfare began. There was much to learn about this specialized

* See Chapter XXI, Story of the 5th Battalion (Guides) in the Second World War.

† The disembarkation at Suez was the first occasion on which the Dogras indulged in promiscuous tea drinking. The other classes had already overcome their scruples in this respect and on the voyage all J.C.Os. except the Dogras had taken afternoon tea prepared by the ship's cooks. It took the dust and heat of Suez, coupled with the fatigue of man-handling baggage from ship to train by lighter and lorry, to persuade the Dogras that N.A.A.F.I. tea prepared by Egyptians was better than no tea at all.

subject. Colonel Dean and Major Macleod went off to the Western Desert to study the methods of the 4th Indian Division, already desert veterans. The rest of the Battalion concentrated on learning how to use the sun-compass for land navigation, how to manoeuvre at night in the featureless sand, and how to move by day in the broad-flung vehicle formations of desert warfare. Equipment was drawn from the great base at Tel-el-Kebir, but supplies were still very short and the Battalion had not yet been fully equipped.

In August the 5th Indian Division moved westwards to build the reserve defensive positions which later became famous as the Alamein Line, but the 3rd Sikhs were not left for long on this duty. At three o'clock in the morning on 22nd August, urgent orders arrived for the Battalion to move at once to Burg-el-Arab, sixty miles away on the Mediterranean coast. The move began four hours later and had been completed before midnight that night.

At Burg-el-Arab the reason for this sudden call at once became apparent. The Division, less the 29th Brigade, was concentrating there in preparation for an imminent move by road to Iraq, where they would be available as a reserve while the Russians and the British took joint action against pro-German elements in Persia.

The journey commenced on 27th August and took thirteen days to complete. It was thirteen hundred miles. After staging at Mena the first night, their next halting-place was on the east bank of the Canal near Ferry Post. The 3rd Sikhs had occupied defences in this area during the First World War,* and Colonel Dean was able to point out on the journey places where the Battalion had campaigned and fought, both there and in Palestine in 1914-18. After crossing the desert by the pipe-line route through Rutba Wells there was a full day's halt at Habbaniyah for vehicle maintenance and a much-needed opportunity for bathing and washing clothes in the lake, and finally on again through Baghdad to the Kirkuk oil-fields, their destination. The long line of vehicles came in at a steady speed of twenty miles in the hour, evenly spaced at hundred yard intervals, as had been the order since the first day of the move. Road discipline had become excellent and there had been no accidents.

But the reason for the Division's journey had already been removed, before their arrival, by the installation of a new Shah and the conclusion of a treaty with Persia which insured the safety of the oil-fields and the southern supply route to Russia. The Battalion therefore settled into their camp near the oil-fields of Kirkuk for three weeks' rest before retracing their steps back to Egypt. The camp area was barren desert, but the Little Zab river was only eighteen miles away and this provided bathing for all, and fishing for the Colonel, who landed a forty-one-pound† Tigris salmon from its waters. One of the units in

* See Chapter VI.

† An indignant note by Colonel Dean to the compiler avers that it was 42 lb.

the area was the 1st Sikhs, with whom the 3rd Sikhs now had a cordial Regimental reunion. Captain Tasker's company was stationed in Kirkuk itself and had prepared tea for the whole Battalion on the day of their arrival; but their Battalion Headquarters was only at Mosul, not too far away for an exchange of visits.

The return journey to Egypt began on 27th September and was more leisurely. At Habbaniyah *en route* orders were received that the 9th Brigade's destination in Egypt was to be the Combined Operations Training School at Kabrit, where they arrived on 14th October.

Plans were now being made for General Auchinleck's November offensive, which was to relieve Tobruk and drive the enemy back to Benghazi again. It was reasonably supposed that the 9th Brigade was training for a landing in rear of the retreating Afrika Korps, or for some diversionary assault elsewhere. But no. They were indeed to cross the sea, but only to land in the peaceful harbour of Famagusta in Cyprus.

So on 1st November the Battalion was on the road again, this time by rail to Kantara and on to Haifa, arriving on the afternoon of 3rd November. Here battledress was issued. The men had never before worn anything like it and their problems were increased by the non-availability of braces, with the result that many of them presented anything but a military appearance next day as they filed on board the destroyers *Jupiter*, *Jaguar* and *Jackal*, which took them over to Cyprus.

The 3rd Sikhs stayed in Cyprus throughout the winter of 1941 and thus took no part in the newly named Eighth Army's advance westwards to Benghazi and subsequent rather helter-skelter retreat to the Gazala Line in January. Cyprus remained only a potential battlefield, and the Adjutant's War Diary records little more interesting than officer postings. These, however, were of unusual importance, for they show that the Battalion during this period lost four battle-experienced regular officers, including two Company Commanders and an Adjutant who had held their appointments continuously for at least two years. Captain King-Martin was the first to go, to become Training Adjutant of the Regimental Centre at Sialkot. He was soon followed to India by Captain Heard, bound for the Quetta Staff College, and Major Macleod* and Lieutenant Scott, both of whom were to join the newly raised Machine-gun Battalion of the Regiment.† Captain Raw became the new commander of "D" Company, Lieutenant Philips took over as Adjutant, and "B" Company was given to Cap-

* In 1944-45, as a Lieutenant-Colonel, the Commander of the 4th Battalion in its magnificent campaign in the reconquest of Burma.

† Twenty-five of the Battalion's machine-gunners went with them to the Machine-gun Battalion. Since Kabrit the Machine-gun Platoon, under Lieutenant Stewart, had left the Battalion to form part of the new Brigade Machine-gun Company.

tain Finch, who had recently joined from the 1st Sikhs. The Carrier Platoon was taken over by Lieutenant Baird, and the overall strength of officers was made up by the arrival of Lieutenants Brouche and Oakes, E.C.Os. from Sialkot, and Lieutenant Finnis who had been with the 6th Battalion since the 3rd Sikhs had been overseas. Among the J.C.Os. and men there was no comparable turn-over, but the Quartermaster lost his right-hand man, Subadar Prem Singh, who returned to India to become a Commissioned Officer.

Tactically, the Battalion shared with the Mahrattas responsibility for the defence of Limassol from invasion by sea or air landing, and of this and normal training there is little to record.*

The winter was cold, with frost, snow, rain and gales, but the hospitality of the people of Cyprus was warm enough and this extended to all ranks. The local Muslim communities of Mallia took the initiative by entertaining the Subadar-Major and a party of Mussulman other ranks just before Christmas. Later the Sikhs and Dogras were entertained in the same way by the Christian villagers. Some of the men learnt sufficient Greek to be able to maintain a correspondence with friends in Cyprus long after the Battalion had left the island.

With the spring came orders for the 5th Division to move from Cyprus as reinforcements for the Eighth Army in the North African desert. The 3rd Sikhs left Limassol on 18th March, after handing over to the 4th Rajputs, and on 1st April moved to Famagusta for embarkation on H.M.S. *Antwerp* and s.s. *Princess Marguerite*. The ships sailed the following day and by the evening of 3rd April the Battalion was back again under canvas in Qassassin.

The Western Desert and After, April 1942-April 1943

During the year that the 3rd Sikhs and the 5th Indian Division had been in Iraq and Cyprus, much had happened in the Western Desert and elsewhere. The low ebb to which Allied fortunes had sunk in May 1941 had improved but little, albeit the entry of Russia into the war in June 1941 had been followed in December by Pearl Harbour and the joining of the Central Powers by Japan, and the Allies by the U.S.A. While the immense strength of the latter was being developed, the tale of enemy successes had continued almost everywhere—Russia had been driven back to the gates of Leningrad, Moscow and the Caucasus, and the Japanese had overrun Malaya, Burma, and the Dutch East Indies. Only in the Western Desert had the gloomy outlook been relieved by a degree of Allied success.

Here General Auchinleck's "Crusader" offensive in November 1941, had driven back Rommel's Afrika Korps, relieved Tobruk after its gallant defence

* The Garrison, though composed only of two brigades of the 5th Indian Division, was known as the 25th Corps, for the benefit of a prospective invader.

and re-taken Benghazi. This feat, accomplished with inferior tank equipment and hardly adequate air support, had been largely due to the prowess of the 4th Indian Division,* but the success was short-lived. General Auchinleck's forces, depleted by the demands of the Far East to stem the Japanese tide† now threatening Australia itself, had been counter-attacked by Rommel's Afrika Korps in strength. While the true nature of the menace had yet to be appreciated, heavy fighting had been followed by a withdrawal (once more) from Benghazi.

By April 1942 the battle had been temporarily stabilized on the Gazala Line while each side was hurriedly preparing to renew the offensive. It was as part of these preparations that the 5th Indian Division was being brought in to relieve the 4th Indian Division, but the former required time to train and equip themselves before moving into the battle area. The 3rd Sikhs left Qassassin on 13th April and moved westwards to Halfaya Pass, just south of Sollum, where they remained for a month. The pass was a hundred miles behind the firing line, but was a very suitable place in which to become acclimatized to desert life. Nothing grew on the red cliffs of the Sollum escarpment or in the surrounding sand. Dust storms were frequent. Water was rationed to three-quarters of a gallon per man per day for all purposes. The tide of battle, passing and re-passing over the area, had left the few buildings verminous and the whole locality strewn with booby-traps which caused seven or eight casualties in the Battalion. H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester visited the Battalion here soon after their arrival, and the officers were presented to him; but for the most part they were left to themselves, to train. A new Anti-tank Platoon was raised under Captain Finnis, and crews were trained for its eight two-pounder anti-tank guns. By 13th May the Battalion was ready to move to a special training area nearby for practice in co-operation with armour, but this was cut short next day by orders recalling them to Halfaya and putting them at six hours' notice to move up to the battle area. The move took place on the night of the 16th: the long column of vehicles moved westwards without lights along the narrow strip of tarmac throughout the night and arrived early in the morning at the El Adem Box, some twelve miles south of Tobruk as the crow flies.

The box, in which the 3rd Sikhs now at once relieved the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, was a reserve position behind the main Gazala-Bir Hakeim line. It consisted of an extensive area of desert, protected on all four sides by barbed wire and mines against infantry and tank attack, and its garrison comprised the Battalion, anti-tank, anti-aircraft and field artillery, amounting in all to about fifty guns, and a large number of service and supply troops, all under command of Colonel Dean. There were signs during the next ten days that the lull in the fighting was nearly at an end; the box was visited by General Ritchie, Commanding the Eighth Army, and General Gott, Commanding 13th Corps,

* Chapter 8, *Fourth Indian Division*, Stevens.

† See Chapter XIX, narrative of 2nd Battalion.

and by General Briggs, the new Divisional Commander, while the enemy's aircraft became increasingly active over the area. Then, on the morning of 27th May, the box stood to on a report of enemy land forces pushing round to the south of them. This report proved true the same evening by the appearance of a German armoured formation to the south, which opened ineffective fire on the box at a range of 1,200 yards. The British 4th Armoured Brigade came down from the north to engage the Germans, and the garrison had a good view of the tank battle as it moved over the desert like a great "dust devil." The enemy disappeared and were not seen again during the further two days that the 3rd Sikhs remained in the box. On the 30th, the Brigade having been relieved by the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, the Battalion moved into Tobruk and took over a sector on the south-east of the defensive perimeter.*

Back in Tobruk it soon became evident from B.B.C. broadcasts that the German tanks seen by the Battalion on the 27th had been part of a new major offensive by the enemy, but at this time information from military sources was scarce. The British 50th Division was said to be in difficulties at Gazala, with one brigade being supplied by air. Then, on 2nd June, came more optimistic reports: the German armour was said to have been caught in the Knightsbridge "Cauldron," on the east of the Gazala mine marsh, without oil, petrol, water or rations. They were to be "liquidated," and this was to be done by the 5th Indian Division. The Colonel and Anti-tank Platoon Commander went forward to point 169 on the 3rd to reconnoitre the forming-up area for the attack, and the Battalion moved there next day. Operation orders were given out that night for an initial attack by the 10th Brigade with artillery support in the early hours of the following morning, and for the 9th Brigade to attack past the right of the position to be taken by the 10th Brigade. Each battalion had been strengthened into a battalion group by the addition of anti-tank and field artillery and an Engineer detachment, and each was supported by tanks of the 8th Royal Tank Regiment.

The 10th Brigade's attack had already begun by the time that the Battalion, having left "B" Echelon at point 169, moved on to their start line and formed up in four columns in their lorries. They were due to advance at 5.45 a.m.; but by that time the Divisional plan of attack had already gone so far wrong that they were ordered to remain where they were. During the morning the Anti-tank and Carrier Platoons were taken away for the protection of Divisional Headquarters, the remainder of the Battalion being left in position without further orders or information. Then at noon a warning came through to expect a possible attack by enemy tanks from the south, as a result of which Colonel Dean was ordered to move his men to a more defensible position two miles to

* This was in fact the sector pierced by the Germans three weeks later after the Battalion had left, when they captured Tobruk by assault.

the south, where they dug-in near point 615 on the Bir Hakeim track. A battalion of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry from the 10th Indian Division was already in position half a mile farther south. Shortly after this the Colonel handed the Battalion over to Captain Finch and left in his staff-car to find the Brigadier, to whom he had orders to report personally. Soon after his departure the Battalion positions were attacked by German dive-bombers, and at four o'clock these were followed up by enemy land forces approaching from the south. A great cloud of dust was seen to engulf the D.C.L.I.'s positions and some shells from that direction began to fall in the 3rd Sikh's defences. Then a single Bren-gun carrier from the D.C.L.I. arrived in the Battalion's positions. The driver reported that his battalion had been completely overrun by German tanks, and then disappeared in the direction of Tobruk, leaving Captain Finch trying to decide whether to believe this, in the absence of any other information.

The Colonel had spent all this time searching for the Brigadier, who was not with his headquarters, and it was only after he had eventually found him that he received some sort of information about the general battle situation. The 10th Brigade's attack in the early morning had at first been successful, but our armour had later fallen into an anti-tank trap and disaster had followed. What had happened was that the tanks covering the 9th Brigade's attack had run into very heavy fire from well-dug-in anti-tank guns which had inflicted heavy losses and forced them to pull out to the north-east. The infantry, left without armoured protection, had then been counter-attacked in the open by the far from immobile enemy tanks, and the 10th Brigade, the West Yorks and the 3/9th Jats (who had replaced the Mahrattas in the 9th Brigade) had been overrun. It was now intended to form a new brigade from the remnants of the 9th and 10th Brigades, and Colonel Dean was therefore ordered to retire with the 3rd Sikhs to that morning's concentration area. The Battalion's Anti-tank Platoon would be collected by a liaison officer and sent to join them.

This serious news was meanwhile being borne out by actual events at point 615. Captain Finch had tried to get through to both Brigade and Divisional Headquarters by wireless, only to be told by the signallers that both were on the move and were closing down until next morning. A stream of vehicles from many different units was also visible in the surrounding desert, all moving eastwards at top speed, and the enemy armour was still sending over shells at long range. Captain Finch had therefore decided before Colonel Dean's return to withdraw to the previous night's harbour area, and the Battalion had already moved back two miles by the time that the Colonel rejoined them. He was surprised to find them withdrawing before armour which Brigade Headquarters had just identified as friendly, but these same tanks now opened fire again, causing some casualties in "D" Company and demonstrating that they were in fact anything but friendly. Colonel Dean resumed command and the withdrawal continued, at a steady four miles per hour, so that discipline and control could

be properly maintained, until that morning's concentration area was reached just as the sun was setting.

According to the Brigadier's orders, the Battalion should have halted here to form the new brigade, but this did not prove feasible. There was in fact a large concentration there already of soft-skinned "B" Echelon vehicles when the 3rd Sikhs arrived, and these were quickly put to flight by 75-mm. shells fired by the enemy armour out of the setting sun, so that the Battalion was soon left alone except for the stream of vehicles still retreating from the west, the drivers shouting that the Germans had broken through. The enemy shelling continued, and then infantry appeared in the west, moving towards the Battalion. These were identified, fortunately before fire was opened on them, as fifty men of the West Yorks who had lost their troop-carrying vehicles in the general confusion. The 3rd Sikhs therefore waited for them and put them on to their own vehicles. At the same time two of the Battalion's anti-tank guns rejoined and a troop of Bofors light anti-aircraft guns arrived and put themselves under command of Colonel Dean, who placed them on his flanks and ordered them to engage the enemy armour. Their fire was not very effective as the enemy was practically invisible in the setting sun, and they continued to advance. Some armoured cars which had passed through had told Colonel Dean that the main enemy armour was moving east along the Trig Capuzzo (the coast road through Bardia), and the situation on which Colonel Dean had to make his decision was as follows in his own words:

"The Battalion, mounted in its vehicles, was the only forward body of troops in the area. Complete darkness was about thirty minutes away. A few enemy tanks were coming toward us, firing, but were only to be seen when they fired; because they were moving in the dust with sunset after-glow behind them.

"The Battalion was in line of company columns with fifty yards interval and fifty yards distance between vehicles. Thus they were vulnerable to shell fire; but, to let them open out under those conditions, was to lose effective control. Moreover, once that was lost, with darkness coming on, it could not have been regained.

"I therefore decided to keep them as they were—moving very slowly back, with the anti-aircraft Bofors firing from one flank (portée) and our two anti-tank two-pounders from the other. This was not in the hope of doing much damage, but to keep the men's spirits up so that they could see that we were hitting back. After a mile or so like this, it became quite dark, and as expected the enemy armour halted.

"It was then that I received a report that the Brigade wireless truck (manned by Brigade signallers and carrying our radio link with Brigade Headquarters) had disappeared.

"My previous orders to rendezvous at point 169 had been cancelled by

events—the enemy were there now! I could get no fresh orders or information by radio in the absence of the Brigade wireless truck.

“There had obviously been a serious débacle in front. Most of the major units engaged had been overrun or had had serious casualties; and most of the rest—‘soft-skinned stuff,’ the Division and Brigade Headquarters, etc.—now seemed to be running a ‘Desert Derby’ eastwards.

“The fighting part of the Battalion was almost complete, though the carrier platoon and six anti-tank two-pounder guns were still away under Brigade command. It seemed that we should be needed somewhere in the morning, so I decided to take the whole lot back and report to the El Adem Box, where 29th Brigade should still be holding a ‘firm base.’ ”

The convoy, which by this time had grown to about 200 vehicles, moved off with the Bofors Troop Commander, who knew the ground, navigating. All the vehicles were heavily overloaded and there were numerous break-downs, but these were either taken in tow or their loads transferred to other vehicles, and at last the whole convoy reached the El Adem Box, coming up the Gubi Track, at half-past two in the morning of the 6th June.

The Eighth Army was now being hastily regrouped in an attempt to hold the already highly successful German thrust. On arrival in the El Adem Box Colonel Dean reported to Brigadier Reid, commanding the 29th Brigade, and was ordered to take over Box 650, a defended locality five miles away to the north-west. This box was about a thousand yards square in area, and although it was surrounded by open ground it was not a good natural position because, firstly, it was overlooked by higher ground to the south and, secondly, the ground was so rocky that slit-trenches for the men and emplacements for the guns were mere scratches in the ground, improved only by low walls of stones. The perimeter was wired and protected by a thin line of the unsatisfactory, Egyptian-made anti-tank mines. The 3rd Sikhs relieved a company of the 3rd Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment here early on the morning of the 6th and took up battle positions on the perimeter. A troop of the 8th Regiment of Field Artillery, two troops of light anti-aircraft guns and one troop—all that remained—of the 95th Anti-tank Regiment were already in the box and came under command. “B” Echelon, which had been forced by the enemy tanks to withdraw from point 169 to El Adem during the night, was now located four miles to the east of the box, on the edge of the El Adem landing ground.

For the next four days the battle in the El Adem area remained fairly stable. All ranks were tired—the Colonel had had very little sleep during the past two weeks—but morale was good, largely as a result of the steady manner in which the trying withdrawal from the Cauldron had been conducted. There were some casualties from enemy air attack on the box, but the Bofors claimed to have shot down five German planes, and these raids did not seriously interfere with the work of improving the defences and laying in an adequate supply of

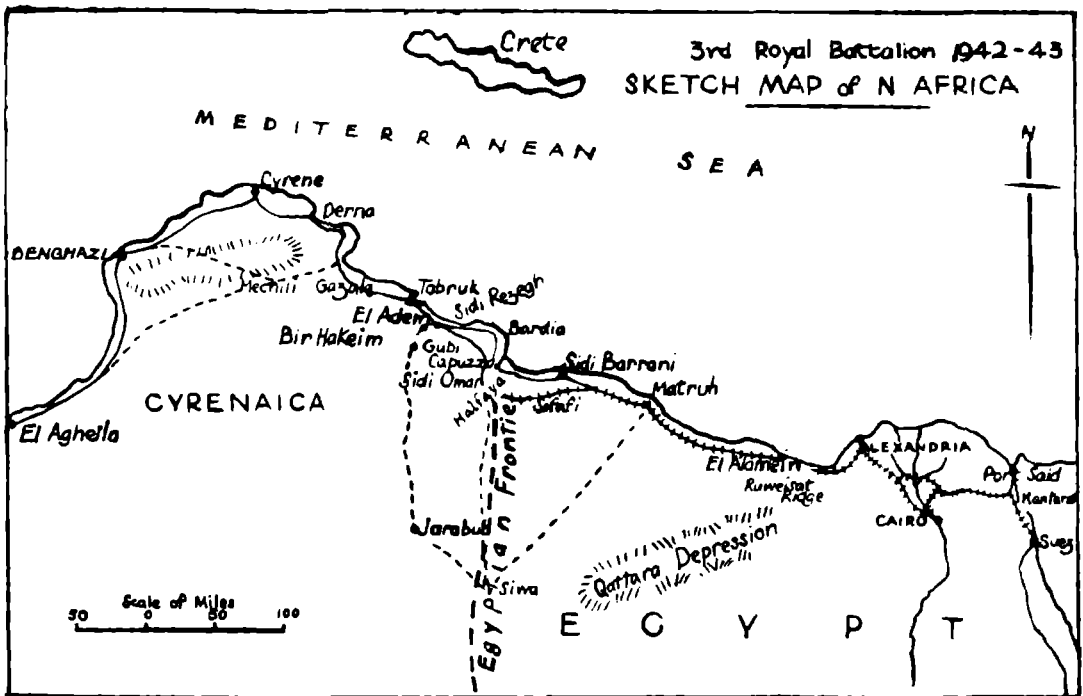
ammunition, water and rations. There were reports of the German 90th Light Division manœuvring in the desert to the south, and some distant tank battles were seen from the box, but for the present there was no direct attack by enemy land forces. On the 10th the Colonel wrote in a letter: "I think . . . that the Battalion and I are being specially looked after by Providence." But at that time he was unaware of the real gravity of the general situation, which was to unfold itself during the next four days.

The El Adem Box

The first indication of direct enemy ground action came on the evening of 11th June with the information that a German armoured column was advancing from the south-west to attack El Adem. The Battalion stood-to, but nothing happened until next day. Then on the 12th, Lieutenant Broucke, the Liaison Officer, arrived in a great hurry in "B" Echelon to tell them to move. Indeed, shells were already dropping in the area before Major Moss could put these orders into effect. "B" Echelon moved back that day to kilo 70 on the Tobruk-Bardia road and halted there for the present with the rest of the 29th Brigade's "B" Echelons. Enemy armour now appeared in force, but their objective seemed to be El Adem and they paid little attention to Box 650, although they had almost surrounded it and leaguered near by for the night. Fighting patrols from the box went out to attack the enemy leaguers during the night and had the satisfaction of causing considerable confusion. Next day, the 13th, the enemy withdrew and appeared to be successfully engaged by British armour while doing so. Carrier patrols sent out from the Battalion reported no sign of the enemy, and the general impression that all was going well was reinforced by the Division and Brigade Commanders, who visited Box 650 later in the day. The 14th was comparatively uneventful. Three days' rations, sent up by "B" Echelon, got through to the box; and a carrier patrol sent out under Lieutenant Baird took prisoner three German officers in a jeep, who were found to have Arab clothing with them. But the Brigadier visited the box again that morning and the Colonel now knew, although he was not allowed to pass it on to anyone, how serious the general situation had become.

The French had been forced to abandon Bir Hakeim, the British armour had suffered severe losses on the previous day, and a general withdrawal to the Egyptian frontier, leaving Tobruk held, was now contemplated. It was not yet realized, however, that the actual situation had already deteriorated beyond the point at which the enemy could be either halted or evaded "according to plan."

During the night of the 14th, while the South African Division was streaming back past Box 650 from the Gazala Line, Colonel Dean was summoned to Brigade Headquarters in the El Adem Box and told the plan for a



general withdrawal next day. He returned to the Battalion at three o'clock on the morning of the 15th and gave out his orders. "B" and "C" Companies with part of the Battalion Group were to move straight back to a new defensive line at Halfaya, while "A" and "D" Companies with the remainder of the Battalion Group were to be formed into a mobile "Jock Column," under his command, to operate with other similar columns in delaying the enemy's advance to Halfaya. Tobruk would be left held. Troop-carrying vehicles from Brigade would arrive in the box later in the morning and company guides were to report to the Jemadar-Adjutant at Battalion Headquarters by eight o'clock to take the transport to their company areas. Dawn broke while preparations were being made. Elements of the Knightsbridge garrison were now passing through the box from the west, and not long afterwards German tanks and motor transport were seen moving past the box to the south.

The morning wore on and there was still no sign of the troop-carrying vehicles from Brigade. The enemy had now halted in the desert south of the box, and at about eleven o'clock Colonel Dean ordered his artillery to engage them. This drew enemy artillery and tank fire down on to the box and the enemy armour advanced to reconnoitre. German dive-bombers then attacked the defences, throwing up great clouds of dust inside the box. Outside, the enemy tanks continued to circle round the perimeter, but were unsuccessful

in locating the Battalion's anti-tank guns, which had been ordered to hold their fire until an actual attack was made. All this occupied several hours and it was obvious to those in the box that the troop-carrying vehicles could not now arrive. In fact great difficulty and delay had been experienced in collecting the transport at "B" Echelon, and by two o'clock in the afternoon, when it did move forward under the Staff Captain, the enemy were already astride its line of advance and it got no farther than Sidi Rezegh. In the box, meanwhile, the Colonel was trying to get fresh orders from Brigade by wireless.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, after a preliminary bombardment by eight German batteries which had lasted for three hours, the enemy made their first attack. Tanks and infantry advanced from the south against the sector of the perimeter occupied by "A" Company, while covering fire was poured into the defences from the direction of the El Adem landing ground. The box's anti-tank guns now came into action for the first time and the attack was repulsed with the loss of some tanks to the enemy. Other enemy tanks, however, had remained "hull-down" during the action, noting the positions of the anti-tank guns inside the defences, and the enemy shelling had set on fire the few vehicles in the box, destroying much of the reserve ammunition. There was a lull after this attack, during which the Colonel managed to gain wireless contact with Brigade Headquarters and was instructed to remain where he was until further orders. Indeed, there was no alternative, as the enemy had by now infiltrated round on to "B" Company's front in strength and cut off the only line of retreat. A break-out by night might still be possible, but darkness would not come for many hours yet, and it was still full light when the Germans threw in their second assault at seven o'clock that evening.

The new enemy attack was again directed at the southern perimeter of the box, held by "A" and "D" Companies, and this time they advanced in full force, supported by artillery and some thirty Mark III and Mark IV tanks in open formation. The box's anti-tank guns, which had already revealed their positions in the first attack, were now silenced one after another and guns on other sectors were blinded by the smoke and dust inside the box. The enemy armour closed up to the perimeter mine-field on "A" and "D" Companies' fronts and poured heavy machine-gun fire into their positions. There were now no weapons with which to drive enemy tanks back and only the mines prevented them from advancing. The check did not last long. The tanks began to infiltrate through the mine-field on the edge of the escarpment in front of "D" Company. The mines here may have been old and certainly now proved ineffective. The Carrier Platoon, which had been concealed in a near-by nullah, made a last attempt to prevent the penetration, but Lieutenant Baird, who led their sortie, was killed almost as soon as his carrier moved out of cover, and the carrier behind him was also destroyed by armour-piercing shells fired at point-blank range. The tanks broke in. Captain Raw, commanding "D" Com-

pany, seized a Bren gun from one of the carriers and was killed while firing it from the hip at the advancing tanks, which now overran his company's positions. One of the enemy tanks then advanced on Battalion Headquarters and the Colonel was taken prisoner. "A" and "B" Companies' defences were next covered from the rear by the tanks while their infantry advanced through the wire and made prisoners of the defenders in their shallow trenches. In the north of the box, "C" Company was still holding out and the last remaining twenty-five-pounder was still being fought by a wounded gunner, the sole survivor of his troop; but after Captain Curtis, the Company Commander, had been killed trying to hold back the tanks with "sticky bombs," resistance here collapsed also. The fight was now over. Three officers, one J.C.O., Subadar Mohabat Khan, and about twenty-five other ranks of the Battalion had been killed, and there were another sixty wounded, to whom Captain Nayar, the Medical Officer, was attending. The remainder of the Battalion was collected by companies and marched off as prisoners* to a rendezvous some three miles west of the box. The Germans were very correct; they expressed admiration for the resistance which had been put up, and some of them tried to be friendly.

"B" Echelon and the Reconstitution of the Battalion

Major Moss and "B" Echelon knew nothing of the disaster which had overtaken the Battalion, and they heard no reliable news of them for another six days. "B" Echelon, leaving Captain Smith behind with the 29th Brigade Transport Company to administer the "Jock Columns," had started a further two days' withdrawal during the afternoon of the 15th to Hamra, but they were diverted on the 16th to Sofafi East. On the 17th they were ordered back to Hamra and moved there that night. At Hamra "B" Echelon found 29th Brigade Headquarters and learnt from Brigadier Reid that he had given the 3rd Sikhs permission to withdraw on the 15th by wireless and he hoped they were now safe in Tobruk, although nothing had been heard of them.† The retreat continued. On the 19th "B" Echelon found themselves back at Sofafi

* 3rd Sikhs officers taken prisoner were: Colonel Dean; Captains Finch, Phillips and Heath; Lieutenant Marshall; and Captain Broucke (who, as Liaison Officer, had come into the box and been unable to get out again). J.C.Os.: Subadars Dina Nath, Bela Singh, Rulia Ram, Man Singh and Khan Mir; Jemadars Shandi Gul, Sant Singh, Ghanam Rang, Tara Singh, Ali Khan, Bije Singh, Walayat Khan, Pur Dil, Farman Ali, Sardar Singh and Sarfaraz Khan. The other ranks numbered about 600. Glenn, driver of the American Field Service ambulance, was also taken prisoner—more will be heard of him in Chapter XVII.

† On this Colonel Dean writes as follows: "Since the Brigadier said so, I have no doubt whatever that this message was sent; but I am completely definite that the last message I received (it was in Urdu) was that there would be no withdrawal until orders to that effect were received from higher authority. Another possibility is that the message arrived during the final stages of the battle, when any withdrawal had become impossible, and was thus ignored as irrelevant to existing conditions. However, I cannot remember this having happened."

East; on the 20th they moved to Bir Abu Sweir, and on the 21st to the Bagush Box. It was here that they heard of the fate which had overtaken the Battalion in Box 650. The news was announced at a roll-call parade of all ranks that evening. The 3rd Sikhs had been reduced to the number of men there present: Captain Finnis, Captain Smith, Lieutenant Oakes, Subadar-Major Ali Khan and some 120 other ranks, of whom most were administrative personnel.

Before going on to relate how the nucleus of a new Battalion was formed from "B" Echelon and rejoined the 9th Brigade, we must finish the story of those who had been taken prisoner in Box 650. The prisoners had been divided into officers, J.C.Os. and other ranks on the 16th, and most of them had been taken away in lorries the next morning. The following incident then occurred and is given in Colonel Dean's words:

"During the second night after the fall of Box 650, while we were all still in German hands and had not yet been handed over to the Italians, I was woken by a German officer who asked me to detail a party of two or three J.C.Os. and 100 to 150 men, for whom he said transport had arrived. I did so.

"I was later told by a Sikh N.C.O. who had been with the party that they had been taken to near the El Adem main box, which was to be attacked just before dawn. They were told that they were to go with the leading attacking troops, and shout in Urdu to the defenders of the box that they were friends and not to be fired on. My informant (Havildar Gurbux Singh, commonly known as "Gearbox") said that the party refused to do this in so vehement a manner that the Germans accepted the refusal and did not press the matter.

"Otherwise, the Germans generally behaved correctly and well. For example: The day after our fight we were collected in the desert (about 12 officers and 800 men of various units). The officers were kept about 200 yards from the men and allowed no access to them. No food or water (except water for the wounded) had been issued, and as the day wore on it was very hot and the men became terribly thirsty and obviously restive. They were surging towards every vehicle that came near, and the guards had to keep them back by force, but behaved with restraint. There was at a distance what appeared to me to be a H.Q. of some kind. Fortunately Dick Finch spoke good German, so I asked him to call the *Feldwebel* (guard commander). When he came, I said I wanted to be taken to see an officer at the 'H.Q. over there,' and told him why. He agreed that the water situation was serious, and he and I went over to the H.Q., which was a Regimental H.Q. (i.e., Brigade H.Q.) and we saw two staff officers. They were polite and correct and gave us a most welcome cold drink; then with Dick Finch interpreting, I pointed out the dangerous situation which was arising as a result of the men's thirst. I said that if nothing was done the men, especially the Indians, would become frantic and the guards would find themselves obliged to fire—which I was sure they would regret as much as we should.

"The German officers agreed, but pointed out that they had a battle on

their hands (El Adem was being attacked), and they had nothing they could give us till their supply columns arrived up that night. These would take our men back on their return journey to depots where rations, etc., would be available. I told them that while I saw their point, that would be too late. I then told them that at Box 650, three or four miles east of us, our water and reserve rations were dug in. I said that if they would produce transport I would send Finch and some men to bring some of this up. I added that I would give my personal word of honour that there would be no 'funny business.' They accepted the idea, and after some telephoning (the Commander was away) a 10-ton diesel truck with trailer arrived. Finch went off with some men, and returned with enough water to produce a ration of about a quart per man—with two biscuits each."

The prisoners from the 29th Brigade were in due course taken away in lorries to the north-west, in the direction of Acroma. In passing Acroma, however, they came under artillery and mortar fire from the South African defences in the area, which caused great confusion and enabled a large number of the prisoners to escape into the South African positions in Tobruk, bringing with them their German lorry drivers, who now in turn found themselves prisoners. Most of the party, however, were recaptured when Tobruk fell on 20th June, though the wounded had been evacuated by sea the previous day. They it was who told the tale, a month later in Cairo hospital, of how Box 650 had been captured.

All that remained of the Battalion in the Bagush Box was now reorganized. Captain Smith and the strictly administrative personnel were sent to the rear on 25th June, and eventually arrived by easy stages in 11 Reinforcement Camp at Mena, near Cairo. The rest of the men, some seventy strong, were formed into a rifle company under Captain Finnis and Lieutenant Oakes, and came once more under command of Major Moss as part of the 3rd Jats. They remained in the Bagush Box until the 27th, when the whole of the 9th Brigade Group made a further hurried and rather loosely organized withdrawal to Alamein, arriving there on the 29th. The remnants of the 9th Brigade Group were now in very urgent need of a thorough reorganization and they were withdrawn out of the Alamein defences on 1st July to Khatatba.

The rest of July was devoted to reorganization. Major Moss rejoined from the Jats at Khatatba on the 9th to take over command, and Lieutenants Sawhny* and Gordon arrived next day from the Reinforcement Camp with 220 other ranks. On the 17th the Battalion moved to Mena, where a further forty other-rank reinforcements were waiting, and where it became reunited with Captain Smith's administrative party. Captain Finnis was now made Adjutant; Lieuten-

* Lieutenant Sawhny, a Regular officer of the 4th Sikhs, had been posted to the Battalion some time previously but had meanwhile been on a signal course. He was the first Indian officer ever posted to the 3rd Sikhs for duty.

ant Spalding returned to regimental duty from Divisional Headquarters, and Captain Sachdev was posted as Medical Officer. All available J.C.Os. were gathered in from extra-regimental employment and, together with Subadar-Major Ali Khan and the promotion of Havildar Mir Wali Khan* to Jemedar, made a total of eight. And so at the end of July the new 3rd Sikhs, having been detached from the 5th Indian Division, were posted to Port Sudan to complete their reorganization. They embarked on the s.s. *Lancashire* at Port Tewfik on the 29th and sailed the same day. Their strength was now 8 J.C.Os., 312 other ranks and 33 followers. Much hard work lay ahead for all of them.

The next five months, spent partly in Port Sudan and later at Wadi Halfa, were uneventful. They were passed, once reorganization was complete in training the reinforcements received from India together with 270 rank and file who had been captured at El Adem in the Western Desert and had now rejoined the Battalion. These had mainly been recovered from the enemy when Benghazi was retaken after the battle of El Alamein, but many had also escaped and walked to join our advancing forces in the desert.

By December the Battalion, now re-formed, was once more back in Qassassin, and spent the opening months of 1943 in further training for campaigns which all knew must be fought before the Second World War could be brought to a victorious conclusion. Some of this training, however, was of a character and for a role entirely new to Indian troops. The 3rd Sikhs was indeed the only Frontier Force unit ever to have the experience which now followed of being part of a "Beach brick" in a modern combined operation. The story is told in the next chapter.

* Havildar Mir Wali Khan had been among the "Left Out of Battle" Reserve in "B" Echelon and throughout the withdrawal had been an invaluable help to Captain Finnis, who now made him his Jemadar-Adjutant. Another N.C.O. deserving special mention was Havildar Ajaib Singh who had been mainly responsible for keeping the Battalion's worn-out transport in motion during the long desert journey from El Adem back to Mena.

CHAPTER XVII

THE 3RD ROYAL BATTALION IN SICILY, ITALY AND GREECE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Sicily and the "Beach bricks"—The Landing in Italy—Italy, 1944—The Battle of Campriano—"B" Company's Attack—"C" Company's Advance—The Pathan Assault—The Battle of Castel Nuovo—Montebello—Greece, 1944—Salonika, 1945-46.

BEFORE proceeding with the Battalion story a brief reference is necessary to the developments that followed the withdrawal of the Eighth Army in 1942 and the events recorded in the last chapter. The decisive victory of Alamein in October and the drive along the North African coast to Tripoli, followed by the final capture of Tunis and the surrender of all enemy forces in Africa, are too well known to recapitulate here.

Of British Indian forces, only the famous 4th Indian Division* took part in the Tunisian campaign, but no battalion of the Regiment was then with it. The 3rd Royal Battalion fought in the Italian campaign, however, as part of it, and the story follows below.

The Tunisian campaign ended on 13th May 1943, when the Axis forces capitulated at Tunis, the commander, General Von Arnim, making his surrender personally to the 4th Indian Division.

The Allied Armies in Tunis, which then consisted of American as well as Canadian and British forces, immediately commenced organizing for the attack on Sicily and Italy; and the story once more returns to the 3rd Royal Battalion back in Qassassin Camp in Egypt.

Sicily and the "Beach bricks"

In time of war a fighting battalion has every reason to feel sorry for itself if relegated to the lines of communication. However, if the 3rd Sikhs were not to play any part in the final expulsion of the enemy from North Africa, at least they were to be given a place in the next phase of Allied strategy, but it meant the complete disruption of the Battalion for the time being and the use of its

* "The fame of this Division will surely go down as one of the greatest fighting formations in military history; to be spoken of with such as the 10th Legion, the Light Division of the Peninsular War; Napoleon's Old Guard"—Field-Marshal Earl Wavell in his foreword to *The Fourth Indian Division* (Stevens).

personnel in an entirely new role for which they had to be specially organized and trained in 1943. The role consisted of operating, in company with two Scottish Battalions, the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, two so-called "Beach bricks" for the assault landing in Sicily.

Plans for this landing were already in hand before the enemy surrender in Tunis, and on 20th April the Battalion moved to carry out specialized training at Givet Olga on the Palestine coast. Here it was split up into five companies, each about 110 strong, with two officers, three J.C.Os. and six followers. These were given numbers and allocated as follows: 65, 66 and 67 to the 2nd H.L.I. (32 Brick) and 68 and 69 to the Argylls (33 Brick)—the British battalions being the "nucleus" battalion of the "brick" in each case.

Each "brick" was commanded by the Commandant of its nucleus battalion and was a military unit of all arms, with the special role of organizing and maintaining a beach-head in the early stages of an invasion by sea. The infantry element of the "brick" consisted of a number of rifle companies, one of which was a defence company and the remainder working companies. The task of these working companies was to unload military stores from landing-craft on the beach and build up dumps within the beach-head, from which the assault troops would be supplied. Our five companies were working companies, or more exactly, independent Indian working companies, under the orders of and administered by their respective "brick" headquarters. The only other Indian troops in the "bricks" were small Indian Army Medical Corps detachments with each. Perhaps everyone was a little disappointed to discover that they were to do nothing more than what the men called "coolie" work; however, it was pointed out to them that fighting troops had been selected for this work because, firstly, the beaches would certainly be under aerial and possibly under artillery bombardment, and this must not interfere with the work of unloading; and secondly, they would form an immediate tactical reserve to be thrown into the battle in emergency.

Training, which was to begin at once, amounted to teaching every man to swim, attaining a standard of physical fitness that would bear the strain of heavy and continuous manual labour, and learning the relevant parts of the theory and practice of assault landings. The first of these was easy, with the sea little more than a hundred yards away; the second came about almost automatically from the first in the exhilarating springtime weather; and the last was taken up with a keenness which surprised those officers of the "bricks" who had not before worked with Indian troops. The drill for the assembly and use of "roller runway" was mastered; the making of dumps by commodities was practised; the "scrambling net," the assault boat and the waterproofed vehicle became familiar objects to every sepoy; and on the purely military side, anti-aircraft action, aircraft recognition and mine-lifting were thoroughly revised. In addition

to this, most companies found time to do a short course at the Combined Operations Training School at Kabrit. Here on 10th May they were joined by 74 and 75 Companies, two further working companies which the Battalion had been ordered to raise. 74 Company had been formed from Dogras, P.Ms. and Pathans of H.Q. Company. It joined 33 Brick soon afterwards; 75 Company also consisted of Dogras, P.Ms., and Pathans. It was to join 34 Brick, which was made up of the 1st Battalion The Welch Regiment and a number of Indian working companies from the 3rd Battalion 10th Baluch Regiment. With the departure of these two companies there remained in Qassassin only Battalion Headquarters and the bare minimum of men necessary to maintain the transport, Bren carriers and anti-tank guns. By the end of May their strength had been even further depleted with the departure of Majors MacDonald and Heard to join 32 and 33 Bricks as their respective Indian Army Liaison Officers (in which capacity they proved of great value in championing any special administrative arrangements necessary for Indian troops and generally acting as unofficial detachment commanders of their own troops in the "bricks"). The disruption of the Battalion was completed on 1st June when Colonel Moss, accompanied by Lieutenant Borwick, left to take over temporary command of Port Said Sub-area.

By the end of May preliminary training had been completed, and after a full-scale exercise the "bricks" were concentrated with the assault troops at El Shatt on the eastern bank of the canal and embarked. A final rehearsal now took place, under the eye of the High Command, at the head of the Gulf of Akaba. This appeared to be satisfactory, and the troops returned to El Shatt.

On 27th June General Montgomery paid the "bricks" one of his informal visits; the men gathered round his car shouting their war cries. "Monty" liked this informality, but he was even more pleased when Major Heard, asked what "Sat Siri Akal" meant, gave him the rather free translation,* "Three cheers for General Montgomery." Two days later all re-embarked and the convoy sailed on 30th June 1943.

The 7th July found the fleet sailing along within sight of the North Africa coast. The excellence of the security in the Sicilian landings was surpassed only by the perfection of the staff work which had provided for every detail in spite of the fact that the plan and objective was not known to more than a handful of senior officers in each ship until after the fleet had sailed. Moreover, there was complete wireless silence between ship and ship, and ship and shore. Scale plaster models of the beaches, air photographs, defence overprint maps, up-to-date intelligence reports, information about the big plan, detailed orders for all units, and even a *Soldiers' Guide to Sicily* were now produced and orders to sub-units given out. The plan in brief was for a force of American, Canadian and British troops, drawn from a large number of ports on the African and eastern coasts of the Mediterranean, to concentrate simultaneously

* A literal translation would be "Strike Holy Prophet!"

on the south of Sicily, land and drive northwards to the Strait of Messina. 32, 33 and 34 Bricks, which were supporting the British 5th Infantry Division in their landing south of Syracuse, were to establish themselves respectively on How beach, south of the mouth of the Cassibile river, George beach, directly opposite Cassibile village, and Jig beach in front of the town of Avola.

The invasion of Sicily caught the enemy almost completely unawares in the early hours of 10th July 1943. The landing ships had taken station some miles from the coast during the night, with the working companies mustered on their decks, ready to climb into the assault craft and follow the assault troops.

The land battle had moved well north by the time that the working companies landed and only a distant noise of artillery could be heard. The beaches themselves showed little evidence of battle, although George beach was littered with wrecked gliders. The men went straight to their bivouac areas near the beaches and relieved themselves of the huge loads they were carrying on their backs. (The orders had been to the effect that a man could land with what he could carry leaving both hands free.) They then went straight back to the beaches and began the work of unloading stores. D Day for Sicily so far had been remarkably like a "wet shod" exercise. The first indication that anyone of the enemy objected to the "bricks" establishing themselves on the beaches was therefore an unpleasant surprise, unpleasant because of the cannon shells, a surprise because some of the enemy aircraft came in very low in dead ground and were not seen until they were already strafing.

With the first air attack began a hectic period in which there was no day and no night and no meal times, and which cannot properly be measured in time though the calendar indicates that it lasted from 10th July (D Day) until about 15th July. The working companies spent most of this time on the beaches where the landing-craft were packed so close at the water's edge that they almost touched one another. As soon as one was empty it was replaced by a loaded one. Most of the craft carried mixed loads which had to be sorted into separate dumps on the beaches so that lorry loads should be all of one commodity; someone had forgotten to send any roller runway and the physical labour in moving and sorting was very great; motor transport to clear stores to the beach-head dumps was in greater demand than supply, and the large quantities of petrol and explosives which accumulated on the beaches made the threat of an air attack particularly menacing.

Actually, enemy air attack during daylight most often took the form of sneak raids by Me.109s and Fw.190s which came singly or in pairs very low or out of the sun to strafe and bomb. There was no warning of such attacks. Suddenly every multiple pom-pom and Oerlikon gun on the landing craft would open a simultaneous and ear-splitting fire, there would be a scream of engines overhead, and the raid was over almost before the men had had time

to throw themselves down where they had been working. Such raids caused little interruption to the work of unloading and, considering the size and concentration of the targets, did very little damage. Ju.88 bombers also sometimes carried out daylight attacks of a more deliberate and more dangerous nature, but their usual time for attack was after dark.

Meanwhile the 5th British Division's drive north was going according to plan, and soon chaos had been reduced to order. From about 15th July until the end of that month conditions in every way improved. The working companies built rough jetties of stones on which the landing-craft could drop their ramps, and stores were thus no longer unloaded through the water. Even labour became more plentiful, for Italian prisoners of war were now helping in the unloading. These Italians worked well; our men saw to it that they never lacked drinking water and treated them with firmness in which there was no bullying. Many of the men had themselves been Ps.O.W. in Benghazi nine months previously; they knew how to make Ps.O.W. work.

Our fighter planes were now based on Sicily itself and enemy aircraft were rarely seen over the beaches in day time. With the better organization on the beaches life in general returned more to normal. Time was found for bathing in the sea, which was beautifully clear and most refreshing after the heat and dust of a working shift. But above all, the days in Sicily will be remembered for the food that the langars produced. The basic requirements—ghee, ata, dal and curry powder—were provided in adequate quantity and excellent quality by the Indian "Compo" ration which had been specially prepared for the use of the small number of Indian troops taking part in the Sicilian landing. This basis was supplemented and given variety by local produce—almonds, grapes, tomatoes, pumpkins, figs, brinjals and many other fruits and vegetables. Meat was not so plentiful, but any sheep or goat unwary enough to stray within two or three miles of the beaches generally found its way into the cooking-pots of either the British or Indian troops of the "bricks." All this local produce was free; the farmers had fled inland. The men had never had such good appetites and never had them so well satisfied. The same cannot be said for the officers; 32 Brick companies in particular suffered much at the hands of their mess cook, a Madrassi called John, whose artistry was confined within the narrow limits of opening tins or producing curries which did permanent damage to the palates of any bold enough to eat them. Many officers preferred to eat from the langars.

From 1st August the final phase on the Sicilian beaches began, and by the 15th they had closed down. In retrospect the men of the Battalion had done a good job—all, indeed, and more than all that was expected of them. Everyone was unstinting in praise of the keenness, energy and cheerfulness with which the sepoys invariably worked.

There had been casualties, but these were few—one havildar and one man killed and twelve men wounded.

The Landing in Italy

The "bricks" were now brought forward as preparations for a second assault landing across the Straits of Messina were made. For this landing Captains Chandler and Buta Singh were appointed Assistant Military Landing Officers, but for the rest there was nothing new. By 1st September all was ready and the two A.M.L.Os. went forward to join the assault troops. Intelligence reports stated that the enemy coastal defences were manned by Germans and surmised heavy mining of the beaches. There could be little hope of surprising the enemy and everything indicated a harder initial fight than in Sicily. To counterbalance this, General Montgomery had massed all the artillery of every type on the island of Sicily on the straits, and an artillery carpet of 150,000 shells was to be put down as covering fire for the assault. H-hour was to be in the early morning of 3rd September.

After dark on 2nd September the great artillery barrage began, many of the guns firing tracer as an aid to the assault-craft in maintaining direction. Vertical searchlights, arranged in parallels inland, served the same purpose. The assault troops embarked and set off across the straits. Large fires, however, had been started on the enemy coast-line and a great pall of smoke made the recognition of landmarks extremely difficult. As a result of this the assault troops who should have taken Gallico Maria had been landed five miles farther west and 33 Brick beach reconnaissance party, on landing, found themselves in fact the assault troops. Fortunately, the German troops spoken of in intelligence reports had been withdrawn north at the last moment, and the Italian defenders, having satisfied their honour by firing one burst of machine-gun fire into the landing-craft, retreated hastily to their billets in the village to avoid capture by changing into civilian clothes. Gallico Maria was thus casually captured by Captain Chandler, his three checkers, and a handful of military police in the course of their search in the village streets for the mines which happily proved as mythical as the Germans.

The working companies landed on their proper beaches soon after dawn that morning and quickly settled down to the same routine that they had learnt in Sicily. From the very beginning, however, their work lacked much of the intensity and excitement of Sicily. A large proportion of the stores that came in were already loaded on vehicles, Italian prisoners were soon available to help, and enemy air attacks were kept completely in check by our "fighter umbrella," which was very active and efficient. The Battalion suffered only one casualty in the Italian landing: Lieutenant Tomlinson, who had previously changed places with Lieutenant Ajaib Singh in 32 Brick, died from very severe burns caused by the explosion of a booby-trap in an Italian coastal defence gun position which he was inspecting.

The assault troops now moved north with all possible speed to the

relief of the hard-pressed beach-head at Salerno, and Calabria very quickly became a backwater. Indeed, within seven days of the assault landing, Mr. George Formby and his wife were giving an entertainment on the beach at Gallico Maria. By the end of a fortnight both "bricks" had virtually closed down.

In early October orders were received for the Indian working companies of both "bricks" to concentrate as a battalion at Taranto. They moved by train from Gallico, and the whole population of the village turned out to wave them good-bye at the railway station. It is not only the British private soldier who can claim to be a good ambassador! The people of Gallico had been terrified by the arrival of the sepoys, for Fascist propaganda had spread about the report that Indian troops ate small babies and, having exhausted supplies in Sicily, were about to invade Italy in search of more. Even educated men like the village doctor had believed this, and for some days after the sepoys' arrival all the local children had been kept concealed indoors. After these unpromising beginnings it was gratifying to have such a send-off.

Soon after arrival in Taranto the "bricks" finally broke up and the Argylls and H.L.I. returned to Egypt. The Battalion was reconstituted under Major MacDonald with an officiating Battalion Headquarters, pending the arrival of Colonel Moss and the personnel still in Egypt. It had played its part in the landings with unqualified success and had gained much of value from the experience. Conditions had not been those of real battle, but there had been enough of danger and difficulty to give the many young soldiers who had joined the Battalion since the disaster in the Desert a taste of battle; there had been success enough to raise again the morale of those who had been shaken by the experience of being prisoners of war for six months the previous year; there had been common perils and privations enough to infuse officers, J.C.Os. and men with that mutual comradeship and trust which can only spring from such conditions. These things, and the very high standard of physical fitness attained, were to prove of the utmost value in the severer tests which lay ahead.

Italy, 1944

On 20th December 1943, the Battalion was located, less three companies, not far from Lecce. The detached companies were on guards and duties so little training was possible; but by 20th January 1944, the whole Battalion was concentrated and for two months intensive training was carried out.

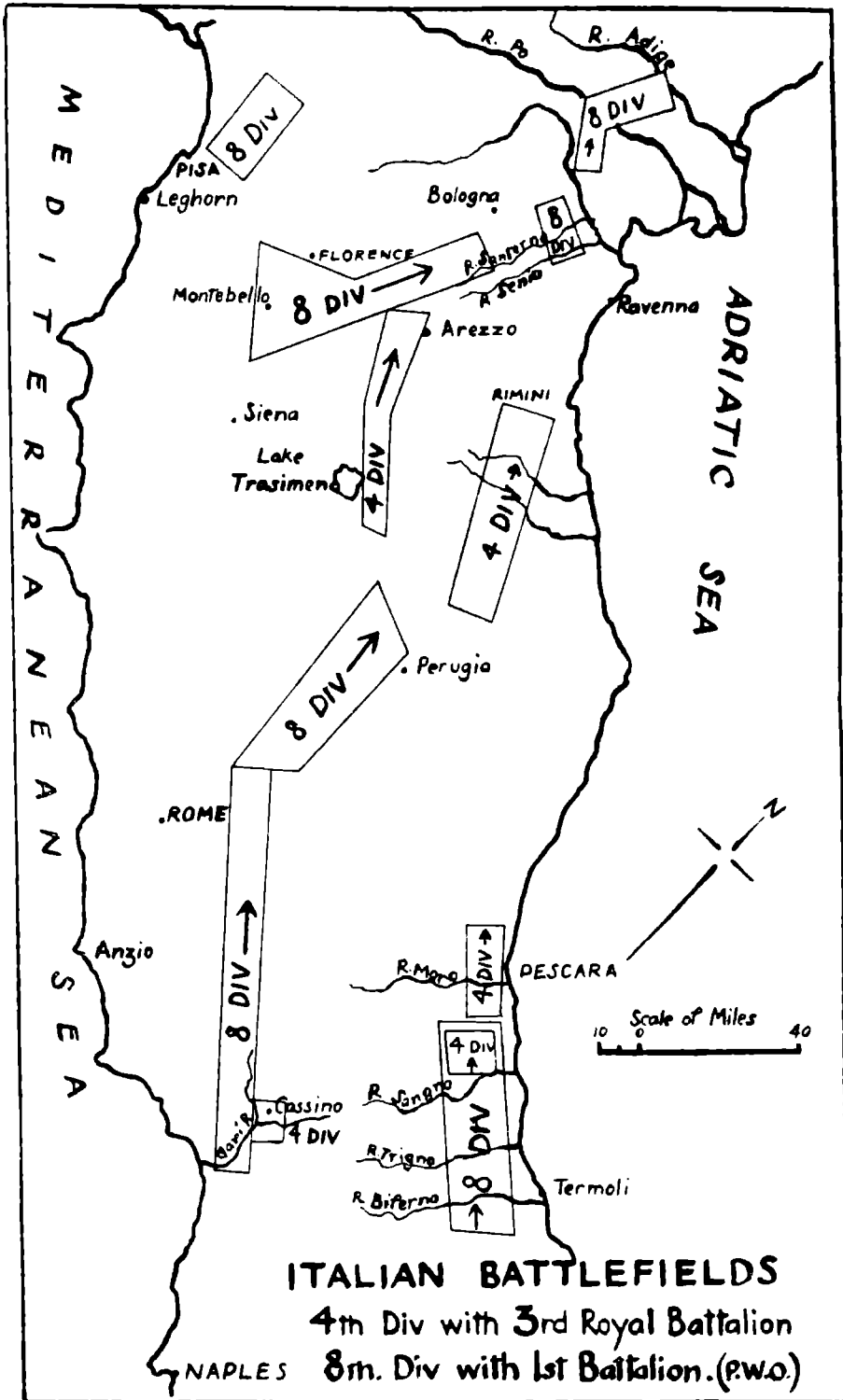
On 20th March, after a nerve-racking drive via Bari over the Apennines to Naples, the Battalion reached Venafro and joined the 4th Indian Division, which was now to be its fighting formation for the rest of the war. On its arrival the Battalion found the rest of the Division still fighting the Battle of Cassino, but was in fact in process of pulling out of the line. The Battalion therefore was not engaged in that battle, but went into the front line at Lanciano after

the Battalion had moved across to the East Coast. Here it met the 1st Battalion, who gave a dinner to all officers and J.C.Os. on 8th April.

The enemy was now pursuing a policy of aggressive patrolling. During the night of 16th-17th April, "A" Company patrols of two sections went to inspect some houses on the company front to see whether they were occupied. Finding them empty, they left at 11.15 p.m. and on their return journey they bumped into an enemy ambush. The enemy's strength was estimated at from thirty to forty, in three sections. The enemy threw grenades and fired at the leading sections and called on them to surrender in English and Urdu. The patrol returned the fire, and then charged the enemy with bayonets. A hand-to-hand fight ensued lasting about fifteen minutes. Considerable casualties were inflicted on the enemy, of whom three were definitely killed. Our casualties were two killed and ten wounded. Havildar Mehar Singh was awarded the I.D.S.M. for his fearless leadership in this action, and a congratulatory message was received from the Divisional Commander on the incident. During the next three weeks there was only patrolling, but enemy shelling caused a number of casualties. Lieutenant Cumming died of wounds on 19th April, and on 11th May a direct hit on "B" Company Headquarters killed Major Deakin and three men—a tragic loss. Eighteen men were also wounded during the period.

On 14th May the enemy attacked the Battalion position strongly. At dawn the equivalent of a battalion, supported by tanks and preceded by an artillery box barrage to isolate the area, attacked and overran the two forward platoons of "C" Company. An immediate counter-attack was not possible as the enemy had the range and were engaging by fire all the forward and rear areas. At 9.30 a.m., however, a deliberate counter-attack was launched with "A" Company supported by tanks from the 23rd Armoured Brigade to regain the lost positions. Soon after crossing the start line, "A" Company ran into severe enemy fire and suffered heavy casualties. The Cameron Highlanders were ordered to send one company to replace them, and at 8 p.m. the whole battalion of the Camerons, supported by the entire divisional artillery, advanced in three waves of a company each, drove on the lost positions and ejected the enemy. The Scottish casualties were 21, and the Battalion lost Jemadar Jaswant Singh and 12 men killed; Major R. Sawhny, Lieutenant Ajaib Singh, Subadar Mahinder Singh, Jemadars Gujjan Singh, Ruplal Chajju Ram and 70 rank and file were wounded; Jemadar Chajju Ram, I.O.M., and 42 rank and file of "D" Company, and Lieutenant Faqir Shah were reported missing.

The assistance given by the Scotsmen to the Frontiersmen in this costly action started a very close and friendly association between the two units which lasted throughout the campaign. It eventually culminated in the 3rd Royal Battalion The Frontier Force Regiment being unofficially affiliated to the 2nd Battalion Cameron Highlanders—an affiliation which still stands.



On 19th May the Battalion was relieved by the Camerons and moved to "B" Echelon for reorganization due to the heavy casualties sustained by "A" and "C" Companies. On reorganization, "A" Company under Captain Spalding had two platoons of Sikhs and one of Dogras; "B" Company under Captain Stuart, all Pathans; "C" Company under Captain Buta Singh, one platoon each of Dogras, P.Ms. and Pathans; and "D" Company under Major Finnis, all P.Ms.

Five days later the Battalion was back in the front line, and on the night of 25th/26th May one platoon of "A" Company under Captain I. L. Spalding and one platoon of "B" Company under Subadar Mir Wali Khan were ordered to attack with artillery support and capture two enemy localities on the front of the Cameron Highlanders. Both the platoons passed through the Camerons. "A" Company platoon ran into a mine-field a hundred yards from the objective and also came under heavy Spandau machine-gun fire laid on fixed lines. Poor Captain Spalding's leg was blown off by a mine when kneeling to help a wounded man. He died of wounds in the regimental aid post. Jemadar Bhabi Khan and six men were also badly wounded. The "B" Company platoon reached one of the houses of its objective, but came under machine-gun cross fire which had not been subdued by our artillery, and retired to keep out of enemy fixed lines of fire. Subadar Mir Wali Khan lost a foot in this attack. The attack failed.

On 8th June the Battalion advanced up the coast road and occupied first Francavilla and then on the 11th Pescara without opposition. Here the Division was relieved on the 15th by the Polish Carpathian Division, and the Battalion moved back to Sepino, near Campobasso.

While this was happening on the east coast, the Allied forces on the Gari river at Cassino finally broke through on 14th May,* linked up with the Anzio beach-head and captured Rome. The Germans retired to the mountainous country of Northern Italy, being followed by the Eighth Army and the American forces.

The Battalion now carried out a month's mountain warfare training at Sepino, and moved up on 15th July to near Arezzo. It arrived in the record time of two days, having covered 390 miles.

The Battle of Campriano

The Battalion now took up a defensive position north of Arezzo and just south of Campriano, and from 18th to 23rd July did some successful probing with patrols to discover enemy strength and dispositions.

On 24th July the Battalion was ordered to be prepared to attack and capture Campriano, a formidable feature five miles north of Arezzo, so as to

* See Chapter XVIII, narrative of the 1st Battalion.

protect the left flank of the 5th Brigade, who were to advance from Antria eastwards. The 2/7th Gurkhas were also ordered to protect the left flank to enable the 3rd Royal Battalion to concentrate for the attack. Owing to the width of the front and the difficult nature of the ground to be traversed, Lieutenant-Colonel McDonald decided to put in a silent attack with three companies up: "B" Company under Captain Stewart, supported by tanks, was to advance on the right—objective point 547. "C" Company under Captain Buta Singh was to follow in rear of "B" and slightly echeloned to the left. Once "B" Company had taken its objective the latter was to move on to point 584, the highest ground on the feature, dominating all else. "A" Company under Lieutenant C. L. Lockyer was to go for point 430 just beyond and 600 yards to the left of Campriano. "D" Company under Subadar Pahlwan Khan in reserve was to move to L'Antecchia hamlet and be prepared to go into Campriano once the other companies had taken their objectives.

The attack involved an advance of 2,000 yards from our front line and the country was very difficult. The advance therefore had to start by infiltration while it was still daylight, and was timed so that companies should be ready to go into the final assault at dusk. Intelligence reports said the feature was lightly held (thirty men at Campriano), and the whole attack was therefore to be silent. A F.O.O., Lieutenant Tyler of 11 Field Regiment, accompanied "C" Company to give support as required.

"B" Company's Attack

On 25th July "B" Company by 6 p.m. had infiltrated forward to their start line without incident. They were due to cross it at 7 p.m., but the tanks had stuck in very difficult and broken ground, and Captain Stewart waited till 7.20 p.m. to allow them to come up before advancing. The tanks could get no farther forward than Ulleri and remained there for the rest of the action. At 7.20 p.m. "B" Company advanced, 4 Platoon under Havildar Jemadar Shah on the right on high ground, 6 Platoon under Jemadar Rahim Khan on the left moving up the line of a track. Company Headquarters was to move behind 4 Platoon, with 5 Platoon under Jemadar Nauroze Khan in reserve behind Company Headquarters.

At 100 yards beyond the start line, 4 Platoon came under machine-gun fire from high ground to the right of them. This increased in intensity as the company came into view of enemy holding two copses on the right. 6 Platoon, though not under heavy machine-gun fire, had run into enemy artillery and mortar concentrations, but the advance continued in spite of the increasing fire from enemy machine guns in both copses and in the Lone House. Casualties were now being sustained, particularly by 4 platoon, but the Pathans never hesitated. "B" Company came steadily on up to a position only 300 yards from

the objective (4 Platoon attacked one post at the point of the bayonet, driving the enemy before them as they went). Here the Company was in ground more or less defiladed from the enemy in the copse and in Lone House, seventy yards away to the flank.

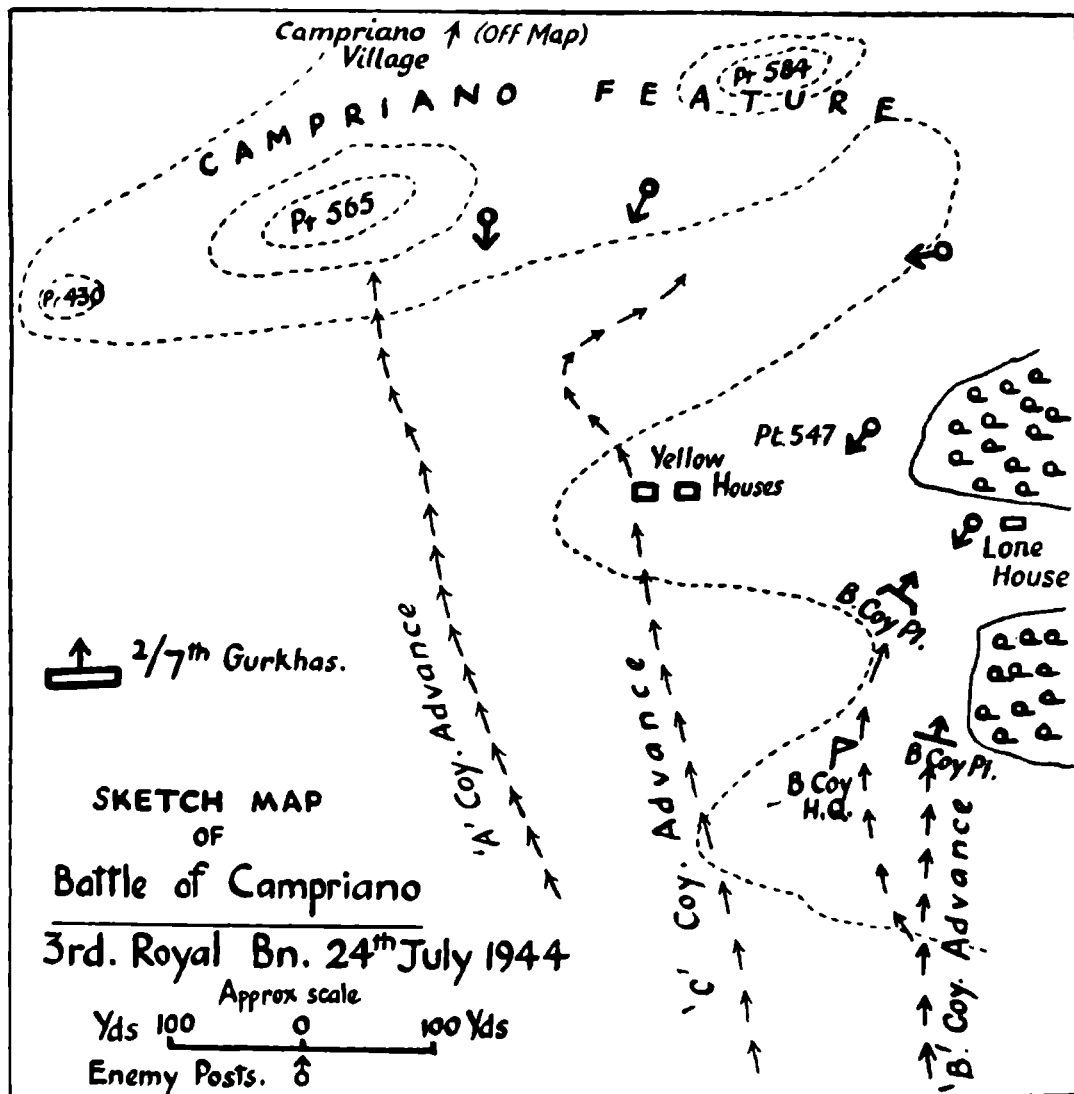
Nothing more now was possible till the machine gun in the house had been silenced. Two-inch mortars, PIATS and eventually tanks were used in the attempt to do this, but in spite of many direct hits the machine gun continued to hold up any attempt at further advance. "B" Company was now running short of ammunition, and had had casualties. Also it was getting dark, so Captain Stewart decided to wait till dawn for the final assault. He reported by W/T to Battalion Headquarters that he had reached about 300 yards from the objective, was short of ammunition, and that the Company had dug itself in in an all-round defensive position.

Meanwhile "A" Company on the left, lucky for the first time, was having no opposition and reported itself on its objective soon after dark.

"C" Company's Advance

"C" Company had not been so lucky as "A." Crossing the start line soon after "B" Company, it had moved forward down a nullah with two platoons up and one back in reserve with Company Headquarters. It very soon came under heavy enemy mortar fire, the same that had also caused "B" Company losses. "C" Company at this time was composed of a large percentage of young recruits, many of whom were in action for the first time, and they made the mistake of going to ground. This caused them more casualties than if they had gone straight through. Eventually Captain Boota Singh succeeded in getting them through the fire-swept area into defiladed ground near two yellow houses and about 200 yards to the left of "B" Company. Captain Boota Singh now went forward to reconnoitre. It was ten o'clock and almost dark, but he was able to see his objective some 500 yards away. There was no fire coming from it, so Captain Boota Singh decided to advance up a nullah which led directly to it. He accordingly ordered 7 Platoon (Dogras) under Jemadar Diwan Chand to advance up the right-hand side of the nullah, below the sky line, and 8 Platoon (Dogras) under Havildar Shankar Singh to move up the left side in the same way. He, with his headquarters and 9 Platoon under Havildar Mohd Iqbal, followed up in the centre. The advance began, but had not gone far before being fired on by enemy machine guns from both sides of the nullah, and both forward platoons were pinned down.

Captain Boota Singh, seeing that he had lost any chance of surprising the enemy, now altered his plan to a left hook, ignoring the right machine gun, and aimed at rushing the left machine-gun post. Once the two forward platoons had taken this post, they and the reserve platoon would go through to the

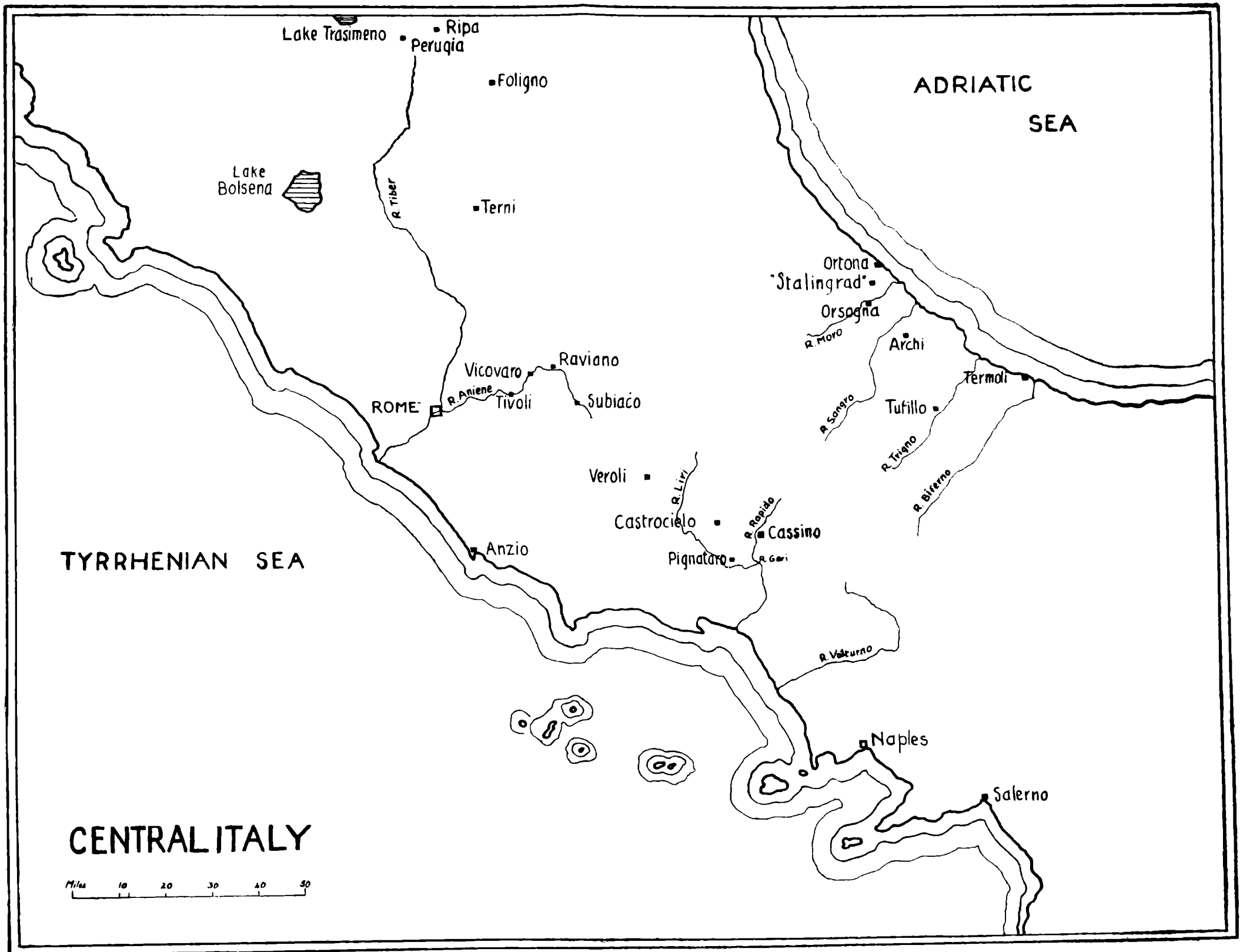


objective. To help in this he arranged with his artillery F.O.O. for a twenty-minute artillery concentration on the objective. While this plan was being made, "C" Company was unavoidably under heavy mortar fire, but the broken ground saved them from many casualties. Captain Boota Singh collected the platoon commanders together and pointed out to them what great things "B" Company had been doing and that "C" Company must also take its objective and its bag of prisoners. When all was ready, under cover of the artillery concentration the two forward platoons withdrew a little, dropped down into the nullah and started to climb up to the enemy post on the left. It was very dark and the

going was difficult. Captain Boota Singh, himself in the area of the two yellow houses with the reserve platoon, watched his platoons get about half-way up to their objective when suddenly two more machine-gun posts which had hitherto held their fire opened on them at point-blank range from either side of the nullah. The platoons went to ground. Then grenades from the enemy posts started bursting among them as well, and the cries of the wounded showed that they were suffering casualties. Captain Boota Singh was able to get through on his 38 set to his right-hand platoon commander, Jemadar Diwan Chand, and hear from him that his platoon was also in a sticky position and quite pinned down. Also he had no communication with 8 Platoon on his left. By this time the artillery concentration had finished, and Captain Boota Singh now got through to the Commanding Officer on his 38 set and told him what the situation was. With one platoon pinned down on the right, and another out of touch, he could not get forward by that route, but suggested moving round to "B" Company's area and trying from that flank once more to get forward. To this the Commanding Officer agreed, and a ten-minute artillery concentration was therefore arranged to help 7 Platoon to disengage. This was successfully accomplished and "C" Company, less 8 Platoon, moved over and joined "B" Company at about 3 a.m. Before all this, "C" Company Commander had been too busy to be able to report back to Battalion Headquarters. Battalion Headquarters therefore, working on the information that "A" Company were on their objective and "B" Company only a short distance from theirs, had ordered "D" Company to move forward from L'Antecchia to their objective, the church at Campriano. Battalion Headquarters itself had then started off to move forward with its long string of mules in the direction of L'Antecchia. They had advanced about 1,000 yards when they found from locating the sound of small-arms fire that the situation in front was anything but stabilized. Being without any local protection, therefore, they retired again to Laverna. Meanwhile Captain Boota Singh had found on joining "B" Company that they, too, had had about thirty casualties, and were therefore reduced to a strength of only two weak platoons. "C" Company, of course, was likewise without 8 Platoon, and the two platoons that remained had also been much weakened by casualties.

The Pathan Assault

By five o'clock that morning dawn was breaking, and "B" Company, still further reduced by mortar fire which had been falling among them off and on throughout the night, steeled themselves for a final attempt at capturing their objective—a well-sited enemy-defended locality of about thirty men with three machine guns. These were divided into two main positions fifteen yards from one another—one at Lone House and the other in some trees north-west of



Lone House. Captain Stewart's plan of attack was for 5 Platoon to go in on the right-hand enemy post while 6 Platoon went in on the left. The enemy positions were too near to use artillery, but covering fire was to be given from the right flank by 4 Platoon, now reduced to only seven men under Jemadar Shah, but strengthened with 7 Platoon of "C" Company. Both platoons moved forward, one section up and two back.

From the time the men left slit trenches, bayonets fixed, grenades in hands, a merciless fire was brought to bear on them, but there was no stopping these Pathans. By the time Shaista Khan's leading section had covered seventy-five of the hundred yards to the objective, only he and Lance-Naik Khem Singh, a Sikh of the Battalion Sniper Section attached to his section, were unhit, but Jemadar Nauroze Khan with the rear section came up and they went in all together with grenades and the bayonet. This was too much for the enemy, who fled, closely followed up by the survivors of 5 Platoon. Shaista Khan and Khem Singh had also by this time been wounded, but they nevertheless accounted for some of the fleeing enemy.

On the left Naik Yar Khan's section of 6 Platoon had been no less successful. Advancing in the teeth of heavy fire with his section and making good use of his grenades, he made three of the enemy prisoners on his way up to the objective. Continuing to advance, he threw another grenade and then, seizing the section's Bren gun, of which both numbers had become casualties, he himself emptied two magazines into the German post at point-blank range, killing four of the enemy and taking four more prisoners before they could join the remainder of their post of sixteen men in flight.

This attack won the objective and secured seventeen German prisoners, but the attacking force was so depleted by casualties by the time it got on to its objective that ten of them managed to escape while the position was being consolidated and before a reserve platoon could be used to bring the prisoners back. The objective having been taken, 5 Platoon moved over to the right and consolidated in a position from which it was better able to cover the right flank, whence the main threat of an enemy counter-attack was to be expected.

At 8.45 a.m., therefore, Brigadier Partridge ordered a company of the 2/7th Gurkhas to push forward under the command of the 3rd Royal Battalion and capture the two woods (above-mentioned) immediately to the right of "B" and "C" Companies' positions. This attack could not go in for some time, but by 2 p.m. the Gurkhas advanced, captured one of the woods and secured the right flank.

In the meantime, after the break up of an enemy counter-attack at 10 a.m., 8 Platoon of "C" Company under Havildar Shanker Singh came into "B" and "C" Companies' areas. They had taken advantage of the artillery fire brought down on the enemy at the time of their counter-attack. Now for a couple of

hours while the enemy was licking his wounds, "B" and "C" Companies had a chance to attend to the wounded, many of whom were still lying where they had fallen. The evacuation of these over 1,000 yards of difficult ground back to Ulleri was slow work, but the four stretcher-bearers were magnificent and all were ultimately brought in.

Although "B" and "C" Companies were now more comfortable with their right protected, the enemy did not leave matters like that, and commenced a concentrated mortar bombardment on the Gurkhas. Now, a man in a well-dug slit trench is generally fairly safe from all but a direct hit by a mortar bomb, but where there are trees this is not so. The Gurkhas in the wood were suffering many casualties from mortar bombs which burst in the air as they hit trees and sent showers of lethal splinters down into their slit trenches. At about six o'clock, therefore, the Gurkhas were forced to withdraw a short distance out of the wood, and the enemy at once took advantage of this to infiltrate forward once more on "B" and "C" Companies' right flank.

The intense mortar fire which had forced the Gurkhas to fall back had also killed some of the artillery F.O.O. party and smashed their wireless set. But it was not in the traditions of the 3rd and 5th Batteries 11th Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, to leave the infantry without artillery support in their hour of need. Lieutenant Tyler, the F.O.O., got through on the company 18 set and brought the fire of his guns down where it was needed. To do this meant making repeated journeys between his O.P. and the Company Headquarters, and the men held their breaths as this intrepid gunner again and again made the dash across the open mortared ground between the two slit trenches. By some magic he lived to receive the M.C. which he had earned so well.

At five o'clock that evening His Majesty The King, who had come to pay a visit to the 4th Indian Division, was able to watch from an observation post at Arezzo a very heavy concentration shoot on Campriano by the 1st and 11th Field Regiments, the 5th Medium Regiment and the 32nd Heavy Regiment, and the tanks of the Royal Warwickshire Yeomanry.

The company of 2/7th Gurkhas was now very short of ammunition. A further company of Gurkhas was therefore ordered to move forward to their assistance. With the second company of Gurkhas the last reserves of the Brigade had been committed, and as night approached it was obvious that the far-advanced salients at point 547 and point 430 could not be held against determined enemy attack under cover of darkness. At 8.30 p.m., therefore, the Brigade Commander ordered a partial withdrawal. In accordance with these orders, "A" Company was told to fall back to its original positions of the 24th; while "B" and "C" Companies were to amalgamate under Captain Stewart and come under command of Major Hook of 2/7th Gurkhas, whose company, assisted by them, was to hold on to the right salient which had been so dearly won.

As "A" Company withdrew they were shelled by the enemy and Lieutenant Lockyer, after only a week's service in the Battalion, was killed—a sad tragedy. "B" and "C" Companies now withdrew a short distance to meet the mules coming up with their rations. After a meal, replenishing their water-bottles for the first time in thirty hours, and a short rest on the track, the weary men trudged back to join the Gurkhas again and were put in position by Major Hook in the rear of the right cople as a reserve in the event of another enemy counter-attack developing. Here they stayed until 1.30 p.m. the next day (27th), being shelled and mortared at fairly frequent intervals more heavily even than before.

On 29th July the Battalion was withdrawn, but the next day was moved forward five miles to cover the left flank of the 2/7th Gurkhas for their attack on Monte Castellaccio. It continued to probe forward with night patrols and following up during the day, until by 1st August it was in a position overlooking Subbiano and again being mercilessly shelled and mortared.

On 2nd August the 2/7th Gurkhas attacked and captured Monte Castellaccio, thus coming up on the right flank of the Battalion. The enemy had pulled out that night and retaliated by firing 800 shells, but it was into a valley between the two battalions without any effect.

The Brigade was now up to the Arno river, and a further thrust forward on the night of the 7th August was made by the Gurkhas, supported by the Camerons, tanks of the Central India Horse and a heavy artillery barrage. The 3rd Royal Battalion were meanwhile to put in a diversionary attack on Roccolo and Pianle, across the River Arno and overlooking it. In brilliant moonlight a two-company attack on Roccolo was halted within fifty yards of its objective by mortar and Spandau fire; and though a fresh attack was made in daylight on the 8th it was unsuccessful. A further fifty casualties, including a Company Commander killed (Major J. P. Oakes), were suffered by the Battalion in this expensive affair. Shortly afterwards the Division was pulled out for a rest, and by 12th August the Battalion was concentrated on the shores of Lake Trasimeno.

The Battle of Castelnuovo

The Battalion had a well-deserved rest, and nearly everyone had a few days' leave in Rome—much to the consternation of the Indian Rest Camp there. The Battalion was, however, seven J.C.Os. and fifty-five rank and file under-strength from battle casualties.

On 23rd August, the rest over, the 3rd Royal Battalion began, in great secrecy, the long approach to the Gothic Line, after receiving a hundred badly needed reinforcements. Movement by M.T. stopped after the first day, and from the 24th onwards the advance up the axis of the much-battered "Route 3" was mainly on foot, with all belongings carried on the man. The 150-odd miles were

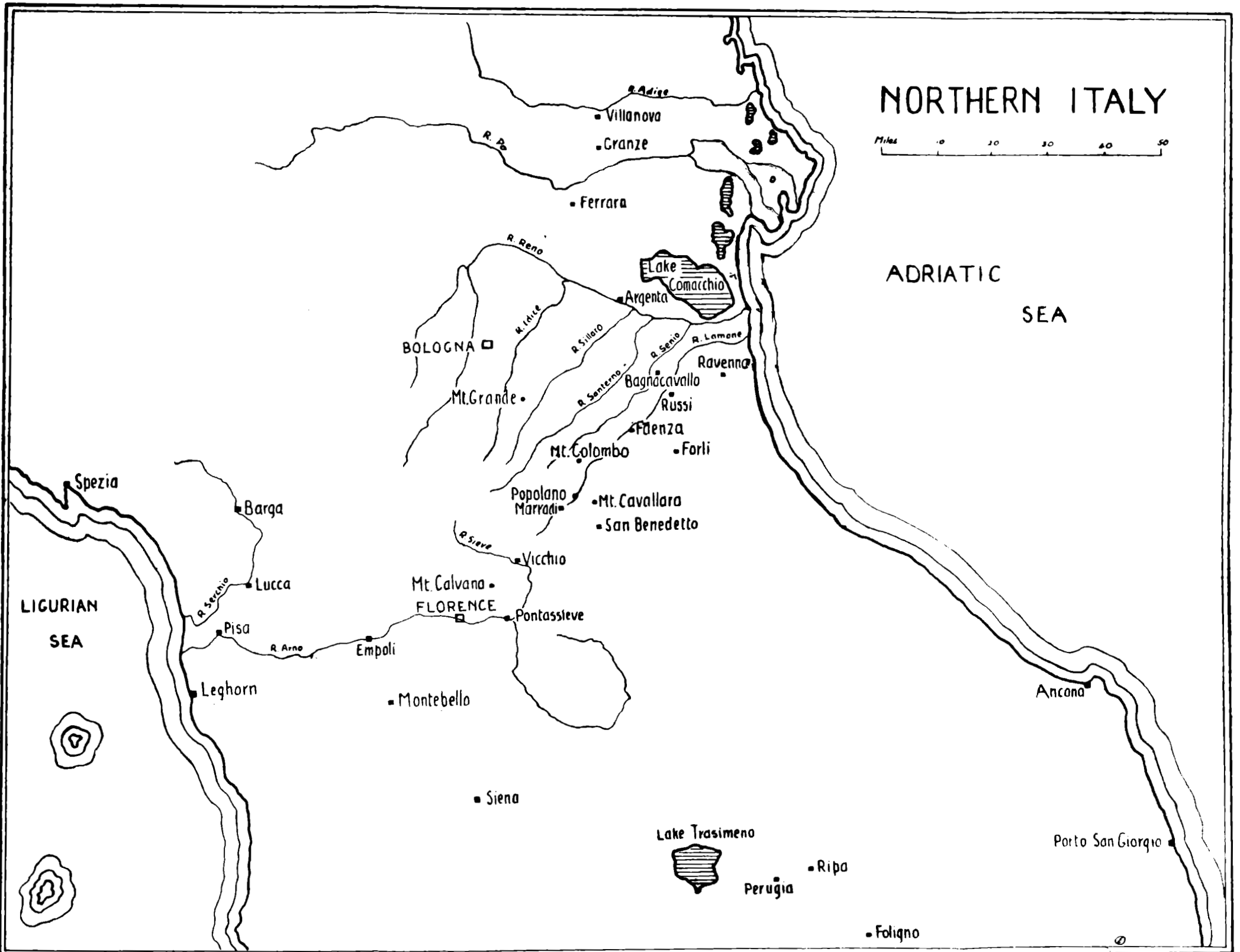
covered in a week, and on 30th August Urbino, near the Adriatic coast, was reached. Here the Battalion was given 350 mules for transport in the mountain country and continued the advance, through gaunt Monte Calvo, to Calpichio.

On the night of 5th/6th September the Brigade struck at Pian di Castello, thus starting the battle of Castelnuovo. The 3rd Royal Battalion attacked on the right and the 2nd Camerons on the left. The advance commenced at 11.15 that night, when "A" and "D" Companies crossed the start line to attack Castelnuovo. "A" Company soon found that their line of approach was barred by impassable country, and were then ordered to by-pass Castelnuovo village and join "D" Company on their right flank. As the attack was proceeding favourably on the right flank, "C" Company was also ordered forward to support the leading companies. Soon after passing Battalion Headquarters, however, they very unluckily ran into some heavy enemy shelling and suffered thirty casualties.

By first light "A" and "D" Companies under command of Major Finnis captured the village of Poggiale and held it against a German counter-attack which penetrated right into the village before being driven out. A firm base had now been established, and the attack on the main objectives was continued against determined enemy opposition, which was only finally overcome when a squadron of tanks from the 6th Royal Tank Regiment, at last finding a practicable route through Castelnuovo village, went forward. This advance of the tanks was a magnificent effort, as the route had not been reconnoitred, the going was difficult due to the heavy rain and it was a very steep ascent. On the arrival of the tanks a combined tank and infantry attack was launched, which was too much for the enemy, the hardy 5th German Mountain Division, who finally started to surrender. The objective, the high ground, and twenty-eight prisoners were taken by 3.30 in the afternoon. The enemy, however, were not yet done with. They launched a counter-attack with a full company, but this could be clearly seen from Battalion Tactical Headquarters. It was first halted by small-arms fire and then broken up by a prompt artillery concentration from the 11th Field Regiment.

This was indeed the first of four strong counter-attacks, supported by intense bombardment, which the enemy put in during the night. During these the men's ammunition ran out, but fortunately the enemy had left a great deal of their own equipment behind, and no fewer than five Spandaus were used with devastating effect to drive the attacks off.

At dusk on 6th September Battalion Tactical Headquarters received word from Brigade Headquarters that an enemy message had been intercepted stating that they were about to concentrate on the right flank to put in a strong counter-attack. This priceless information was almost immediately confirmed by "D" Company, who informed Battalion Tactical Headquarters that a large party



of men, approximate strength 200, were collecting in the low ground to the east of Poggiale. 11th Field Regiment, R.A., were ordered to deal with this menace, which they did promptly and effectively. Now once more, owing to the heavy casualties suffered by the leading companies, the 2/7th Gurkhas were ordered to put one company under command of the 3rd Royal Battalion. This company was pushed forward on to the eastern slopes of Castelnuovo to hold the right flank. This was the prelude to the most astonishing incident that the Battalion witnessed throughout the campaign. Soon after dawn on 7th September a whole company of German infantry were seen advancing unprotected and without covering fire across the open high ground from the north-east towards the 2/7th Gurkhas company. Almost immediately Bren and small-arms fire was opened on them by the leading companies and the enemy were seen to halt, falter and then go to ground. The 11th Field Regiment were ordered to stand by to open fire on the appropriate fixed lines if the opportunity offered. Shortly after this it happened. The enemy commenced to withdraw in full view, leaving their casualties on the ground. The artillery fire was brought down and the effect was devastating. It was the gravest blunder to advance across open high ground without any mortar or artillery support, and the Germans must have suffered very severely.

Night fell with the Brigade firmly established on the right edge of Pian di Castello, but regrettably at a cost of substantial casualties. From this dominating position the Battalion were able to overlook Cemano, where the 46th Division were fighting to capture this important height. It fell to them after a severe battle.

During 7th September the 2/7th Gurkhas were ordered to put a second company under command of the Royal Battalion, but this affair was now at an end, and the Battalion was brought into reserve in the rear of Poggiale. On the 10th it was withdrawn for two days' rest at Botticelli, but on the 13th the Brigade was again on the move. While a battle for Rimini was going on in the coastal plain, the Brigade moved forward during the next week over the hills through Montefiore, Montescubo and Le Ghotte to San Marino, experiencing much discomfort from the enemy's accurate shelling of the roads and from the wet weather.

On 21st September the whole area was blanketed in a thick mist which made it extremely difficult to identify any of the objectives. The Battalion, however, seized Monte Cerret, between San Marino and the wide, winding valley of the Marecchio, and in the process captured twenty prisoners. These in the majority of cases were tired out and sleeping. The enemy had not anticipated such a quick advance.

Montebello

But the Battalion was now again to be called on for a strong attack against a well-prepared enemy position, and once more they were to win through against tremendous difficulties. On 22nd September the Brigadier ordered the 2/7th Gurkhas to advance and capture high ground slightly to the south-west of Scorticata, and the 3rd Royal Battalion to advance on their left and capture Montebello, a very formidable fortress-like village on the left of Scorticata. The advance entailed an approach march of 1,000 yards after dark, followed by an attack on Montebello. However, the troops were fit and in good heart, in spite of a drenching the night before.

The attack started at 11 p.m. with "B" Company right and "C" Company left. First the Marecchio river, a formidable obstacle with the water rising, had to be crossed, but the troops got through somehow. Next they ran into heavy fire from Montebello and the high ground on the right. Then "C" Company were almost immediately ambushed (or what amounted to that), but managed to extricate themselves. "B" Company were also held up on an intermediate objective, and at daybreak both companies were running short of ammunition. Nevertheless the Battalion clung grimly to their gains, and a counter-attack against the indomitable Pathans of "B" Company was thrown back. The ammunition shortage of the forward companies was now so acute that no further counter-attack by the enemy could possibly have been held. Mercifully, however, the Germans contented themselves with sniping and made no further counter-attacks. When darkness fell ammunition came up; "A" and "D" Companies went forward and, assisted by a heavy artillery barrage, captured Montebello. The position was thus stabilized and, although an S.P. gun continued to give trouble, the Battalion now settled down to a comparatively restful period. The only activity was patrolling, and our patrols, coupled with the local Italian "Resistance," started bringing in deserters from the German "Todt" organization. This was a labour organization used by the enemy to carry out constructional and other work behind the front line and in back areas of countries they had overrun. It was called after its original German organizer and numbered hundreds of thousands of forced labourers taken from the various German-occupied countries. Thus the deserters that now came into the hands of the Battalion were of many nationalities, including Poles, Russians, Roumanians and French Alsations. All had to be interrogated and they often furnished useful information.

Montebello was the final action of the Battalion in Italy.

On 23rd October 1944, the 3rd Royal Battalion was relieved by a battalion of the 10th Indian Division and withdrawn from the front line.

Greece, 1944

In November 1944, the 4th Indian Division was withdrawn from the front line in Northern Italy and concentrated in the Taranto area. Its services were now required in Greece, where a new situation had arisen as a result of the German withdrawal; and the 3rd Royal Battalion was thus to spend the remaining six months of the war, and several months afterwards, in that country.

In order that the reader should understand the tasks that now faced the Battalion, a short summary of the situation in Greece is necessary, and the reasons why Allied troops were required for service there. It will be remembered that in the spring of 1941, when Axis forces were threatening the Balkans, an attempt was made by British forces to save Greece. The Greek army had conducted a successful defensive campaign against Mussolini's Italian invasion of Albania, and Hitler had come to Mussolini's aid with a powerful expeditionary force that advanced through the Balkans on Greece.

A British force (ill spared from the Western Desert at the time) was too weak and too late to hold the German advance, which not only overran the Greek mainland, but by airborne assault captured Crete. By the end of May, to quote the official Indian History, "The British Expeditionary Force . . . to Greece . . . had been evacuated [and] the Balkans were a German province."* Hitler's forces established themselves in Greece and for three and a half years, till October 1944, that country could similarly be described as a German province.

The turn of the tide against the Axis that commenced with Alamein and Stalingrad had by October 1944 carried the Allied armies in Western Europe to the Rhine, in Italy to the Gothic Line, and in Eastern Europe to Poland, Hungary and Roumania. With their victories in the latter theatres, the advancing Russians rendered the position of the Germans in the Balkan peninsula precarious and threatened to cut off the latter's units in Greece. Moreover, the Allied army in Italy was in a position to attack Austria by a seaborne advance across the Adriatic, which would also have intercepted German forces in Greece and the Balkan peninsula. While this latter strategy was never put into effect, it was strongly advocated by Winston Churchill and the British War Cabinet, and it was little wonder that by the autumn of 1944 Hitler found it advisable to withdraw from the Balkan peninsula altogether.

At this time the Greek Government were in Italy. They had left Greece when the German occupation began, but had kept in touch with patriotic resistance groups in the country. Developments in Greece were being closely watched, and as signs of a German evacuation became clear, an Allied force to land in the country with the return of the Greek Government was organized. In order to arrange for a smooth and rapid return to normal conditions, a meet-

* *Eastern Epic* (Compton Mackenzie), p. 82.

ing was held in Italy between General Wilson (the British Commander-in-Chief in Middle East), the leader of the Greek Government, and the leaders of three patriotic movements in occupied Greece, E.L.A.S., E.A.M. and E.D.E.S.* At this meeting an agreement was signed on 26th September, called the Caserta Agreement, laying down that all guerilla forces in Greece should place themselves under the orders of the Greek Government. The latter in turn agreed to put them under General Scobie, who was appointed Commander of the British Force to accompany the Greek Government back into the country.† Unfortunately, the patriotic guerilla forces were not reliable or obedient. They were Communist controlled, and though the post-war hostility of Communism to democratic government that bedevilled the world after the Second World War had not yet shown itself, here in Greece was to be its first appearance. The 4th Indian Division and with it the 3rd Royal Battalion were to be among the first to find themselves involved in a campaign, not only to restore order in a disorganized foreign country, but also to defeat well-armed Communist guerilla forces whose hostility was unexpected and attitude difficult to understand.

Incidentally, as this development became clear after the first British and Indian troops arrived in Greece, the action of these forces in fighting the Greek guerillas on the orders of the British War Cabinet (and of Winston Churchill himself, who flew to Athens at Christmas 1944, in person) was largely misunderstood in England and the U.S.A., and condemned in the Press. It was not for many months that the true nature of post-war Communism was grasped in democratic countries‡.

To return to the course of events. The Germans left Athens on 12th October. By then British troops had already occupied Patras and were advancing on the capital. On the 13th and 14th a British airborne force landed on the airfield eight miles from Athens and occupied the capital. They were closely followed by Allied naval forces which occupied the Piræus and landed General Scobie and the main British force.

Of the next four weeks Sir Winston Churchill writes as follows: "We wished to hand over authority to a stable Greek Government without loss of time. But Greece was in ruins. The Germans destroyed roads and railways as they withdrew northward. E.L.A.S. armed bands filled the gap left by the departing invaders and their central command made little effort to enforce the solemn promises that had been given. Everywhere was want and dissension. Finances were disordered and food exhausted. . . . Our troops willingly went

* E.L.A.S. were "The Greek People's National Army of Liberation"; E.A.M. was the Greek "National Liberal Front"; E.D.E.S. were the Greek "National Democratic Army."

† *The Second World War*, Vol. VI (Winston Churchill), pp. 248 and 249.

‡ To understand more fully the international complications that arose at the end of 1944 with the Allied return to Greece, the reader should consult Chapter XVIII of Winston Churchill's *Second World War*, Vol. VI. He will find it of the greatest interest.

on half rations to increase the food supplies, and British sappers started to build emergency communications. . . . But the Government in Athens had not enough troops to control the country and compel E.L.A.S. to observe the Caserta Agreement. Disorder grew and spread.”*

A revolt was imminent and Athens was declared a military area. Reinforcements were urgently needed, and at this juncture the 4th Indian Division was sent to Greece. By the beginning of November 1944, the 3rd Royal Battalion had come south from the Gothic Line and was in the Taranto area awaiting embarkation. Normal training was carried on as far as opportunity offered, while refitting and preparation proceeded.

On November 13th Lieutenant-Colonel MacDonald left for sixty-one days' leave, and command of the Battalion devolved on Major L. B. H. Reford, M.C.

Orders were now received outlining the tasks before the Battalion in Greece as follows: They were to maintain law and order pending the formation of, and taking over of full control by, Greek National Troops and Police Forces. They were also to assist in restoring confidence and a normal way of life in the Greek people by the presence of orderly, well-disciplined troops, and by establishing friendly relations with the Greeks and promoting good will.

As the Germans had left the country carrying out demolitions as they went, the troops were to help in restoring and improving essential communications. The Battalion, less "A" Company, was sent to garrison Missologni with a field battery, a platoon of sappers and ancillary units of supply and transport. "A" Company was detached to garrison Agrinion.

In view of the special nature of the task before them, the troops in Greece were reminded of the principles of duty in aid of the civil power, and all ranks were warned on the subject of good behaviour.

The Battalion embarked at Taranto in landing-craft on 25th November, and arrived at Missologni on the 27th. Here it was given a noisy welcome from the inhabitants and an E.L.A.S. brass band played the column up to some barracks, where satisfactory accommodation was available.

The next day a representative party marched under Lieutenant-Colonel Reford to the Town Hall for speeches by the Mayor (who belonged to the E.A.M.) and the commander of E.L.A.S.

On 1st December detailed instructions for the disarming of E.L.A.S. were received from Brigade, which made detachment commanders responsible for organizing collecting centres, protecting the arms handed in, and maintaining close liaison with the Greek Government local representatives. Meanwhile, at the higher command, the three Greek generals commanding E.L.A.S. in the Peloponnese and Salonika were to assemble at Corps Headquarters and receive details of the plan of disarmament.

* *Ibid.*, p. 249.

While these preparations were proceeding a shocking sea disaster occurred which caused casualties to the Battalion. The Turkish Ferry *Empire Dace*, carrying vehicles, personnel and petrol, struck a mine, caught fire and ran aground, blocking the entrance to Missologni Harbour. Captain Langden was wounded and was the only survivor of a party of six (the others being rank and file) coming to join the Battalion. Many casualties were caused by the sea becoming covered with burning petrol, and the vessel was burnt out. A total of 328 were lost.

The next day brought the first signs of the coming trouble. Demonstrations began in the towns with shouts of "We will not lay down our arms for our enemies," and "We are not responsible for the civil war." Coincident with this, clashes occurred in Athens, and on 3rd December "Communist supporters engaging in a banned demonstration collided with the police and civil war began."* The next day, when General Scobie ordered E.L.A.S. to evacuate Athens and the Piraeus forthwith, their troops and armed civilians tried to seize the capital by force. A virtual siege of the British force in Athens ensued.

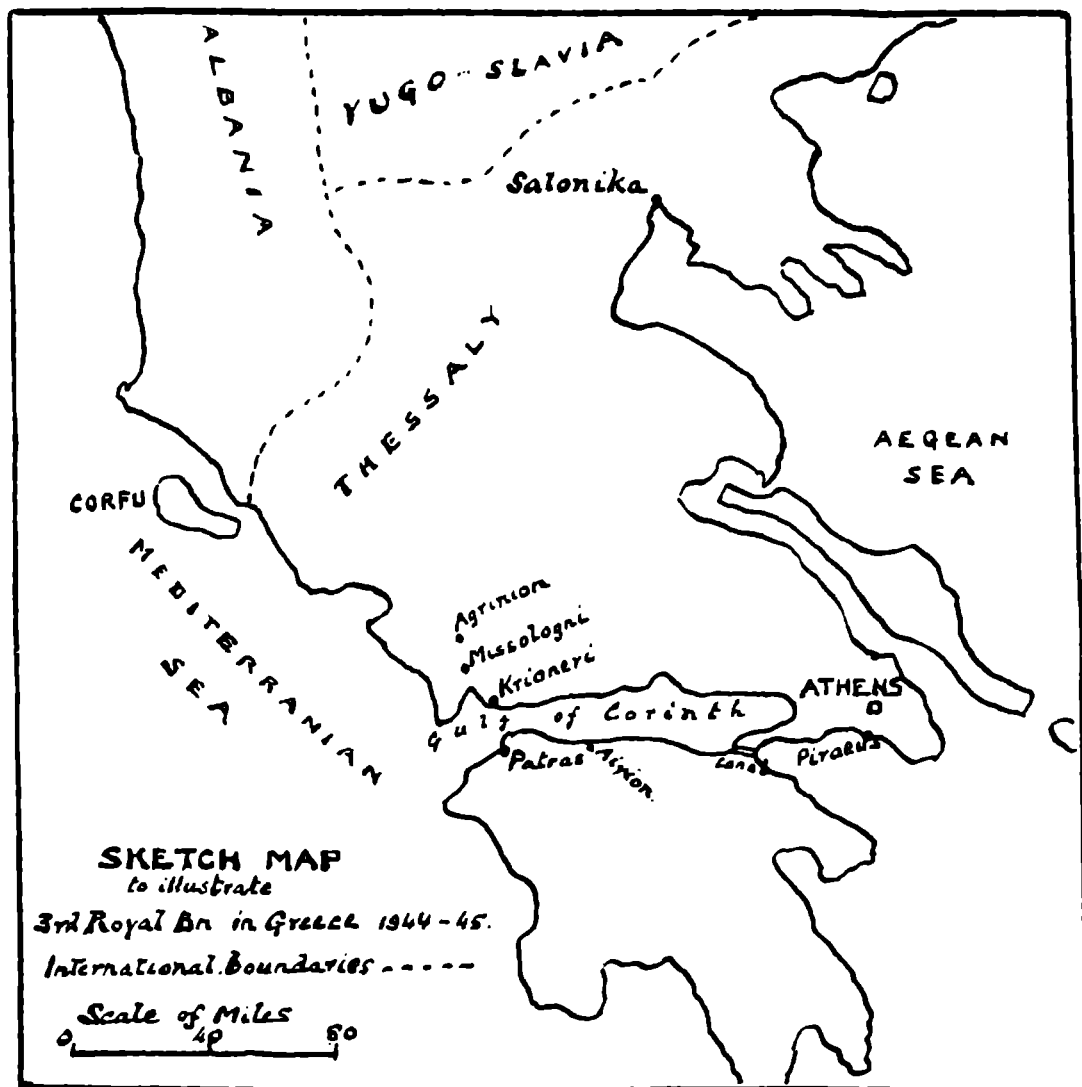
The situation in the Battalion area also now deteriorated. Workers came out on strike and E.L.A.S. preparations to attack the government and police were in evidence.

In the meantime on 5th December, another ship (a landing-craft) carrying vehicles and personnel for the garrison was blown up and sank close by the *Empire Dace*. Sixteen men of the Battalion were on board, of whom five survived wounded and eleven were lost. Krioneri was now the supply line for the Battalion, and as the internal situation grew worse, the company at Agrinion was withdrawn to Battalion Headquarters, and "D" Company was sent to Krioneri. On 7th December a deputation from E.A.M. with a noisy mob arrived at the barracks in Missologni and tried to persuade Lieutenant-Colonel Reford to commit himself regarding British intervention in Greek politics. They were told to wait till eleven o'clock next day for a reply. Lieutenant-Colonel Reford then made a speech from the Mayor's balcony urging cessation of warfare by E.L.A.S. and stating that orders to disarm E.L.A.S. in the area would be carried out.

The same evening (8th December) the barracks were put in a state of defence and some thirty refugees were accommodated, but it was now clear that the Battalion's line of communication through Krioneri could not be protected, and on 10th December the Battalion evacuated Missologni. "C" Company went to Patras (Brigade Headquarters) and the Battalion made a tactical move in M.T. to Krioneri. There was no opposition.

On 8th December 102 Italian prisoners of war from Agrinion had been handed over by E.L.A.S. and sent to Patras at once. These were now followed

* *The Second World War*, Vol. VI (Winston Churchill), p. 251.



by a further 95 German prisoners, all of whom were in a shocking physical condition.

During the next four days information of E.L.A.S. activity was obtained by listening in and intercepting telephone conversations. The signallers had tapped into the civil line with an instrument, and the interpreter was able to hear and report E.L.A.S. command conversations with their detachments. From this, on the 14th, it was learnt that E.L.A.S. expected us to start hostilities, which was far from being the intention. On the contrary, on the 15th E.L.A.S. commenced to mortar the jetty area (where loading was going on), gun positions and Battalion Headquarters. This mortar fire came from high ground

which overlooked the whole harbour area. The Battalion had one killed and twelve wounded. One gunner (R.A.) was also killed and three wounded.

On the afternoon of 13th December, E.L.A.S. captured Peter Glenn, the Battalion Intelligence Officer, and nine ranks (including two R.A. officers, two British drivers and three Indians). Peter Glenn was, in fact, an American citizen of the U.S.A. who had joined the Indian Army with a temporary commission, and his adventures after his capture are worth a digression. Here is his story in his own words:

“We were on our way back to Missologni when we were ambushed just before the entrance to the town. We were kept in the garrison there for several hours, and then hauled up to Agrinion in the back of a 15-cwt. truck. We were kept there for about three days under guard, during which time we learned of the attack at Krioneri, and the actions in Athens and elsewhere, mostly by being allowed to listen to the B.B.C.

“We were then packed up into the mountains on foot (to a monastery about sixty miles north of Agrinion, where we were confined to one room. The place was filled with political prisoners of one sort or another. I protested violently, and produced a very flimsy excuse or proof of being an American.” (His captors, in fact, asked him why he was wearing British battledress if he was an American, to which he replied by asking them why they also were wearing British battledress.)

“My protestations did produce results eventually, and I was allowed to leave on foot, with a guide, a loaf of bread and some honey, and made my way to Agrinion, complete with a pass. At Agrinion they put me up in a hotel, and the next day put me on a train that took me to Krioneri, where I spent the night before leaving the next day for Patras by caïque.

“By virtue of having been an E.L.A.S. prisoner, I was entitled to thirty days’ leave. The regulation said ‘in country of residence,’ and we duly applied for passage to U.S.A. This was something which the Headquarters in Athens would not authorize, but after a week of my being ‘in their hair,’ they said I could wait in Naples, near Allied Forces Headquarters. After a further week of waiting there, and daily trips to Caserta, I got permission to spend a week in Rome, on the assurance that I would call in to get word in case my passage came through from the War Office.

“In Rome I met old college friends in the 10th American Mountain Division who invited me up; this was to be the last Italian push. I called up Allied Forces Headquarters and asked to go up to the Fifth Army, which they agreed to. I ended up in the Headquarters of the 3rd Battalion, 87th Regiment, and spent about ten days with them prior to the attack, and then went right up to the Po Valley. During this period I was with Battalion Headquarters mostly, doing whatever jobs I could find to do, which, as I remember, were quite a lot and included time with companies, helping the medics, etc. Once we broke

through into the Po Valley and were just spearheading ahead, I was with a driver going back to pick up some men when the old ambush game was played again, and the two of us were again guests of the enemy—this time the Germans. We stayed with them for two days, and finished by racing across the Po Valley. In the midst of some confusion up in the hills near Verona I slipped away, and on foot made my way down to the American lines, ending up with the 3rd Battalion again. Two days later the message came through that my leave had been approved.

“I flew into New York City on V.E. night and, for reasons best known to themselves, the Americans did give me a Bronze Star with some sort of ‘V’ attachment.”

To return to the story in Greece. The Battalion was now threatened and greatly outnumbered by well-armed hostile E.L.A.S. One outlying platoon of “A” Company was indeed surrounded by a whole battalion 700 strong. It was considered advisable to commence evacuation of stores and personnel, and caiques were sent by Brigade for the purpose. The attempt to load stores and casualties on them on the afternoon of the 15th had to be abandoned after both the jetty and caiques had been damaged and casualties caused by mortar fire.

A plan was now made to withdraw after dark, man-handling stores to a beach that was under cover from observation where small caiques could be loaded. The mortar fire ceased at 3 p.m. and the plan was carried through that night. Only two carriers and three jeeps could be evacuated by a landing-craft from Patras. All lorries were destroyed and seven carriers were left on the jetty temporarily immobilized, so that they could be collected at first light by another landing-craft.

By 4.30 a.m. all troops of the Brigade were concentrated in Patras, the 3rd Royal Battalion sharing the German hospital building in very crowded fashion with the 2nd Battalion 7th Gurkhas.

The international situation in Patras was now reported to be very tense, and the 16th December was spent in organizing tactically and administratively for any eventuality. The next ten days however passed without incident, and the Battalion was allotted the role of “Patforce” reserve with the German hospital building to itself.

Christmas Day was observed as a holiday, and some relaxation of precautions became possible, but on the 30th civilians reported that an E.L.A.S. attack was again impending. Guards were doubled and troops slept in their clothes that night.

Meanwhile, British forces in Athens and the Piraeus had experienced heavy fighting against great numbers of E.L.A.S. troops—all in the congested city areas of streets and houses which favoured the guerillas. But the need for an early settlement and an end to the fighting was urgent and this was achieved by securing the King’s eventual agreement to the appointment of Archbishop

Damaskinos* as Regent with full powers to form a Government free of Communists. Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden flew to Athens on Christmas Eve in person to see the Archbishop and secured his agreement to the plan, and also to seeing the E.L.A.S. leaders (if they would comply with the invitation). This was thought to be the quickest way to stop the fighting, which should never have started. To quote Field-Marshal Alexander (who was now in Supreme Command), "Greek troops should be fighting against the enemy in Italy and not against British troops in Greece."†

By the end of December the insurgents were finally driven from the capital, and a truce was signed on 11th January 1945, by which all E.L.A.S. forces were to withdraw well clear of Athens, Salonika and Patras. Thus ended the six weeks' struggle for Athens and for the freedom of Greece from Communist domination. Winston Churchill adds (lest one should fail to appreciate the importance of these events): "When three million men were fighting on either side on the Western Front and vast American forces were deployed against Japan in the Pacific, the spasms of Greece may seem petty; but nevertheless they stood at the nerve-centre of power, law, and freedom in the Western World."‡

To return to the Battalion's story, during the early days of January more than one warning of impending E.L.A.S. attacks caused alerts, and men slept in their clothes. On the 11th operations were planned, should E.L.A.S. not accept the ultimatum, to drive them out of the Patras town area altogether. At 5 a.m. on the 12th, however, word was received that the ultimatum had been accepted and the men stood down.

Early on the 13th the Battalion was ordered along the coast road to establish with naval support a firm base at Aiyion. Any E.L.A.S. met were to be disarmed and allowed to go free. The move was made by bounds with a company and a troop of tanks as advance guard. This was wise as E.L.A.S. were not all tractable, although they had accepted the ultimatum, and opposition was encountered at midday. This resulted in an attack, supported by naval fire, being necessary before the insurgents were driven off. In this the Battalion lost one killed and four men wounded—the result of a mortar bomb which set a vehicle on fire.

The Battalion entered Aiyion at 3 p.m. on the 14th and were given a great ovation by the population. The next day, the 15th, the news of the truce at 3 p.m. was received, but without details of conditions.

A return to stability in the area was now seen. Two battalions of the Greek National Guard arrived, thereby releasing the Battalion for more active duties. Accordingly, the companies were given independent missions to round up neighbouring towns and villages, searching for arms and disarming E.L.A.S.

* The only person whose authority, it was thought, E.L.A.S. would accept.

† *Ibid.*, p. 275.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

where necessary. Movement, however, was hampered by heavy rains which brought rivers down in spate and impeded crossings. A ceremonial march past was organized in Patras on 19th January to which the Battalion sent representative detachments.

Before leaving the story of 3rd Royal Battalion in the Patras area, a tribute is due to the work of its Medical Officer, Captain M. Nair, during this very difficult period. Besides showing great gallantry in attending to wounded under mortar fire, he saved a gunner and gave medical aid to wounded civilians in a caique at considerable risk to his own safety. He was awarded the Military Cross.

Salonika, 1945-46

The Battalion was now ordered to Salonika and was once more concentrated in the German hospital at Patras by the 27th, preparing for embarkation. After several orders and counter-orders the Battalion finally embarked on the *Princess Kathleen* on 15th February in very crowded conditions. Cooking of chupatties was impossible and the men lived on dhal and rice till the ship's arrival in Salonika at midday on the 17th. By the evening the Battalion was accommodated in good billets at the American Technical School, and on the 19th took over guards in Salonika, requiring 14 N.C.Os. and 43 men.

Shortly after its arrival the Archbishop Damaskinos, now head of the Greek Government, visited Salonika and the Battalion provided a guard of honour of 25 ranks of each class. The turn-out was excellent. The Battalion was not however long required for service in Salonika itself.

The 11th Brigade had, in fact, been sent to Northern Greece as part of the 4th Indian Division's assignment to supervise the hand-over of arms and authority by E.L.A.S. to the Greek National Guards and Government, in accordance with the arrangements accepted by all parties.

Accordingly, the 3rd Royal Battalion was now allotted a large area of the Salonika Province to the south and west of the town in which it was responsible for carrying out the above task. Its difficult nature may be judged from the instructions which stated that the troops' role was to assist the Greek Government to regain control through the National Guard as soon as possible; but, while they could advise, they were not to become involved in affairs of local government.

The Battalion moved out of Salonika on 2nd March, each company going by M.T. to its allotted area. Between the 6th and 9th March three battalions of Greek National Guard arrived and were also distributed over the area. The work of handing over now proceeded, and though demonstrations and regrettable incidents occurred, the Battalion was not involved in any of these. Companies patrolled incessantly and helped in unearthing hidden arms dumps and supplies of all kinds.

On 7th March Colonel MacDonald returned from leave and resumed command of the Battalion, but was almost immediately required to take command of the Brigade as the Brigadier was going on leave. Major Nicholls, who had officiated in MacDonald's absence, continued in command with acting rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

The Battalion now settled down to its role of promoting internal security, and as arms were gradually collected, E.L.A.S. units disbanded and insurgent groups broken up, the country gradually returned to a normal life under a stable government.

At the end of March Lieutenant-General Scobie, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., Commander-in-Chief of troops in Greece, visited the Battalion, saw training and met officers.

For the next eight months the Battalion remained in the Salonika area while the presence of the 4th Indian Division was still required in Greece. The end of the war in Europe and the surrender of Japan were duly celebrated.

Eventually the return to India (and what is now Pakistan) commenced, and the 4th Indian Division, after six and a half years overseas, during which it had made itself world-famous, was warned for embarkation.

During the 3rd Royal Battalion's last fortnight in Salonika the Band gave many public programmes, and on 17th January beat "Retreat." It had a great reception, and when the final time for departure came many were the demonstrations of friendship and good will on the part of the Greek populace. When, on 28th January 1946 the Battalion embarked on H.T. *Carthage*, it could look back on a period of war service overseas that was surely unique in either World War.

Commencing as it did in September 1940 at the very start of the first campaign in which the Indian Army was involved, its war service lasted five and one-third years. During that time it fought in the Sudan, Eritrea, Abyssinia, the Western Desert, Sicily, Italy and Greece. Although it was destroyed and its remnants captured by Rommel in the Western Desert, it was reconstituted and retrained without returning to India. Its period as part of a specialized "Beach brick" in Sicily, coming immediately after its reconstitution, was a novel experience only to be followed by the severe fighting of the Italian campaign. Its achievements there against some of the finest German troops showed that all that had gone before had served merely to raise the Battalion's standards to even greater heights. Its final chapter in Greece was not the least trying, with its bewildering confusion of friends and foes. Covered with honours and decorations, the Battalion now returned to its homeland to its well-earned rest and reunion with friends and families. It had good reason to be proud indeed.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE 1ST BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER, THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITALY

The Ahmedzai Salient—The Middle East—The Mid-East Situation, 1941—Iraq, 1941-42—Iraq and Syria, 1942-43—The General War Situation, 1942-43—Italy, 1943-44—The Battle of the Gari River—The Advance into Northern Italy—1945 and the Final Victory in Italy—The 8th Indian Division—The Return to Sialkot.

The Ahmedzai Salient

THE Battalion was in Bannu when the Second World War broke out, and remained there till the autumn of 1940, when it was transferred to Delhi Cantonment. Before its transfer it took part in minor operations in the Ahmedzai Salient (north of the road between Bannu and Kohat) from 12th February till 7th March 1940.

The Second World War was still in the quiescent stage while Hitler was preparing for his onslaught on Western Europe in April and May 1940, and on the North-West Frontier the Faqir of Ipi* was still fomenting trouble. One of his followers, Mehr Dil by name, had organized gangs to raid the Kohat-Bannu road from "hide-outs" in the inaccessible country known as the Ahmedzai Salient, and it was decided to round up these gangs and establish control of the area by building roads and Frontier Constabulary posts there.

The force detailed for the purpose consisted of the Kohat and Jhelum Brigades, and the 1st Sikhs were employed from Bannu in protecting the main road and commencing road construction at the south side of the salient. On 13th February the Battalion was located in Gumatti Camp, protected by its own camp piquets, and employed on keeping open for convoys, etc., the sector of the main Kohat-Bannu road from Siti to Bannu.

On 21st February the Battalion came under the 3rd Brigade (Jhelum) for the attack on the Gumatti defile, which was the entrance to the area which the hostile gangs were holding. It was about to advance on the heights overlooking the defile, where tribal banners were flying, when the C.O. of the Reserve Battalion (Gurkhas) obtained leave to attack instead. The Gurkhas captured the heights and banners without the enemy firing a shot. The 1st

* For the Faqir of Ipi's rise to prominence, see Chapter XI.

Battalion, having regarded the banners as already "in the bag," were somewhat disappointed! Road building commenced immediately and the Battalion remained on protective duties while the road into the salient was built. By 7th March, main road security being restored, the Battalion returned to Bannu.*

The remainder of 1940 passed uneventfully, though the progress of the war from May onwards, and the disasters that attended the Allied armies, made it clear that an all-out national effort to train for and fight a major war was once more ahead. The Battalion accordingly devoted itself to the problems of training with new† equipment (as and when received) and learning the new techniques that the progress of the war was already producing.

It was during this period that the Battalion passed from animal to mechanical first line transport, the initial training of drivers being carried out with the aid of civilian instructors and "bazaar" lorries and buses. During this period too, the Battalion received its first three-inch mortars, which were later to prove so valuable during the Italian campaign. The training of motor-cycle despatch riders presented a particularly difficult problem, as to change an Orakzai mule leader to a past-master in the use of B.S.A. motor-cycles was not an easy matter. However, after many spills and a few fractures, the motor-cycle was mastered. B.Os. and J.C.Os., who had to be proficient in all Battalion vehicles, were initially as terrified of the motor-cycle as any of the men!

The Middle East

The 1st Battalion mobilized in May 1941, and embarked in Bombay for Iraq on 1st June. A fact perhaps worthy of mention, portraying the spirit of the Battalion, was that not a single man was absent without leave or missed the boat. A Punjabi reservist who, when on ten days' war leave, was cut off by a swollen river, arrived in Bombay under his own steam, and was received with a great "shahbash." All prisoners in the Quarter Guard were released on board ship, and the Battalion entered the war with 100 per cent. clean sheet. The Battalion maintained this standard and, as this narrative will show, it returned to India having covered itself with glory.

The convoy arrived at Basra and the Battalion disembarked on 9th June. The following officers accompanied the Battalion :

Lieutenant-Colonel L. E. MacGregor, O.B.E., Commandant.
Major P. T. Clarke, O.B.E., Second-in-Command.
Captain G. S. Tasker, Adjutant.

* For further details of these operations, see the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XII, narrative of the 5th Battalion.

† See Chapter XIX, where the immense difficulties of expansion and training that were met in the early years of the Second World War are discussed.

Second-Lieutenant P. B. Kirrage, Quartermaster.

Captain H. S. Sandhu, O.C. H.Q. Company (one-fourth of each class).

Second-Lieutenant Amar Singh, O.C. "A" Company (Sikhs).

Captain J. D. Clark, O.C. "B" Company (P.Ms.).

Second-Lieutenant F. N. Catto, "B" Company.

Major H. E. Boulter, O.C. "C" Company (Pathans).

Captain M. A. J. Cowan, O.C. "D" Company (Dogras).

The 1st Sikhs were now to spend two and a half years in the Middle and Near East, moving hither and thither, hoping always that the next order would be for the longed-for move to the battle-front. It did not come till September 1943, when the Battalion went to Italy and fought for the rest of the war in the campaign in that theatre.

Nevertheless the intervening period spent in the Middle and Near East was of vital importance, for it was here that the spring-board for final Allied victory was laid, and had this area been lost to German infiltration in the early days of the war—as it very nearly was—it is difficult to see how the pattern of victory could have been forged.

The Middle East Situation, 1941

Before, therefore, proceeding with the story of the 1st Battalion's doings in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East during 1941, 1942 and 1943, the reader should understand briefly the events that led up to the dispatch to those regions at this time of strong forces from India and Egypt, and the strategic situation that demanded it. For some time prior to 1941 Hitler's Germany had pursued a policy of peaceful penetration in Iraq and Persia. In particular the latter country had come markedly under German influence, and the Persian King, Reza Shah Pahlevi, although placed on the throne by British-Indian power after the First World War, had himself become a whole-hearted admirer of Germany.

When Hitler's victorious campaign in France in 1940 placed an enemy-controlled puppet government in power there, French colonies and mandated territories overseas followed German-inspired instructions and policy. This applied to Syria, where the "Vichy French"—so called because the French puppet government was located at Vichy—rapidly absorbed German technicians on their airfields and elsewhere, and in fact made Syria into an enemy country. As for Iraq, in April 1941, a pro-German clique, under one Rashid Ali, seized power in Baghdad by a *coup d'état*. The danger to the entire Allied fighting forces was immediate, for Abadan was their main source of oil supply, and if this fell into enemy hands the entire war effort could be immobilized.

A Brigade Group from India (20th) that was embarking for Malaya was

hurriedly dispatched to Basra, and landed there on 18th April 1941. It was followed by further British Indian forces to complete an Indian Division, and it was as part of this Division that the 1st Battalion went to Iraq.

In the meantime the only British force in Iraq—a Royal Air Force installation at Habbaniyah on the Euphrates, forty miles west of Baghdad—was attacked by the Iraqi Army. Furthermore, Rashid Ali's government signed a treaty with the enemy, by the terms of which Germany and Italy undertook to supply financial and military aid to the Iraqi government for a war against the British Commonwealth.*

To supplement the defensive fighting and bombing power of the R.A.F. at Habbaniyah (which was only nine Gladiators and a Blenheim) there were seven companies of Iraqi levies, of whom only four Assyrian companies were reliable; and on 24th April half a British battalion was hurriedly flown there from India in obsolete aircraft. These forces, totalling but 2,200† fighting men, were all that we had in Iraq; but they succeeded in fighting off the attacks on Habbaniyah of the entire Iraqi army till the arrival of the above-mentioned Indian force in Basra and that of a mobile armoured column called "Kingcol"‡ sent from Syria. It was a magnificent performance, but the Frontier Force Regiment had no hand in the fighting and the story has no place here.

The situation in Iraq, therefore, was saved only in the nick of time. German armies that had overrun Greece were still attacking Crete with air-borne forces, but had not been able to reinforce Rashid Ali, nor had the Vichy French in Syria moved to his support. Rashid Ali and his friends fled, and "Kingcol" entered Baghdad by the end of May.

Such was the situation when the 1st Battalion landed in Basra on 9th June, and proceeded up-country on the 26th as part of the 17th Indian Infantry Brigade. The Battalion's immediate destination was Mosul, where it arrived by train on 28th June.

The evening before the departure of the Battalion to Mosul the Commanding Officer paid his customary visit to the ration stand. The meat on hoof had been distributed, and among the P.M. rations stood a really magnificent goat with four horns. The C.O. turned to the S.M. and said, "Subadar-Major Sahib! Such a magnificent creature cannot be '*hallaed*'; it should be the Battalion mascot." The goat, immediately christened "Rohna," was marched out of the stand and tethered outside the C.O.'s dug-out. "Rohna," rather smelly but the pet of the Battalion, accompanied it on its Syrian campaign, and died suddenly in the field from colic, the result of a surfeit of Delhi biscuits.

The Battalion was dispatched to Mosul two weeks before the remainder of the Brigade as the situation there had deteriorated. On arrival the Battalion

* *Eastern Epic*, Sir Compton Mackenzie, p. 93.

† *The Grand Alliance*, Winston Churchill, p. 226.

‡ *The Golden Carpet*, Somerset de Chair.

did not receive a civic reception, but was spat at by all ages and sexes of the population. It went into a camp in a plain on the banks of the Tigris overlooked by barracks occupied by a truculent Iraqi battalion commanded by a seemingly badly disposed C.O. As further evidence of its hate, M.M.G. emplacements and platoon localities were dug and occupied in front of the Battalion's very eyes.

The town of Mosul was placed out of bounds for the best part of a week to give time for contact to be made with both civil and military Iraqi notables. A few guest nights and challenges to football matches and sports meetings broke down the barrier, and a good time thereafter was had by all. The situation, indeed, to start with was really most unpleasant, and a slip by any of the men would have produced an ugly scene. The behaviour of the men was magnificent and received the approbation of our Consul in Mosul.

But during this short period since the Battalion's arrival in Iraq two further developments of importance had occurred. First the war as a whole had taken an unexpected major turn with the sudden and treacherous attack on Russia by Hitler's armies on 22nd June. This astounded the world, for Hitler had indeed only recently concluded a pact of non-aggression and friendship with Russia.

Such a vast change in the war outlook, indeed, more than ever emphasized the importance of the Middle-East countries, and particularly of Persia, since through her was the only possible way to link up with South Russia and (as later became so necessary) to send Russia vital munitions and supplies. Indeed, before long the German forces, driving all before them in Russia, were threatening the Caucasus, defence measures in Iraq itself, as will later be seen in this history, became a priority work.

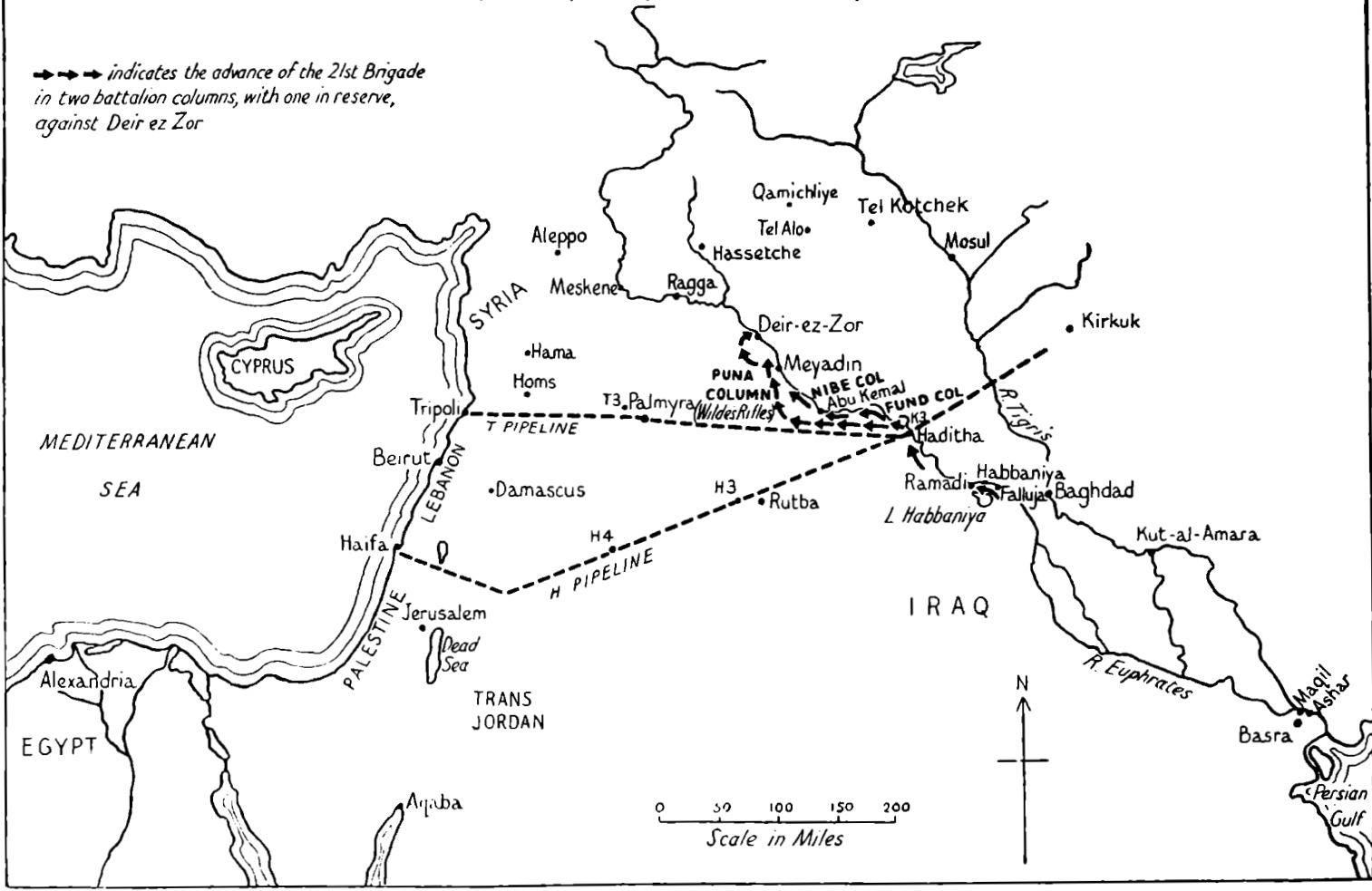
The second development was the decision to deal drastically with the Vichy French in Syria and remove what amounted to a dangerous enemy "pocket" in Allied Near-East territories. An attempt was first made to induce the French forces in this area to join the Free French and fight with the Allies, but this having failed, an invasion of Syria was undertaken from Egypt with the 5th Indian Brigade Group, the 7th Australian Division (less one brigade), a "Free French" Division and sundry armoured formations and units of the Trans-Jordan Arab forces. The advance commenced on 8th June, and by 21st June Damascus was captured (after bitter fighting by the 5th Indian Brigade in which it was sacrificed at "Mezze House"). The Vichy French forces retired to their bases at Aleppo.

Thus when the 1st Battalion reached Mosul the enemy in this theatre were indeed the Vichy French, who were still resisting in northern Syria. Moreover, a combined campaign against them was being staged by both the Free French and Australians advancing north from Palestine and Damascus, and by forces of the 10th Indian Division from Iraq.

Sketch Map of Iraq and Syria to illustrate operations, 1941

→→→ indicates the advance of the 21st Brigade in two battalion columns, with one in reserve, against Deir ez Zor

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Iraq, 1941-42

The Battalion was now to participate in this latter advance, but the Vichy French had no stomach for further fighting. It could do them no good and they retired without offering opposition. The Battalion's story of this period is as follows :

The day after the Battalion's arrival by train at Mosul, its transport (mechanized), which had moved by road, also arrived, having suffered only one casualty among its vehicles—a fine achievement at that stage of the war and with the standard of vehicles then forming the Indian Army's equipment. In the course of its journey the transport column had achieved the unusual distinction of having captured a thief during the night of its stage at Baghdad. He had been unwise enough to try to steal a rifle from a tent occupied by members of the Pathan company.

Orders were now received for a further advance along the road and rail axis towards Aleppo to Tel Kotchek. This was to be led by a mechanized column called "Cotswold," and consisted of Bn. H.Q. and two companies 1st Sikhs with detachments from the Mortar Platoon and M.M.G. Platoon, a section of guns, a detachment of Sappers and Miners and ancillary services. On 2nd July "Cotswold" occupied Tel Kotchek without incident, and the remainder of the Battalion was ordered to follow. The next day reconnaissances to Tel Alo were carried out and enemy were seen on the roof of the post there, but no opposition was encountered. The day was spent interviewing local railway staff, sheikhs and informers who had come in from further French posts. All were very friendly and said no resistance would be met from French Syrian troops, though their officers had orders to oppose our advance.

On the night of 4th/5th July three companies of the Battalion went forward in M.T. to occupy Tel Alo post, where a quantity of arms and equipment was captured and some French officers taken prisoner. This was a bloodless victory, but it was achieved after some very tense parleying between the C.O. and the French post commander, backed by a show of force by the supporting armoured cars and artillery.

A brigade camp for the 17th Brigade was now formed at Tel Alo while the mobile column again went forward to reconnoitre Hassetche*—a post a hundred miles farther west. On the way at Tel Brak the column was met by local Arab sheikhs and representatives from Hassetche, who said that the French had left that morning at six o'clock and the fort was only occupied by Assyrian troops. They all appeared very friendly and requested that the column should move in that evening. The mobile column was now divided in two—a fast column (Battalion Headquarters, "C" Company and two armoured cars, R.A.F.) and a slow column comprising the remainder.

* Capital town of the Vilayat.

The fast column reached Hassetche at 6 p.m. the same day, 8th July, and was met outside the town by the governor, police and civil authorities, all dressed in well-laundered white drill uniforms with medals, rather a contrast to the Battalion's begrimed drill bush-shirts and shorts. The keys of the town were handed to the C.O., who was also informed that Government House was available for him and that the barracks had been vacated and cleaned to receive the troops. The C.O. declined this invitation, much to the surprise of the Hassetche notables, and instead selected a suitable perimeter camp on the bank of the river. One platoon was sent into the town and occupied the French fort to reassure the local population, who feared looting by Kurds. On the morning of 10th July the governor and his staff escorted Colonel Macgregor and his staff to the town hall, signifying the official entry of the British into that part of Syria known as the "Duck's Bill."

The *gendarmerie* provided a guard of honour. Colonel Macgregor assured the notables that the British Government wished the administration of the country to carry on as before, and the proceedings ended by the toasting of the new administration of Hassetche,

Reports were now received that the main bridge over the river on the road to Deir ez Zor was mined, and the detachment of sappers and miners were sent to remove the mine. This took them thirty-six hours to do, as the mine was found to be at the end of a tunnel 36 feet long. The fort at Hassetche was also found to be in good condition, but certain unaccountable demolitions had been carried out by the French—e.g., the new aerodrome buildings and wireless station had been carefully broken up, in particular the officers' quarters and mess were destroyed, including all mirrors, basins, baths, etc. On the other hand, large quantities of petrol, ammunition and stores had been left intact, as also was the main bridge which, as remarked above, was ready mined for destruction.

The mobile column was ordered to leave one company in Hassetche (which was later relieved by the 5th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles*) and returned to Tel Kotchek on 10th July.

Next day the Battalion returned to Mosul. The Vichy French commander in Syria had asked for an armistice, as indeed he had now no further hope of German or Italian support, and the war in Syria was at an end.

The Battalion was now to spend the next ten months in Mosul and the neighbourhood, and the time, which was quite uneventful, was employed in training where possible and building up the men's efficiency with up-to-date weapons and equipment. With the raising of fresh battalions of the Regiment in India, constant "milking" to provide trained nuclei took place, and fresh drafts of young soldiers were received from the Regimental Centre at Sialkot.

* See *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XVIII.

Locally the Battalion provided guards etc., for the security of airfields and other installations, and detachments on posts to safeguard oil pipelines from Arab marauders.

On 25th July the Battalion suffered a tragic loss in the accidental death by drowning while bathing in the Tigris of Captain J. D. Clark. His body was recovered five miles downstream by Arab villagers, and was buried in Mosul Cemetery with military honours on the 27th. The 60th Rifles (K.R.R.C.) provided the buglers and the Battalion the firing party. This in fact completed a tragic trio of accidents in the three battalions of the 17th Brigade since its arrival in Iraq, the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (F.F.) and 5th Battalion 13th Frontier Force Rifles having also each lost an officer, one through a motor-cycle crash and one through a shooting accident.

On 13th September a party of one J.C.O. and forty rank and file of the 3rd Royal Battalion visited the Battalion—the former Battalion having arrived in Iraq with the 5th Indian Division. This move had been occasioned by the menace to the Caucasus of the continued advance through South Russia of the German armies, and the need to show strength in the area should Turkey be attacked by the Central Powers.

In November preparations were made for the actual construction of defences against a possible German advance on Iraq through the Caucasus, Mosul Fortress (on which work was done by the Battalion) being planned as a main bastion of the system. In the event these projects, as well as similar ones on the North-West Frontier of India, were later quite redundant. Stalingrad and Alamein in October, November and December 1942, removed all such enemy threats in the Second World War.

A sudden and far more menacing threat, however, broke on the Allies from the opposite direction, when news from the Far East was received of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, followed by others on Guam, Midway and Malaya. The diary records this news as causing a great reaction among men of the Battalion. That their feelings were to be borne out by events is witnessed by the stories that follow in this volume of the 2nd and 4th Sikhs and the war-raised battalions (particularly the 9th Battalion) in the fierce campaigns in Malaya and Burma. Indeed, the Japs proved to be probably the toughest fighters the Regiment had ever had to meet, an opinion confirmed by all who fought against them in the Second World War.

The New Year (1942) brought a heavy fall of snow and intense cold at Mosul, and two results are perhaps of interest. The first was the cracking of water-jackets of M.T. vehicles—no fewer than sixteen being put out of action. Two of these were with the Mobile Workshop and had been empty of water for some days. The second was the arrival of masses of wild duck, Colonel Macgregor and Major Boulter obtaining a bag of thirty-three within a mile of camp on one afternoon alone.

On 13th January the Premier of the Punjab, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan, visited Mosul and a parade was held of men from the Punjab to meet him. He gave an address to the men, assuring them that their families were well cared for. He also made known that a certain amount of land in the Punjab and some government appointments would be distributed as awards for specially deserving war service. The Subadar-Major replied, calling for three cheers, and the parade ended with tea in the Officers' Mess for the Premier's party, to which all J.C.Os. were invited.

On 16th January 1942, Lieutenant-Colonel Macgregor left for India to attend a course at the Higher War School, and Major P. T. Clarke, O.B.E., took over officiating command of the Battalion. January and February were spent almost entirely on digging the defensive works of the Mosul bastion, which kept the men remarkably fit and improved their physique. In the latter part of February, however, it was possible to carry out some badly needed individual and section training.

On 2nd March the Battalion was ordered to put a guard on the Field Supply Depot to try to stop the thieving. The installation had a perimeter of over four miles from which continual losses were occurring from theft. The Battalion was successful. Nothing was stolen during the week it was on guard, and the diary records with satisfaction that it secured a bag of two Arab thieves killed and three captured.

News was received on 7th March that Colonel Macgregor had been appointed to command the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade. This was a loss to the Battalion and also a disappointment, since it was hoped that he might be given the 17th Brigade, which was soon to fall vacant on Brigadier Gracey's* promotion to a divisional command. Brigadier Gracey visited the Battalion on 13th March to say good-bye.

Colonel Macgregor had commanded the Battalion from February 1939, throughout its transformation from a Frontier Battalion, armed and trained primarily for operations against a tribal enemy and equipped only with mules, to a battalion organized and equipped for modern war with nearly a hundred vehicles. He had safely steered it through its initial teething troubles on moving overseas and had led it successfully on its first operational roles of the war. Many more months of training were still to follow before the Battalion was again to see action, but under him the foundations of its future successes had been very surely laid.

Life continued uneventful for the Battalion during April and up to 27th May, and the diary at this point records that five out of the previous six months had been spent in digging. On this date the Battalion left for Habbaniyah and

* General Sir Douglas Gracey, K.C.B., K.C.I.E., C.B.E., M.C., later Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army.

moved on to K3, where for the first time for a year the men were accommodated in barracks and not in tents.

Here, for a moment, it is necessary to digress in order that the reader shall understand the nomenclature K1, K2, K3, T1, T2, T3, etc., of places in the Arabian desert on the oil pipelines.

Iraq and Syria, 1942-43

The Iraq Petroleum Company had two famous pipelines to carry oil to the Mediterranean. They ran as one from the oilfield at Kirkuk to K3, but thence they diverged, the northern line running to Tripoli, with posts named T1, T2, etc., and the southern to Haifa, with posts named H1, H2, H3, etc. For much of their length they were exceedingly vulnerable, the pipes being covered with only a shallow depth of sand and their alignment clearly marked by a line of telegraph poles. They were accordingly the object of constant raids by the Arabs. This thieving of oil, though the Arabs naturally considered it beautiful in itself and would have pursued it for no other reason, had at this time considerable other justification on economic grounds. Irrigation of fertile lands on the Euphrates banks was carried out with pumps run on fuel oil. The French Socony-Vacuum Company's organization for selling oil to the owners of the pumps had vanished with the Iraq and Syrian campaign, and without the oil the fields could not be irrigated and the people could not live. On the other hand, the oil was a war necessity to our forces in the Western Desert and elsewhere, and the Arab had a playful habit, after helping himself to his requirements, of setting the broken pipeline on fire and admiring the blaze.

It was little wonder, therefore, that the vital security of the pipelines constituted a priority claim on the services of the troops, and the 1st Sikhs had now to do their share (at the very hottest time of year) of this dull and wearisome duty. While Battalion Headquarters remained at K3, two companies were detached on 28th May to outlying posts at T1, H1 and another location known as LG5. However, the duty was not for long, and on 25th June the Battalion was ordered to Syria—news which was welcome indeed, for not only was Syria a far pleasanter country, but it was a step nearer the fighting in the Western Desert, where General Rommel's drive against the Eighth Army* was reaching a critical stage.

The Battalion left K3 on 1st July, Deir ez Zor on 2nd July, and arrived at Aleppo at 5.30 p.m. on 3rd July without incident or casualty to man or vehicle—an efficient performance, for the distance was upwards of 350 miles in the greatest heat. From Aleppo the Battalion moved to Tripoli by rail, leaving its vehicles behind at road-head. The change to Tripoli, remarks the diary, could

* See 3rd Royal Battalion story, Chapter XVI.

not be greater, for the men found themselves in a camp by the sea in an olive grove with a cool breeze blowing and streams everywhere.

The Battalion's role in Tripoli was internal security, and on the 11th it received a visit from General Sir H. Maitland Wilson, the Commander of the Ninth Army in the Middle East. He had tea in the Mess and met all the officers.

On 21st July Lieutenant-Colonel H. E. Cubitt-Smith arrived from India via Iraq and assumed command of the Battalion. The diary remarks that, arriving by rail, he was recognized by the Staff Captain at the station before Tripoli and taken by him direct to the Battalion camp. At the same time, the party from the Battalion to meet him were waiting at Tripoli Station—a wholly auspicious start for a new C.O.!

During the months of August and September the Battalion, with its Headquarters in Tripoli, was responsible for the over-all protection of the sea coast from Alexandretta in the north to Beirut in the south. Under Colonel Cubitt-Smith was also a force of several thousand Lebanese under Free French officers.

On 29th September the Battalion left Tripoli again for Kirkuk in Iraq, where it was to rejoin its Brigade. This was a disappointment and caused hopes of an early move to the battle area to recede. The move was entirely by road in M.T. (121 vehicles), and the first night was spent at Damascus, the second on the road across the desert, and the third at Rutba Wells. On the fifth day Baghdad was reached, where there was a halt for maintenance, and two days later the Battalion arrived in Kirkuk, having completed the 850 miles from Tripoli on 6th October—i.e., in eight days (including the day's halt at Baghdad)—without casualty. In Kirkuk the Battalion was employed on guard duties in the oilfields once more, and had little time for training. However, periodically companies were struck off complete, and were able to go to camp in a training area. On 9th November the whole Battalion went there for two and a half weeks' collective training.

On 1st December the Battalion moved into a winter camp at Kifri and shortly afterwards the weather broke. On 14th December "D" Company were sent on detachment to Kermanshah (in Persia) for guard duty. The rest of the year elapsed without incident.

January 1943, was devoted to collective training schemes with higher formations, and this continued into February, when three days were devoted to battle inoculation. The remainder of this month and the whole of March passed without incident, but early in April the Battalion was warned for a move to an unknown destination. This time it was to be the first move on the road to active service at last.

It was, indeed, the move of the 8th Indian Division to Syria, whence some months later it went to the Italian war theatre as a reinforcement to the Eighth Army. The Battalion moved once more across the Arabian desert as part of the third flight of this Division, and arrived at Baalbek in the valley of the

Lebanon, after a journey of 813 miles, on 29th April. Here it continued training, mostly in mountain warfare, and the C.O. was put in charge (in addition to the Battalion) of the 8th Division Mountain Warfare instructional team. The diary records that during May the companies carried out many long and arduous exercises by night and day. These were to pay handsome dividends later. This continued till 21st June, when "dry-shod" training on the "mock-ups" of landing-craft, already built in the area, commenced as a preparation for possible landing operations.

On 7th July the Battalion moved to Kabrit on the shore of the Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal for "wet shod" training. Here various schemes were carried out, including an assault landing by night, followed by the seizing of a beach-head position. This training was completed by the end of the month and the Battalion moved to Jebel Mazar, where the men were once more accommodated in huts for a while. Nine days later, on 9th August, the 17th Brigade received its first preliminary instruction for a move overseas to the fighting front, and by the 15th all heavy baggage had been placed in the Divisional dump and the Battalion was ready. At this time the objective was the island of Rhodes, which the 17th Brigade was assigned to attack. But after the defection of the Italians this somewhat useless expedition was called off at the last moment, although the advanced party of the Battalion had actually set sail. Perhaps for all concerned this abandonment of the attack on Rhodes was most fortunate from every point of view! In the end, it was not till 11th September that the move to the port of embarkation took place in two parties—main party by rail and a road party taking the M.T. direct to the port. The latter turned out to be Alexandria and the theatre Italy.

The General War Situation, 1942-43

Before proceeding to the story of the Battalion's exploits in the Italian Campaign of 1943-44, it is necessary again to digress for a moment, to remind the reader of the developments in the war that had led to the Allied Eighth Army fighting in Italy.

After the elimination of the Vichy French and Axis forces from Syria in 1941, an important change in the High Command took place. General Auchinleck, who was then Commander-in-Chief in India, was appointed to command the Allied forces in the Middle East, and General Wavell went to South-East Asia. In the Western Desert the latter had left Tobruk invested by the Axis forces under Rommel, while the Eighth Army on the Egyptian frontier was building up its strength to go to its relief. By November 1941, General Auchinleck was ready. He launched his "Crusader" offensive which relieved Tobruk and drove Rommel back once more to Tripolitania. But in the meantime Japan had struck on 7th December. Australia required her forces that were

in the Western Desert back for her own defence, and the Eighth Army's drive was paralysed. In January and February, while Japan (having secured a free hand by destroying the U.S. Fleet at Pearl Harbour) was overrunning the Far East, Rommel struck again in Cyrenaica and drove back the Eighth Army, capturing Tobruk by armoured assault. The story of the retreat that followed in the Western Desert is described in the 3rd Royal Battalion narrative (Chapter XVI).

By the autumn of 1942, with Rommel at Alamein, German armies at the gates of Stalingrad, Moscow and Leningrad, and the Japanese armies threatening both India and Australia, Allied fortunes had reached their lowest ebb of the war. But the darkest hour precedes the dawn, and America was rapidly building her strength to intervene. A really satisfactory tank had now reached the Eighth Army and was being learnt by its armoured forces, and British sea power had enabled the Eighth Army to receive reinforcements from England and again to build up its strength in the Western Desert.

In October 1942, the Eighth Army, now under General Montgomery,* attacked Rommel's Axis forces at Alamein while the British Navy stopped the German oil supplies across the Mediterranean. The victory (in which the 4th Indian Division participated) was complete and decisive. The Eighth Army advance which followed overran the whole of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Tunisia, being joined in the spring of 1943, opposite Tunis itself, by the British First Army and American forces, all of which had landed in Morocco and Algeria. Meanwhile the Russians, largely supplied by the Allied railway through Persia, had counter-attacked at Stalingrad and the Germans in Russia were retreating with heavy losses.

In May 1943, followed the surrender to the First and Eighth Armies of 250,000 German and Italian forces trapped in the corner of Tunis. It was the result of a combined attack by the Allied armies, led by the 4th Indian Division and the 7th Armoured Division (the Desert Rats). Thus in the early summer of 1943 the way lay open for the invasion of Sicily and Italy, and with the conquest of the former and the landing in Italy, the Italian Government capitulated to the Allies, handing over the Italian fleet. The Allies, however, were slow to seize the opportunity to occupy Rome and gain control of the country; and German forces were rushed over the Brenner Pass into Italy to oppose the Allied armies now advancing in the south. There followed the campaign in Italy in which the 1st Battalion participated.

Meanwhile, the German armies in Russia, after their disaster at Stalingrad, had continued to withdraw westward and the threat to Iraq and Persia had disappeared, thus releasing the 8th Indian Division.

By September 1943, the Allied forces in Italy had reached a line across

* Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery of Alamein.

the country from the Bifurno River in the east to Cassino and the Gari River on the west. The enemy line here, which was in fact defending Rome, was to hold firm with the epic struggle for the Cassino monastery continuing throughout the winter. There followed the costly Anzio landing to outflank the enemy, and the final break-through on the Gari in which the Battalion was one of the spear-heads of the 8th Division's assault.

Let us return, however, to the Battalion's story from the time it landed in Italy in September.

Italy, 1943-44

The Battalion's main party embarked on 20th September 1943, at Alexandria, and sailed in a convoy for Taranto the same day. The M.T. party followed in a second convoy via Alexandria and Malta. The main party arrived at Taranto on 24th September and the M.T. party on 1st October. Many surrendered Italian vessels were seen on the voyage under Royal Naval escort. After twelve days in the Taranto area on guards and fatigues, the Battalion moved, as part of the 17th Infantry Brigade, which consisted of the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers, 1st Sikhs and 1/5th Royal Gurkhas, to the battle area on the River Bifurno, halting for four days at Corato *en route*.

On 22nd October the Battalion was ordered up into the forward area, moving up that night through the forward positions of the 1st Battalion The Royal Fusiliers. All companies reported arriving on their objectives without contacting the enemy, and it was not till 1.30 p.m. that leading elements of "C" Company exchanged small-arms fire with an enemy outpost.

A dawn attack on Palata was ordered for next morning with the support of two artillery regiments of 25-pounders and one medium battery, and the companies advanced at 5 a.m. No opposition, however, was met, and the companies reorganized on their objectives, the rest of the day being spent in bringing up transport, road improvements and mine clearance. The 25th October to 2nd November were spent in local protection and R.E. fatigues on roads and diversions, till on the latter date the 17th Brigade were warned for an immediate move to a new area, to come under the 78th British Division. This took place in troop-carrying transport on 4th November and the Battalion arrived at Petaciatto at 4.30 p.m. The 5th November was spent in reconnaissance of the new area, as the Battalion expected to make an attack through the 1st Battalion 5th Royal Gurkhas on arriving there. However, information was received that no enemy were in the area, and the Gurkhas continued to advance almost unopposed.

The next town as an objective was Furci, and the Battalion entered on the 6th to be greeted with enthusiasm by the populace. There was no fighting. On moving out to advance, however, "C" Company encountered mortar and

machine-gun fire, and the companies were pinned down. The Battalion lost two killed and fourteen wounded—its first battle casualties in the Second World War.

On the 8th the Battalion moved through Castelanguida and companies took up position at the northern edge of the town. The bridge over the River Sinello being broken, supplies and ammunition had to go forward on local mules and donkeys. The next two days were spent consolidating the position and improving communications.

On 12th November, patrol activity caused a few casualties, but next day the Battalion was relieved by the 1/5th Essex Regiment of the 19th Brigade, and the 17th Brigade moved to a new locality. The Battalion was now warned for an attack across the Sangro, which was the next river obstacle ahead.

After two postponements the attack commenced on the night of 26th November, the Battalion going forward behind a barrage. By 11.40 p.m. the Battalion reported the first objective taken, with the loss of one J.C.O. and two men wounded. The loss in mules from shell fire, which the enemy brought down behind the Battalion, was heavy, twenty-six being killed. The loads had to be man-handled forward.

At 1 p.m. on 28th November a successful move forward under a still more heavy artillery-cum-air barrage was accomplished without incident, to a position just south-west of Mozzagrogna from where the Battalion was to launch a night attack on the village that night.

The attack on Mozzagrogna by the other two battalions of the Brigade, the 1/5th Royal Gurkhas and 1st Royal Fusiliers, resulted in bitter close fighting, and was the first occasion on which enemy flame-throwing tanks were encountered.

At 9 a.m. on 29th November the Battalion received belated orders to occupy a forward position under cover of a very big barrage. In the event the late arrival of the orders was of no consequence, since the Battalion was already on the position.

The one and only road leading into Mozzagrogna was heavily mined and covered with many dead bodies. The C.O. did not receive final orders for the attack until 4 p.m. and there was little time to enable further reconnaissance to be made. "A" and "B" Companies went forward and were gallantly assisted by a small party of officers from the Royal Fusiliers who had taken part in the previous night's battle. Acting as guides they proved of great value (and suffered casualties).

The morning of 29th November broke to find that hand-to-hand fighting had ensued without appreciable result one way or the other. On going forward from Battalion Headquarters, the C.O. found at the west end of Mozzagrogna a mass of tanks and men lying completely "bomb happy," the tanks being unable to move. A general sweep of the town was then co-ordinated by the

C.O. to include two companies of the Royal Fusiliers taking the south-east sector and the Battalion the north-west. This final sweep proved effective and the enemy were eventually forced to withdraw, leaving the first prisoners to be captured by the Battalion, for which event at 2 a.m. the following morning the C.O. received the personal congratulations of General Montgomery.

Mozzagroga was the Battalion's first big test of battle in the Second World War, and their training and discipline stood the test well. The Battalion had suffered forty casualties.

Clearing-up operations occupied the next twenty-four hours, and they were most unpleasant as hidden machine-gun posts and snipers were active throughout from the neighbouring houses and trees. Lieutenant Bird, in spite of being blasted by a bomb in Mozzagroga and rendered almost deaf and certainly stunned, gallantly carried on with his signal duties. Lieutenant Morris rendered great service as Liaison Officer before being temporarily disabled by an accident to his jeep.

On 1st December the Battalion was ordered to move to Romagnoli. Here it relieved the Royal West Kents in a reserve position, and the next day suffered a raid by bombers, causing six casualties. For the next few days the Battalion carried out physical training parades, training with enemy weapons, together with the unpleasant task of burying the many German dead, until on 7th December it took over positions overlooking the Moro river from the 3rd Battalion 15th Punjab Regiment of the 21st Brigade. Here there was considerable enemy shelling, but casualties were very few. The front was quiet and patrolling was the only activity till 18th December, when the Battalion moved forward at 1.30 a.m. across the Moro to attack the enemy position to the north. Moving behind a barrage with a squadron of tanks in support, the Battalion reached its first objective by 6 a.m. and remained there all day. There was strong enemy opposition with tanks, some using flamethrowers.

Next morning a further attack on essential enemy-held houses was launched at first light after thirty minutes' intense bombardment and again with tank support. After severe fighting the objective was captured and a counter-attack beaten off. Several destroyed tanks were found on the position, and two anti-tank guns complete with a quantity of light machine guns, rifles, grenades and ammunition were taken. Captain Harnam Singh, unfortunately, was seriously wounded in this action.

Patrol activity forward of the captured position continued till 21st December, when the Battalion was relieved by the 1st Battalion The Royal Fusiliers and moved to rest at Caldari. Bathing, maintenance and attention to administrative details occupied the next few days, and the Battalion enjoyed a good Christmas with the aid of much appreciated amenities from the N.A.A.F.I.

However, all was not quiet at Caldari and the town was heavily shelled

on 26th, 27th and 28th December, causing a direct hit on a house occupied by a section of "D" Company, killing three and wounding four men.

On the 29th the Battalion moved in jeeps and carriers to Villa Grande and relieved the 1/5th Essex Regiment, Battalion Headquarters being in cellars in the town. Here also enemy shelling continued, but the front was quiet.

The year ended with the weather breaking, and the final entry in the diary records: "Activity on front nil—blizzard—'A' and 'D' Company trenches filled and collapsed."

The New Year came in with the continuance of a savage blizzard and one-third of each company was pulled back in turn to dry and "thaw out." In the morning the snow turned to rain, and on 2nd January the weather improved and snow began to thaw. On the 5th there was a clash with a strong enemy patrol which was driven off, but in spite of further snow on the 6th, patrolling activity continued and there was much enemy shelling, including *Nebelwerfer* fire. This was a fearsome multiple weapon that fired a number of light shells simultaneously. On further acquaintance, however, its fearsomeness was found to be greater than its actual effect, owing to its lack of accuracy.

On 10th January the Battalion was again pulled out to rest, this time in Roalti for three days—spent in general maintenance and cleaning.

On the 16th the Battalion was back at the front, relieving once more the 1/5th Essex Regiment in the north sector of the divisional front. The same evening a platoon of "A" Company were attacked by two platoons of enemy. They held their fire till the enemy were within thirty or forty yards, and then opened with grenades, 2-inch mortar and small-arms fire, inflicting heavy casualties. Documents were recovered from an enemy body left on the ground, and later the Battalion were congratulated by the Brigade Commander on this successful little affair.

The Battalion remained in the front line till 26th January, when, being relieved, it was again withdrawn to rest in Roalti. While resting, the Battalion's Medical Officer throughout its period overseas, Captain J. N. Ghosh, left for another appointment. The Battalion was sorry to lose him as he had done well and had been recommended for a Military Cross, which was in due course awarded to him.

On 12th February the Battalion moved to Castelfrentano, arriving on the 16th, and went forward to its position in the front line forthwith. The weather during the previous fortnight had been deplorable, and on this day the rain changed to snow and a blizzard developed. The River Moro had now become an icy torrent and it became a problem to get the mules across. Several poor creatures drowned in the attempt. Eventually the remainder got across, but were completely exhausted and had to be unloaded when over.

During the time spent in the Castelfrentano area patrol activity and mortar-

ing continued. Towards the end of February three awards for gallantry were received, and Lieutenant-Colonel Cubitt-Smith left for India on temporary duty, handing over the Battalion to Major Boulter. The awards were the I.O.M. to Havildars Bakhshi Ram and Karam Singh, and the I.D.S.M. to Naik Habibullah.

On 8th March the Battalion was again withdrawn from the front line to the reserve area and accommodated in rather cramped and straggling billets on Taverno Ridge. For the next three weeks shelling and patrol activity were the only activities, but on the 30th the enemy opened a heavy bombardment, lasting an hour, on the area where Battalion Headquarters was located, but no attack developed.

On the 3rd April the Battalion was relieved by the 3/8th Punjab Regiment and moved to a new area for rest and refitting. The 4th Indian Division were due to take over the front in the Brigade area on 9th April, and details of the change-over were studied with officers of the 3rd Royal Battalion of the Regiment,* who were one of the 4th Indian Division battalions concerned. In celebration of the reunion of the two sister battalions it was found possible to hold a tea party which was attended by all officers and J.C.Os.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cubitt-Smith returned from India on 11th April and resumed command.

The Battalion now moved to Guglionesi, described as a dirty and unprepossessing town on the Biferno, and carried out training in river crossings, since the future appeared to indicate that this would now be the type of fighting that might repeatedly have to be undertaken. Italy has in fact one river after another flowing down its North Eastern watersheds to the sea.

On 24th April the Battalion moved across the Apennines to Dragoni in rear of Cassino, where similar training continued. This was in fact for the Battle of the Gari River which now followed.

The Battle of the Gari River, 11th-14th May 1944

Thus the preliminary training for this battle was carried out many miles behind the front line. Indeed, the Brigade as well as most of the Division, having some months previously undergone weeks of combined operation training in Egypt, were the more easily able to understand the procedure followed in this night assault over an opposed river crossing. A Beachmaster's staff and communications through whom the move of the Battalion on "D" night would be controlled was to be found from attached units and personnel outside the Brigade. Battle drill, including moves from the concentration area to the forming-up place, and from there to the river bank and across the river, was perfected as

* See story of the 3rd Royal Battalion, Chapter XVII.

nearly as possible, and every detail of the preliminary arrangements was studied and practised in advance.

The whole 8th Indian Division had now moved across the country to the west side of Italy, where the battle for Cassino (and Rome) had reached a stalemate, and the Allied force that had landed from the sea at Anzio had also been held up by strong German forces. The blow planned was an attack across the Gari with the object of breaking through, linking up with the Anzio beach-head, and capturing Rome. The general plan of attack was for the 4th (British) and the 8th Indian Divisions to attack together across the river on a front of about two miles from Cassino southwards; the 4th British Division on the right and the 8th Indian Division on the left, while at a given moment the Polish Corps would attack the famous monastery hill.

The river separated the 8th Division from the enemy on its entire front and was a swift-flowing stream, some six to eight feet deep, with marshy meadows on both banks. Beyond the river on the right stood the little village of San Angelo. This and all the high ground along the front of attack had been well prepared in depth and fortified by the enemy with numerous strong-points manned by machine guns and mortars. The position was strongly held. It was a stiff proposition indeed, and little wonder that the Americans, who had taken a "bloody nose" in a recent attempt to break through, were offering long odds with the British Eighth Army Headquarters against the attack of the 4th and 8th Divisions succeeding.

General Russell's plan was for the 17th Brigade to attack on the right and the 19th Brigade on the left, and when the flanks were secure to drive forward on Pignataro, a village some three miles from the start, which was to be the Division's immediate objective.

The Battalion arrived at Tarvernole on 4th May, bringing with it the special boats for the river crossing, from Dragoni. The next morning it received a visit from Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, K.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., the Eighth Army Commander. He met officers and saw the Battalion on parade.

On the night of 9th May the Battalion dug in in a forward concentration area overlooked by the Cassino monastery and high ground on the far side of the Gari; and now the narrative of the battle itself is best given in the words of Colonel Cubitt-Smith, the Battalion's Commanding Officer.

The country east of the River Gari was in fact overlooked by the enemy nearly all along the line. A gigantic smoke screen, day in and day out, from beyond Monastery Hill to the hills above Sappolinaire blocked the enemy's view for two or three weeks before the battle. The brigade sector, a very long one, for ten days preceding the battle was held by only one battalion, and in order that the "gaff" should not be blown, only a few small reconnoitring parties of the assaulting battalions were permitted to go down to the river at night. Enemy patrols, though active, were inclined to be careless. The Germans

appeared to be over-confident. They were certainly in good spirits. On one occasion about ten o'clock at night, from a shell-hole by the water's edge, we heard a gramophone being played in the very strong post 400 yards away which we were later to capture. A German was also singing with great feeling a song to the tune of "When will this ruddy war end?"

From the 700 guns supporting the 4th British and 8th Indian Divisions some 56,000 shells were to fall on our brigade sector, in a fire plan that dealt successively with enemy artillery, mortar batteries, defended localities and suspected headquarters.

Finally groups of not less than twenty-four field guns, concentrating on located enemy positions, would move at the rate of 100 yards in six minutes in front of the assaulting infantry advancing westward after crossing the Gari, with long pauses on each objective.

A Bofors battery was to fire directional "tracer" from one gun on the axis of advance of each assaulting battalion at every lift of the barrage—i.e., every six minutes, and after every long pause on objectives.

Two troops of Sherman tanks, having quietly slipped into a concentration area during the night of 10th May, were to rush forward to a previously reconnoitred fire position and blaze away at a strong-point called "Bank," with the aid of their telescopic night sights (before the moon rose). Thereafter these tanks would concentrate on San Angelo and the strong-point immediately north of it, until the Brigade's first objective was taken.

In the air, superiority being complete, the strategic air support was to continue disrupting enemy communications. The Desert Air Force (tactical support), from first light on 12th May, was to have the somewhat unusual role of locating and destroying hostile guns and *Nebelwerfers* (multiple mortars). A percentage of aircraft were to be detailed to deal with anticipated enemy air attack on the river during the early morning of 12th May. Immediate close air support was to be given by one or two flights operating continually in the air, or very close at hand, and able to proceed direct on a target, on call from even a brigade headquarters at very short notice. Both at Sangro and other battles such assistance had arrived within fifteen to twenty minutes of call, and in time to break up enemy concentrations for counter-attack. The system was somewhat extravagant in the use of aircraft, but the "P.B.I.," in spite of the extravagance, naturally prefer this form of support to any other. Conditions, however, rarely made it possible!

The Sappers were to prepare and clear vehicle routes of mines, etc., and in addition were, of course, to construct a number of Bailey bridges.

The brigade plan was to attack on a two-battalion front, two companies up; the third battalion to follow whichever assaulting battalion made most progress and capture San Angelo from the west. A squadron of tanks was to

be in immediate close support of each assaulting battalion and would be the first vehicles to cross over the first Bailey bridge constructed. The bridge-head final objectives extended to about 3,000 yards west of the River Gari.

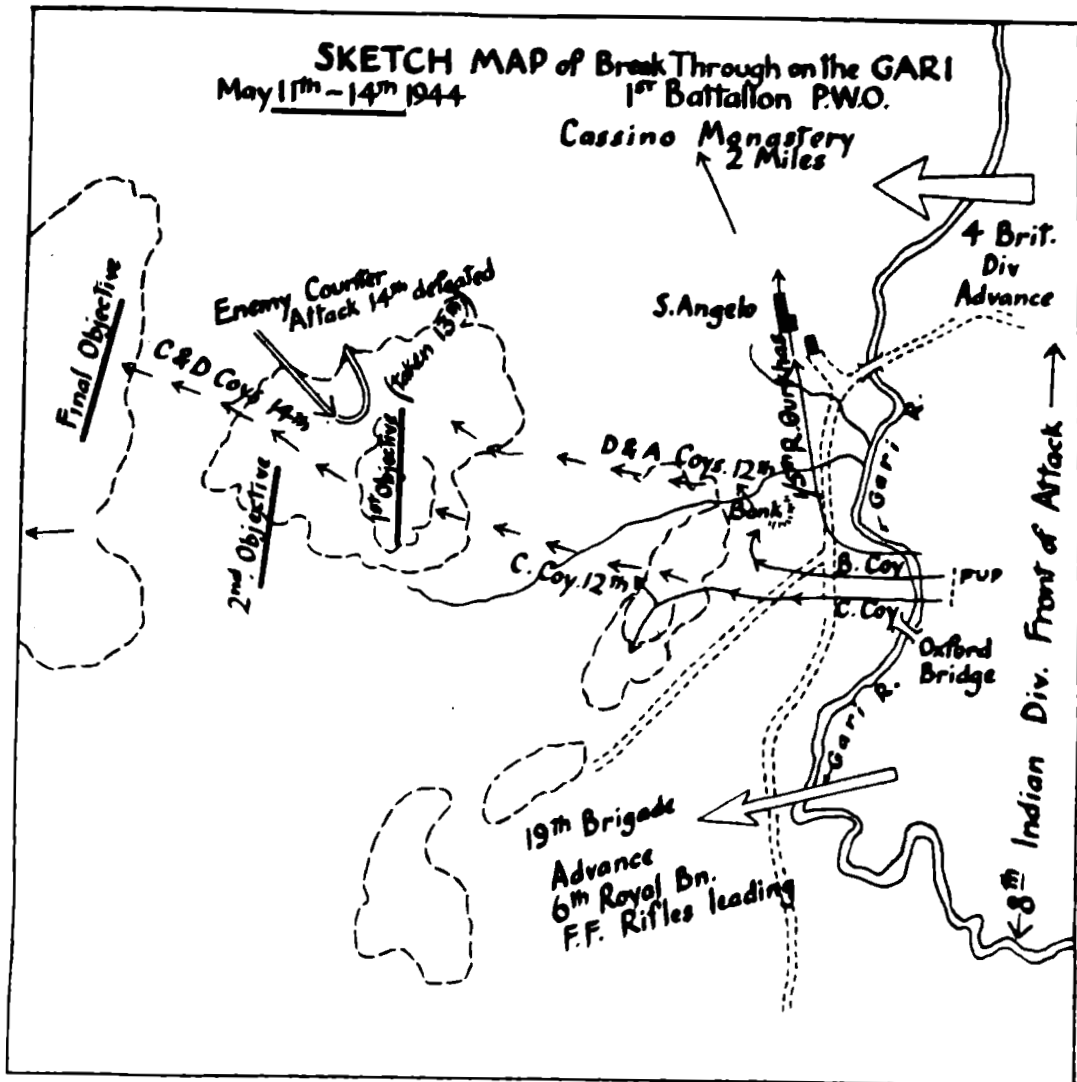
During the night of 9th/10th May the two assaulting battalions marched quietly into their concentration areas a mile or so from the river bank and there lay “doggo”—“very doggo”—during the hours of daylight of 10th and 11th May. No other brigade in the Corps moved to its concentration area before the night of 10th/11th May, fearing that the presence of extra troops might be spotted by the enemy and the whole operation thereby be jeopardized (apart from the heavy punishment likely to be received from hostile guns!).

The night of 11th/12th May was starlit but slightly cloudy. At 9.30 p.m., marking parties set about their tasks, preceded by small patrols, with the Beachmaster's staff. At 10 p.m. Battalion Tactical Headquarters left the concentration area to take up positions in big shell-holes near the forming-up places, there to watch the assaulting companies pass through. It was fortunate that this procedure was adopted, for on arrival it was discovered that the entire Beachmaster's communications had completely failed! With the arrival of the companies, the commanders were quickly told of the situation and plans made for the Battalion to do without these communications. Suddenly, at 11 p.m., the whole sky was lit up by the guns opening fire. Assaulting companies, carrying their heavy Mark III assault boats, accompanied by selected men from another company who were to do all the ferrying, clambered down the steep bank to the meadow east of the river and from there slowly made their way forward to the river bank. Boats punctually slid into the river at 11.45 p.m., and some dozen casualties were very soon sustained as the result of our own air bursts above the river. The two leading companies were about to get across, with the third company following closely, when suddenly a very heavy mist, together with smoke, completely engulfed the countryside. Visibility was reduced to one yard.

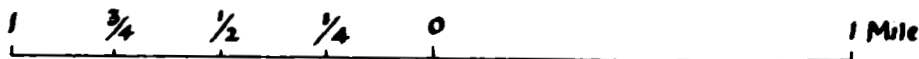
By dint of much shouting, joining of hands, and in spite of dozens of falls in dykes and shell-holes (which, incidentally, called forth the same exclamations in a remarkable number of languages), parties of men were organized in their boat-loads and very slowly led forward to the river bank. *En route* we met the Beachmaster. He had lost his river! Our irate adjutant in due course appropriately showed him where it flowed.

The river bank was now subject to machine-gun and light mortar fire but the Battalion, crossing on a very narrow front, managed to escape lightly, the fire being high and very dispersed. Eventually the entire Battalion got across, no company being free from casualties. At this juncture I may state that had it not been for the trouble taken previously to perfect the battle drill, coupled with the discipline shown by all ranks, much of the Battalion, in the



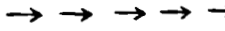


SKETCH MAP of Break Through on the GARI
1st Battalion P.W.O.
May 11th - 14th 1944



Scale of Miles



LEGEND

-  Initial Advance of Coys. 11th May
-  FUP Forming up Place
-  Advance on 12th - 14th May
-  Enemy Counter attack
-  Form lines showing configuration of ground.

absence of communications from the Beachmaster in the heavy mist, would never have got across and the attack might have failed. Eight boats had originally been put into the river and five remained in commission, three being damaged by artillery fire, while two were saved through N.C.Os. or sepoy jumping into the river to retrieve the drifting ropes.

West of the river the enemy had laid low concealed trip wire over a large part of the front, and on this wire being cut or pulled smoke bombs were released, to be followed by machine guns opening up on fixed lines. The two forward companies, slowly advancing, succeeded in reaching the lateral road in the vicinity of the enemy strong-points at "Bank," suffering considerable casualties from heavy rifle, grenade and machine-gun fire. From a previous scrutiny of air photographs and from reconnaissances, these companies, in accordance with orders and (to their credit) by the good use of the compass in the heavy mist, managed to attack this strong feature from the south, thus avoiding the enemy's well-concealed frontal fire. His tunnelled communications to the rear enabled the enemy to withdraw a few yards in order to contest the advance of the companies along the top. Dug-outs and quarries favoured the defence, but a series of close, sharp encounters with grenade and bayonet eventually destroyed the enemy. One company commander was killed and the other wounded, all except one platoon commander of these two companies became casualties, but of the Germans only prisoners remained. Much the same experience was met by the rest of the Battalion. Visibility continued to be nil, and for one hour Battalion Headquarters formed with the reserve company a small perimeter camp amongst the dykes, while the enemy were gradually cleared out by short charges, accompanied by much shouting to maintain touch. The enemy's fire, including grenades, was comparatively wild. He could, of course, see no better than we, and by midday, just as the mist began to clear, the Battalion was firmly entrenched along the whole ridge running parallel to and some 600 yards west of the river. As visibility increased, however, so did enemy sniping and machine-gun fire, and a little later the whole ridge and the area east of it was subject to intense shell and mortar fire.

By 7.45 a.m. the first Bailey bridge ("Oxford" Bridge) had been erected just behind us, a most magnificent piece of work on the part of the Sappers. Before a further fifteen minutes had elapsed, the first tanks came rumbling over and took up positions behind us and on the flanks. For the rest of the day the Battalion made good its position, being supported immediately east of it on the river bank by the third and reserve battalion of the Brigade which, having followed us earlier, had been forced to dig in very near the river bank. Early next morning (the 13th) San Angelo, after a most terrific bombardment, including shells from American and British 8-inch and 7.9-inch guns, was captured at the third attempt by very gallant fighting on the part of the reserve

battalion—the 1/5th Royal Gurkhas. The key to further advance had now been secured, and our Battalion was ordered to move forward with close tank support, to the limit of the final objective, but during the morning the enemy counter-attacked with tanks. However, these were held with the aid of artillery concentrations brought down with good effect, and “A” and “D” Companies were ordered to lay mines across their front.

Thus ends the C.O.’s narrative.

At midday on the 14th the enemy withdrew, followed by “D” Company with “A” Company in support. The position on the final objective was now made secure. The remainder of the day was spent in reorganization and resting. Rations, which had been “man packed,” were cooked behind the captured position.

The night was quiet, with little shelling, and the 15th and 16th May were spent in minor tasks. These were done with the aid of tanks to eliminate remaining enemy pockets of resistance, though substantially the whole area had by now been hastily evacuated by the Germans.

On the 17th the Canadians and the 6th Armoured Division passed through and the Battalion marched back to the river. Here the Divisional Commander, Major-General “Pasha” Russell, watched them across and congratulated them on “an excellent job of work.” Indeed, this was less than an adequate description of the 8th Indian Division’s achievement in this battle. Previously all attempts to take Cassino had failed, the Anzio beach-head was precarious, and D Day for the Normandy landings was approaching. The American forces in Italy had attempted to force the Gari without success and were openly offering odds against the British Indian attack succeeding. The victory on the Gari effected the link-up with Anzio, the capture of Rome and the advance up to North Italy, and so the landings in the South of France to support the Allied drive from Normandy were possible. It was the decisive battle of 1944 in Italy, and the Allied cause had reason to be grateful to the 1st Battalion Frontier Force Regiment and the 6th Royal Battalion of the Frontier Force Rifles* for their achievement in it, for they were part of the spearhead of the 8th Indian Division’s assault that effected the break-through.

The Battalion moved back in vehicles to Dragoni on 18th May, and the same afternoon Lieutenant-Colonel Vosper arrived to relieve Lieutenant-Colonel Cubitt-Smith, who had been selected for a staff appointment and was to return to India. “Cubitt’s” departure was a loss to the Battalion that everybody regretted, for he had trained and led it through its hardest battles in the Second World War, maintaining a spirit and record up to the highest traditions of the Frontier Force. It was, however, advancement for him, and the good wishes of all ranks went with him.

* See *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XIX.

The Advance into Northern Italy

The Battalion had eight days for rest and refitting and did some training in weapons and platoon fieldcraft. Unfortunately, "A" Company, while engaged in this, had a tragic accident with a Hawkins mine which caused eleven casualties, including two killed—all rank and file.

On the 27th the Battalion moved as part of the Brigade column to the Roccasecca area, where it went into action again in an attack on an enemy rear-guard position. Once again it was across a river (River Melfa), but the task proved simple as no resistance was met. The forward companies were held up next day, however, by enemy holding a dominating feature just off the main axis of advance. The depleted strength of "A" Company left them unable to advance until a troop of supporting New Zealand tanks had made their way painfully up the steep hillside and were able to join in a combined assault. This drove the enemy from their positions, leaving a number of dead and prisoners in the Battalion's hands.

The 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers relieved the Battalion in the van of the advance on the 29th, and the next day the Brigade was withdrawn. The Division as well as other large formations were now pressing forward along the axis of the main road northward to Rome, the famous "Highway 5" as it was generally called. As a result the road became congested and the Brigade's forward move was greatly hampered.

By 2nd June, however, the Battalion was established in Pesci, and the entire Brigade was engaged in constructing a separate divisional axis road across difficult country. By now the whole Allied line was engaged in pursuit of the retreating German forces, a pursuit which carried them into and past Rome and forward over a distance of some 220 miles in twenty-two days. During this time, as far as the Battalion was concerned, the congestion on the roads was a greater delaying factor than enemy opposition, and it was not until 20th June that it was again engaged in serious fighting. This was at Bosca, in the neighbourhood of Perugia, when the Battalion lost two killed and ten wounded in a morning attack which had to overcome stiff opposition and repel an enemy counter-attack supported by tanks. Any attempt at a further advance on this sector was strongly opposed, and further casualties were sustained in the lively shelling and patrolling which persisted for the next few days. Eventually, on 29th June, the Battalion, along with the remainder of the 8th Indian Division, was withdrawn to Foligno for a month's very welcome rest.

It was during these operations that the Battalion lost Lieutenant Hamir Hussain (Intelligence Officer), wounded, and Major Cowan ("D" Company Commander), who died from mortar wounds. Major Cowan was the last officer very promising young officer was heard with great sorrow throughout the to join the Battalion from Sandhurst, and the news of the loss of this gay and

Battalion. Five officers and the Subadar-Major of the Battalion were able to attend his funeral at Assisi.

Another notable casualty during this period was Harnama, Officers' Mess sweeper for many years, who was wounded in the head when the Officers' Mess received a direct hit. No officers were present at the time, and Harnama eventually made a complete recovery.

On the lighter side during this period, the Battalion received an addition to its strength in the shape of two week-old goslings, which were sent back to Battalion Headquarters by Major Redsull ("B" Company Commander) from his headquarters in a much-shelled farmhouse. These were promptly named "Chopper" and "Spanner" (the code names given to two important road junctions in the area) and became great pets. They remained and travelled with Battalion Headquarters for the remainder of the campaign, and after an unsuccessful attempt to hatch out a family during the course of the following spring offensive, were eventually returned to the farmhouse of their origin before the Battalion returned to India.

During the Battalion's month's break from operations, the opportunity was taken of sending parties in succession on leave to Rome, where a staging camp had been established for the purpose. During this period too, Major Tasker rejoined the Battalion after an absence of some eighteen months first at the Staff College, Haifa, and later as Brigade Major of the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade.

On 23rd July the Battalion moved north to the front once more, this time in the Certaldo area, and it occupied the reserve position under the command of the 19th Brigade. On the 28th it reverted to its own Brigade (17th), and a few days were spent in training. Following this, on 2nd August, the Battalion moved to the River Pisa, but by the 7th was back again in Certaldo.

Meanwhile news was received, which gave the greatest pleasure, of the following awards to the Battalion. They were well merited indeed.

Lieutenant-Colonel H. E. Cubitt-Smith	..	..	D.S.O.
Major H. S. Sandhu	..	..	M.C.
Major D. A. T. Wilson	..	..	M.C.
Subadar Nurab Shah	..	..	M.C.
Jemadar Feroze Khan	..	..	M.C.
Havildars Aurangzeb Khan, Azram Gul and Ghulam Mehdi, and Naiks Sant Ram and Bhagi Rath	..	..	Military Medals.

On 8th August the Battalion moved forward to the front line in the Casciano area near Florence, being much delayed by roads being completely jammed with vehicles. A week's patrol activity and shelling followed, during which "A" Company headquarters received six hits with the heaviest shells so far

experienced. Subadar Sapuran Singh, a stalwart of the Battalion soccer team, was killed and four men were wounded.

On the 14th a divisional move commenced, the 8th Indian Division relieving the 1st British Division in the Villamagna Sector farther east, and the next day the Battalion took over in a new area overlooking Florence itself.

After an uneventful ten days the Brigade (now under the Fifth Army) crossed the Arno by daylight, the enemy having withdrawn, and touch was lost till the 27th, when the enemy were contacted in position in the Colline-Cerrone area. The Battalion was ordered to take the latter village and went into the attack on 30th August with tank support. Objectives were reached and consolidated in the face of moderate opposition; the Battalion was about to be relieved by the 1st Battalion Royal Fusiliers when the enemy counter-attacked. With the aid of artillery D.F. fire, and after close and fierce fighting, the enemy were driven off with many casualties. The Battalion only had two. By this time it was dark, and the relief was postponed and finally cancelled. Colonel Vosper now fell ill and was evacuated to hospital. Major Boulter assumed command.

The first week of September 1944 was fairly quiet, and only shelling and patrol activity continued. On the 8th patrols and local inhabitants reported the enemy to have withdrawn, and the Brigadier ordered the Battalion to follow up. Galiga was reached without contact being made.

On the 13th the Brigade moved to a new area opposite Monte Stiletto, which was seen to be held by the enemy, but it was thought only lightly, and efforts were made to probe forward. In fact however, the position was part of what became known as the Gothic Line. It was a mountainous region and when operating in it the Battalion had to be maintained entirely on a pack-mule basis.

On 17th September information was received that Major Boulter, who had been in command since Lieutenant-Colonel Vosper had been taken ill, was appointed Commandant and promoted Lieutenant-Colonel. This, and the news that Major Tasker was to be Second-in-Command, was greeted with great satisfaction, as Colonel Boulter had been with the Battalion since before the war. This was at the time the youngest combination in the Division to command a battalion.

For some days the Battalion probed and patrolled its way forward over this difficult country, forcing the enemy from a number of commanding features and inflicting considerable casualties. The Battalion's experience of operations on the North-West Frontier stood it in good stead here, and its casualties were comparatively light, though they included two of the supporting artillery F.O.Os., both wounded. Major Dodwell, O.C. "A" Company, was another loss in this period, due to a painful attack of mumps. This illness haunted the Battalion for several months at this time, "D" Company, the

Dogras, being particularly badly affected. After several days of good though necessarily slow progress, the Battalion was moved to the Crespino area and at once ordered to push forward over most difficult country to Monte d'Alto. This however was strongly held by the enemy and no concerted attack was made before the Battalion was relieved in the front line by the 3/8th Punjab Regiment (of the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade) at the end of the month.

The Battalion remained in brigade reserve during the first week of October, and on the 8th the whole Brigade was relieved in the front line and taken back to a rest area. At the same time the Battalion was placed under 8th Division Headquarters direct as divisional reserve. It was concentrated in dirty and cramped billets near Vecchio, and almost at once was directed to send two companies to take up a holding position under the 19th Brigade to support an attack on Casolina. Before this took place, however, the whole Brigade was ordered back to take over the Adriano sector, and the Battalion went with it on 13th October to the area it previously held there.

Here for the rest of the month patrol activity, shelling and minor efforts to push forward continued incessantly. In one of the latter, "D" Company ran into a minefield and suffered terrible casualties. There were five killed, twenty-four wounded and four missing in this tragic affair. The "Schu" mine was a most lethal weapon in Italy.

November opened with another minor disaster on the 5th, when the unfortunate "D" Company again suffered four killed and seventeen wounded from a direct hit by a heavy shell on a house occupied by two sections.

The weather now broke, and six inches of snow fell on the night of the 9th. Ten days later the Battalion was relieved and side-stepped in M.T. to Modigliano, where it was still in a forward area and was in fact the right-hand battalion of the Fifth Army, with the Eighth Army on its right. It was greeted with heavy shelling, and the position for some days was very uncomfortable as the enemy were still holding a dominating feature close by overlooking the town. Again the Battalion started probing its way forward, suffering a number of casualties, chiefly from shelling and mines, but eventually it cleared the enemy from his commanding positions. The process of probing and patrolling forward continued until the end of November, when the Battalion, together with the rest of the Brigade, was withdrawn to rest.

After ten days' rest, during which leave parties were sent to Florence, the Battalion went back in the front line in the Adriano area, but on 13th December were moved to Palazzuoli. Here the advance had been held up by numerous demolitions, and the enemy had taken up his position on the line of a sheer cliff known as the Gesso feature, all the approaches to which had been extensively mined. Heavy snowfalls and bitter weather severely curtailed operations, and although plans were prepared for an assault on the enemy position, little activity could take place. The only noteworthy incident was when a patrol led

by Major Dodwell managed to make its way by the light of a full moon to the top of the Gesso feature, only to be spotted at point-blank range by a German sentry. Several anxious hours passed before the patrol was safely extricated without casualty, with the aid of smoke fired by our supporting artillery.

1945 and the Final Victory in Italy

The first ten days of the New Year were uneventful, and on the 11th the Battalion moved out of the Apennines and across to the Cascine area, some twenty miles from Pisa. Here a month was spent, in company with the remainder of the 8th Indian Division, resting, training and organizing. The change from the grim atmosphere and bitter weather of the front line in the mountains to the relaxations and milder weather of the rest area was greatly appreciated by all. While not neglecting training, the fullest use was made of this wonderful opportunity of sight-seeing in Florence, Pisa and the surrounding countryside, and exchanging hospitality with other units of the Division. It was a memorable month. Training during this period was directed in particular to the crossing of rivers and canals in assault boats and on improvised rafts, and to methods of dealing with isolated farmhouses and pill-boxes. It did not require much intelligence to infer from this what was in store!

More advanced exercises by companies were possible during the first ten days of February. Then the Division commenced a move to the east of Italy, leaving the Fifth Army and rejoining the Eighth Army. The latter had broken through the enemy's mountain defences at Rimini on their extreme eastern end during the autumn and early winter offensives, but had been held up ever since (apart from minor advances) on the general line of the flood banks of the Senio River in the Po Plain. The Battalion moved as part of the Division, arriving at Ripatransone on 14th February, where further training was carried out until the 22nd, when it moved forward again into the front line.

The Brigade was now relieving the 1st Canadian Brigade in the Cervia area, and the country here was typical of the whole of the Po Plain through which the Battalion was to fight for the remainder of the campaign. Completely flat and highly cultivated, the fields were interspersed with orchards and vineyards, and the plain was dominated by the flood banks of the rivers which stood like enormous continuous rifle butts up to thirty feet or more above the surrounding countryside. These flood banks and the towns, villages and houses provided the armies with their defensive positions and observation posts.

Companies were in position by the evening of 23rd February. Next day "D" Company suffered slight mortaring, but "C" Company was heavily shelled. Two rank and file were killed and two wounded.

The remainder of the month was largely uneventful, though mortaring by the enemy continued and some casualties were sustained by one of our patrols from mines.

On 4th March the Battalion was again relieved in the front line and withdrawn to a back area, where further training with tanks and flamethrowers in the art of assault river crossings was carried out. By the 14th it was back in the front line, having taken over a sector from the 3/15th Punjab Regiment. This was a curious sector on the Senio river. The right-hand platoon was dug in on the near side of the near flood bank. The enemy were dug in on the far side of the same flood bank. Farther to the left the enemy were in possession of both flood banks and our positions were in houses some three hundred yards or so from the river. Mines had been plentifully laid by both sides. This close proximity led to some very lively patrolling and grenade battles, particularly on the right flank.

On the 30th the diary records the arrival for the first time of deserters from the German Army. This was now to increase, as it became abundantly clear that Germany had no longer any hope of winning the war. Many of them were of other nationalities, such as Russians, Czechs, etc., who were doing forced labour for the Germans.

On 3rd April the Battalion was relieved in this "nervy" sector by the 6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles,* and continued the same training in the reserve area, but this time not for long. Indeed, the hour had now struck for the German enemy in Italy, for it was the eve of the final battle that was to bring about his defeat and surrender, and the plans of the Fifteenth Army Group (comprising the entire Allied forces in Italy) under the American General Mark Clark were ready.

Briefly, the general war situation in Europe at this time was as follows. The Allied forces in Northern Europe under General Eisenhower had been held up during the winter on the line of the Rhine, but were now about to launch an attack to force the crossing and advance on Berlin. The Russian armies were steadily advancing in Poland and Austria, and were already threatening both the cities of East Prussia and Vienna. The curtain was indeed about to rise on the final drama of the Second World War, and the first scene was to be in Italy, where the 1st Battalion was about to play a leading part.

The battle was to open on the British Eighth Army front on 9th April with an attack in the plain south of the River Po, with Verona as the objective. The Fifth Army was to join the offensive on 12th April by breaking into the valley of the Po after capturing or isolating Bologna. The Eighth Army attack was on a four-division front, with the 8th Indian Division on the right. Its task was to break through the enemy's powerful position on the rivers Senio and Santerno, and having achieved this to help bring about the final destruction of the enemy's

* The 6th Royal Battalion's magnificent attack across the Senio that was now to take place at the same time as the 1st Battalion's attack in the Victory offensive is fully described in the *Frontier Force Rifles History*, Chapter XIX. It was in this attack that Sepoy Ali Haidar gained the Victoria Cross.

forces in Italy by allowing them no time to recover and withdraw across the Alps. All this was indeed fully achieved, and the 1st Battalion's part in it was as follows.

On the 10th it was placed on one hour's notice to move, and at 4.30 the same afternoon it went forward to the concentration area at Valvassora. The attack was preceded by heavy bomber attacks during the afternoon, followed by a series of artillery concentrations and light bomber attacks, followed by a barrage. It commenced soon after last light to allow time for the construction of bridges for the supporting tanks before morning.

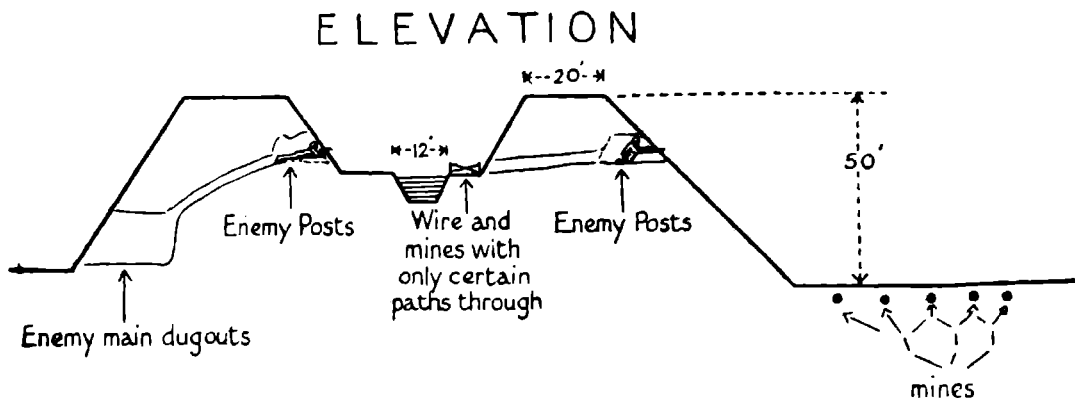
The 19th and 21st Brigades of the Division were leading and first reports indicated that the attack was going well. The Battalion, together with the rest of the 17th Brigade, moved forward again at 6 a.m. to a further concentration area at Bizzano. Three hours later, at 9 a.m. on the 11th, it advanced from Bizzano in battle formation—"B" Company right, "D" Company left, with "C" and "A" Companies in reserve. At 10.30 a.m. the Battalion contacted the 1/5th Mahrattas and relieved them in the front line of attack. Colonel Boulter was now called back by the Brigade Commander and given orders for the assault crossing of the Santerno. The assault was to be made by 1st Battalion 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles (Frontier Force), old comrades in arms, on the right, and the Battalion on the left, with the 1st Battalion The Royal Fusiliers in reserve and available for exploitation. The assault was to be preceded by a very heavy bombardment by the Corps artillery for ten minutes, as well as by attacks by fighter bombers; and it was to be supported by tanks using flamethrowers. "Kangeroos" (armoured tracked personnel carriers) were available to carry the leading companies forward to the objective. The assault was originally planned to start at 3.40 p.m., but, due to the time needed to co-ordinate all the various elements of the support with the assaulting infantry, this was eventually put back to 5.35 p.m.

A detailed account of the 1st Battalion's share in this final victorious battle in Italy of the Second World War is now best given in Colonel Boulter's own words. It is as follows:

"The Santerno was some thirty to forty feet in width and ran between flood banks thirty feet or more thick and up to thirty feet high. At this time of the year the level of the river was fortunately low, and it was fordable by infantry at most places. The enemy had tunnelled machine-gun posts into both flood banks, and prepared them with customary thoroughness. Depth was given by well-sited defensive localities, based on houses in rear of the river. In front of the river all houses had been demolished and all trees and undergrowth felled for a distance of 1,000 yards to allow a clear field of fire for the defences. Finally, the position was covered by a minefield some three to six hundred yards in depth and by belts of wire.

"In the face of this formidable position it was evident that all the previous

Diagram of German defences on River Senio, April 1945



training in the technique of crossing this type of obstacle and all the skill and determination at the Battalion's command would be needed if the attack was to succeed.

"The hours before the start time were fully occupied in final attention to innumerable details with the supporting armour and artillery, in laying lines to the Battalion Command Post for the battle, and in getting the men fed and prepared. At 5.35 p.m., to the sound and fury of the supporting artillery and air attacks, the flamethrowers, tanks and leading infantry in Kangeroos moved forward into the attack.

"The minefields, as was to be expected, caused some trouble and casualties, and in particular the flamethrowers were forced to stand back and engage only the near bank of the river instead of being able to close right up and engage the far bank as well. Twelve of the sixteen Kangeroos lost their tracks on mines as they moved forward, but fortunately without serious casualty to their occupants, who quickly dismounted and charged over the short remaining distance to the objective. Heavy opposition was met in the shape of machine-gun and artillery fire. Major Monckton, commanding 'C' Company (Pathans), was an early casualty with a bullet through the wrist, but remained in command of his company for several hours until the position was firmly in our hands. Jemadar Hukam Dad, commanding a platoon in 'B' Company (P.Ms.) was killed by a direct hit from a shell. Jemadar Jodh Khan, also a platoon commander in 'B' Company, for long a staunch member of the Battalion football team, was wounded in the chest. Despite these and many other casualties, the attack was pressed home and it was not long before leading elements were across the river. All companies were at once engaged in 'mopping up' the enemy posts in the river banks and in the houses beyond, and prisoners began coming

in. During this mopping-up period Major Atta Ullah, commanding 'B' Company, received a severe wound in the thigh. This left both right-hand companies without a company commander, and they were reorganized during the night as a composite company under Major Wilson, M.C., who had till then been commanding the Support Company. On the left 'A' Company (Sikhs) under Major Dodwell and 'D' Company (Dogras) under Major Catto had suffered less heavily, and did fine work, rounding up prisoners and extending our positions forward of the river. On the right the 1st Battalion 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles had met with similar success after an equally stiff fight. By midnight the Royal Engineers were able to start preparing crossings over the river for the passage of supporting tanks and transport. At midnight also, recce parties from the 1st Battalion The Royal Fusiliers arrived in the battalion area, and at 3 a.m. (12th April) that battalion passed through to continue the advance. At this time forward parties of all companies were firmly established across the river and mopping-up was nearly complete, though small parties of prisoners were still coming in. There had been no enemy counter-attacks, though the Corps artillery was called for once during the early part of the night to engage an area some thousand yards beyond the leading companies where sounds of considerable enemy movement could be heard; these were effectively silenced by the subsequent bombardment. Contact had now been established with the 1st Battalion 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles on the right, and 1st Jaipur Infantry who had come up on the left.

"It was soon clear that the break-through had been achieved. The Sappers completed their bridge over the river for the passage of anti-tank guns, and by 2 p.m. on the afternoon of the 12th, a squadron of tanks came up and made contact with the forward companies. At 3.30 p.m. recce parties of the 78th (British) Division, coming up from the rear to exploit the break-through, arrived at Battalion Headquarters; and at 5.15 p.m. their leading troops passed through the Battalion's forward companies who were now out of contact with the enemy."

Thus ended the 1st Battalion's final battle of the Second World War (though they did not yet know it), and the next three weeks up to V.E. Day when Germany surrendered were occupied in the pursuit of the broken German armies across the rivers of the plain of Lombardy.

The Battalion had once more carried out a major attack, this time on a fully prepared position defended by a river obstacle and held by German storm troops who had been ordered by Hitler to permit no withdrawal but "defend every inch of the North Italian areas entrusted to them."* It was a magnificent performance and one which, with that of the 4th and 6th Royal Battalions of the Frontier Force Rifles,† who had fought in the same battle with equal suc-

* *The Second World War*, Winston Churchill, Vol. VI, p. 455.

† See *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapters XVII and XIX.

cess, will go down to history as a fitting finale to the Piffer's achievement in Europe in the Second World War.

Considering the importance of the battle and the magnitude of the task, the Battalion's casualties had not been severe, totalling just over a hundred, most of which were sustained in the first hour, and of which a mercifully small proportion were killed.

The Battalion was called forward again on 24th April to take over from the Royal West Kents on the banks of the Po. The battle picture at this juncture is worth noting. The Fifth Army had crossed the Po the previous day and joined the left flank of the Eighth Army. "Trapped behind them were many thousands of Germans cut off from retreat. . . . The offensive was a fine example of concerted land and air effort wherein the full strength of the strategical and tactical air forces played its part. Fighter bombers destroyed enemy troops, tanks and guns, light and medium bombers attacked lines of supply, and our heavy bombers struck by day and night at rear installations.

"We crossed the Po on a broad front at the heels of the enemy. All the permanent bridges had been destroyed by our air forces, and the ferries and temporary crossings were attacked with such effect that the enemy were thrown into confusion. The remnants who struggled across, leaving all their heavy equipment behind, were unable to reorganize on the far bank. The Allied armies pursued them to the Adige."*

The Battalion crossed the Po in storm boats on 26th April, having heard the previous day that the German 76th Panzer Corps had surrendered. The last casualties of the campaign were sustained when parties preparing for the crossing were subjected to a sharp bombardment by *Nebelwerfers*. These casualties were fortunately all of a minor nature.

On the 27th the Battalion was concentrated at Grignano, and on the 28th it crossed the Adige in local boats. There was no opposition, and it was clear from the mass of equipment, vehicles and guns abandoned on the banks that this time victory was indeed complete and final.

On the 29th the Battalion reached Granze and was concentrated there on the 30th. It remained there for the next fortnight, Victory Day being celebrated on 9th May. Leave to visit Venice was also opened on the 3rd and parties of sixty men were sent daily to visit the city.

On 19th May 1945 the Brigade moved to Perugia, and three days later Lieutenant-Colonel Boulter went on short leave to England. The command of the Battalion devolved on Major G. S. Tasker for three weeks in his absence. On 25th May Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India, paid a visit to the 8th Indian Division, and the Battalion provided a guard of honour for him on Perugia airfield. One J.C.O. and thirteen men of each

* *The Second World War*, Winston Churchill, Vol. VI, pp. 457, 458.

class were included in a very smart turn-out, for which the Field-Marshal expressed his appreciation.

The 8th Indian Division

A word here may be of interest on the subject of the 8th Indian Division. Coming on the scene in the Italian theatre comparatively late in the war, it perhaps received less limelight than perhaps it deserved. Its achievements were indeed spectacular, and it is of particular interest to "Piffers" in that it was commanded throughout its campaigning by a Piffer-Major-General "Pasha" Russell.* Moreover three of its Battalions were Frontier Force—the 1st Sikhs, the 6/13th Royal Frontier Force Rifles, and the 1/5th Royal Gurkhas—and a fourth, the 3/15th Punjab Regiment, was commanded by a Piffer—Colonel (now Brigadier) P. R. Macnamara, D.S.O., of the Guides.

Space does not permit of even an outline here of the 8th Indian Division's fighting record in Italy, but the stories of the 1st Sikhs in this volume and the 6th Royal Battalion in the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles* give some idea of its magnificent achievements. At the same time the following list of the honours and decorations won by members of the Division during its short time in the field may be of interest:

V.C. 4.	I.O.M. 22.
D.S.O. 24.	I.D.S.M. 111.
Bar to D.S.O. 2.	Bar to I.D.S.M. 1.
M.C. 145.	M.M. 235.
Bar to M.C. 4.	Bar to M.M. 1.
D.C.M. 4.	

The Return to Sialkot

Four days later orders for the Battalion's return to India were received, and by 5th June it had settled into the staging area at Mozzagogna where it had fought its first big fight in Italy eighteen months earlier.

The Battalion embarked in two ships, "B," "C" and Support Companies on s.s. *Monowai*, which sailed on the 14th, and the remainder of the Battalion on s.s. *Empire Pride*, which sailed on the 19th, both for Karachi. The former arrived on 26th June and the latter on 1st July 1945. The Battalion was welcomed back to India by Major-General Richardson (late Coke's Rifles, F.F.) on behalf of His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, and the men all received Red Cross gifts of tea and fruit before setting off up-country by train at 8.15 p.m. on the 1st. More hospitality was extended to the Battalion as the train went north. At Rohri all ranks received tea and fruit, and at Renala Khurd station Captain Chanda Singh gave a party to the whole Battalion on the

* Lieut.-General Sir Dudley Russell, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

morning of 3rd July. Next day the train arrived at Sialkot. The first preoccupation was to send the men off on leave, and this was arranged in parties of one hundred by the Sialkot Brigade.

They went on two months' leave that was well earned indeed. Before they returned, VJ Day, with the surrender of Japan, had been celebrated and the Second World War was over.

For the rest it was a matter of reducing once more to the peace strength of a Regular Battalion, and the work of demobilization and resettlement in civil life of those who were not remaining in the service commenced. The story of this applies to all Battalions, both Regular and war time, and is therefore included in the story of the Regimental Centre, Chapter X.

THE 2ND BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: MALAYA

Problems of Training and Expansion, 1939-40—Training in the use of New Weapons and Equipment—Fort Salop, 1940—Quetta and Secunderabad, 1940—Malaya up to the Japanese Assault—Defence Plans in Malaya, 1941—Kelantan, 1941—The Japanese Landing and the Battle of Kota Bahru—The Withdrawal Commences—Kuantan and After—Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming, V.C.—The Retreat to Singapore—The Battle for Singapore Island—Capitulation of Singapore, 15th February 1942—Captivity to the End of the War, 15th August 1945—Reconstitution.

Problems of Training and Expansion, 1939-40

THE history of the 2nd Sikhs during the first nine months of the war differed not at all from that of any other infantry battalion in India, and the period has well been named "the phoney war." But in June 1940, with the overwhelming German offensive in Europe, came the belated realization by the Government of the task ahead. With it came a change of outlook and the warning to the forces of both large-scale expansion and of arming with modern weapons and equipment.

Thus the Battalion (in common with the rest of the Regiment, and indeed the Indian Army) suddenly found itself subject to two urgent policies, those of expansion and of modernization. Both policies were pushed with almost frantic haste to make up for lost time, and just how much the fulfilment of the one conflicted with the aims of the other can be judged by what follows.

The need both to expand and to bring the equipment of the Army up to date was undeniable, but it is equally undeniable that the immediate result of pursuing both policies simultaneously and with such vigour was to reduce a relatively small but highly efficient army, with outdated equipment, to an army of greater numerical strength, but one whose units had been so weakened by expansion that they were incapable of making proper use of their new equipment when it was issued. It so happened that the drain of expansion left some of the Regular battalions even weaker in trained soldiers than the first raised war battalions, and it was the misfortune of certain of these to have to go into action while still in this emasculated condition.

The 2nd Sikhs were lucky in that they had eight months in Malaya in which to settle down before being put to the test, but nevertheless the effect of these sudden changes could not fail to be felt in such a campaign as that which followed.

The actual effect of expansion on the 2nd Sikhs was as follows.

In July 1940 the Training Battalion adopted a war establishment which necessitated the 2nd Sikhs posting an additional officer, 2 J.C.Os., 20 N.C.Os., and 16 I.O.Rs., almost all picked drill and weapon training instructors, to the Training Battalion.

At the same time 20 P.M. and Pathan I.O.Rs. were called for by the R.I.A.S.C. to be trained as drivers to assist in the expansion of that Corps.

In August the 6th and 7th Battalions, 12th Frontier Force Regiment, were raised and the 2nd Sikhs drafted 1 officer (Major C. R. Hughes, as Commandant), 5 J.C.Os., 10 N.C.Os. and 92 I.O.Rs. to the 6th Battalion, and 1 officer (Captain Milanes), 3 J.C.Os., 16 N.C.Os. and 93 I.O.Rs. to the 7th Battalion.

These losses were made up by a draft of 176 reservists and 27 duty personnel from the Training Battalion, vacancies in rank being filled by promotions within the Battalion.

In February 1941 after the 2nd Sikhs had joined the 9th Indian Division and a month before they sailed for Malaya, 3 J.C.Os. and 38 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs. were called for to help in raising the 8th Battalion and a further 4 J.C.Os. and 38 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs. for the 9th Battalion.

This time, as in all future cases, losses were made good with recruits, the last 200 of whom joined the Battalion in Secunderabad *en route* for embarkation. These recruits and subsequent drafts had had the benefit of only five months' training at the Training Battalion instead of the peace-time ten.

At the same time as this last "milking" the Battalion had to cater for its own expansion from a peace establishment of 726 all ranks to a war establishment of 12 officers, 19 J.C.Os. and 742 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs., plus a first Reinforcement party of 2 officers, 2 J.C.Os. and 75 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs. and the 5 per cent time lag reinforcement of 1 officer, 2 J.C.Os. and 36 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs., both of which latter were to accompany the Battalion overseas, and to find 1 Officer (Major Dart, M.C., as Camp Commandant, 9th Indian Division), 1 J.C.O. and 42 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs. for Divisional and Brigade Headquarters.

Nor did this drain on a unit cease once it had gone overseas, for in November 1941, only three weeks before the Japanese assault, the 2nd Sikhs were called on to send 2 officers (Temporary Captains Wilding and Johnson) and 28 N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs., all trained Vickers machine gunners, to help in the raising of the Machine-Gun Battalion of the Regiment.

In addition to these regular drafts, three of the best J.C.Os. (Subadar Mohd Bakhsh, Subadar Mohd Ghulam, and Subadar Kishan Singh) were commissioned and lost to the Battalion, and officer casualties were naturally more than ordinarily heavy.

The rapidity of promotion to make up for these transfers and to complete to the increased war establishment is best left to the imagination, but its effect, when practically every N.C.O. had risen two ranks in as many months, was an

inevitable loss of efficiency and the steadying influence of the older J.C.Os. and N.C.Os. who had gone to other battalions was sadly missed. During the nine months from July 1940, to March 1941, at the time of mobilization for overseas service, the 2nd Sikhs lost 16 officers, 21 J.C.Os. and 385 N.C.Os. and men, out of a total of 726 all ranks, and at the same time the establishment was increased to 15 officers, 22 J.C.Os. and 875 N.C.Os. and men (including reinforcements to accompany the Battalion).

When these figures are considered, and normal casualties and the subsequent draft to the Machine-Gun Battalion are taken into account, there is little wonder that in December 1941, at the time of the Japanese attack, only 121 of the N.C.Os. and I.O.Rs. then serving had as much as one year's post-recruit service.

The highly trained pre-war Indian Army could no doubt have undergone expansion on this scale without undue loss of efficiency had it afterwards been expected to fight in the way in which it had been trained and with the weapons to which it was used. The Army had now, however, to adopt an entirely new set of weapons and not only learn to handle these but to adopt the new tactics which they and the mechanization of transport called for.

With most of the old leaders gone and with recruits instead of trained sepoy this was an uphill task, which was not made easier by the fact that the acute shortage of equipment made it impossible at this stage of the war to issue battalions with their new weapons and transport until they actually went overseas.

Up to the time of joining the 9th Indian Division in October 1940, the Battalion had remained on its old peace establishment, in which rifle companies were armed with rifles and bayonets only, with one Vickers Berthier light automatic in each platoon (the V.B. had replaced the Lewis gun in 1936), and in which the only "specialists" were the signallers and machine gunners of H.Q. Company. (There were six Vickers machine guns in the Support Platoon, later to become the Carrier Platoon.)

Unit transport consisted of pack mules, and there was no M.T. and no drivers in the Battalion.

On joining the 9th Indian Division the Battalion adopted a war establishment of four rifle companies of three platoons each, with an enlarged H.Q. Company consisting of No. 1 (Signal) Platoon; No. 2 (Protection) Platoon, equipped with four Bren guns with tripods for ground or A.A. defence, carried in four 15-cwt. trucks; No. 3 (Mortar) Platoon of six 3-inch mortars, also carried in 15-cwt. trucks; No. 4 (Carrier) Platoon of ten Bren gun carriers with Brens; No. 5 (Pioneer Platoon); and No. 6 (Administration) Platoon, consisting of the M.T. drivers, stretcher-bearers, etc. The rifle companies were to be equipped with a Bren gun and tripod per section; and one 2-inch mortar, one Boys anti-tank rifle and one tommy-gun per platoon.

Training in the use of New Weapons and Equipment

Each platoon was to have a 15-cwt. truck to carry this additional equipment. Of all these new vehicles and weapons nothing was actually available for issue to the Battalion, and until the Brigade left for Secunderabad all that could be lent for training purposes were four old Albion lorries of almost First World War vintage and a single Boys anti-tank rifle for which there was no ammunition and which could only be retained for a few days.

It says a lot for the imagination and adaptability of the "jawan," almost every one of whom had now to be a "specialist" of one kind or another, and most of whom were raw recruits, that they were able to absorb sufficient knowledge from wooden dummies and other make-shift devices to enable them to make good use of the real weapons when they were later received in Malaya.

The greatest credit is also due to the instructors: J.C.Os. or N.C.Os. who after a short course had to pass on their knowledge to a class who had never seen, and who had no chance of seeing or handling, the weapon concerned. One J.C.O. (Subadar Gul Badshah) and one N.C.O. attended a 3-inch Mortar Course and without any equipment trained a Mortar Platoon which, shortly after getting its mortars in Malaya, proved itself in action to be a highly efficient support unit.

Similarly the few J.C.Os. and N.C.Os. who attended the Small Arms School passed on their knowledge of 2-inch mortars, Bren guns, Boys rifle, and tommy-guns; and Captain Hawkins and Subadar Mehr Khan gave the drivers such a sound basic training on the old Albion lorries that up to the time of the Japanese assault not one of the units' new trucks or lorries, drawn from Kirkee before embarkation, had been involved in an accident.

It can be imagined, however, how far the 2nd Sikhs were from being trained and ready for war when they sailed for Malaya. Even after arrival, equipment became available so slowly that the last weapons, the Bren guns and the tommy-guns, arrived only just before the Japanese, as did some sinister-looking engines of war scarcely distinguishable from drain-pipes and known as Northover Projectors. It was believed that these were designed to project glass bottles of Molotoff Cocktail mixture, but as no bottles were forthcoming they were got rid of at the first opportunity.

It must not be thought that too much has been made of the difficulties of this re-equipping and expansion. The need for a great increase in both strength and fire power if the Army was to play its part in this war was realized by all. The facts of the matter were, though, that units which had been raised to the highest state of efficiency by years of careful training to meet such an emergency had been caught, when the time came, at their lowest ebb. The battalions which were to go into action would have to be hurriedly created almost from scratch, and who can blame them if some feared for the reputation of their Regiment?

The difficulties of the times must be recognized if full credit is to be given to those units which went into action in this early phase of the Second World War and upheld their old traditions.*

Fort Salop, 1940

To return to the story: the Battalion's role during its year at Fort Salop was the normal one of watch and ward; and at that time it was rendered somewhat more arduous by a blockade of the Afridis. This succeeded in securing their submission, and there was no fighting.

So far the war had had little or no impact on the Battalion; in fact, the only change had been that the Support Platoon had lost two of its eight Vickers machine guns and changed its name to the Carrier Platoon, it being understood that the mules would be replaced at some future date by Bren gun carriers. Captain MacDonald, the Adjutant, was now flown home on a special mission. This turned out to be as a mountain warfare expert with an Independent Company in Norway, some thirty similar experts being sent at the same time.† Having been one of the only four to reach Norway, and having survived that campaign and the subsequent evacuation, Captain MacDonald rejoined the Battalion, still in Fort Salop, in August.

In June came the first warning of the expansion of the infantry, and in August the drafts were sent off with the aid of which the 6th and 7th Battalions were raised.

On 5th August the tenure of command of Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. S. Minchin came to an end, and he was succeeded as Commandant by Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming, M.C., who was transferred from the 3rd Royal Battalion.

Lieutenant K. C. Medappa, the first Indian officer to serve with the 2nd Sikhs, also joined the Battalion at this time, having been transferred from the 4th Sikhs.

No further event of note took place until in October orders were received to move to Quetta to join the 9th Indian Division which was forming there for overseas service. The 2nd Sikhs, together with the 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles and the 5/11th Sikh Regiment, were to form the 22nd Brigade under Brigadier G. W. A. Painter. On arrival on 24th October the Brigade went into camp on the Quetta parade ground.

* The reader will appreciate that these remarks applied with equal force to all the battalions of the Regiment at the commencement of the Second World War. They have been included in the narrative of the 2nd Battalion as that Battalion was subjected to the most sudden and severe test of any. In the stories of other battalions appropriate references to these paragraphs on training in 1939-40 have been included.

† See also Chapter XXI, the Guides Infantry.

The enemy successes in Europe had now made clear the magnitude of the Allied task, and unlike the First World War, British India in the Second World War had to provide officers as well as rank and file for its fighting forces.

Quetta and Secunderabad, 1941

To everyone's disgust in Quetta, instead of getting down to serious training, the first six weeks had to be spent in digging all tents down three feet into the rocky ground and building fire-places, and then, when the work was just completed but before the first fire was lit, the Brigade moved out to its new hatted camp at Baleli on 31st December 1940.

However, a start had been made in training M.T. drivers, the Battalion having been issued with four old Albion lorries for this purpose, and by February 1941, 63 I.O.Rs. could claim to have a rudimentary idea of driving.

At Baleli severe weather and snow now made training difficult, as did the complete absence of any of the weapons with which the Battalion was supposed to be equipped.

Up till now the Division had been proceeding on the assumption that it would be given till June or July to complete its training, but early in February orders were received to mobilize and be ready to move to an embarkation area within one month.

In the midst of mobilization further drafts had to be sent off for the raising of the 8th and 9th Battalions, followed by another inevitable reorganization within companies, since specified ranks with specified qualifications were called for in these drafts.

On 1st March the 2nd Sikhs, still without any of their vehicles or new weapons, left Quetta for Secunderabad, and shortly after arriving were joined by the rest of the Brigade.

In the middle of February, owing to the great need of reinforcements in the Middle East, the 9th Indian Division was broken up, two brigades (20th and 21st) being sent to the Middle East, leaving only Divisional Headquarters and 22nd Brigade to go to Malaya as "Force Creek."*

While at Secunderabad full-scale unit transport was drawn from Kirkee Arsenal, and with this portion of its new equipment complete 22nd Brigade moved to Madras, where it embarked and sailed in convoy for Penang on 10th April, the 2nd Sikhs being transported as a complete unit in H.T. *Santhia*.

While at Quetta the Divisional Commander, Major-General A. E. Barstow, had been much impressed by the performance of the 2nd Sikhs' brass band, and on his orders the complete set of instruments was taken overseas. Once in

* See Chapter XVIII for the story of the Middle East at this time and the manner in which the intervention of these brigades saved the situation for the Allies.

Malaya the band was sent to Kuala Lumpur, where it became the Divisional Band and was very popular at entertainments of one kind or another. It returned to the Battalion shortly before the assault on Kota Bahru, only to lose all instruments and stores when these had to be abandoned in Chondong camp on the Battalion going into action.

The following officers sailed for Malaya with the 2nd Sikhs (including Major L. V. Dart, M.C., as Camp Commandant, 9th Division Headquarters, and Temporary Captain B. W. Harvey as 22nd Brigade M.T. Officer):

Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming, M.C.

Major C. H. Price.

Major L. V. Dart, M.C.

Captain G. J. Hawkins.

Temporary Captain I. R. Grimwood.

Temporary Captain W. I. Campbell.

Temporary Captain F. H. B. Wilding.

Temporary Captain T. R. Johnson.

Temporary Captain K. C. Medappa.

Temporary Captain D. B. Sedgwick.

Temporary Captain B. W. Harvey.

Second-Lieutenant H. P. Williams.

Second-Lieutenant E. A. F. Brunner.

Second-Lieutenant J. A. C. Hill.

Malaya up to the Japanese Assault

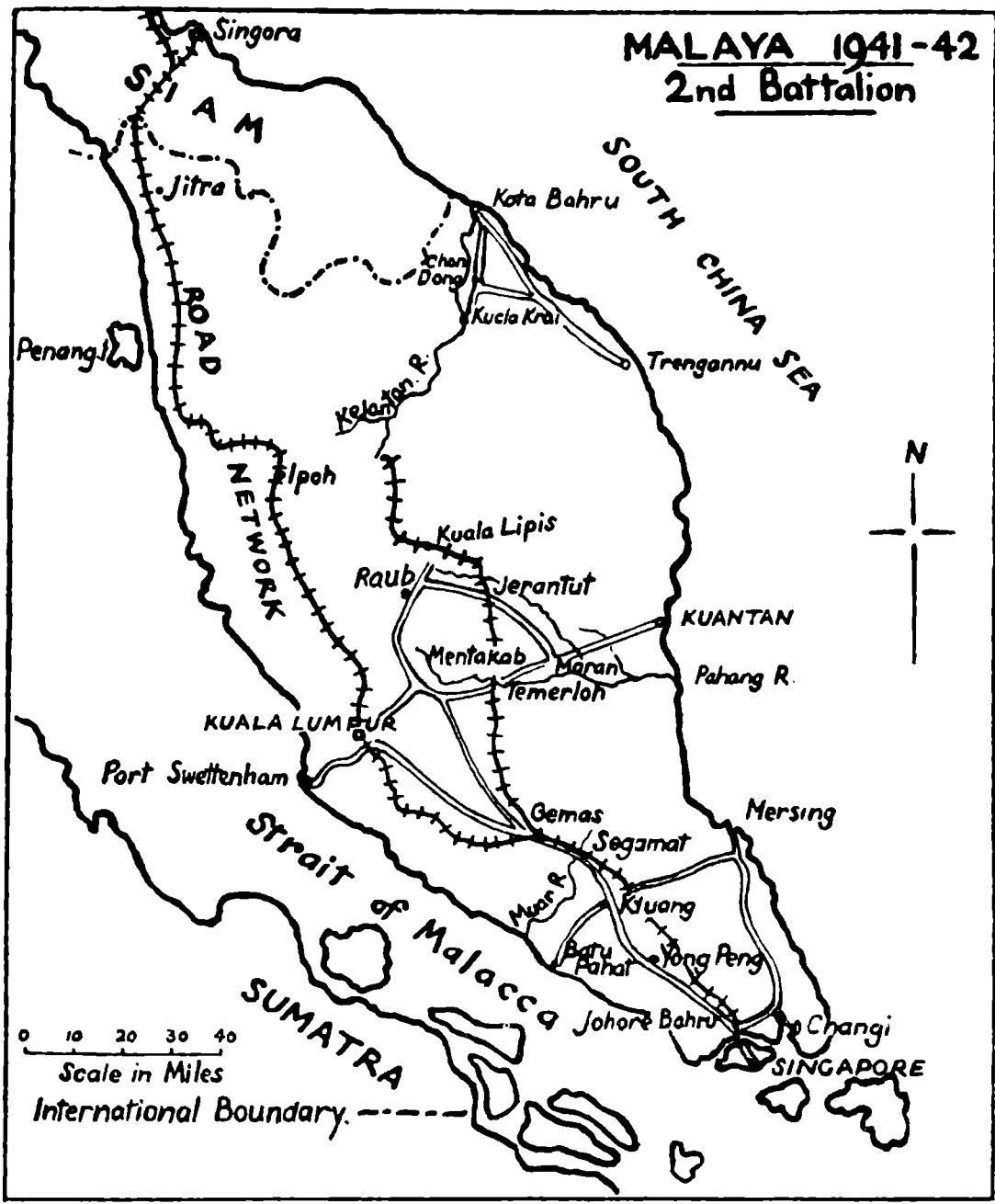
The situation in Malaya in April 1941, was briefly as follows.* The defence of the naval base at Singapore had been accepted as an Air Force responsibility rather than a naval one, and though the R.A.F. were not at the time in a position to station the necessary aircraft in Malaya, a series of aerodromes from which the fighter forces were to operate had been built, or were in the process of being built, across the north of the peninsula. From the fact that these distant bases were a strategic necessity it followed that the defence of Singapore now involved the defence of the whole Malay peninsula since the forward aerodromes had to be protected from ground attack.

The Japanese occupation of Indo-China had given point to this, as from there it would be a relatively easy operation to launch a surprise attack, either by a landing at Singora on the east coast of the isthmus of Thailand, followed by an advance down the west coast of Malaya, or by a direct assault at some point on the east coast of Malaya itself. Because of the easier terrain all road and rail communications lay on the west coast, and the former alternative was thought

* For the general War situation at this time, see Chapter XVIII, narrative of the 1st Battalion.

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2nd Battalion



the more probable, but on the east coast Kota Bahru, Kuantan, and Mersing were each connected to the west coast road and rail system by either a single road or single railway, and the possibility of a landing at any of those places could not be ignored.

The disposition of forces was therefore as follows: The 11th Indian Division was concentrated in the Alor Star-Sungei Patani area in the north-west, from where they could advance to oppose a landing at Singora or protect the aerodromes in that neighbourhood. The 8th Indian Brigade was responsible for the defence of both Kota Bahru and Kuantan, Brigade Headquarters, the 3/17th Dogra Regiment, and the 2/10th Baluch Regiment being at Kota Bahru, and the 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles at Kuantan, some 150 miles to the south. The Australian 8th Division of two brigades was in the Johore area to guard against possible landings at Mersing or Endau, and a mixed British and Indian brigade was stationed on Singapore Island.

On arrival in April the 9th Indian Division absorbed the 8th Brigade and became responsible for the defence of the whole of the east coast north of Mersing. The 22nd Brigade, which on landing had been temporarily accommodated at Ipoh with one battalion (the 2nd Sikhs) at Taiping, moved to Kuantan at the beginning of June and absorbed the 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles, the 2nd Sikhs being sent to Kota Bahru to take their place in the 8th Brigade, which was commanded by Brigadier B. W. Key. It was a very pleasant surprise for the Battalion to find in the Brigade Major another 2nd Sikh in the person of Major R. C. Dent.

With only two Regular battalions under his command at Kota Bahru, Brigadier Key had only been able to make preparation to repel an attack from the sea, and had had to ignore the lesser threat from the land frontier with Thailand. By June the whole of the thirty-five miles of possible landing beaches from the Kelantan river south to the Trengganu border had been prepared for defence, with several belts of double apron and dannert wire, with pill-boxes at 1,200-yard intervals and intermediate dug positions, and with anti-tank and anti-personnel mines ready for laying in the event of an emergency.

Defence Plans in Malaya, 1941

The 2/10th Baluch Regiment held the southern beaches with Headquarters at Pasir Puteh, while the northern sector was held by the Dogras, whose Battalion Headquarters, together with Brigade Headquarters, was alongside the aerodrome at Kota Bahru. A battalion of the Hyderabad State Forces shared the defence of the aerodrome with a section of the Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery. On arrival, the 2nd Sikhs were accommodated in a camp at Chondong, sixteen miles south of Kota Bahru, and were given the triple role of extending the beach defences north from the Kelantan river to the Thailand border, the

defence of the land frontier with Thailand, and mobile reserve to the Brigade. Since the country on the Thailand side consisted of dense jungle quite unprovided with roads, such a role was fantastically beyond the powers of any single battalion, but the jungle itself made an attack in force across the border unlikely.

It was not long before the Brigade received further reinforcements, and on their arrival only one Company ("D") was allotted to frontier defence, and the remainder of the Battalion was concentrated at Chondong. These reinforcements included the 1st Battalion Frontier Force Rifles* ("The Cookies") and the 5th Field Regiment of Artillery. The total Air Force in Kelantan however, was pitifully weak, and comprised only a single squadron of Royal Australian Air Force light bombers at Kota Bahru airfield.

Kelantan, 1941

In May 1941, the long-awaited arms and equipment began to arrive. Training cadres on 3-inch mortars, 2-inch mortars and Boys rifles could begin in earnest, and the Bren-gun carrier drivers could start their training. The arming and laying of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines and similar devices had also to be learnt. The Battalion was still subject to constant calls for officers for extra-regimental posts. In November Major Price returned to India to raise and command the Mazhabi and Ramdassia Sikh Regiment, his appointment as Second-in-Command being taken over by Major Dart, who had succeeded in returning to the Battalion from the 9th Division Headquarters. In the same month Temporary Captains Wilding and Johnson returned to India with the draft for the Machine-Gun Battalion,† while Temporary Captain Hill was posted as staff Captain, Malaya Command, and Temporary Captains Sedgwick and Williams went to 9th Division Headquarters as G.S.O. 3's. While not so irrevocably lost to the Battalion, the posting to 8th Brigade Headquarters of Temporary Captain Larson as Assistant Brigade Major and Lieutenant Gurcharan Singh as Liaison Officer caused a further reduction in strength. Subadar Ishar Singh also left the Battalion at this time, having been appointed Acting Subadar-Major of the First Reinforcement Camp in Singapore.

Though the forces were now somewhat stronger, they were still weak and they laboured under the two handicaps which affected all preparations for war in Malaya: the complete absence of security, and the policy that defence preparations must not be allowed to interfere with the daily lives of the inhabitants. No restraint could be put on the movements of the many Japanese in the country and free access to even beach defences had to be allowed, as the closing of these areas would have put a stop to fishing, the chief industry of the country.

* See *History of Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XIV. The 1st Battalion—originally called "Coke's Rifles"—have always been known familiarly as "the Cookies."

† See Chapter XXVII, The Machine-Gun Battalion in the Second World War.

Large iron mines near Pasir Mas were owned and operated by a Japanese firm, the ore being loaded into barges at Tumpat and transferred to Japanese ships which lay at anchor off the mouth of the river. Even had there been no Japanese staff on shore an excellent idea of the defences could have been obtained from these craft, and it is not surprising that the attackers eventually landed with ready-prepared maps showing the Brigade defences down to the last detail. A photograph showing two officers of the 2nd Sikhs standing beside a section post was actually recovered from the body of a dead Japanese!

The policy, too, that prevented the felling of trees and the removal of native huts in order to clear lines of fire before hostilities actually began meant that far too many things had to be left to the last moment besides the laying of mines and closure of river booms and gaps in the wire.

The Japanese Landing and the Battle of Kota Bahru

Throughout 1941 relations with Japan had become more strained, culminating in November in the freezing of all Japanese assets in the British Commonwealth and the U.S.A. in an attempt to force the withdrawal of Japanese forces from China. But the general strategic appreciation in the Pacific took into account the overwhelmingly powerful American Fleet. Any attempt at a large-scale invasion of Malaya could hardly have been undertaken without inviting war with the U.S.A.—an eventuality that Japan was scarcely expected to risk. The story of Pearl Harbour is too well known to recapitulate here, but the destruction there on 7th December 1941, of the American sea power in the Pacific not only upset all Allied calculations, but gained for the Japanese in their onslaught on Malaya the enormous advantage of a major strategic surprise.

There was therefore no feeling of the inevitability of war with Japan, and with the onset of the monsoon in mid-November beach defences throughout Malaya were reduced to skeleton strength and a period of open warfare training commenced, as, whatever the international state of affairs might be, an attack was considered impossible until the monsoon was over.

Such was the position in Kelantan when on Friday, 5th December, aerial reconnaissance reported a large fleet of transports escorted by thirty warships steaming north-west in the Gulf of Siam. The next day this fleet was reported as having split into two, the smaller part now proceeding south-west. On Sunday touch was lost, the Sunderland reconnaissance planes failing to return, but shortly after midnight the Japanese landed at Singora practically unopposed by the Thais, and at about 1 a.m. on the 8th the smaller fleet appeared off Kota Bahru and attempted a landing.

During the week-end final defence preparations had naturally been put into

effect. Mines had been laid, gaps in the wire closed, fields of fire cleared, and beach defences occupied. One gap alone remained in the defences, and that was the mouth of the Pengkalan Chapa, for which no boom had been constructed as the necessary steel cable had been unobtainable. It was on this point that the main Japanese attack was concentrated.

The 2nd Sikhs, less "D" Company (who were on Frontier Defence north of the Kelantan river) and the Sikh platoon of "B" Company (on local protection duty at Kuala Krai), were lying at the first degree of readiness at Chondong when at 1.30 a.m. on Monday, 8th December, a telephone message from the Brigade Major gave the information that the Japanese had landed on Badang and Sabak beaches after a brief naval bombardment, and that, though they were still fighting fiercely, the company of the 3/17th Dogra Regiment on each of these beaches was in difficulties. The 2nd Sikhs were to move to the vicinity of the Kota Bahru aerodrome immediately and to be prepared to counter-attack on both beaches at dawn. One company was to be sent on to Badang, to come under command of that sector commander (Major North, M.C., 3/17th Dogras). Unit transport and M.T. of the R.I.A.S.C. Company were to be used for the move.

"A" Company under Captain Medappa was accordingly sent off to Badang, while the rest of the Battalion moved to a rubber plantation near the western edge of the aerodrome. To everyone's surprise, no refugees were encountered moving from Kota Bahru to the previously prepared refugee camps, and on arrival at the aerodrome it was found that quite large crowds had assembled in the pouring rain to watch the bombing of installations as though they were watching a football match. By dawn the situation was as follows. The Japanese landing, which had been made from three transports which came close inshore supported by warships standing farther off, had been concentrated between Badang and Sabak villages. By daylight the shipping had withdrawn over the horizon, with the exception of one of the transports which was ashore and burning fiercely and which was "claimed" by both the Mountain Battery and the R.A.A.F., but the enemy were ashore and established on both the spits dividing the lagoon of the Pengkalan Chapa from the sea. These spits are separated from each other by the channel known as the Kuala Pa'amat, and many armoured landing-craft were known to have entered the lagoon by this route and disappeared in the maze of channels and islands. The beach defence troops had paid dearly for the absence of a boom across the Pa'amat as the armoured craft had been able to enter the lagoon unaffected by the Boys anti-tank rifles, the heaviest weapons that could be brought to bear, and the troops they carried had assaulted the beaches from behind, thus avoiding the wire entanglements and mines.

From first light onwards enemy fighter planes were constantly over Kota Bahru aerodrome, and though little damage was done to the runway, they made

the use of the aerodrome impossible. No British fighters appeared, and apart from the squadron of R.A.A.F. Hudsons, which were out of action by mid-morning, the only air support in evidence was a R.A.F. squadron of Wildebeeste torpedo bombers from Kuantan, which operated from the new aerodrome at Gong Kedah until it was destroyed by bombing later in the day.

The greatest credit is due to the pilots of these obsolete aircraft, incapable of even 100 miles an hour, who were up against modern Japanese fighters in overwhelming numbers. Kota Bahru aerodrome was finally evacuated by the Air Force early in the afternoon, and the ground staff and remaining crews were lorried to Kuala Krai.

At first light the 2nd Sikhs were ordered to send one company to counter-attack from the village of Sabak, to retake the spit on the eastern side of the lagoon and the pill-box at its end. This task was given to "B" Company, commanded by Subadar Mohd Ali, whose missing Sikh platoon was replaced by a Platoon under Jemadar Makhmad Baz. On advancing from Sabak "B" Company found that the bridge across the Gali leading to the beaches had been destroyed, but a boat was found to ferry them across, and the attack was launched. At first all went well and the nearest pill-box was reached and found to be still in the possession of its Dogra garrison. Farther on, however, the spit narrowed into a high shingle ridge and the counter-attack was drawn to the seaward side of this, where the Japanese were still landing from boats. At this point, "B" Company came under heavy fire from its left flank where the enemy who had landed from the lagoon side of the spit had taken up covering positions on the ridge. The attack was held up, and Lieutenant-Colonel Preston, C.O. of the Dogras, who had accompanied "B" Company, was wounded and had to be evacuated. Though further slight gains were made, the attack was unable to regain its momentum and "B" Company remained in this exposed position, subject to withering cross-fire, for the remainder of the day. When the order to withdraw was given after dark that night it was found that the enemy had worked their way round to "B" Company's left rear. Many casualties were suffered as a result of this, and even more men were drowned when attempting to swim the Gali under fire, a feat that was forced on them by the sinking of the boat which had transported them across in the morning. Jemadar Spin Gul was amongst those lost, being drowned while attempting to help a Sikh sepoy in difficulties. For the leadership he showed throughout the day Subadar Mohd Ali was awarded the I.D.S.M.

Meanwhile "A" Company had reported at Badang before dawn, where one platoon had been sent to help the beach defence troops while the other two platoons under Captain Medappa had been sent across on to Smugglers Island to clear it of enemy. These two platoons advanced up the island in open formation until unable to make any more headway against increasing opposition. When about half the island had been retaken, Captain Medappa was killed by

fire from a boat heavily camouflaged with branches, and command devolved on Subadar Siri Chand. These two platoons remained holding the half of the island in their possession until the afternoon when the 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles arrived to carry the attack on to the main western spit of the lagoon. "A" Company's two platoons joined in the advance, but owing to bad guides and the Frontier Force Rifles' unfamiliarity with the ground (they had only just arrived in Kelantan), the whole attack got lost in the mangrove swamps and those concerned had the greatest difficulty in extricating themselves, some individuals arriving out on the beach three days later.

After the departure of "B" Company, Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company of the 2nd Sikhs had moved to the bank of the Pengkalan Chapa where it formed the boundary of the aerodrome. Any movement immediately drew attention from enemy fighters who machine-gunned every worth-while target, but otherwise there was no sign of the Japanese. As the morning drew on it became apparent that the main force of the enemy ashore must be concealed on the various islands in the lagoon, and the Dogra platoon of "C" Company under the Adjutant was ferried across the Pengkalan to patrol down the left bank to see if contact could be made. This patrol reached the point opposite Kidney Island without encountering any enemy, but were unable to get farther without boats. From the point they were able to see many enemy on Kidney Island and much activity of boats. On returning the platoon started to ferry itself back to the right bank in the only canoe available, which could carry only four at a time. On the very first trip the canoe was spotted by enemy aircraft, who machine-gunned and sank it, only the Adjutant and one sepoy escaping drowning. The remainder of the platoon under Jemadar Parmodh Singh were thus left on the wrong bank of the river with no means of getting across, and were forced to make their way through the mangrove swamps to the pontoon bridge at Kota Bahru, which they succeeded in doing by midnight.

By afternoon it was evident that all Japanese ashore were confined to either the islands in the lagoon or the two spits to seaward, and though it might not be easy to attack them, owing to the lack of boats, Brigadier Key hoped that it would be possible to prevent their crossing to the mainland. The two remaining platoons of "C" Company, under Captain Hawkins, were therefore ordered to take up positions on the right bank of the Pengkalan to cover the gap between the aerodrome and the 3/17th Dogra Regiment's reserve positions near Sabak, and Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming was placed in command of all troops on this side of the river, consisting of two companies of the 3/17th Dogra Regiment, two companies 1/13th Frontier Force Rifles, and "B" Company plus two platoons of "C" Company of the 2nd Sikhs.

At dusk the Japanese, who must have spent the day re-forming and reorganizing, began to cross on to the right bank of the Pengkalan. The two platoons of "C" Company strung out along a mile and a half of this swampy

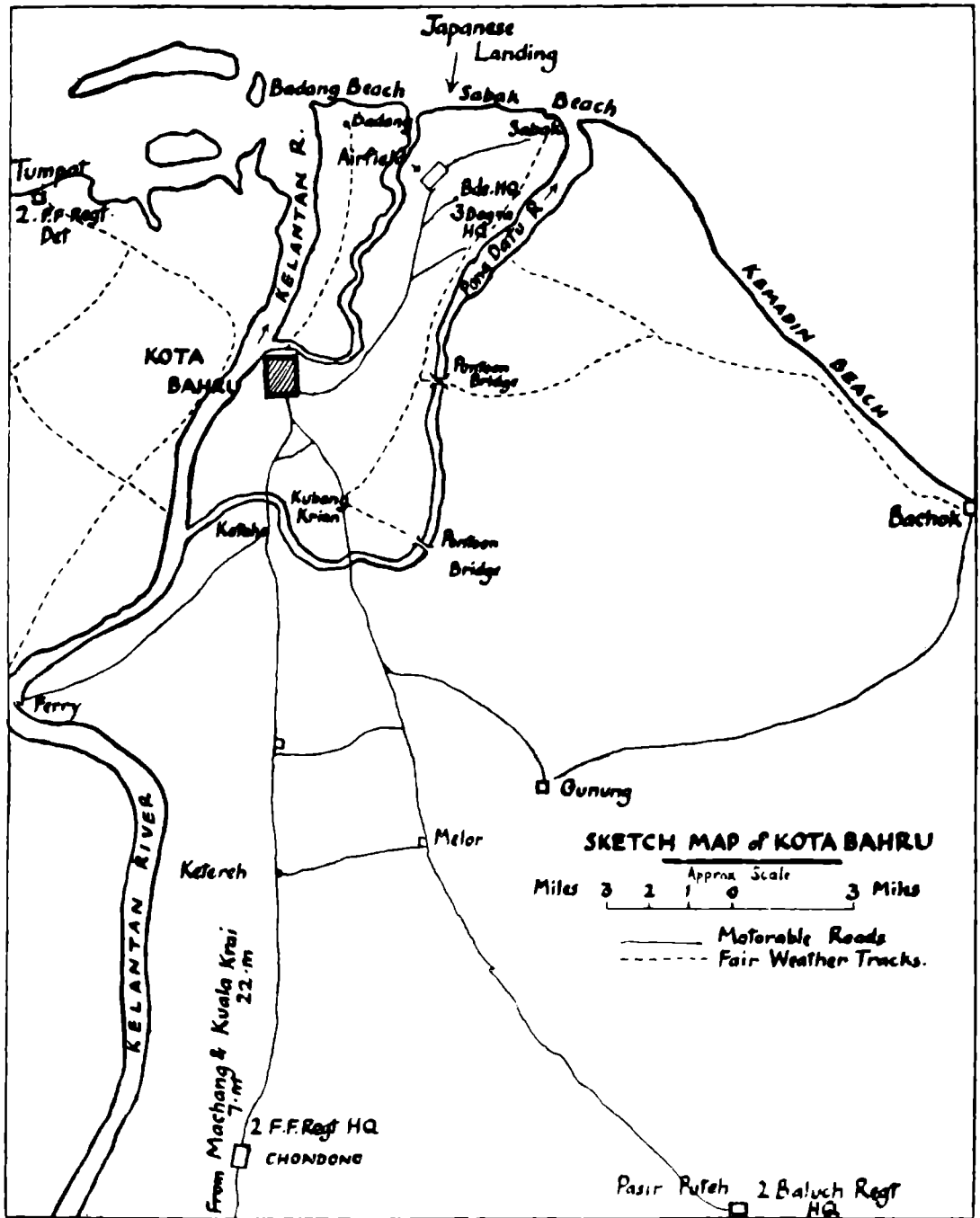
bank were soon in heavy action, but in the darkness and pouring rain were too thin on the ground to prevent enemy penetration. In a remarkably short time a considerable force of Japanese had crossed the river, formed up, and launched a fierce attack on the aerodrome and defence positions of the Hyderabad State Battalion. Subadar Shiraz Khan, second-in-command of "C" Company, was killed in this action while gallantly attempting to recover a Bren gun, the numbers one, two and three of which had been successively killed by a sniper. His younger brother Sherbaz Khan had been wounded earlier in the day with "B" Company.

At this juncture (7 p.m.) Brigadier Key ordered a withdrawal from both banks of the Pengkalan back to a line running east and west from the pontoon bridge at Kota Bahru. Troops withdrawing via Sabak, under Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming, got away without much difficulty except in the case of "B" Company, 2nd Sikhs, who not only lost heavily in crossing the river mouth at Sabak, but most of whose survivors arrived on the other side without boots or arms (they were no wetter than their companions as it was by then raining in torrents). All vehicles other than carriers had now to be abandoned owing to the state of the road, which was a sea of mud.

In the centre two reinforcing companies of 1st Frontier Force Rifles were just arriving, and the Hyderabad State Battalion, the Hong Kong-Singapore Royal Artillery anti-aircraft gunners, and Headquarters and "C" Company, 2nd Sikhs, were just retiring when the Japanese launched their assault on the aerodrome. There followed a strange scene of utter confusion in which bodies of men of both sides were moving across the open space in the same direction in an inextricable muddle through the darkness and the rain. To complete the confusion, the vast dumps of aviation petrol on the south side of the aerodrome were now fired, and as each drum exploded the scene was lit with dazzling brilliance, only to be plunged into inky blackness a few seconds later.

On the Badang side (to the left) things became even worse, as it was found that the Japanese had infiltrated to the rear in considerable force and were only prevented from capturing the pontoon bridge at Kota Bahru itself by a counter-attack launched by the Dogra Regiment's followers. By 2 a.m. on the 9th the new line had been reached, but the 2nd Sikhs and the 3/17th Dogras were all mixed up. The Brigadier had ordered Colonel Cumming to take over command of the right flank (Colonel Preston of the Dogras had been evacuated wounded), and now had in addition to "B" Company of the Battalion most of the Dogra Battalion under his command. He was for the time being out of touch with his own Battalion Headquarters.

"B" Company had lost some thirty men, and the remainder were barefoot and half armed. Battalion Headquarters was in the centre, on the main road. "C" Company's P.M. platoon had got lost in the darkness, and great credit is



due to Jemadar Hyat Mohd for bringing it in intact through the Japanese lines next day. From Battalion Headquarters the only communication to either flank was by runner, and intervening troops had been unable to select positions in the darkness.

The Japanese had been able to disembark more troops without interference during the night, and at dawn launched a heavy attack. Considerable numbers had already infiltrated through the new "line" which it had been found impossible to occupy fully in the darkness, and these were making their presence felt as far to the rear as Kota Bahru itself. By 8.30 a.m. it appeared that there were more Japanese behind the position than in front, and a further withdrawal was ordered. No respite had been given which units and battalions could utilize for re-forming, and the withdrawal was carried out by the same mixed parties of men as had collected on the defence line during the night. This hotchpotch of mixed units, companies, and sections had all to withdraw through the bottleneck of Kota Bahru, parties from the aerodrome road mingling with parties from the Badang pontoon bridge track, and many sharp little actions were fought with Japanese infiltrators and with snipers who had established themselves in the buildings of the town. The discipline of each party was, however, above criticism.

On reaching the road fork just south of Kota Bahru an attempt was made to sort out units, and the Brigade Major was stationed at this point directing sections and units which way to go. Orders were that the Hyderabad State Battalion was to go straight through to Kuala Krai; the Dogras and the Frontier Force Rifles were to go down the Kuala Krai road to Chondong; and the 2nd Sikhs were to link up with two companies of the Baluch Regiment which had been sent up to Peringat. The 2nd Sikhs and these two companies were to prevent the enemy from crossing the Kota Bahru—Peringat road from the east.

As the 2nd Sikhs Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company party moved through Kota Bahru, mortar fire was opened from the east, and one of the carriers containing Jemadar Ajit Singh had a narrow escape from destruction, emerging unscathed from the midst of a salvo of about a dozen bombs. Fire from concealed snipers near the road fork also increased, so "C" Company was left to take up positions covering the last troops out of the town while Battalion Headquarters, augmented to a total strength of about forty by two sections of the Baluch Regiment, sent forward from Peringat as a connecting link, pushed on down the road towards Kubang Krian. The party had scarcely come in sight of the third milestone when Japanese started swarming across the road in large numbers, having apparently come down the track along the Peng Datu river to Kubang Krian. What had actually happened was that the order to withdraw had not reached Colonel Cumming on the right flank and the enemy, having by-

passed the positions of his troops, were pushing on to try to cut communications in the rear of Kota Bahru.

Lieutenant Gurcharan Singh the liaison officer, and Havildar Mohd Shafi were sent off on motor-cycles to carry the information to "C" Company and Brigade Headquarters, but found that the enemy had already seized the road south of "C" Company's positions, and both were taken prisoner.

Battalion Headquarters immediately went into action and succeeded in inflicting very heavy casualties on the Japanese. The latter behaved with complete disregard for their own safety, and one Bren gun wiped out four successive crews of a mortar which the enemy attempted to bring into action in the middle of the road. Eventually weight of numbers told and the party had to pull back to the road junction at Kisna Dua. Here they were able to find cover in the monsoon drains alongside the road, but after another three-quarters of an hour of heavy fighting, in which their carriers were put out of action, they found themselves surrounded on all sides, with the enemy closing in for a kill. Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, Major Dart ordered bayonets to be fixed and led a charge which carried the party through the enemy and into the swamps to the south. From there the party made its way across country to Chondong, where it succeeded in arriving on the afternoon of the 10th, having been handicapped by having to carry the wounded. On its way through Kota Bahru, Battalion Headquarters had been lucky enough to meet the truck of rations sent up by the Quartermaster, as apart from this no other meal was taken between leaving Chondong just after midnight on the 7th until returning there on the 10th.

Meanwhile Colonel Cumming and his party of mainly Dogra Regiment troops, with a few 2nd Sikhs, remained in their positions to the north until the afternoon of the 9th, when news of the withdrawal reached them. They then began to retire down the Kubang Krian track, but on reaching this village they found it occupied by a large number of the enemy. Three successive attacks were put in, but each one was repulsed and two of the Dogra Regiment carriers were blown up. The survivors succeeded in crossing the Peng Datu river in two sampans, taking most of their wounded with them, and then making their way to an unoccupied Chinese village. There they learnt that the Japanese were holding the Kubang Krian-Peringat road in strength, so Colonel Cumming ordered the wounded to be left in the village and the fit to disguise themselves as Malays and make their way in ones and twos through the enemy positions to Chondong. He himself remained in the village, but, having seen the bulk of his men safely across the road, Jemadar Khushi Ram of the Dogra Regiment returned, and he and Colonel Cumming set out again with a party of the less severely wounded. Having been once spotted and having to return to the village, the party succeeded in making their way through the paddy-fields to the south, where they were picked up by a 2nd Sikh carrier containing Captain Pomeroy, O.C. "D" Company. This carrier had burst its way through various Japanese

strong-points on the road, and was guided by a sepoy of the first party to get through. On this carrier the party completed its journey back to Chondong.

The Withdrawal Commences

Having failed to cut off appreciable numbers of troops in Kota Bahru, the enemy did not follow up the withdrawal with much vigour, and 8th Brigade had the whole of the 9th, 10th and 11th in which to re-form and to allow stragglers to rejoin. This was indeed lucky, as the 2nd Sikhs, who were in no different case to the Frontier Force Rifles or the Dogras, rose in strength from 140 on the morning of the 10th to nearly 700 by the 12th.

On the morning of the 11th, after receiving a report of a fresh Japanese landing at Besut, south of the Sungei Semarak, Brigadier Key moved his brigade back some seven miles and took up a position a mile south of Machang, where a stretch of paddy-fields about a thousand yards wide gave an adequate field of fire. It was shortly after taking up this position that the news of the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* was received. The story of this disaster is now well known, but the reader can refresh his memory from the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles* or *Eastern Epic*.^{*} It placed command of the sea in the hands of the Japs—a decisive factor in the campaign.

After their capture of Kota Bahru and the area to the immediate south of the town the Japanese advance must have been cautious, as it was not until the morning of the 12th that their patrols began feeling out the new position. During that night they moved strong forces close up through the standing crops and attacked shortly after dawn. The attack was repulsed with little difficulty and with considerable loss to the enemy, and this check was followed up by a vigorous counter-attack by two companies of the Baluchis who drove the enemy right back through Machang village. On this day Colonel Cumming again had a miraculously narrow escape when three snipers concealed in a pile of timbers opened fire at only ten yards range while he and the O.C. Baluch Regiment were standing and talking by the roadside. Their aim was bad, however, and they did not get a second chance, all three being killed by grenades thrown by Colonel Cumming.

During the next three days, successive withdrawals were carried out in good order, all enemy attacks being repulsed. The men were much disgusted at this continued retirement, as they could see no reason for it. It was not known that it had by now been decided to evacuate Kelantan to conform with the withdrawal on the west coast, and that all that the Brigade was required to do was to delay the enemy sufficiently to enable all stores and M.T. to be got away from Kuala Krai.

^{*} *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 163; *Eastern Epic*, Compton Mackenzie, p. 241.

During the next two days the enemy continued to work round to the rear, and on one occasion succeeded in destroying the carriers of "The Cookies" (1st Battalion Frontier Force Rifles) by dropping bombs on them from trees. On that day five carriers of the 2nd Sikhs brought off a most successful ambush. They were in position heavily camouflaged with foliage, in "rubber" on the left of "The Cookies." The latter, on being ordered to withdraw, were closely followed up by the Japs. These walked straight into the concealed carriers of the 2nd Sikhs. Fire was opened with Bren and rifle at close range, doing great execution. More Japs were diverted to deal with the 2nd Sikhs party, and as this attack came in the C.O., who was in one of the carriers, ordered the withdrawal. In the half light, with Brens spitting orange flame, the carriers threw off their camouflage and in line ahead, like little ships in the darkness, drew out of the rubber on to the tarmac road. They caught up with the infantry rear-guard a mile beyond.

On the night of the 15th the withdrawal was to the Pasir Gajah Rubber Estates. In this position the discomforts consequent on fighting during the monsoon reached their height, for, as well as the rain, floods covering the whole area to a depth of six inches had to be contended with. With digging an impossibility, the forward troops spent the night standing in the rain, only lowering themselves into the water when enemy mortar bombs or the fire of jitter* parties made this imperative. At dawn the Japanese attacked in strength, and though the attack was beaten off it was found impossible to clear them out completely from the thick growth of secondary jungle that came right up to the front of the position. As a result desultory fighting continued throughout the morning and the 2nd Sikhs suffered about twelve killed, including Havildar Shingara Singh. One carrier which attempted to reconnoitre up the main road was put out of action by a shell from a 2-inch gun, and the driver Naik Ram Singh, had his foot cut off. With great gallantry this N.C.O. continued firing the Bren gun from the ditch beside the road until help arrived to carry him back and rescue the carrier.

By now it had become obvious that it would not be possible to continue loading stores at Kuala Krai for much longer, as besides the growing danger of attack from the ground, enemy air attacks were increasing in number and severity, and it was too much to hope that the latter would continue to be as ineffectual as they had been up till then. Brigadier Key therefore decided to abandon the few remaining lorries and stores and to start evacuating his troops while the railway was still in operation. On the night of the 17th the 2nd Sikhs accordingly marched into Kuala Krai and next morning entrained and left for Kuala Lipis, the enemy speeding them on their way with another bombing raid in which they failed to score a hit. The remainder of the 8th Brigade was safely

* The expression to "jitter," "jitter parties," etc., was used in the Japanese campaigns of the Second World War to describe the Jap method of simulating an attack by a demonstration with noise, shouting and fire.

evacuated during the next two days, the rear-guard withdrawing on foot until it had destroyed the bridges south of Kuala Krai.

It says a lot for the quality of the "jawan" that the morale of the 2nd Sikhs was still as high as ever when the Battalion left Kuala Krai, and the same can be said for all units of the Brigade. It must be remembered that the fighting had been carried on under appalling climatic conditions, with almost ceaseless rain, and that owing to the nightly moves and the need to prepare new positions on arrival, very little sleep had been had by anyone from the time the Battalion left the Machang position on the 13th until entraining on the 18th. On top of this practically all bedding and kits had been lost when the bulk of unit transport had had to be abandoned during the withdrawal from the beaches, and what few vehicles were left were required for ammunition and the langars.* As a result all ranks were dependent on what they carried on their backs, and most of the heavy weapons, such as 3-inch mortars, and entrenching tools had to be man-handled. The Battalion had been taking part in that most difficult and demoralizing operation, a withdrawal in contact with the enemy, throughout all of which the 2nd Sikhs had acted as rear-guard to the Brigade. Since noon on the 9th no British aircraft had been seen, while enemy aircraft were constantly overhead. The enemy had always the advantage of being able to use fresh troops each day, and the Brigade's sole superiority lay in artillery. This was because the Japanese had been able to deploy nothing heavier than their mortars and 2-inch infantry guns as all tanks and field guns had been loaded in the ship which was sunk.†

The enemy is perhaps always in the best position to assess the quality of the troops opposing him, and it is satisfactory to be able to quote from Compton Mackenzie's *Eastern Epic* that "the enemy himself has testified that he was worn out and disorganized by the continuous fighting and proclaimed 'the bloody landing at Kota Bharu one which will go down in history as the most magnificent of landing operations' (Enemy Publications No. 278)." Memorials inscribed "To the Fallen" were erected by the Japanese at Badang and at Sabak.

Kuantan and After

On arrival at Kuala Lipis the Battalion was given two days in which to reorganize before being moved down to Raub as divisional reserve. At Raub billets were found in the gold mine, and patrols were sent out to keep a watch on the track to Cheroh in the north.

On 22nd December orders were received to join the 22nd Brigade at Kuantan, where the Battalion arrived at midnight on the 24th. Here the return of the

* Langars—cooking gear.

† This of course applied only to the Japanese forces employed at the Kota Bahru landing.

Battalion to its old Brigade was marked by a magnificent reception laid on by the British troops of the 5th Field Regiment, R.A.

A misfortune however occurred when Major Dart, the Second-in-Command, travelling in a lorry involved in an accident had to be evacuated to hospital suffering from several broken ribs. Captain Campbell, "B" Company Commander, also had to go sick on reaching Raub. "B" Company was therefore commanded by Subadar Mohd Ali, and Lieutenant Ishar Singh took Captain Medappa's place as O.C. "A" Company.

The road which the 2nd Sikhs had traversed from Raub through more than a hundred miles of the Pahang jungle is the sole connecting link between the small seaport of Kuantan and the main road-rail system of the rest of Malaya. This and the need to protect an aerodrome recently completed there led to first one battalion of 8th Brigade and later the whole of 22nd Brigade being sent to Kuantan. The aerodrome had actually been abandoned by the R.A.A.F. on 9th December after it had been bombed by the Japanese, but it was still vitally important to deny its use to the enemy.

The situation of 22nd Brigade was not altogether enviable. The possibility of a landing on any of the beaches gave easy access to the aerodrome, only nine miles inland, but as it was also known that the Japanese were advancing down the coastal track from Kelantan there was additionally a strong possibility of a major land attack from the north. Yet another course open to the enemy was to penetrate up the Pahang river in launches and to land at any point as far west as Jerantut. Heavy bombing of the road, or more particularly the Jerantut ferry, could also isolate the Brigade.

To follow the details of the desperate fighting in which the Brigade, and more particularly the Battalion, were now to be involved, the dispositions of the units need to be clearly understood. Incidentally it was in the course of these operations that the Battalion Commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Cumming, gained the Victoria Cross—the only one awarded to the Regiment in the Second World War.

With only two battalions under his command (prior to the Battalion's arrival) to guard against contingencies, Brigadier Painter had disposed of his forces as follows. The 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles were holding beach defences from the mouth of the Kuantan river to the Balok, ten miles to the north. Though the whole coast from Trengganu to Pekan, and farther, was considered suitable for landings, this section was thought to be the most likely as it gave access to a network of good roads.

The 5/11th Sikhs were holding secondary positions along twenty-two miles of the Kuantan and Belat rivers, up to and inclusive of the bridge on the Pekan road. The almost north-south course of the Kuantan effectively cut off the town and the beach defence troops from the rest of the Brigade, and the only means

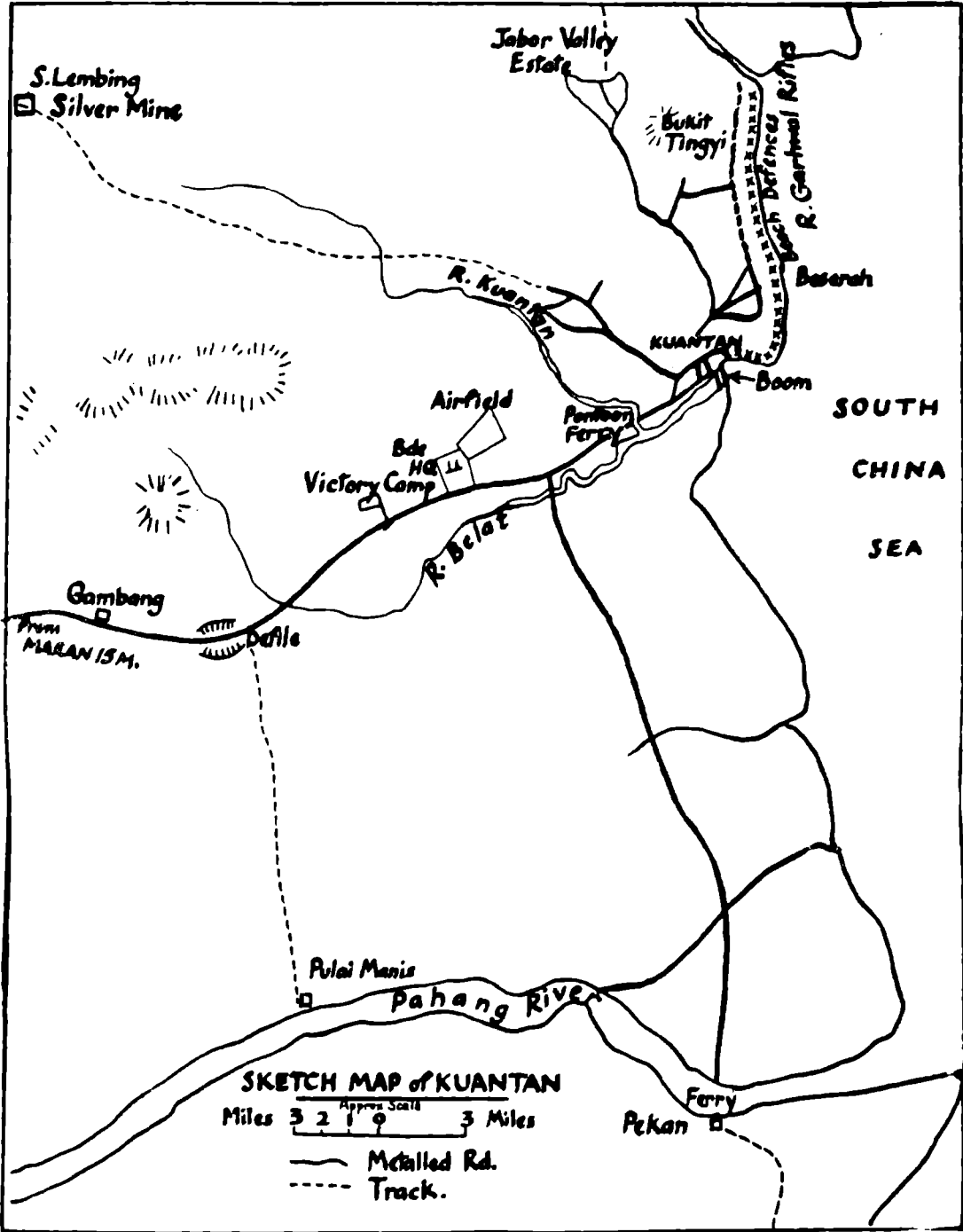
of crossing the river was by the pontoon ferry on the main road. The 5/11th Sikhs also had one company on aerodrome defence, and were finding patrols on tracks approaching the aerodrome from the north, on the coast between the two rivers, and boat patrols on both of them.

On arrival the 2nd Sikhs were ordered to send one company to come under command of the Royal Garhwal Rifles and also to take over the protection of the line of communications. "A" Company was accordingly sent off across the ferry, and the remainder of the Battalion moved back to a rubber plantation at Gambang, some seven miles to the rear of Brigade Headquarters which was at the aerodrome. "D" Company, under Captain Pomeroy, was allotted the task of covering the threat from the Pahang river, one platoon constructing defences at Pulau Manis, only approachable on land by a fourteen-mile-long footpath through the jungle, while the remainder of the company moved to Lubok Paku. "B" and "C" Companies patrolled all tracks leading to the north, and during the course of one of these patrols evacuated a party of Europeans from the Sungei Lembing silver mine.

Enemy aircraft were fairly active, and the 2nd Sikhs were not long in seeing proof that they were receiving assistance from the ground. Having arrived at Gambang after dark, unit transport was left parked in the main street of the village while a suitable harbour for Battalion Headquarters was being reconnoitred. This having been found, the vehicles were moved to it at dawn, but the village had scarcely been evacuated when a formation of enemy bombers appeared and bombed the whole area, destroying most of the houses and killing a large number of innocent Malay and Chinese civilians. The source of leakage was soon discovered when it was found that the civilian air raid warning system was still in operation, and that warnings were being received from Trengganu, behind the Japanese lines. The passage of information had obviously been taking place in both directions!

With the complete absence of Allied aircraft it had been impossible to gain accurate information of the Japanese advance. It was felt that the major threat was from a land advance, but Brigadier Painter was unable to obtain permission to withdraw troops from the beach defences to form a front to meet it. In consequence, when on the night of 29th December the Japanese crossed the Balok and Nior rivers to the north in force, they were able to advance down the estate roads without meeting opposition until 30th December when they came up against a reserve company of the Royal Garhwal Rifles in the area of Bukit Tinggi where the roads met. Here there was heavy and confused fighting which continued throughout the day of the 30th, and "A" Company, 2nd Sikhs, was sent up to assist the Royal Garhwal Rifle Company.

From dawn onwards enemy aircraft had been dive-bombing and machine-gunning the length of the beach defences, and the northern posts had come



under mortar and machine-gun fire. Orders were at last given for beach defences to be abandoned and a line formed to meet the threat from the land to the north, but it was already too late.

The Japanese had continued to press round both flanks of "A" Company and the Royal Garhwal Rifle company, and by the time the order to withdraw was received both were almost completely surrounded and had to fight their way back. At one point in the road they found that the Japanese had erected a road-block and that here "A" Company's vehicles, which had brought up food and ammunition during the morning, had been ambushed on their return journey. The burnt-out trucks were lying by the roadside and near by were the decapitated bodies of C.H.M. Fattah Khan (the Battalion weight-putter), all the Company followers, and what had been two truck-loads of wounded—a dreadful sight. A platoon of Royal Garhwal Rifles, also in M.T., and two motor-cycle despatch riders from the gunner O.P. had met a like fate.

By nightfall on the 30th the Japanese had penetrated as far as the outskirts of Kuantan town and westward as far as the Kuantan river, thus outflanking all the beach defences. A battalion position was, however, selected running in an arc from the Kuantan river north of the ferry around the north and east of the town and down to the river again, and it was hoped that all units would manage to get back to take up their allotted places during the night.

"A" Company's sector was in the neighbourhood of the school on the eastern outskirts of the town, and during the night they were several times in action with parties of Japanese advancing down the road from Besera. At dawn they and a scratch company of Royal Garhwal Rifles made up from first reinforcements found themselves cut off from the rest of the Battalion by a force of the enemy occupying the centre of the town.

The two companies tried to fight their way through to the ferry, first down the main street and later along the river bank, but on each occasion they were forced back by the ever-increasing number of Japanese. At last, encircled and pinned to the river bank, they were reduced to the desperate expedient of trying to cross the river by the boom of logs which had been constructed to close the river mouth to enemy craft. Lieutenant Ishar Singh and one platoon of "A" Company took up covering positions while the others started out. The first half-dozen men had just reached the mangroves on the other bank, and the remainder were strung out along the boom, when the Japanese opened up on them with mortars and machine guns. Of those still on the boom many were killed outright and the others were forced into the water, and most of them were swept away by the current and drowned.

Of those who got across, seven were 2nd Sikhs, and these succeeded in making their way round through the mangrove swamps and rejoining the Battalion. With the exception of these seven and another party of twenty the

whole of "A" Company were killed or taken prisoner. This party of twenty, led by Lieutenant Ishar Singh and Jemadar Firoz Khan, managed to remain concealed throughout the day, and after crossing the boom by night they made their way along the beaches to the south, eventually arriving at Endau, over a hundred miles away. At Endau they were well looked after by the men of the 8th Australian Division before being sent up to rejoin the Battalion, which by that time was at Labis.

Meanwhile, from dawn on the 31st onwards, sporadic attacks had been made on the ferry bridgehead by small parties of Japanese making their way down the east bank of the Kuantan river. Three such attacks were beaten off by the 5/11th Sikhs platoon holding this key point, but the risk of the complete isolation of those east of the river if the crossing fell into enemy hands was too great, and the order for the withdrawal of all troops to the west side of the Kuantan was given at midday. By evening all troops except "A" Company, 2nd Sikhs, and the one company of the Royal Garhwal Rifles had crossed, and the ferry was destroyed.

Although the beach defences had been turned there still remained the aerodrome to be defended, and the Brigadier received orders that it was to be held at all costs until 5th January, when a large convoy was expected to arrive at Singapore. The 5/11th Sikhs were therefore retained in their positions along the Kuantan river, and the Royal Garhwal Rifles and 2nd Sikhs, less "A" and "D" Companies, formed a seven-mile perimeter round the aerodrome and Brigade Headquarters Camp. This camp was composed of rows of wooden huts on stilts, and to the north and north-west lay dense secondary jungle, known locally as "blucher," which gave a maximum visibility of three yards, and through which it was practically impossible to force a way. About a mile farther west a dirt road led up from the main road to another hutted camp known as Victory Camp, and to the north of this was a fairly large cleared area covered in tall grass. Victory Camp was unoccupied at this time.

The Royal Garhwal Rifles held the sector of the perimeter to the north, east and south of the aerodrome, while the 2nd Sikhs, assisted by the 5th Field Regiment, R.A., held round the south, west and north of Brigade Headquarters Camp and a short arc of about half a mile on the north-west corner of the aerodrome. The Gunners undertook the short western side of the 2nd Sikhs perimeter, while Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company occupied the adjacent sector on the northern side, with "B" Company on their right linking up with the Garhwalis. The southern side, between the Gunners and the Garhwalis, was given to "C" Company (now commanded by Subadar Gul Badshah as Captain Hawkins had become Second-in-Command).

A single apron wire fence had been erected in a ride cut round the whole perimeter, but in H.Q. and "B" Company sectors large patches of swamp and

“blucher” had been left standing inside the wire, rendering it impossible to choose positions covering the length of this obstacle.

“D” Company had been withdrawn from its positions on the Pahang river and were now some four miles down the Gambang road protecting the line of communications and patrolling certain tracks to the north.

The 2nd January passed quietly except for occasional innocuous enemy air activity. The Gunners continued to shell Kuantan Club and the Volunteer Camp, where the Japanese were believed to be concentrating. Some six months later, as a prisoner of war, Captain Harvey (of the Battalion), the Staff Captain, had an extraordinary meeting with the Japanese General in charge of the Kuantan operations. At this meeting, in which the Japanese officer got extremely drunk with the British prisoners of war on fatigue duty at a Japanese dump, the General admitted that this shelling cost him a thousand casualties. The figure is hard to believe, but there is no doubt that the 5th Field Regiment took a goodly toll of the enemy.

On the morning of 3rd January it was learnt that the expected convoy had reached Singapore and that the aerodrome could now be abandoned. On the west coast the 11th Division had been forced back to the line of the Slim river, and if a further withdrawal became necessary the east-west road running over Frazers Hill would become exposed, allowing the enemy to cut 22nd Brigade’s sole line of communication. Orders were therefore issued for the Brigade to withdraw to Jerantut, avoiding engaging the enemy if possible so as to retain units intact. But this was to prove an optimistic hope. It was already too late, and the enemy were infiltrating through the jungle to the north-west to cut off the Brigade. As will be seen, only by desperate fighting did a battered remnant win through to the west.

The Brigadier’s plan was for the 5/11th Sikhs to pull out from their forward positions at 2 p.m. on the 3rd and to retire to a covering position about one mile west of Gambang. The 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles were to close on Brigade Headquarters Camp at 7 p.m., to embuss there, and to move straight back to Maran. As soon as they were clear of camp they were to be followed by the 5th Field Regiment, R.A., and Brigade Headquarters, while the 2nd Sikhs, who were to act as rear-guard, were to clear the camp at 9 p.m.

The Battalion plan was for “B” Company to swing back its right flank, thus completing a smaller perimeter round the Brigade Headquarters Camp. As the Gunners, who had been holding the western flank of the 2nd Sikhs perimeter, withdrew, Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company were to bring their left flank round, taking up a line along the main north-south road through the camp, and thus again shortening the perimeter. When the time came to abandon the position the Battalion was to retire on foot to a point west of the

Victory Camp road, where it would embuss and withdraw under cover of "D" Company.

During the day there was a strange lack of activity on the part of the enemy and an ominous feeling grew that a major assault was impending. Patrols, however, failed to make contact with anything but small bodies of Japanese, these being mainly encountered to the north and north-west of the aerodrome.

At 2 p.m. the 5/11th Sikhs abandoned their forward line, apparently undetected by the enemy, and moved back to their covering position. As 7 p.m. approached the Garhwalis began to thin out and to assemble in Brigade Headquarters Camp, but before their withdrawal from the perimeter was completed mortar fire was opened on "B" Company's two platoons on the aerodrome. Though no casualties were incurred, the men of "B" Company's Sikh platoon were in a most uncomfortable position as they had perforce to construct their section posts in amongst the piles of aerial bombs which had been blown up, but not exploded, by the Sappers after the aerodrome had been abandoned by the air force. However, the bombs again refused to explode, and the platoon took comfort in the fact that it was shortly to abandon the position and take up its previously reconnoitred posts on the new front linking up with "C" Company.

Almost simultaneously with the opening of the mortar fire on "B" Company, news of a more serious nature was received. This was from a patrol in the Victory Camp neighbourhood, who reported enemy massing in the open space to the north. From this area it would be possible for them to cut the line of withdrawal of the whole force, so "C" Company's Pathan platoon under Jemadar Makhmad Baz, and two carriers under command of Havildar Mir Badshah, were sent off to try to clear up the situation.

The embussing of the Garhwalis proceeded apace, and the convoy started to move off dead on time. As the leading lorry left camp heavy firing was heard from "B" Company's positions, and at the same time the two carriers returned from Victory Camp with the news that Jemadar Makhmad Baz's platoon was up against vastly superior numbers and was hard pressed. The carriers also reported that they had had to fight their way through parties of Japanese assembling in the rubber near the Victory Camp road—main road junction.

This information was passed on to the Garhwalis, who prepared to fight their way through if necessary, while "C" Company's P.M. platoon under Jemadar Mohd Hyat was sent off at the double to the assistance of Makhmad Baz. (This left only "C" Company's Dogra platoon on the southern sector of the perimeter, but no further troops were available.) At the same time the two carriers were sent back to protect the lorries of the Malay M.T. Company which were already at the embussing point with only light local protection.

For the sake of clarity it will be necessary here to break the chronological sequence of events and recount the apparent plans of the enemy and what befell the Garhwalis and the two carriers.

There seems little doubt that since the withdrawal across the Kuantan river the Japanese had been moving their forces round through the jungle well to the north of the aerodrome, outside the range of patrols, and preparing to launch concerted attacks from the west and north-west timed for dusk on 3rd January. Owing to the thick nature of the "blucher" it is doubtful if the various columns can have been in communication with one another, and all were probably acting on a timed programme.

Whether or not they were aware that the Brigade had started to withdraw is uncertain, but if they were not they showed their usual opportunism. The parties that the two carriers had met near the Victory Camp road junction immediately started to prepare an ambush on the main road. Mines were hastily laid in the road and positions chosen on the high bank covering them. Troops occupying these positions were in possession of weapons firing a proportion of armour-piercing bullets.

The Garhwalis in their lorries ran straight into this ambush, but luckily before the enemy could complete their preparations by felling trees across the road. Several vehicles were lost on the mines and some casualties sustained, but the bulk of the convoy was able to burst its way through.

One of the two 2nd Sikh carriers was put out of action, but the gunner, though wounded in the leg, seized the Bren gun and continued to engage the enemy from the roadside ditch. This much was reported by an officer of the Royal Garhwal Rifles, but, due to the dispersal of prisoners of war and the rapid release of survivors after the war, it has not been possible to discover the identity of this individual, though it is believed that it was Havildar Mir Badshah.

The 5th Field Regiment and Brigade Headquarters in turn ran into the same ambush, but the sequence of events had been too rapid to allow the enemy completely to block the road, and all got through with only comparatively light losses. Had the withdrawal of the Brigade been timed for only half an hour later the consequences might have been much more serious.

To return to the scene in Brigade Headquarters Camp, where the sound of heavy firing had been reported from "B" Company's position. This firing heralded the first of the Japanese assaults, launched on the north-west corner of the aerodrome just as "B" Company's Sikh and P.M. platoons were about to take up their new positions. Though caught on the move, these platoons maintained their discipline and were able to close on their new front while the Japanese poured out on to the aerodrome. Not long afterwards "B" Company

was to find the Japanese streaming through from the camp in their rear, but by closing on their centre and taking up all-round defensive positions they were able to form an island of resistance round which the Japanese surged on to assault the empty aerodrome buildings.

On the western Brigade Headquarters Camp perimeter the Gunners had just left their infantry positions on the wire, and the 2nd Sikh Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company were just moving to take up their new line when the Japanese second assault arrived. This was directed on the front just evacuated by the Gunners, where the enemy had managed to creep up close to the wire under cover of the "blucher" and the growing darkness. Within a matter of seconds they were swarming over the wire along a front of some two hundred yards, using blankets to help them surmount this obstacle. As each party arrived on the inside of the wire it formed up and rushed forward into the camp, screaming, yelling, letting off fire crackers and firing its rifles in all directions, while further parties could be heard jabbering to one another while they forced their way through the "blucher" up to the wire.

It is perhaps as well for the 2nd Sikhs that the enemy's orders were so obviously to create as much chaos as possible in the camp and to make straight for the aerodrome, for the attack had found the weakest place on the perimeter and had again caught the defenders on the move. Within a very short space of time half a dozen huts and some of the Brigade Headquarters and Gunner lorries had been set on fire, and the light from the flames, contrasting with the rapidly increasing darkness, added more confusion to the scene, in which parties of Japanese seemed to be everywhere. The number of enemy taking part in this second assault was estimated to be about one battalion.

Despite the violence of the attack, the various posts of Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company were able to rally in little groups around the Brigade Signal Exchange, where slit trenches were already prepared. Here they put up a determined defence and subsequently had the satisfaction of being able to count forty-two dead Japanese. The first wave of the attackers, sweeping on, over or round these positions and leaving them to be dealt with by succeeding waves, rushed on through the camp, setting fire to all they could, taking "B" Company in the rear, and cutting off the sole remaining platoon of "C" Company (the Dogra platoon: Jemadar Parmodh Singh), together with Company Headquarters (Subadar Gul Badshah).

In the midst of this confusion the R.A. and Brigade Headquarters managed to get clear, the Gunners of the section which had been in action near the R.A.F. lines having to fight off the Japs with bayonets before being able to limber up. 2nd Sikh unit transport under Lieutenant Brunner was evacuated at the same time.

Many acts of gallantry were performed during this chaotic half-hour, and though the Battalion as a whole was caught off balance there was no lack of initiative on the part of sections or individuals. Examples which can be quoted are those of Jemadar Manak Khan, who saw a party of Japanese go to ground in a slit trench and who crept up and killed the lot by rolling in two grenades, escaping himself with no more serious hurt than two bullet holes in his steel helmet; the Carrier Platoon Commander (Subadar Mehr Khan), who from his carrier managed to get in a whole magazine burst down a ride in the trees, a burst reported to have killed a full score of Japs; the party of "jawans" who fought it out with a similar number of the enemy in a kicking, biting mass on the ground behind the Brigadier's office; Captain Harvey (by then Staff Captain), who, remembering that the war diary was still on his office desk, was seen to dash along the veranda of that hut, closely pursued by two Japanese, dart in through the door, grab the diary, dive out through the window and duck back under the hut, while his pursuers followed him out through the window and ran on into the darkness. Nor was Regimental honour upheld by the "jawans" alone, as the followers took their full share in the fighting, armed with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on.

Shortly after the Gunners and M.T. had got clear and during a lull in the fighting, Colonel Cumming with his orderly and the Signal Havildar (Havildar Ahmed Khan) went off to see what was happening on the southern flank, which the dispatch of "C" Company's Pathan and P.M. platoons to Victory Camp had left undefended. The Adjutant (Captain Grimwood) and Subadar-Major Rai Singh were left to reorganize the defences against the next waves of the attack which could be heard assembling near the wire, and to try to re-establish communications with "B" Company and "C" Company Headquarters, the telephone lines to both of which had gone dead.

Some time later Colonel Cumming sent his orderly back to fetch the Adjutant. The latter officer's departure was somewhat delayed by a fresh attack on H.Q. Company's position, but when this had been beaten off he joined the C.O. near the entrance road, between the inner and outer belts of wire. As he arrived, enemy to the strength of about one company advanced on Battalion Headquarters through the coconuts and started to climb the wire, silhouetted against the rising moon.

The first section over attacked the two officers with bayonets, knocking them both down in the first assault. From their position on the ground the C.O. and Adjutant succeeded in shooting six of the seven with their revolvers, but the fourth and last man that he killed fell on top of Colonel Cumming, knocking him unconscious with his steel helmet.

When he came to, Colonel Cumming managed to reach Battalion Headquarters with the aid of the Signal Havildar, although suffering from two bayonet wounds in the stomach.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming, V.C.

The fighting during the next hour is perhaps best described in the words of Sir Compton Mackenzie in his *Eastern Epic*:

“Battalion Headquarters consisted of about forty men (runners, signallers and intelligence staff), who proceeded to put up a magnificent fight. There seemed abundant ammunition and the leading enemy waves suffered heavily. Then ammunition began to run short, but in Colonel Cumming’s Bren gun carrier were five more boxes. This was now backed up to the trench and Cumming managed to throw them down. As he was getting out of the carrier the driver, Sepoy Albel Singh, handed him a tommy-gun—a weapon he had never previously used. However, he turned it on a swarm of Japanese and got back into the trench.

“The yellow swarm started another attack from the rear, but stopped at a grass hut behind the position, some climbing on the roof, some inside and some crawling under the raised floor. Cumming told the Subadar-Major to open rapid fire on the hut and took his carrier round to the back of it. Between his tommy-gun and the rapid fire, all the Japs in the hut were slaughtered.

“It was now 9 p.m. Cumming ordered the Subadar-Major to begin the withdrawal, while he went forward to ‘C’ Company to order its withdrawal. While on the way he was three more times wounded, and fainted. When he came to, the driver told him there was a road-block in the cutting on the line of withdrawal, and there were now several wounded men in the back of the carrier. . . . The cutting was held by the Japs, who had put a tree across the road. Cumming told Albel Singh to charge the cutting as the tree was held up by the bank and there was room for the carrier to pass under it. A mine exploded under the carrier and blew it into the air, but it came down with tracks undamaged and went on. A shower of grenades was thrown from the bank, but these bounced off the rabbit-wire that covered the top of the carrier and burst harmlessly in the road. Machine-gun fire was opened in front and several bullets passed through the carrier. . . . Rifle fire was also opened and some of the wounded men were wounded afresh. Cumming’s right arm was shattered. Finally an armour-piercing bullet pierced the carrier to hit Albel Singh in both thighs. Nevertheless he drove on through the road-block and the carrier reached Brigade Headquarters, where he and his C.O. were evacuated to hospital. Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming was the first British officer of the Army in India to be awarded the Victoria Cross in the Second World War.”

As this Regimental History is being written, Brigadier Cumming, now in retirement in Cyprus, is once more facing danger of death as a volunteer police officer among the terrorist E.O.K.A. insurgents of that island.

In addition to the C.O.’s decoration, the immediate award of a Military Cross was made to Subadar-Major Rai Singh for his organization of the defence and subsequent attempts to extricate what was left of the Battalion, the story

of which will be told later. There is regrettably no record that the conduct of the two men who continued to drive in spite of crippling wounds received recognition; but in this connection see paragraph at foot of p. 386.

Meanwhile the Adjutant,* who had become engaged with another section of the enemy on regaining his feet after the initial attack on the C.O. and himself, had made his way alone to contact "C" Company Headquarters.

Moving along in the darkness in the same direction as the enemy had not been difficult, but on arriving and finding "C" Company's remaining platoon position empty (the Subadar-Major had succeeded in getting through on the telephone and had ordered "C" Company to close on Battalion Headquarters), he had found it impossible to return against the general direction of the advance. He therefore edged his way down to the main road, where he contacted the two carriers from the standing patrol (at that time returning from a sortie in the direction of Kuantan), and with one of them set out to discover the fate of two platoons which had been sent to Victory Camp.

As they passed the entrance to Brigade Headquarters Camp all was quiet, but on approaching the Victory Camp road fork the carriers ran into the ambush. By now the roadside was littered with damaged and burning vehicles and the two carriers had some difficulty in fighting their way through, both being riddled with armour-piercing bullets and sustaining some damage from grenades. Nothing was to be seen or heard of the two platoons from the main road, and to turn off was impossible. The Adjutant with the carriers therefore continued on down the road towards "D" Company.

On the way the Staff Captain and Captain Pomeroy were encountered advancing to the help of the rest of the Battalion with two platoons of "D" Company and an armoured car of the Malay Volunteers. The third platoon of "D" Company had been left to guard a dangerous defile on the road (see map) which the enemy had to be prevented from occupying at all costs. This defile, as will be seen, later justified fully the apprehension felt in regard to it.

While fresh plans were being made in the light of the Adjutant's knowledge, a message was received from the Brigadier forbidding the commitment of "D" Company in the battle and ordering its withdrawal to Gambang. At this moment the carrier containing Colonel Cumming and five other casualties arrived, and the Adjutant took over from the wounded driver and drove back to Brigade Headquarters. The dangerous defile was now evacuated in accordance with the Brigadier's order withdrawing "D" Company—a move that, as will be seen, spelt disaster very shortly afterwards to Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company retiring from the camp, and also to "B" Company retiring down the same road some time later. It was the most tragic error.

* Capt. Grimwood, whose account of the 2nd Sikhs in this campaign this record closely follows.

Let us then return to the story of Battalion Headquarters and those left in Brigade Headquarters Camp, melancholy though it is. With the departure of the C.O. in his carrier to contact "B" Company, Subadar-Major Rai Singh became the senior officer present. He immediately set about reorganizing the defence of headquarters, now grouped closely about the Brigade Signal Exchange, and as has already been narrated, he succeeded in contacting "C" Company and bringing in Company Headquarters and the remaining platoon to the same area. By about 9 p.m. the enemy attacks had ceased as they, having overrun the camp, were now all concentrating on the aerodrome. Rai Singh therefore decided to continue the withdrawal previously ordered.

Leaving the camp with its wreckage of huts and vehicles and advancing cautiously down the Gambang road, the small force saw no sign of the enemy until they reached the scene of the ambush where the Victory Camp road debouched. Here were more wrecked vehicles and a good many corpses, but the enemy had abandoned this position, and Rai Singh's force advanced with more confidence in the direction of Gambang. About four miles farther on they reached the defile which "D" Company had been so careful to deny to the enemy until they had been ordered to withdraw. Here the leading troops were hailed in English and were foolish enough to be misled into entering the trap by what turned out to be an English-speaking Japanese. As they advanced a withering fire was poured on them from both sides, and many were killed. Subadar-Major Rai Singh managed to extricate the survivors, and, having split them into three parties under himself, Subadar Gul Badshah and Subadar Mehr Khan, gave orders for each party to make its way independently through the jungle. In this only Subadar Mehr Khan's party was successful, forty men led by the wounded Subadar rejoining the Brigade at Maran two days later. Of the other two parties, some were killed, some succeeded in hiding themselves in friendly villages for periods varying up to the whole duration of the war, but the majority became prisoners of war.

The Subadar-Major's force fell into the ambush at about 11 p.m. on 3rd January, and the noise of firing was heard by "D" Company, who had eventually been granted permission to lie out just forward of Gambang in the hope of collecting survivors from the Battalion. In the early hours of the 4th a second burst of fire was heard, and it was subsequently learnt that this marked the tragic falling of "B" Company into the same trap.

It will be recollected that "B" Company had been holding the right flank of the airfield defences when the retirement commenced. What had happened was that as things had quietened down on this sector of the perimeter, Subadar Mohd Ali had led "B" Company down the aerodrome road and across the main road into the jungle to the south. After proceeding for several miles westward through the jungle the Company had again emerged on the road, and thinking themselves clear of danger, had continued confidently down this in

the direction of Gambang. Unfortunately the point at which they hit the road was little less than half a mile short of the ambush, and "B" Company had met the same fate as Rai Singh's force. In this case however, no survivors of "B" Company got through to rejoin the Brigade.

Anyone who has tried to lead a party through Malayan jungle in the darkness will understand why both these parties made use of the road instead of sticking to the bush; and anyhow they had no warning of Japanese penetrating along the road to lay ambushes.

Little is known of what befell "C" Company's P.M. and Pathan platoons, which had been sent, as related above, to hold off the Japanese threat from the direction of the Victory Camp. After fighting a staunch battle against overwhelming odds in the clearing beyond Victory Camp (during which they suffered a good many casualties), they were gradually forced back towards the road-block, from which they could hear periodic bursts of firing in their rear. They then found pressure slackening, and a little later sounds of action from the direction of Brigade Headquarters Camp also ceased. The survivors therefore made their way southward to the Pahang river, where, after various attempts to obtain boats in which to make their way upstream, they eventually broke up into small parties. What happened to all of these is not known, though many were later taken prisoner, but one party at least, under Jemadar Makhmad Baz, succeeded in avoiding capture, and Makhmad Baz himself was still at liberty on the cessation of hostilities, having by that time made his way up to Burma and Indo-China and south again to Thailand.

Though the outcome of this battle left the 2nd Sikhs with a total strength of 220 all ranks, it must not be thought that the enemy had it all his own way. Though no computation of enemy casualties was possible, all the scattered units engaged were confident that they had "killed their own weight in Japs," and this may well be the case as in the final assault the Japanese were reckless in the way they advanced in tightly bunched groups, and in the hand-to-hand fighting the Battalion had the advantage that every man had been issued with six extra grenades in order to clear the Brigade dump.

Nor despite these losses must it be thought that the Battalion did anything but enhance its reputation as a fighting unit. Though the object of the Brigade had been to withdraw without engaging the enemy, two companies and a skeleton headquarters of the 2nd Sikhs had had to withstand the brunt of a planned attack by the main force of the enemy, intended to annihilate the whole Brigade. The safe withdrawal indeed, of the remainder of the Brigade was directly attributable to the part played by the 2nd Sikhs, and it was their action too, which enabled the Gunners and Brigade Headquarters to get clear. The immediate award of decorations to the C.O. and Subadar-Major was in tribute to the gallantry displayed by the whole Battalion in its fight against overwhelming odds.

Finally, it must not be thought that the 2nd Sikhs were abandoned to their fate by the rest of the Brigade. The Divisional Commander's orders to the Brigadier had emphasized the necessity of retaining his Brigade intact for future use, and though the 5/11th Sikhs in particular were urgent in their demands to be allowed to go to the help of the Battalion, permission was categorically refused by the Commander of 9th Division. In this he was undoubtedly right, and must be upheld in making an unpleasant decision.

The story of the remainder of the withdrawal from Pahang requires but a brief description. The night of 3rd/4th January was spent by "D" Company just forward of Gambang, hoping against hope that some survivors from the battle for the aerodrome would make their way back. None appeared, and next morning what was left of the Battalion joined with heavy hearts in the general withdrawal to Maran. On arrival there permission was granted for a last attempt to contact survivors, and a party under Major Hawkins went back six miles to a demolished bridge with a bugler to sound the Regimental Call. To the intense delight of everyone, Subadar Mehr Khan and his party of forty men were contacted next morning, and there were high hopes that more would follow. Mehr Khan's party however, was to be the only one.

On the night of the 5th the Brigade withdrew again, and next day the 2nd Sikhs were detached from the remainder of the Brigade and sent back over the Pahang river to The Gap on Frazers Hill.

While the Kuantan battle was being fought, a disaster to 11th Division at Slim Bridge had occurred, and the first east-west road was open to the Japanese. Our forces in Malaya were therefore now in such straits that even such a battered remnant of a battalion as the 2nd Sikhs could still serve a useful purpose. Their new role was to prevent the enemy moving armoured forces over from the west to reinforce their troops in the east.

The Retreat to Singapore

The little hamlet known as The Gap consisted of a first-class hotel and a few Europeans' cottages situated on the highest point on the Kuala Lumpur—Raub road at about 7,000 feet. As it turned out, the enemy made no attempt to use this road, and the two days spent in these delightful surroundings gave the 2nd Sikhs a much-needed rest and an opportunity for reorganization.

"D" Company was still more or less complete, and it was found possible to form a second company consisting of two platoons of mixed P.Ms. and Pathans and one platoon of mixed Dogras and Sikhs, and still retain a skeleton H.Q. Company. Command devolved on Major (now Lieutenant-Colonel) Hawkins, and he had as officers Grimwood (Adjutant), Holmes (Quartermaster), Brunner (H.Q. Company), and Pomeroy ("D" Company). The Battalion strength was now 220.

On 7th January the remainder of 22nd Brigade (less the 5/11th Sikhs who had been detached to 11th Division) arrived in Tras and Tranum, and for the first time 9th Division were assembled as a whole, 8th Brigade having been sent to cover the river crossings at Temerloch and Jerantut. For the first time, too, the Division was to be out of contact with the enemy for a period, as the Japanese made no attempt to cross the Pahang river or exploit the Frazers Hill road.

The enemy were still making rapid progress on the west coast however, against the now exhausted 11th Division, and 9th Division had soon to fall back in conformation. The 2nd Sikhs accordingly rejoined 22nd Brigade in Tras. After an earnest request by Colonel Hawkins that they be allowed to remain behind and fight as a guerilla force in the Japanese rear had been refused, they continued the withdrawal via Bentong to Segamat.

Segamat lay in approximately the centre of the Mersing Line about which so much had been heard in the last few weeks as the place where the Japanese advance would be brought to an abrupt halt. This line was held by the Australian 8th Division, who had so far not been in action. On reaching the line 9th Indian Division was to come under command of General Gordon Bennett, the commander of the Australian Division, while the remainder of III Corps passed through to obtain a much-needed rest in the rear.

It was understood that a strong defensive position had been built from coast to coast, running from Mersing in the east, through Segamat, to Muar in the west, the area of the latter town being held by the 45th Indian Brigade which had just arrived in the country.

On reaching Segamat, however, it was found that the extensive minefields, belts of wire, and concrete emplacements for all battalion automatic weapons, which unit commanders had been led to expect, were figments of imagination. In fact battalion positions had not even been selected and this task had to be undertaken immediately.

Typical of the confusion then reigning was the order received by the 2nd Sikhs to link up with the "fresh M.G. Battalion" on their flank, which when at last found consisted of the twenty British officers of a disbanded Malay Volunteer unit, armed with pistols. 22nd Brigade was allotted a sector just north of the town of Segamat, and the 2nd Sikhs area included the bridge carrying the Jasin road over the Muar river. Two days were spent in hastily preparing defences while the whole of 11th Division, with all its motor transport, streamed through on its way to the rear.

On 14th January the Japanese walked into a skilfully laid ambush of the 2/30th Australian Battalion near Gemas, which caused them some 400 casualties and had the effect of slowing up their incautious advance. As a result nothing was seen of the enemy on 22nd Brigade's front until the 16th, except aircraft and a few small patrols.

Things had not been going so well on the Muar front (near the west coast) however, where the Japanese threw their fresh Imperial Guards Division against the raw and untried 45th Indian Brigade. The attack was launched on the 16th, and within forty-eight hours the Brigade had been virtually destroyed, only two of all the officers surviving. The two Australian battalions sent to their rescue fared no better, and a brigade of the newly landed 18th Division was also soon in trouble. The withdrawal started again.

On the 19th 22nd Brigade moved back to a position some five miles north of Labis, where the road and railway lie some three-quarters of a mile apart and are separated by thick jungle country. The 2nd Sikhs were detailed to hold the main position, with the rest of the Brigade echeloned to the rear, and as the country lent itself to the plan, an ambush manned by "D" Company was laid where the road ran through a deep cutting over a gentle rise. The composite company under Captain Williams (who had rejoined at Segamat) had the task of blocking the railway.

Two days were spent in the preparation of this ambush and in waiting for the enemy to arrive. The plan was to allow as many Japanese as possible to enter the 600 yards defile before blowing up a culvert behind them and destroying those trapped with grenades and tommy-guns, while the battalion mortars and the 25-pounder battery shelled the road behind. After the trap had been sprung the 2nd Sikhs were to withdraw to Labis behind the rest of the Brigade; Battalion Headquarters and one platoon of the composite company by way of the main road, the railway detachment via the railway line, and "D" Company by a circuitous jungle track to the east of the road.

At about 4.30 p.m. on the 21st the enemy arrived, marching up the road in column with only a small party as vanguard, and the trap was successfully sprung. The demolition failed to go off, but a goodly number of Japanese were caught in the cutting and "D" Company dealt faithfully with these, while even greater numbers were destroyed by the mortar and artillery fire on the road to the rear. Jemadar Shankar Singh and another scout who had been posted some two miles down the road vouched for this.

The order to retire again was now given, and "D" Company set off on its path round the right flank. Unfortunately, time had not allowed of this track being fully reconnoitred, and after a mile or two it was found to peter out suddenly in the middle of a swamp. Darkness had fallen by this time, and the remaining few miles to Labis took the company the whole night to cover, the going being alternate patches of watery swamp and thick and thorny jungle. To their surprise, on arriving at the rendezvous at 9 a.m. next morning, they found the Japanese already in possession. What had happened was that 22nd Brigade had received sudden orders to withdraw to Kluang during the night, and though Lieutenant-Colonel Hawkins had obtained permission to remain in

Labis with one platoon and sufficient motor transport to carry the whole of "D" Company, they had nevertheless been ordered to withdraw at dawn after blowing up the road bridge over the railway.

This meant a loss of half its strength to the Battalion plus a further two officers (Grimwood and Pomeroy) and was a serious blow. Only slightly was it eased by the addition of the twenty men under Jemadar Firoz Khan, who had made their way down from Kuantan to Endau, and who had rejoined with Captain Campbell just before the ambush was sprung. What was worse, it tended to counteract the raised spirits resulting from the successful action at the trap.

"D" Company lost no time in making their way down the line of the railway as far as Kluang, but they were never able to get ahead of the enemy again, and much time was lost in minor encounters with small bodies of Japanese. At Kluang they found themselves involved in the Japanese assault on the demolished bridge over the river and had to make a two-day detour through the flooded jungle before finding a crossing. When they eventually reached the town they found that they had once again been forestalled by the enemy, who this time were present in great strength, and who deployed aircraft as well as considerable ground forces to hunt them down. The company had by now been without food for eight days and it was obvious that the very size of the party (105 all ranks) was making progress slow. The two officers therefore decided to split the company into small parties of fours and fives which could more easily obtain food and which had a better chance of slipping through the Japanese lines. Most of these parties got as far as the Johore Causeway, only to find it already demolished, while the Company Headquarters party, consisting of Pomeroy, Grimwood, C.H.M. Gul Ajaib, and Sepoy Sazi Khan, were taken prisoner on the bridgehead itself at dawn on the 3rd February, having made the understandable error of mistaking the Japanese troops in position there for Gurkhas.

Meanwhile what remained of the Battalion had taken over the eastern defences of the Kluang aerodrome from the Bhawalpur State Forces Battalion on the morning of 22nd January. The rest of the perimeter was manned by the 3/17th Dogra Regiment, while the 5/11th Sikhs were on the left flank north of the Yong Peng road, and the 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles at Paloh, some four miles north of the aerodrome.

At this time an Australian Brigade and the 8th Brigade were withdrawing from Yong Peng, while farther west the battered remains of the 11th Division were collecting in the Batu Pahat area.

For two days local patrols made no contact with the enemy, but on the night of the 23rd three rifle companies of the 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles arrived from Paloh, where they reported their headquarters to have been over-

run by enemy in great strength. These companies were placed under command of the 2nd Sikhs.

The following morning Brigade ordered Paloh to be retaken, the plan being for the 2nd Sikhs and the Dogras to advance astride the railway while the 5/11th Sikhs made a detour and came in on Paloh from the west. The Bhawalpur State Forces Battalion were again to take over the aerodrome defence. When the advance started it had hardly progressed more than a few hundred yards when Captain Williams reported bodies of enemy moving down the railway, and opened fire. On receiving information of this, Brigadier Painter ordered the 2nd Sikhs to hold their present positions and to contain the enemy by fire, placing one battery 5 Field Regiment under command and two further batteries in support of the Battalion. Thanks to excellent patrol reports, considerable shelling of the enemy was possible, and this caused them to withdraw. Throughout the night the 2nd Sikhs remained in this position, continually patrolling but without further contact with the enemy. While this action was going on, the Brigade received what was to be its last visit from the Divisional Commander, General Barstow, who was killed only three days later while once again trying to make his way forward on foot when contact between 22nd Brigade and 8th Brigade in their rear had been lost.

The following day (25th January) it was learned that the decision had been taken to withdraw all forces from the mainland to Singapore Island, and that the 9th Indian Division would move down the line of the railway while the Australians withdrew down the Ayer Hitam—Johore road and 11th Indian Division along the west coast road from Batu Pahat.

The first step led 22nd Brigade back through Rengam, where 8th Brigade took over the front, and where the night was spent after an unsuccessful bombing attack by enemy planes. Before leaving Kluang, Battalion Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the Royal Garhwal Rifles had rejoined, having succeeded in making their way through the enemy but having become lost in the jungle south of Paloh.

The story of the rest of the withdrawal is soon told. The withdrawal continued during 26th January, and although continually hunted by enemy aircraft flying just above the tree-tops, cover was too good amongst the rubber to afford them any observation. Late that afternoon the Battalion was ordered to hold a position north of Layang-Layang while the 8th Brigade withdrew through it. It was tactically unsound and unsupported by artillery, but fortunately the Japs elected to by-pass it though coming close on the heels of the 8th Brigade.

This resulted in the 22nd Brigade finding the enemy across their line of retreat, and in avoiding them, touch with the 8th Brigade was lost. There followed a march through dense jungle which is best described in Colonel Hawkins' own words.

“From this point onwards it is difficult to describe with any accuracy the progress of 22nd Brigade, for very soon after having left the railway we ran into such dense jungle that 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles had to send a platoon ahead to cut a path before we could move at all. Not only did this at times reduce our pace to something less than a quarter of a mile an hour, but it also caused the whole formation to string itself out in a single line the best part of a mile long, and the resulting constant concertina-ing was most trying and tiring. Moving on a compass bearing, the way was in addition undulating, falling in and out of nullahs, leading through swamps, and scrambling up steep hillsides. The sufferings of the wounded must have been beyond words.

“The 29th January saw us still struggling southwards in the same halting and disjointed manner. The men were now becoming very tired—they had had almost no rest since Kluang, apart from a few odd moments snatched here and there, and little enough food. Whenever there was a halt (and how many halts weren't there on a journey such as this!) little groups sat down to rest, and often were almost immediately asleep; when awakened they were a few yards behind the next batch, and in this manner the column became more and more strung out. There was nothing else to do but continue to plod on and try to make the best of things, encouraging the men continually, but there was now no doubt that lack of food and sleep was very definitely beginning to tell on them. In addition, heavy showers not only soaked us through and through but made the going slippery and slimy, and especially was this the case for the stretcher-bearers. During the night the jungle began to thin out somewhat, but rising ground grew steeper and became even more broken up. There was now no attempt to preserve any sort of formation. The advanced guard, the main body, and the rear-guard (still 2nd Sikhs) became linked into one continuous chain, and had this not been the case many more parties and individuals would have become lost.

“Towards the dawn of the 30th the trees thinned further and suddenly gave place to an open undulating area under pineapple cultivation: these at least meant food. Here also by great good fortune we found a small Chinese rice store and managed to cook ourselves a meal, literally the first food we had had except an odd pineapple since the morning of 27th January. It needs little imagination to realise just how welcome this was. Somewhat refreshed, but still very weary, the advance was then continued roughly parallel with the railway. Later during a check halt almost the whole Brigade fell asleep, and when we pushed on once more one whole company of 5/11th Sikh Regiment and several other small parties, including groups of 2nd Sikhs were left behind. This was not discovered till a subsequent halt.

“The following day, the 31st January, saw no improvement in our plight. Although in much less tricky country, faster progress was out of the question, first because our pace was regulated by the pace of the stretcher-bearers, and

secondly because it would have caused further stringing out and consequent greater losses of men. 2nd Sikhs numbers had by now shrunk to a total strength of something like sixty or less.

“Shortly before midday we reached a large coolie settlement equipped with a dispensary, and it was decided that the wounded (mostly the 5/11th Sikhs) should be left there with a doctor and some men to look after them. (It is good to know that these men did all eventually recover and return to India.) At this place too, the Brigadier ordered all loads to be lightened. Once again we moved on, and had not gone far before there occurred a small act on the part of the Staff Captain which was to have a significance not foreseeable at that time; this was the picking up and carrying on a stick a piece of dirty white cloth to mark the location of Brigade Headquarters. It was not until the next day that it was realized that this had been taken by many of the troops to signify that the Brigadier had decided to surrender at the first opportunity!

“As darkness fell the advance continued and not long after midnight it became evident that everyone was completely exhausted and that further progress would mean the loss of many men through straggling. At this time I was leading the march and the Brigadier sent forward a message that we would halt and form a perimeter in order to get some rest. Markers were called for and areas allotted. Captains Campbell and Williams were the Battalion markers and they were shown the 2nd Sikhs area and told to wait for the men and direct them to section positions. Later, when the men arrived, neither of these officers could be found. All that had happened, however, was that on sitting down they had fallen asleep, and in the darkness their bodies had been taken for logs!

“The following day, the 1st February, the march was continued. At about 1100 hours we bumped a small party of enemy in the rubber ahead, but owing to the play of sunlight and shadow, and because they did not fire on us, it was not at first possible to distinguish whether they were in fact friend or foe. Some men said they were ‘Gora log,’* others that they were Gurkhas, and it should be remembered that for the last two or three days we had been expecting (or maybe hoping) to contact our own forces. Being uncertain as to who they were, Havildar Haji Ahmed was sent forward to find out, and on reaching the strangers he immediately called out ‘Dushman hai,’ whereupon there was considerable confusion for some minutes and a general scattering for cover, during which the enemy opened fire. (It is not unlikely that they were as uncertain about our identity as we were about theirs.) During this scuffle—for it can hardly be otherwise described—the Battalion lost Subadar Ghander Singh and some twenty men who disappeared and were not seen again when the advance continued, while the 5/11th Sikhs, now not much more than one company strong, became separated from the remainder of the Brigade.

* Gora Log—British soldiers.

“Officers and men were now near the end of their tether and more and more became stragglers. They just could not keep going and many lay down to sleep, while others gallantly struggled on: no food, no sleep, and utter weariness had turned the march into a slow, halting plod during which many now fell by the wayside. This went on till late into the afternoon—groups becoming even more separated from each other—until at last the Brigadier, seeing so many had now reached the limit of their endurance, called a conference of the two battalion commanders and explained that he had learned from local sources that the enemy were present in considerable strength between us and the coast and that the causeway over the Straits of Johore to Singapore had already been destroyed. (As it happened both these facts were true.) He considered the state of the troops made any further efforts impossible and announced that he had reluctantly decided to capitulate.”

As by this time the Battalion had less than a dozen men, the Brigadier gave permission for the officers of the 2nd Sikhs to make an individual attempt to reach Singapore Island, taking such of their men with them as were fit to make the effort. As it turned out, none were capable of further movement, so, shortly after dark, and in the midst of a torrential rainstorm, a party of six officers set out alone. The party consisted of Colonel Hawkins, Captains Campbell and Williams, and three other officers who had obtained similar permission.

Moving off on a compass bearing calculated to take them to a small harbour on the Johore Straits, estimated to be about eleven miles distant, the party had not gone far before it ran into the first body of the enemy. This they managed to evade in the darkness, but the journey became a succession of similar encounters, and as the success of the whole venture depended on getting through to and across the Straits before morning light, each encounter seemed to lessen their hopes. Fortune favoured them however, particularly on one occasion when they fell in with a friendly Chinaman who not only provided them with food and shelter for a short rest, but subsequently guided them through a whole Japanese battalion which was bivouacking in the vicinity, and at three o'clock on 2nd February they came out on the shores of the Straits. Here it looked as though the fates had at last turned against them for, though there were plenty of boats and canoes lying near the beach, all had been holed and sunk, and not one could be found in which to cross to the island lying a mere 1,200 yards away in total darkness. In desperation Colonel Hawkins took the electric torch which they had so far been afraid to use and started flashing it across the water. To their intense delight, the signal was almost immediately answered, and after Hawkins had spelled out a message in Morse explaining who they were they heard a launch put out. This launch turned out to be a naval patrol boat which picked them up and in a few minutes transported them to the island.

Only one other party of 2nd Sikhs succeeded in reaching Singapore, and this consisted of Lieutenant Brunner, Jemadar Ram Singh, and three or four

men who had become detached from the rest of the Brigade and who succeeded in crossing the Straits with a party of the 5/11th Sikhs. As has already been mentioned, several parties of "D" Company got as far as the Straits, but none got across.

The Battle for Singapore Island

By the beginning of February the state of affairs in Singapore and on the island in general can only be described as chaotic. The original strategic defences had been planned and built solely with the idea of meeting the threat of a sea attack from the south, and consisted of 9.2-inch and 15-inch naval guns in heavy emplacements which could mostly fire only out to sea and could not be brought to bear on the mainland to the north. When the defence of the great base of Singapore was a naval, and later an air force, responsibility there had been little object in building defences along the northern shores of the island (where, incidentally, the naval base itself was situated), and subsequent to the Japanese landing, and during their advance from the north, the work had not been put in hand for fear of alarming the civilian population! Now, however, an attack in strength across the Straits was imminent and inevitable, and along the greater part of the coast-line not so much as a single strand of barbed wire had been erected or a single position dug. Indeed, whatever work was undertaken at this late date had to be carried out under the direct observation of the enemy, who not only had complete command of the air but who could cover the whole of the northern shore, and all but one of the aerodromes, with artillery fire.

The troops on the island had been mainly line of communication and administrative details, but now the two Australian Brigades and the shattered remains of the 11th and 9th Indian Divisions had been pulled in, and 2,000 Australian reinforcements and 7,000 men had arrived from which to try to re-form the depleted battalions and units. These reinforcements were mainly raw recruits (many of whom had not even fired a rifle); they had no arms other than rifles; and were in any case far too few, and too deficient in N.C.Os. and officers to replace anything but a small percentage of the troops that units had lost in the fighting on the mainland.

In addition to these reinforcements, the remaining two brigades of the 18th (East Anglian) Division had been landed, as well as the 44th Indian Brigade, but not only were these troops new to the east and unable to tell a Japanese from a Chinaman or Malay, but they had never been in action, and the transport carrying nearly all the heavy equipment of the 18th Division had been sunk *en route*.

There was therefore a hectic scramble of units trying either to find their drafts among the many reinforcement camps which had been set up, or trying to re-form, or being amalgamated with other battalion remnants to form a

reasonable-sized whole. All these scratch battalions and amalgamated battalions were formed into brigades and larger formations, and at the same time everyone taking over their allotted sector worked feverishly to construct some sort of defences.

It was to this scene that the four British officers and half a dozen men arrived, when as the remnant of the 2nd Sikhs with that of the 5/11th Sikhs they were the last "units" to struggle into Singapore.

Next day Colonel Hawkins was contacted by Captain Holmes, the Quartermaster, and Jemadar Teja Singh, the J.Q.M., who reported that they had managed to collect a total strength of about 130 consisting of "B" Echelon personnel, certain Headquarters details, and casualties who had been discharged from hospital. They also reported that 400 reinforcements had arrived for the Battalion, consisting of drafts from all Frontier Force battalions still in India and from the Regimental Centre. These drafts included many old 2nd Sikhs who had been transferred to the new battalions, and had as officers Captain A. J. Stead and Captain I. Shaw; Subadars Banta Singh and Fazal Dad, and Jemadars Sarban Singh, Ghulam Sadig, Fazal Dad,* Sukhdarshan Singh,* Mohd Khan, Abdul Jabar, and Sar Gul.

Colonel Cumming was known to have recovered from wounds sustained at Kuantan and to have been discharged from hospital, and for a time it was hoped that the 2nd Sikhs would be considered sufficiently strong to retain their own identity. This was not to be, however. Colonel Cumming was posted to command a composite battalion formed from the two Jat battalions which had been on the mainland, and took with him Captain Larson (who had all this time been with 8th Brigade) and Captain Holmes. The 2nd Sikhs were amalgamated with the 5/11th Sikhs to form a battalion under Colonel Parkin of the latter regiment. This, in the words of Colonel Hawkins, "had the advantage of being with our old friends alongside whom we had already fought on the mainland and who knew what we were up against. It was a great deal more than most of the island's defenders knew."

The order to amalgamate with the 5/11th Sikhs was received on 6th February, and at the same time the new battalion was ordered to join the 8th Brigade (now in the 11th Indian Division) in the Neesoon area. This was later changed, the new order of battle putting the joint battalion in the 2nd Malay Infantry Brigade in the neighbourhood of Changi. Up to now, however, the reinforcement camp holding the 2nd Sikhs' draft of 400 had refused to release the men to the Battalion, and these did not join until the 9th (i.e., the morning after the Japanese had landed on the island), and then only after the Corps Commander had personally intervened.

As the reinforcements arrived, they and the rest of the composite battalion

* Denotes old 2nd Sikhs.

moved to the latest defence sector to which they had been detailed, a coastal sector on the east side of the island. At the same time some sort of battalion organization was worked out. This organization was as follows :

Commanding Officer	..	Lieutenant-Colonel Parkin, D.S.O.
Adjutant	.. ..	Major Hawkins.
Battalion Headquarters	..	Skeleton formation from both units.
"A" Company	.. ..	Sikhs of 5/11th Sikhs.
"B" Company	.. ..	Dogras of 2nd Sikhs and P.Ms. of 5/11th Sikhs.
"C" Company	.. ..	P.Ms. of 2nd Sikhs (Commander, Captain Brunner).
"D" Company	.. ..	Sikhs of 2nd Sikhs (Commander, Captain Williams).
"E" Company	.. ..	Pathans of 2nd Sikhs (Commander, Captain Campbell).

The equipment available allowed of practically no specialists and rather less than one L.M.G. per platoon, while there was a total of only five tommy-guns for the whole Battalion. None of the reinforcements had bayonets, and there were no stretchers for the wounded.

On the 8th February the Japanese launched their attack across the Straits to the west of the causeway and succeeded in landing some 13,000 troops on the front held by the 22nd Australian Brigade on the night of 8th/9th February, but though the preliminary bombardment had been clearly heard, no information as to the strength of the landing or extent of the subsequent penetration could be learned at battalion level, and the following account by Colonel Hawkins of the subsequent activities of the Battalion clearly shows how little anyone taking part in the battle of Singapore knew of what was going on. No other account of this final phase is available, and as he himself spent some twenty-four hours in hospital after being blown off his motor-cycle, Colonel Hawkins himself is unable to fill in all the gaps. It is for this reason that no details can be given of the actions for which Colonel Hawkins himself and Jem Ram Singh were subsequently awarded the Military Cross.

"The whole of the night of 9th February and all day of 10th February were spent in selecting company positions, reconnoitring alternate ones, digging defences with such tools as we could manage to raise, and putting up wire. By evening considerable progress had been made, all the beach frontage was wired and we had got a telephone out to each company. However, we were no sooner settled into our new area when we received orders to move at once to North-West Singapore and come under orders of Commander Massey Force, the force consisting of 5th Suffolk, 1st Cambridge and ourselves. Thus the after-

noon of 11th February found us holding a cross-roads and coming under fairly heavy mortar and artillery fire and considerable bombing. The mortar fire unfortunately located our motor transport, parked in a belt of trees off the road, but the drivers very coolly got out every vehicle they could, and this amid the blaze and crackle of exploding ammunition. For most of the night we continued to hold this locality under intermittent fire, until early in the morning we received orders to move once again—this time to an area to the west—and arrangements were made for a move at dawn.

“At this time the general situation was most confused, information vague and unsatisfactory, and rumours were rife; it could, however, be gathered that the Australian Division had completely failed to stop the Japanese advance which, proceeding towards the city itself, now appeared to have reached the race-course area and was likely to continue astride the main road to the city.

“The advance to our new position was carried out in good order despite considerable bombing and machine-gunning from the air. On the way we ran into small parties of British and Australian troops streaming back down the road. Somewhere about 10 a.m. (12th February) all troops, including 5th Suffolks, had passed through us, this last unit seemingly having broken off contact with the enemy. Shortly after this we were subjected to severe bombing, followed by heavy artillery and mortar shelling which caused us a number of casualties. Our new reinforcements stood up well to this, particularly Subadar Fazal Dad’s men in ‘C’ Company. About midday our patrols managed to establish contact with 1st Cambridge on our right flank, but we failed to make contact with anyone on our left. Just about this time two enemy tanks cautiously nosed their way down Bukit Timah road, but withdrew when fired upon. It is possible that this information got back to the gunners in our rear for very soon afterwards heavy artillery concentrations from our own guns fell on our forward companies. Our F.O.O., who at this time was out of communication with his guns, was sent back to get this shelling stopped—it was later learnt that it was Australian. In the meantime the forward companies were withdrawn to another position which they had previously reconnoitred.

“The move had hardly been completed when the F.O.O. returned with orders for another move—this time a withdrawal. We were now under command of Tom Force (Norfolks, Sherwood Foresters, and Recce Battalion). The enemy made no attempt to follow up and we moved into our new position without any trouble. To our right there was now a gap of some 1,000 yards and this was patrolled day and night to maintain contact with the Gordons. The night (12th/13th February) was quiet with no sign of the enemy.

“The following morning the Battalion once again suffered at the hands of its supporting artillery, which practically wiped out the 5/11th Sikh P.Ms. in ‘B’ Company. That evening we were relieved and moved into Brigade Reserve.

Still no reliable information was available as to how the battle went. Next morning saw us on the move again, this time to the north to seal off a reported break-through by the Japanese. When this report proved incorrect the Battalion was switched to yet another position.

“The situation now remained confused and various patrols had brief skirmishes with the enemy, but no major action developed. Throughout the day enemy planes were low overhead, strafing whatever seemed a suitable target, for by now there was no air opposition at all and only an occasional Bofors gun still functioned. No one appeared to know what the situation was and information was contradictory, but it seemed clear that all co-ordinated resistance was coming to an end. Isolated clashes still occurred but there were no further major developments in the Battalion sector.

“At midday the next day (15th February) a car carrying a white flag passed through and along Bukit Timah road, and we learnt that terms were being sought. Subsequently information was received that owing to lack of water (the supply having been cut by the Japanese), the heavy casualties amongst the civilian population caused by the unopposed bombing, and a shortage of ammunition, it had been decided to surrender. Firing ceased when dusk fell and a strange silence took its place. The Battalion remained where it was throughout the night, and the next morning a message was received that all British officers were to hand over to Indian officers and join British troops proceeding to Changi Barracks at the extreme eastern end of the island.”

Thus ended the nine-week Malayan campaign. Before leaving them Major Hawkins called together all the 2nd Sikhs of the Battalion and exhorted them never to lose heart, no matter what lay ahead, to stick together and to help one another in the knowledge that one day the Battalion would be reunited. The parting of officers and men who in many cases had spent their whole service together, and all of whom had shared so many experiences during the brief campaign, is better left undescribed.

The campaign had ended in defeat, but let it not be thought that those taking part in it were dishonoured. From the start the scales were weighted against the men who fought in Malaya. The front had been admittedly starved to supply the more pressing needs for arms and equipment on other fronts; even the manpower of units had been “milked” to raise new battalions. As a result the war was fought without armour of any sort, virtually without air cover, and with insufficient supporting weapons. As far as the Battalion saw it, too, the war was never “fought”: from start to finish it was that most difficult of all military operations, a withdrawal in contact with the enemy, with the higher command never daring to commit as much as a whole battalion for fear it would not be available for use at a later date.

The 2nd Sikhs were in the campaign from first to last, but though they were scarcely out of contact with the enemy for a day, on not a single occasion

were they in action as a battalion. Companies fought independently or were attached to other regiments, and platoons and smaller units fought their own little actions, but though the initiative was always with the enemy our men never failed to uphold the honour of the Regiment. Day by day the men saw the Battalion whittled away on minor actions without ever getting a real chance to get their own back. "A" and "B" Companies lost heavily at Kota Bahru and were later totally destroyed at Kuantan. There also "C" Company lost two of its platoons and Headquarters half of its total strength. "D" Company was lost at Labis, and after that the Battalion virtually ceased to exist; but at no time was there a wavering in morale, and it can truthfully be said that the 2nd Sikhs never failed to do what was asked of them and never lost a position to the enemy.

That greater recognition was not given to their many acts of gallantry is again the misfortune of those who fought in Malaya. From the time of leaving Kelantan to the virtual dissolution of the Battalion, no opportunity was given for the submission of citations, and by the time the war was over, whether rightly or wrongly, a veil was drawn over a campaign which had ended in ignominious defeat. Individual deeds therefore remain unhonoured, and it must be enough to say of any man that he was a 2nd Sikh.

*Capitulation of Singapore, 15th February 1942—Captivity to the end
of the War, 15th August 1945*

The first act of the Japanese on taking Indian Army prisoners was to isolate the British officers, and from capitulation onwards these were to see nothing of their troops or fellow Indian officers until they met again after the war was over.

British officers of Indian regiments were confined in various camps with prisoners from British, Australian and Dutch units, and here is a brief account of the fortunes of those of the 2nd Sikhs.

Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming, V.C., M.C., had left hospital to command a composite battalion of the Jat Regiment during the fighting on Singapore island. He refused to surrender at the time of capitulation and led a mixed party of nine British and three Indian officers through the Japanese lines to the coast. After many adventures in sampans and junks, he with ten of his companions reached Sumatra, crossed the island and arrived at Padang. Here he and his party boarded a small Dutch steamer crowded with fifty British evacuees from Malaya. After further adventures they reached Colombo eight days later.

Captain C. L. Larson, who had been posted to the same Jat Battalion, formed one of Colonel Cumming's escape party. During the journey to the coast he became separated, and nothing is known of his subsequent fate. It is presumed that he was killed in an encounter with the Japanese.



BRIGADIER ARTHUR CUMMING, V.C., O.B.E., M.C.

(From the Portrait by Simon Elwes)

Major L. V. Dart, M.C., was still in hospital at the time of capitulation. He remained a prisoner on Singapore Island until the end of the war, when he was evacuated to India.

Major R. C. Dent was selected to form one of the official evacuation party which left Singapore in various small vessels on 13th and 14th February. The ship on which he was carried was bombed and sunk, and Dent was severely wounded. He died of wounds in an open boat. The story of this terrible boat journey, during which all but three of the more than one hundred men in the boat died of thirst and starvation during a voyage lasting over a month, has been written by an officer of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the sole British survivor. Major Ackworth of the 4th Sikhs was another victim of this tragic voyage. The story has no place here.

The senior officers actually with the Battalion at the time of the capitulation did not attempt to escape, as they felt it their duty to stay with their troops in the hope of being able to do something for their welfare. Of these Lieutenant-Colonel G. J. Hawkins, Captain E. Holmes, Captain D. B. Sedgwick, Captain W. I. Campbell, Captain E. C. Brunner and Captain I. Shaw (who had arrived with the large reinforcement draft) were at first confined in Changi P.O.W. camp. In May 1943, they were sent to Siam to work as coolies on the construction of the Burma-Siam railway, survived this ordeal, and returned to Changi in October, from where they were released on the Japanese surrender.

Captain J. C. Hill and Captain H. P. Williams were also confined in Changi. They were sent to Siam to work on the railway in December 1942, and remained in that country till the end of the war.

Captain A. J. Stead, who had landed with the last draft but who served with a mixed unit and did not join the Battalion, made his escape by sampan with one other officer. They eventually arrived in Sumatra in time to be evacuated from there by the Royal Navy.

Major I. R. Grimwood and Captain E. C. Pomeroy, who had been lost with "D" Company at Segamat and who were captured together whilst attempting to cross the straits to Singapore Island, were at first confined in Kuala Lumpur gaol, where they were joined by Captain B. W. Harvey who had fallen into Japanese hands when 22nd Brigade surrendered. The three of them were sent to the Burma-Siam railway in October 1942. Pomeroy, who became separated from the other two, made an escape attempt from Tamarkan camp in March 1943. After three weeks of liberty he was retaken by the Japanese and "executed"—i.e., bayoneted to death. (The Japanese officer responsible for this crime was hanged for it after the war.) Harvey survived the work on the railway until its completion, but died of malaria and sunstroke shortly afterwards in March 1945. Grimwood remained on the railway until the spring of 1945, when he was sent to Nakom Nayok on the Indo-Chinese border. He was still in this camp at the time of the Japanese surrender.

Of the three Indian King's Commissioned Officers, Lieutenant Gurcharan Singh, Lieutenant Ishar Singh and Captain Zacharia, I.M.S., more will be told later.

Of the J.C.Os. and I.O.Rs. none managed to escape to India, but a few succeeded in evading capture and remaining at liberty till the end of the war. Most of these were men who had been left behind at Kuantan and who had not succeeded in rejoining the Battalion before the fall of Singapore.

Jemadar Khan Gul, Havildar Malik Khan, and two I.O.Rs. returned to Kuantan and were kept hidden by the Sultan of Pahang at Pekan. Later they joined up with Force 136 officers parachuted into that district and were able to be of considerable assistance.

Jemadar Makhmad Baz opened a shop in Kuantan bazaar, under cover of which he hid and looked after some fourteen wounded men. He was eventually betrayed to the Japanese, but luckily for him he was absent when they made their raid. From Kuantan he made his way north to Kelantan, where he operated for some time with Chinese guerillas. From there he succeeded in reaching Mandalay, where he was again betrayed but again escaped. His subsequent wanderings took him as far afield as Saigon, and the end of the war found him back again in southern Siam, where he too was working with Force 136 officers.

By far the greatest number of the J.C.Os. and I.O.Rs., however, were taken prisoner, and the full story of their sufferings will never be known.

The first effect of capitulation and subsequent imprisonment was alike in the case of Indian and British prisoners—the complete collapse of morale. This showed itself in the non-recognition of rank and the refusal to obey orders, and in the formation of cliques and parties. Soon this took a communal turn and the camps, which had originally been of all classes on a regimental basis, split into Muslim and non-Muslim blocks in which each J.C.O. had his own little following. This played into the hands of Captain Mohan Singh, a King's Commissioned Indian Officer who had started his traitor Indian National Army* shortly after his capture on 12th December. By working on this split he soon managed to persuade practically all the Sikh and Hindu prisoners to join his "army," as well as a few politically minded or malcontent Muslims.

It is not clear what privileges these "volunteers" enjoyed over the other prisoners of war, and they were certainly not armed, but as the British power was generally considered to be broken, many must have thought it as well to be "in on the ground floor" when the Japanese invaded India.

At first the 2nd Sikhs, led by Lieutenant Gurcharan Singh, Captain Zacharia, and Subadar Mehr Khan, managed to stay together, but the pressure

* This was the first Indian National Army and must not be confused with the later I.N.A. who actually fought for the Japanese.

on the non-Muslims became too great and they began to waver. The split came shortly after the arrival in Singapore of the party under Lieutenant Ishar Singh and Subadar-Major Rai Singh which had been held prisoner at Kuantan, and on separating nearly all the Sikhs and Dogras joined Mohan Singh.

A few, notably Lieutenant Gurcharan Singh, Company Havildar-Major Dhian Singh, and Battalion Quartermaster-Havildar Makan Singh, remained with the P.Ms. and Pathans, as did all those at the time in the camp "hospital." It is possible that had Subadar-Major Rai Singh been in Singapore from the start he might have held the Dogras and Sikhs loyal, but by the time that he arrived the damage was done and he and the Hindus of his party weakly followed suit.

The greatest credit is due to Subadar Gul Badshah, Subadar Mehr Khan, Subadar Fazal Dad and Jemadar Manak Khan for their strength of will and leadership through which the Pathans and P.Ms. were kept loyal despite the very great pressure brought to bear on them. In this they received great assistance from Captain Zacharia.

Captain Mohan Singh's I.N.A. do not appear to have carried out any military training, and as has been already stated, few if any were armed. They received an issue of old British uniforms however, and were definitely better fed and were required to carry out fewer fatigues than the prisoners of war.

By the end of 1943 the Japanese seem to have realized that they were deriving little or no benefit from Mohan Singh's "army," particularly as he insisted that he was not under their command but must be treated as an ally. They therefore decided to put an end to it and substitute Indian forces that they could utilize. Mohan Singh was imprisoned, his army disbanded, and its members given the choice of reverting to the status of Ps.O.W. or joining the new Japanese sponsored I.N.A., membership of which was to be voluntary. Of the 2nd Sikhs all but twenty-seven elected to become prisoners again, though amongst the twenty-seven were Subadar-Major Rai Singh, Havildar Clerk Sant Ram and Havildar Onkar Chand. Subadar-Major Rai Singh had been one of a party of Mohan Singh's army which had earlier on been sent to Rangoon, and his statement that this party were *ipso facto* transferred to the new I.N.A. without being told anything of the change of status of that army, or knowing of events in Singapore, may well be true.

Those who had the courage to get out met with the greatest brutality from the Japanese and nearly all were shortly after sent to Rabaul or New Guinea.

The 2nd Sikhs in this category appear to have formed part of a party of 3,000 sent to Wae Wae, where they laboured to produce sago as the sole source of food for themselves and the Japanese cut off in that area. Conditions soon became so appalling that the Japanese regularly killed and ate their prisoners.

A very few, including two 2nd Sikh sepoy, managed to escape to Australian or American forces, but of the remainder only eleven were alive when hostilities ceased; and ten of these were killed in an air crash while being flown out to Australia. The one survivor was Jemadar Chint Singh, and he was able to account for the deaths of several hundred of the Battalion. The exact number of 2nd Sikhs who died here or elsewhere of starvation, exhaustion and disease cannot be determined, but it is believed to be between four and five hundred, and includes Lieutenant Ishar Singh; Subadars Siri Chand, Ghander Singh, Ishar Singh and Sukhdarshan Singh; and Jemadars Parmodh, Shankar Singh, Shakti Chand, Chet Singh, Ram Singh, Teja Singh, Bahadur Singh and Fauja Singh.

Not all of those responsible for these brutalities escaped punishment, and it is some consolation to note that after the war Lieutenant Mitsuba was convicted and hanged for (a) killing Havildar Waryam Singh and Lance-Naik Hazara Singh at Paron on 27th August 1944; (b) shooting Sepoy Rulia Singh near Ain on 21st October 1944; (c) shooting eleven prisoners, including Havildar Girdari Lal at Singu on 1st December 1944; (d) beheading Jemadar Lachman Singh of the 6/14th Punjab Regiment and Lance-Naik Angreso Ram at Yawa on 9th January 1945; and (e) shooting Subadar Ishar Singh, Subadar Ghander Singh, Jemadar Bahadur Singh and Jemadar Ram Singh at Yawa on 1st February 1945.

Fate was luckily less unkind to the P.Ms. and Pathans who had remained loyal from the start, though they too had their full share of suffering and casualties. The P.Ms., under Subadar Mehr Khan and Jemadar Manak Khan, (both of whom served periods in a punishment camp for refusing to have anything to do with the I.N.A.) were kept as a coolie labour force on Singapore Island until the end of the war, with the exception of a few months when they were employed in building an aerodrome at Kluang. With them remained the few loyal Sikhs and Dogras.

The Pathans, under Subadar Badshah, were less fortunate. While the P.Ms. were at Kluang they were shipped to the Pelew Islands, in the Caroline group (Pacific Ocean), and here they underwent many hardships. Many died of disease or torture at the hands of the Japanese, and others were crippled for life. Further casualties were caused by Allied bombardment, but the island was not assaulted till the end of the war, when the prisoners were released by American forces. Of the J.C.Os. Jemadar Abdul Jabar and both Jemadar Ali Khan and Jemadar Abdul Qaium sustained permanent injury by being beaten over the head by the Japanese.

An account of the miseries endured by this party is given in *The Gozawa Trial*,* a foreword to which was written by Earl Mountbatten. The strength

* *The Gozawa Trial*, Volume III of the "War Crimes Trials," author C. Sleeman. Edited by Sir David Maxwell Fyffe.

of the party (which included the Pathans of the 2nd Sikhs) was some 3,000, all packed on to the 5,000-ton *Thames Maru*, which left Singapore for Babelthuap in the Pelew Islands on 5th May 1943. Conditions on board were described as bearing "more resemblance to a slave trader of years ago than to a military transport of a so-called civilized power. They begged description."* All the prisoners were under the command of Captain Gozawa Sadaichi (and a party of sixty-one Japanese), and on the island they were employed "on the heaviest kind of labour, such as the construction of aerodromes, the loading and unloading of ships . . . repairing roads, constructing ration, petrol and ammunition dumps, making huts, digging trenches, cutting wood and loading and breaking stones."† As regards conditions of life, these were appalling. The prisoners, fed only on a meagre ration of rice and vegetables, were sometimes kept at work for two or three days on end with only short intervals for rest. Much of the work itself was a breach of the laws and usages of war, and because of the atrocities committed by the Japanese on this island Captain Gozawa and Lieutenant Nakamura with eight N.C.Os. were tried in Singapore in January 1946 for war crimes.

Space does not permit of giving details of the trial, but Nakamura was sentenced to death and executed for gravest inhumanity, including murdering a prisoner by beheading him with a sword. The remainder received varying sentences from twelve years' imprisonment in the case of Gozawa Sadaichi to seven, five and two years in the cases of other offenders. One was acquitted.

The above accounts for the major parties of 2nd Sikh prisoners, but there were others who, for one reason or another, became separated from their companions, and since few of these were recovered after the war little is known of their adventures. One small party at least is known to have been flown to Manchuria, where most of them died of exposure in the snow. Others were in parties sent to New Britain, and from the accounts of survivors it appears that more than half of these were drowned when the ships carrying them were torpedoed. This must have been a particularly perilous route for the Japanese, as one Pathan (who survived the war) was torpedoed no fewer than three times before reaching New Britain. Of many little is known except that they were shipped from Singapore with other batches of prisoners and failed to turn up when peace was declared.

After the Japanese surrender every effort was made to get all prisoners back to India as quickly as possible.

In Singapore Lieutenant-Colonel Hawkins, as one of the liaison officers detailed to contact Indian Ps.O.W., had managed to collect some 250 men of the Battalion. These were in varying states of health, but all were overjoyed

* *Ibid.*, pp. xxxi and xxxiii.

† *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

that their time of suffering was over. In the month that had to be filled in before shipping could be found to get them back to India, better food, an issue of uniform and a few parades worked wonders, and by the time that Colonel Hawkins got his party to Sialkot it was once more unmistakably a unit of the old Battalion.

Other parties came in from all over the Pacific theatre of operations, and such parties first underwent a centrally organized screening in which prisoners were graded as "black," "white" or "grey." The "blacks," those who had joined the Japanese I.N.A., were dismissed and sent direct to their homes, as it was considered inadvisable to allow them to mix with others. The "greys," who were those who had joined Mohan Singh's I.N.A. and then got out, or who were doubtful cases, were also dismissed, but were allowed to draw any back pay due to them. The "whites" were granted three months' leave, and then, if passed as medically fit, were given the option of serving on or retiring on any pension already earned. Certain mustering out concessions were also granted.

Reconstitution

The end of the war meant inevitable reduction in the strength of the Indian Army, and other changes were imminent. For a time it was feared that the 2nd Sikhs would not be re-raised. In April 1946, however, orders for the reconstitution of the Battalion were received and Lieutenant-Colonel C. P. Murray was appointed Commandant.

Reconstitution took the form of giving the 9th Battalion the name of the 2nd Battalion, and re-forming the reconstituted unit from the several hundred returned prisoners of war of the old Battalion, and selected personnel of the 9th who wished to remain on.

The 9th Battalion's story has been written in Chapter XXV of this volume. It is a magnificent record of achievement by a war-raised unit, contending with all the difficulties of expansion and training that have been described above, as well as those of building and welding together an entirely fresh unit in war time. In a victorious career against the toughest enemy the British and Indian Armies have ever fought, it achieved a name and fame that was outstanding, and worthy in every way of the traditions of the Frontier Force. That it should be reconstituted as the Regular Battalion which had suffered so cruelly from the hands of the very enemies over whom it had itself triumphed was indeed a fitting reward, and eagerly acclaimed by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel (now Major-General), M. Hayaud Din, H.J., M.B.E., M.C., and all ranks of the Battalion.

That the old 2nd Sikhs were after all not to suffer the extinction that was feared was no less a joy and a relief to all, past and present, who had served with them. It was an added pride and satisfaction to know that the new 2nd



INDIAN INFANTRY CONTINGENT IN VICTORY PARADE, LONDON, AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

(Lieut.-Colonel Grimwood, 2nd Sikhs, on right of front rank)

Battalion was built, not only on the veterans of Malaya, but on the young victors of Burma in 1944 and 1945 who had added yet another glorious page to the history of the Frontier Force.*

All ranks who served with the 2nd Sikhs in Malaya were granted the 1939-45 Medal, the Pacific Star and the War Medal, and in addition the following awards were made :

Victoria Cross

Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming, M.C.

Military Cross

Lieutenant-Colonel G. J. Hawkins Subadar-Major Rai Singh
Jemadar Ram Singh

Indian Order of Merit (2nd Class)

Subadar Mohd Ali

Mentioned in Despatches

Major L. V. Dart, M.C.	Temporary/Major W. I. Campbell
Major R. C. Dent	Subadar Shiraz Khan (posthumous)
Major I. R. Grimwood	Naik Wali Khan
Major E. Holmes	Sepoy Paras Ram (posthumous)

Jangi Inam

Subadar Shiraz Khan (posthumous)	Havildar Mohd Shafi
Jemadar Makhmad Baz	Naik Bahadur Niwaz
Jemadar Hyat Mohd	Naik Mir Zaman
Jemadar Gul Ajaib	Naik Said Jamal
Jemadar Haji Ahmed	Sepoy Makhmad
Jemadar Spin Gul (posthumous)	Sepoy Dost Mohd
Jemadar Shiraz Khan	Sepoy Shah Gulzar
Company Havildar-Major F a t e h Khan (posthumous)	Sepoy Kalander Khan
Company Havildar-Major Faquir Shah (posthumous)	Sepoy Allah Yar
Company Havildar-Major Dhian Singh	Sepoy Mohd Amir
Battalion Quartermaster Havildar Makan Singh	Sepoy Rasul Bakhsh
Havildar Clerk Durga Parshad	Sepoy Yakub Khan
Havildar Mohd Gulzar (posthumous)	Sepoy Kehar Singh
	Sepoy Diwan Singh
	Sepoy Mohd Khan
	Cook Rakhmat Ullah

* See however Chapter XXX. After Independence the Pakistan Government decided to retain both the 2nd Sikhs and the 9th Battalion as Regular units in the Pakistan Army.

The following awards were made for leadership shown while prisoners of war :

O.B.I. (1st Class)

Subadar Gul Badshah

O.B.I. (2nd Class)

Subadar Gul Badshah
Subadar Mehr Khan

Subadar Fazal Dad
Subadar Manak Khan

British Empire Medal

Havildar Mohd Shafi

Havildar Shiraz Khan

The total casualties sustained by the 2nd Sikhs during the war, excluding wounded, was 6 officers, 15 J.C.Os. and between 300 and 400 I.O.Rs.

Officers

Major R. C. Dent (died of wounds in an open boat).
Captain K. C. Medappa (killed in action).
Captain B. W. Harvey (died while P.O.W.).
Captain E. C. Pomeroy (murdered while P.O.W.).
Captain C. P. Larson (killed in action).
Lieutenant Ishar Singh (murdered while P.O.W.).

J.C.Os.

Subadar Shiraz Khan (killed in action).
Jemadar Spin Gul (killed in action).
Jemadar Abdul Jabar (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Subadar Siri Chand (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Subadar Ghander Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Subadar Ishar Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Subadar Sukhdarshan Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Parmodh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Shankar Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Shakti Chand (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Ram Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Teja Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Bahadur Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Fauja Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.).
Jemadar Chet Singh (died or murdered while P.O.W.)

CHAPTER XX

THE 4TH SIKHS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: BURMA, THE RETREAT AND THE RECONQUEST

The Japanese Assault on Burma—The Defence of Moulmein—The Sittang River—The situation in Burma after the Battle of the Sittang—The Retreat from Burma, 1942—The Administrative Achievement—Imphal and Ranchi, 1942—Imphal and Shillong, 1943—The Situation in the South-East Asia Theatre, 1943-44—Fort White and Tiddim, 1944—The Battle for Imphal—The Fourteenth Army Offensive, 1944—Burma 1945: The Reconquest—Meiktila, February 1945—The Battle of Pyawbwe, April 1945—The Drive on Rangoon—The Pegu Bridge—Burma 1945-46—Last Days in Burma and the Return to Jhelum.

The Japanese Assault on Burma

THE Battalion received orders to mobilize on 1st November 1941, and was ready by 1st December, when it entrained for Calcutta *en route* for Burma. Although it was proceeding mobilized, the reader will recollect that at this time Burma was in no sense a war area, nor had hostilities broken out anywhere in the Far East and the Japanese were not enemies. If therefore the reader does not personally recollect the closing months of 1941, or has not become acquainted with the events that led up to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour and their almost simultaneous assault on Malaya, he should read the opening narrative in Chapter XIX of the story of the 2nd Sikhs in the Second World War. The international situation at the end of 1941 and the strategic surprise achieved by Japan at her entry into the war are there briefly summarized. They will enable the reader to visualize the unpreparedness of the eastern border of Burma when the Japanese attack on it was launched.* As a whole indeed, Burma was even less ready to repel an invader than was Malaya, and in the event the inadequate and ill-equipped British-Indian garrison was pitted against the finest Japanese divisions who had been trained and prepared to the last detail for the campaign.

It was to join this garrison in Burma that the 4th Sikhs was on its way when it embarked for Rangoon from Calcutta on 4th December—three days before the storm burst at Pearl Harbour. Moreover when the storm did burst, the defence of Burma, for obvious reasons, became immediately vital to the safety not only of China but of the Indian Continent itself. The reinforcement of

* See also *Eastern Epic*, Compton Mackenzie, Chapter XXXII.

Malaya, once the Japanese had gained control of the sea, became hazardous in the extreme, but to save Burma was a far more practicable proposition; and the building up of two divisions there with the utmost speed became the first and most urgent task of the Government and Allied Chiefs of Staff. They were by no means complete when the Japanese advance into Burma commenced; but such as they were, they fought the Burma campaign of January-May 1942, and carried out the epic retreat to India via Manipur. They were the 17th Indian Division and the 1st Burma Division, and it was to the 16th Infantry Brigade of the 17th Division that the 4th Sikhs went when the campaign commenced.

Initially, the 4th Sikhs was part of 16th Indian Infantry Brigade, and the latter proceeded to Mandalay for training. It was in Strategic Reserve, it then being thought the Japs would attack through the Shan states. When the Jap invasion came in through Tenasserim, 16th Brigade were sent to Moulmein, where the 4th Sikhs and 4th Burma Rifles were exchanged—the 4th Sikhs to 2nd Burma Brigade and 4th Burma Rifles to 16th Brigade.

The following officers were with the Battalion :

Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Edward

Major R. A. K. Sangster

Captain J. A. J. Edward-Stuart

Captain M. Attiqur Rehman

Captain S. H. F. J. Maneckshaw

Captain D. B. Wallace

Second-Lieutenant Atta Mohd

Second-Lieutenant J. H. Boyd

Second-Lieutenant Warshaw

Second-Lieutenant Bowerman

Second-Lieutenant P. Stewart

Second-Lieutenant W. R. Hunter.

The Defence of Moulmein

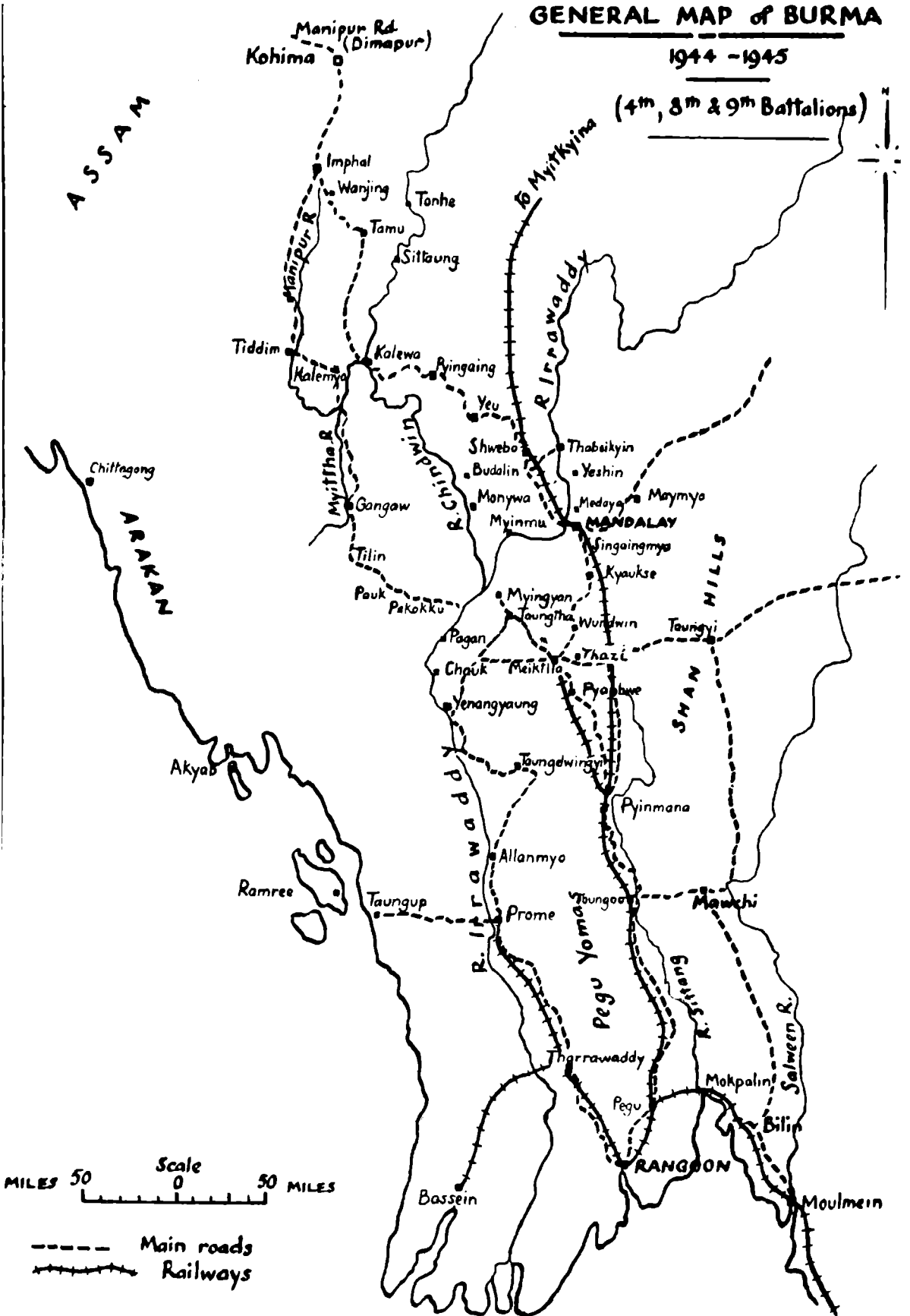
During the next fortnight the Jap advance into the Tavoy area forced the retirement to Moulmein of the Battalion's outlying detachments, and on 26th January a reconnaissance by "A" Company (in M.T.) in the hills to the east ran into the enemy in strength. They extricated themselves with difficulty under heavy small-arms and mortar fire, losing one J.C.O. and three men wounded.

The Battalion now manned the defences they had prepared of Moulmein and detached "D" Company to Mudon to help the withdrawal of the 1/7th Gurkhas. This company was attacked on the night of 30th January and cut off from the Battalion, losing two killed and one wounded—a first experience of the afterwards familiar Japanese encircling technique. The diary records that "D" Company rejoined the Battalion at Kyaikto on 1st February only with great difficulty.

GENERAL MAP of BURMA

1944 - 1945

(4th, 8th & 9th Battalions)



When the Japanese attack started early on 30th January, the 4th Sikhs were in Brigade Reserve within the defences of the area which extended for some ten miles round the town. As enemy pressure increased during the day a Burma battalion defending the south-eastern sector withdrew without orders. The 4th Sikhs were at once sent to occupy the ridge which overlooked the whole area and was the tactical key to the defence of Moulmein. In this strong position the Battalion beat off numerous attempts to dislodge it, and enabled the remaining units to maintain their positions on the east and west sectors of the perimeter defences.

There was a lull after dark, but about midnight 30th/31st January, the Japanese, whose strength in this operation was the whole of their 55th Division, became active again and penetrated our north-eastern defences. It was decided to evacuate Moulmein.

Orders for the withdrawal to the three jetties on the river were issued at 3 a.m., 31st January 1942. The plan was in phases, the last phase to be covered by 4th Sikhs and 12th Mountain Battery acting as rear-guard to the force. The first phase started at 6 a.m. It was a difficult operation involving street fighting in the town, while embarkation was interrupted by the appearance of large formations of enemy bombers. This upset the civilian crews of the river steamers brought over from Martaban, and they took their steamers out into midstream, thus holding up the withdrawal across the river every time the Japanese planes came over. Fortunately the enemy air command thought Moulmein was already in Japanese hands and failed to bomb the jetties or steamers, but their artillery shelled and sank a steamer.

Ultimately the Battalion was taken across safely, but the Battalion's M.T. could not be brought across the river and had to be abandoned. The mules also were set free and left behind. In the Moulmein fighting the Battalion lost one killed and three wounded, while three followers were reported missing. This extraordinarily light casualty list is some indication of the skill with which the 4th Sikhs carried out their difficult task. Indeed, the Brigadier recorded that the British force was able to fight its way to the jetties and embark in the face of heavy pressure by a numerically much stronger enemy largely due to the very able manner in which Lieutenant-Colonel Edward and the 4th Sikhs conducted their withdrawal from the ridge and covered the force through the town.

In the Japanese account of this action mention is made of the spirited resistance of the defenders which prevented the Japanese from achieving their object of eliminating our force and preventing its withdrawal across the three miles of the great River Salween.

The Brigade Commander's comment on this operation was: "I do not think we should have been able to get out of Moulmein if it had not been for the splendid action of the 4th Sikhs and 12th Mountain Battery as rear-guard to the force."

During this campaign our forces in Burma had little or no air support, the only two serviceable air squadrons in Burma having recently been withdrawn for service in the Far East.* Indeed, throughout the whole campaign of the next three and a half months the Japanese had command of the air, their supremacy being only occasionally disputed by a weak R.A.F. Squadron and the American "Flying Tigers" (American Volunteer Squadron of P40 fighters), both located at Rangoon.

The delay imposed on the Japanese in crossing the Salween river allowed some respite, and the Battalion arrived in Kyaikto on 2nd February, where General Wavell (then the Supreme Commander in South-East Asia) visited it on the 10th.

The 16th and 48th Brigades of the 17th Indian Division were now holding the line of the Bilin river, and the next Jap move was to try and outflank it on the north by an encircling move, and from the south by landing from the sea west of the Salween estuary. To meet the immediate threat from the north, the Battalion (now in Divisional Reserve) was dispatched on the 19th from Kyaikto to sweep the hills towards Paya.

It left "B" Company behind in Kyaikto to guard the beaches, as well as all its M.M.Gs. and mortars, administrative personnel and transport. Thus handicapped, the Battalion fought resolutely, but was only partially successful. Against heavy opposition it succeeded in occupying a jungle-covered ridge overlooking Paya and repulsed several counter-attacks, but the Bilin line was clearly becoming untenable and the Battalion was withdrawn into reserve as part of the 16th Brigade. The wounded at the Paya ridge had all to be carried five miles to the 16th Brigade reserve position.

The withdrawal continued to the Sittang river. Actually, as now known, the severely handled units of the Burma Brigade and the two Brigades of the 17th Indian Division on the Bilin river were being opposed by the full strength, strongly supported in the air, of the Japanese 55th and 33rd Guards Divisions. Had our forces attempted to stand on the Bilin river line at this time, the Japanese Commander would have pinned them with the 55th Division while the 33rd Division struck by an encircling movement round the north at the Sittang ridge.† The result must have been complete disaster, with Rangoon and Burma at the mercy of the enemy.

The Sittang River

If the withdrawal to the Sittang saved the situation for the moment, the action which followed at the Sittang ridge must nevertheless be ranked as one of the major disasters of the Second World War. Nevertheless, the part played

* *Eastern Epic*, Compton Mackenzie, p. 432.

† *Eastern Epic*, Compton Mackenzie, p. 433.

by the Battalion in this action was in keeping with Frontier Force traditions and standards, and was one of the few redeeming features of the tragedy. Space does not permit of a detailed account of the battle, which is to be found in *Eastern Epic*, but briefly what happened, and the Battalion's share in it, was as follows:

The withdrawal from the Bilin river, covered by the 48th Brigade (all Gurkha battalions), commenced on 20th February, disengagement being carried out in some cases with great difficulty. The 4th Sikhs were dispatched on the 21st in M.T. direct to the Sittang bridge. The column was bombed and strafed the whole way, and progress was very slow. As a result it was late evening of the 21st before the Battalion arrived at the bridge, where it was intended to take over the defences next morning. In the meantime however, a Japanese encircling movement had already brought up their leading troops, who attacked the bridgehead at dawn on the 22nd. The diary records that the Burma Rifles who were in front panicked and ran, and the Battalion had to put in an immediate counter-attack. "A" and "B" Companies led this, and though suffering severely, the Battalion succeeded with its attack and retrieved the situation. Captain Maneckshaw, who commanded "A" Company, was among the wounded and received a well-deserved immediate M.C. There were some fifty casualties.

Meanwhile the retirement of the main body of our forces on Mokpalin had continued, and various scaremongering reports that it had been cut to pieces began to reach the Battalion holding the bridgehead. Although these were untrue, the withdrawal was badly harassed by the enemy, who put down road-blocks with his encircling units and maintained continuous air attacks on the columns of troops. In addition to this, our own air forces bombed and strafed our own columns as well, in mistake for the enemy, causing numerous casualties and gravely impairing morale. (Post-war evidence acquits the R.A.F. and "Flying Tigers" of blame for this.)

However, by midday on the 22nd the main body began to arrive at Mokpalin and found Pagoda Hill and Buddha Hill held by the enemy forces that had been driven back from the bridge by the 4th Sikhs. The latter during the afternoon shared the defence of the bridgehead with the 4th Gurkhas. The enemy had also been reinforced and now opposed the 48th Brigade, who were leading the column through Mokpalin. The 1/3rd Gurkhas were launched at Pagoda Hill, captured and held it in spite of losing all their officers. Gradually, during the afternoon, the Japanese were pushed back and by nightfall the bridgehead position was made firm with a perimeter established round it. All was not well, however, with the higher command, who were in the dark as to the situation at the bridgehead. The Divisional Commander had fallen ill and deputed to Brigadier Hugh Jones, who now commanded the bridgehead, the responsibility for destroying the bridge (it was ready mined) as the situation demanded. Communications, however, had broken down and he was not in touch with

the formations east of the river holding off the Japanese. To quote Compton Mackenzie in *Eastern Epic* (p. 441), "The fog of war has often been thick, but it never lay more thickly than it lay over the 17th Indian Division during those two February days in 1942."

The enemy did not press hard against the bridgehead that night, but menacing incidents were continuous. One of these was a Japanese machine-gunner who infiltrated in the darkness through to the railway cutting east of the bridge and fired bursts down its length. This made the demolition of the bridge (which was sooner or later going to take place) hazardous by daylight, since fuses had to be touched off at various points along its length. The bridge therefore had to be blown by night if the danger of the Japanese getting possession of it was to be finally averted. At the same time, if the enemy captured the bridge, Rangoon was at their mercy, and at this time reinforcements, including the 7th Armoured Brigade, were still landing there. The Army Commander's orders were insistent and final. At all costs the bridge must not fall intact to the Japanese.

At 3.30 a.m. the 4th Sikhs were relieved on the perimeter and, together with the 4th Gurkhas, withdrawn across the bridge. The bridge was then blown, although the 16th and 48th Brigades with the bulk of their transport were still in a "box" at Mokpalin and unable to cross. The decision had been referred to the ailing Divisional Commander in his bed, who gave the order to blow the bridge with the two Brigades on the far side. These managed to maintain the perimeter while rafts were built to enable the troops, with light equipment, to cross the next night. All else, including vehicles, had to be abandoned. With the explosion the battle ceased and the Japanese discontinued all pressure on the bridgehead. From this it was clear that their objective had been the capture intact of the bridge and not the destruction of the 17th Division. In the light of this the part played by the 4th Sikhs by saving it in the nick of time at the outset of the battle must not be underrated.

On the 23rd the Battalion marched to Pegu—a long, weary march—and the next few days' respite from Japanese pressure was spent in reorganization of the 17th Division and refitting generally. The 7th Armoured Brigade had landed and were unloading their vehicles.

Some changes in the higher commands also took place. General Alexander* was appointed to command the army in Burma, and Major-General Cowan took over the 17th Indian Division.

The Situation in Burma after the Battle of the Sittang

The Japanese lost little time once they were free to organize a crossing of the Sittang. Since our Forces in Malaya had surrendered in Singapore, the enemy were able to reinforce strongly both their land and air forces in

* Field-Marshal Viscount Alexander of Tunis.

Burma. Moreover, with Singapore in their hands, the Japanese Navy were able to move through the Malacca Straits into the Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal where British and Indian naval forces were much too weak to contest the command of those seas. They moved quickly and before long cut off Rangoon by sea and raided Ceylon.*

Thus the reader will appreciate that by early March, when the British-Indian Army in Burma was pulling itself together and licking its wounds in the Pegu area, any prospect of an evacuation of Rangoon by sea (and evacuation was in fact going to be unavoidable) had disappeared. That this sudden change in the outlook created a very serious problem, not to say emergency, will be realized when it is remembered that the entire government of Burma and the large civilian and commercial community of Rangoon were still in the city. Moreover, there was now no way out of Burma except by air or via the very inadequate road and railway system of Upper Burma, to the Indian border of Manipur and thence by the jungle roads (that were now being improved) to Imphal. Evacuation by road of Rangoon and a retreat to the north was now decided on, and Rangoon was held only long enough to complete the landing of the 63rd Brigade from India which was now arriving. With this were the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles.

The exiguous air transport available lifted the most important individuals out of Burma, and comprehensive demolitions of oil refineries and port installations were carried out. But for the rest, an evacuee and refugee problem immediately supervened, and the story of these unfortunate people is another book in itself. Thousands cluttered up the roads to the north. This, and the complicated supply problem that the evacuation of the Rangoon base and back-loading of stores and munitions to the north involved, have also no place here.† But the reader must bear these in mind when reading the story of the retreat to the north.

The Battalion was now in Pegu and was soon involved in another emergency of Japanese origin in the famous Taukkyan road-block. While the Burma army was reorganizing, a Japanese force moving on Rangoon cut the main road to Prome and established and held a solid road-block on it about six miles north of Taukkyan corner. As this road was the main route of withdrawal of all the forces in Burma, including the Governor and General Alexander (the Commander-in-Chief) with all the Headquarters Staff, it was urgently necessary to clear the block without delay or all the above would be trapped. Accordingly, on 8th March, the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles were dispatched to liquidate the road-block. The remainder of the Division (17th) were at the time—i.e., 48th Brigade and one battalion of tanks—fighting their way out of Pegu; 63rd Brigade (less 2/13th Frontier Force Rifles) was holding a position half-

* See Chapter XXV, narrative of the 9th Battalion.

† But see also p. 405 in regard to Lieutenant-General Sir Eric Goddard.

way between Taukkyan Corner and Pegu through which 48th Brigade were to pass, and 16th Brigade was in Divisional Reserve near Taukkyan. The 2/13th Frontier Force Rifles failed to break the road-block (it was held in strength), but remained in observation that night. During the afternoon of the 8th, 63rd Brigade were withdrawn to Taukkyan. This Brigade, with 7th Hussars (tanks) and a regiment of Artillery, advanced to break the road-block in the early hours of the 9th, to find the Japanese had evacuated the block.

The Japanese force holding the block had moved on to Rangoon, which had now been evacuated and was open to the Japs. The road-block had in fact only been put down by the enemy as flank protection to his 33rd Division which was moving on Rangoon via the north of Pegu. The Japanese commander had no idea of its effect on us, and removed the troops holding it as soon as the division was clear.

The Retreat from Burma, 1942

The retreat from Burma of 1942 now commenced, and the Battalion's next move was a long and dreary withdrawal to Prome. The enemy air force maintained constant bombing and strafing, but no major action with the Japs occurred. On 13th March the Battalion moved north of Tharrawady and thence by train to Okpo. On 15th March it continued to Thegaw and took up a position in the Myauk Chaung area, but there was no contact with the enemy during the five days there. On 20th March the Battalion withdrew to Zigon, and six days later continued by rail and march to Paungdale, east of Prome, arriving on the 27th. At this time the Burma Corps (17th Indian Division, 1st Burma Division and 7th Armoured Brigade), a badly mauled and tired force, was taken over by General Slim—his first prominent appearance on the field where later, as Commander of the Fourteenth Army, he destroyed in 1944 and 1945 the Japanese armies in Burma including the very divisions that were operating against us now.

Another development that had been under negotiation for some time and now began to take shape was the arrival in Burma, via the road from Chungking, of Chinese forces. These reinforcements sent by General Chiang Kai-shek were the Chinese 5th Army—equivalent of one division—and took over the line from the 1st Burma Division to the east of Prome, in the Toungoo area. They were therefore on the left flank of the Burma Corps facing the Japs.

While the Battalion, with the 17th Division, had been withdrawing up the Prome road through Tharrawady, the 1st Burma Division, with the leading Chinese elements of their 5th Army, had been continuously attacked by Japanese following up on the main Pegu-Toungoo-Mandalay road.

By the end of March all the Allied forces were on a general east-west line through Prome and Toungoo. On the 29th the 4th Sikhs had been ordered

to secure Shwedaung, south of Prome. The enemy were met in a village on the way. The Battalion attacked, clearing the village and inflicting heavy losses. It proved to be a Thakin battalion (with a sprinkling of Japs) that had joined the Japanese, and it was the Battalion's first contact with Burmese traitor units. More will be heard of them later in this volume, but on this occasion they did not have an encouraging start. The 4th Sikhs captured 97 of them together with 3 M.M.Gs., 12 L.M.Gs. and 100 rifles.

The 4th Sikhs had in fact been sent to hold the town in support of a force of two British battalions, one Gurkha battalion and the 7th Tank Brigade, all under the Tank Brigade Commander, who had advanced south from Prome. (General Slim, who had taken over command of the newly formed "Burcorps," had ordered this advance as a counter-attack.) The Japs, however, had crossed the river from opposite Shwedaung and already held the town in strength. They also sent considerable forces advancing north up the Prome road. The British force under the Tank Brigade Commander was thus cut off, and the Battalion failed to get into Shwedaung. Moreover, it suffered heavily in the attempt to do so. Lieutenant Boyd and Jemadar Kartar Singh were killed and Captain Wallace and Lieutenant-Colonel Edward were both wounded. The 17th Division Commander sent the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles to assist, but little progress was made against very powerful resistance. The Battalion had sixty casualties, and with the Frontier Force Rifles took up a defensive position astride the road half a mile north of Shwedaung for the night.

During the night the Brigade received orders from 17th Division to put in a two-battalion attack astride the road at first light, when the British force under the Tank Brigade Commander would also attack from the south. This combined attack was successful in that it got into the northern part of the town, and the tanks broke through several road-blocks and the southern British force got through with the loss of a considerable number of lorries, three tanks and two guns. This force got clear of the burning town on its way back to Prome in the late afternoon, and the Battalion and 2/13th Frontier Force Rifles, covered by two companies of 2nd Royal Tank Battalion, broke contact and retired to Prome—the Battalion to rejoin 16th Brigade in position north-east of Prome at Pawtaw.

A battle for Prome now ensued, and the town fell on 2nd April, but the Battalion was not engaged in this. To avoid being cut off by strong enemy forces that continually tried to work round in the rear of our formations, the 17th Division continued to withdraw northward up the road cluttered with refugees and under incessant enemy air attacks. Under such conditions only movement at night was feasible.

The Battalion marched continuously on foot and in M.T., without contact with the enemy, for 130 miles through Allanmyo to Taungdwingyi, which was reached on 8th April. With day temperatures of 115° F. in the shade, a scarcity

of water in this dry zone, and clouds of choking dust, the rigours of this retreat as it now progressed must be left to the imagination.

At Taungdwingyi the Brigade held a defensive position round the town, but the Battalion had no fighting. Six days later, on 14th April, it handed over the perimeter to the 48th Brigade and continued the retreat. The reason why Taungdwingyi was ignored by the enemy was that he made the famous oil-fields of Yenangyaung his objective at this time, and bypassed the former position. If he could get it intact, the oil was vital!

As a result of this the main battle in this area that followed was at Yenangyaung and was fought by the Burma Division, reinforced by elements of the Chinese 5th Army, while the withdrawal northward of the 17th Division continued. Yenangyaung resulted in the virtual elimination of the Burma Division's tired and ill-equipped troops. The oil-fields, however, were destroyed before falling into the hands of the Japanese.

The 16th Brigade were now relieved at Taungdwingyi by the 48th Brigade, and sent to Natmauk to keep the rail communication between Taungdwingyi and Kyaukpadaung open. (Natmauk was connected by a lateral road to Magwe.)

The Battalion marched on the night of 14th/15th April, arriving at Natmauk at 6.30 on the morning of the 16th. There it took up a defensive position to the west of the town. During the next five days the Battalion had no contact with the enemy, but in this period events farther east finally sealed the fate of Burma for the next three years. They were as follows: On the night of 18th/19th April the Chinese 55th Division covering Taungyi (100 miles east of Natmauk) was destroyed by a motorized column of the newly arrived Japanese 56th Division, and the Chinese 5th Army was driven out of Pyinmana. By 29th April the motorized column had captured Lashio, thus outflanking on the east our entire forces in Burma and cutting off the Chinese from their base via the Burma-Chungking road.

The Administrative Achievement

While a temporary relief from enemy pressure was obtained by a Chinese counter-attack, led by the American General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, against Taungyi, the campaign for Upper Burma was now lost, and to get our sorely tried forces out of the country and organize the defence of India was the only remaining plan. As the reader may have surmised, a switch from an established sea base to an improvised and very shaky line of communication to a frontier of India ill-served with roads and railways involved an administrative problem of the greatest difficulty. When to it was added that of feeding and maintaining a Chinese rice-eating army as well, the problem assumed a magnitude and complexity that are difficult to imagine. The Major-General i/c Administration who

had to deal with it, and whom those thousands of British, Indians and Chinese had to thank for the fact that they neither starved nor were left without water and ammunition, was Major-General E. N. Goddard,* a "Piffer" and an officer of the 3rd Royal Battalion of the Regiment. The Indian Official History remarks of the latter part of the retreat that, in organizing supplies over waterless tracts in North Burma, General Goddard added "a few more miracles to those he had already performed."† It is right that this History of the Regiment to which he belonged should also salute him for an achievement of outstanding merit.

On retiring from Natmauk the 16th Brigade proceeded by lorry transport via Kyaukpadaung-Myingyan and Kyaukse to Sagaing on the night 23rd/24th April. Here the Battalion formed a bridgehead for the guarding of the Ava bridge, remaining one week without contact with the enemy. The Battalion then rejoined 16th Brigade, who were guarding the Irrawaddy river west of Sagaing. Two days later 16th Brigade marched across country by night to a point about eight miles north-west on the Sagaing-Shwebo road. Here the Brigade proceeded by lorry transport via Shwebo to Yeu, and was ordered to take up a defensive position south of Yeu astride the road and railway; but the same afternoon (1st May) this was countermanded and they were sent in M.T. to hold the Shwegyin-Kalewa crossing. This was because news had been received that the Japs were sending a force up the Chindwin in motor-boats to capture the crossing. Brigade Headquarters Signals Section and the Battalion proceeded at once, the remainder of the Brigade following the next day. The Battalion arrived at Shwegyin the next afternoon and crossed to Kalewa the following morning. All transport had to be left behind except one jeep and one 15-cwt. truck.

The following day the Battalion moved to Kalemmyo to protect the Burma "Corps" right flank, gain touch with the Chin Hill Battalion (which was done) and help cover the withdrawal of 2nd Burma Brigade, who were retiring up the Gangaw valley. There was no contact with the enemy, but much Jap air reconnaissance. The 2nd Burma Brigade passed through on the morning of 13th May, and the Battalion, rejoining 16th Brigade on the Kalewa-Tamu road that afternoon, proceeded on the final march to Imphal.

The chief reason for the latter stages of the retreat being unmolested was the battle of Kyaukse on 27th and 28th April. Here the 48th Brigade, holding a rear-guard position covering Kyaukse while the 63rd Brigade and the shattered remnants of the Chinese 5th Army passed through, inflicted a bloody defeat on the pursuing Japs. The latter were yet another fresh division brought up by the enemy after its victorious career in Malaya and the Philippines—the famous 18th Chrysanthemum Division. It took little further part in the campaign in Burma that spring, and the tired troops of the Burma Division and 63rd Brigade crossed the Irrawaddy unmolested and destroyed the Ava bridge behind them.

* Lieutenant-General Sir Eric Goddard, K.B.E., C.B., C.I.E., M.V.O., M.C.

† *Eastern Epic*, p. 480.

The 4th Sikhs arrived in Imphal on 20th May just before the breaking of the monsoon ended the campaign, and the remainder of the Allied forces dragged their way through the exits of North Burma to India.

Imphal and Ranchi, 1942

Operations were completely broken off. The Japanese made no attempt to follow the retreat beyond the Chindwin, but using fast landing-craft they came up the river to Shwegyin, and the 48th Brigade had a severe rear-guard action on 10th May to hold them off while crossing the river and getting clear.

Indeed, the Japanese divisions now in Burma were based on Siam and French Indo-China, and the limit of their communications for maintenance had been reached.

The Battalion remained in Imphal three and a half months, during which time it received reinforcements and new equipment. A high percentage of the men were unfit and the Battalion was short of strength by 7 officers, 6 J.C.Os. and 342 rank and file. The first preoccupation was to recuperate after the rigours of the retreat, and carry out all the training that was possible having regard to the fact that the monsoon, which had now broken, is heavy and continuous in that region.

On its arrival at Imphal 6 officer reinforcements joined the Battalion, together with 2 J.C.Os. and 98 rank and file. The officers were :

Major C. W. Pearson
Lieutenant Thakar Singh
Second-Lieutenant W. Weld Smith
Second-Lieutenant G. F. Bond
Second-Lieutenant Khushal Singh
Second-Lieutenant Zora Singh.

The time in Imphal was uneventful; 50 per cent. leave was opened on 1st July and on 4th September 1942, the Battalion was moved to Ranchi, arriving there on the 11th.

A fortnight later Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Edward left on promotion to Brigadier to take command of the 16th Brigade—the Brigade in which the Battalion was serving. All ranks of the Battalion were sorry to lose him, for he had been its leader through what was probably the most difficult and trying campaign in its history, and that it had acquitted itself so magnificently when outnumbered and attacked by our toughest enemies of the Second World War was in a large measure due to his leadership and the confidence he inspired. It was, however, promotion, and in this the Battalion wished him God-speed and every success for the future.

Ranchi, in 1942 and 1943, was made into a training and reorganization area for the land forces of the Burma border. The Battalion was camped at

Piska, four miles out, and its orders on arrival were to reorganize as a reconnaissance battalion. Concurrently with this, Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Carter, M.C., was appointed Commandant in succession to Brigadier Edward, and arrived to assume command on 3rd October 1942.

A reconnaissance battalion was a mobile battalion for attachment to Brigade Groups, etc., to carry out tasks demanding high mobility. Two rifle companies were mounted infantry and two were mounted in jeeps. Battalion Headquarters and H.Q. Company were similarly organized, half mounted on ponies and half in jeeps. As may be imagined, the problems such a drastic change presented were many and varied, a typical example being that H.Q. IV Corps, who had designed the War Establishment, omitted to provide for horse holders for the Commanding Officer and certain other personnel of Battalion Headquarters whose duties required them to function both mounted and "jeep-borne." At the start the class composition of companies was rearranged into class platoons instead of class companies. The result was as follows:

"A" Company (mounted infantry): three platoons—Sikhs, Dogras and P.Ms.

"B" Company (mounted infantry): three platoons—Sikhs, P.Ms. and Pathans.

"C" Company (jeeps): three platoons—Sikhs, Dogras and Pathans.

"D" Company (jeeps): three platoons—Dogras, P.Ms. and Pathans.

Headquarters and H.Q. Company: proportion of all four classes.

The Battalion had 116 vehicles and 400 animals; and apart from learning to drive, handle and ride, the men had also to be taught maintenance of vehicles and animal management. It says much for the soldiers of the British-Indian Army that such a task was taken by the men in their stride and that in three months the Battalion was ready to move back to Imphal.

As experts to assist the reorganization and training with animals, Major Vanrenen of Hodson's Horse and four cavalry instructors were attached to the Battalion. Also, to provide a nucleus of instructors in the handling and maintenance of the new vehicles, vacancies on driving and maintenance courses were allotted to the Battalion and local cadres started.

The period up to 20th December 1942, was thus spent in an intensive individual training drive, and progress was such that towards the end it was even possible to carry out some training by sections.

During these months the Battalion was once inspected by the Commander-in-Chief in India, General Wavell, and twice by Lieutenant-General Irwin, commanding the Eastern Command. Finally, during December 1942, a surprise visit was made by the C.G.S. India, the Rear-Admiral Naval Liaison Officer at G.H.Q., and Lieutenant-General Slim (now commanding XV Corps).

That these visits foreshadowed an early return to active service was easy to conjecture, and the warning order came very soon afterwards. The fact was that the Battalion had indeed made exceptional progress, and was the most advanced of all the units that were being reorganized. Even so, not all the mounted infantry companies had completed riding-school; some M.T. personnel were still untrained and only elementary section training had been carried out. One platoon havildar rode his motor-cycle for the first time when the Battalion moved down to Ranchi railway station.

The Battalion entrained for Manipur road (Demapur)—the railhead for Imphal—on Christmas Eve and was concentrated there by New Year's Day 1943. It was to move to Imphal forthwith to join the re-formed 17th Indian Division.

Imphal and Shillong, 1943

The M.T. portion of the Battalion moved first and drove through to Imphal in one day, on 8th January. To the reader who has never seen it, one should explain that the road, 130 miles long, winds its way through the jungle-covered Naga hills, rising to a height of 6,000 feet twenty miles beyond Kohima and falling again to 2,000 feet in the Manipur valley at Imphal. It differs little from other mountain roads, such as that, for instance, from Rawalpindi through Murree into the Jhelum valley, except that it was then very narrow and in a bad state owing to the heavy traffic it had to bear in 1942, and for which it was never intended.

For the raw and inexperienced drivers of the 4th Sikhs vehicles to complete the drive without a casualty and with few breakdowns was no mean feat, and they deserved the "shabashes" that they received for it. The mounted half of the Battalion did not arrive for some days, and the interim was spent by those ahead in training with the 63rd Brigade in the country round Imphal.

No sooner had the Battalion arrived in Imphal than the good news came of some very well-deserved honours for the Burma retreat. They were as follows:

Awards:

D.S.O.:	Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Edward
M.C.:	Captain P. Stewart
I.O.M.:	Subadar Qalandar Khan
I.D.S.M.:	Jemadar Allah Yar Khan
	Sepoy Karamat Hussain
	Jemadar Tulsi Ram

The following received mentions in Despatches:

Captain A. J. Edward Stuart
Lieutenant D. B. Wallace

Lieutenant D. S. Phillips
Second-Lieutenant W. R. Hunter
Subadar Qalandar Khan
Havildar Khazan Singh
Subadar Sarkhru Khan
Naik Makhmad Din Shah
Naik Sher Singh

The Battalion's role was now reconnaissance battalion to the 48th Brigade, who were then thirty-one miles south of Imphal down the valley of the Manipur river on the track leading to Tiddim. The Battalion moved down to join it, carrying out on the way its first "collective" exercise as a unit under its new role with the rest of the 17th Division. The diary naïvely comments that "there were many testing troubles."

For two months exercises and training continued, but then the 17th Division was given a quite different task—that of constructing a M.T. road to Tiddim (Operation "Navy"). This occupied March 1943, and the first half of April; the animals being left in camp at Imphal the while.

In the middle of April the whole of the 17th Division was withdrawn and moved to Shillong for rest and training. In the process of this move, on 20th April, just after the Mounted Infantry portion of the Battalion had left Imphal for railhead, forty-two Jap planes bombed Imphal and most of the bombs fell in the Battalion area. Fortunately the animals had left, and there were only Battalion Headquarters and cadres of the jeep companies in Imphal, so casualties were light. Two men were killed; one officer (Captain Coupland), one J.C.O. and five rank and file were wounded. The civilian casualties in Imphal, however, were heavy and included ninety killed.

On 28th April the unit transport was sent down the Tiddim road to bring back the party working on the road. This latter party did very well, and were personally congratulated on their work by the Divisional Commander, Major-General Cowan.

The Battalion arrived in Shillong on 9th May, and with it arrived also the first rain that heralded the approach of the monsoon. In Shillong, however, its effect is less intense than elsewhere in north-east India and a good deal of training was possible.

This, however, was to receive a somewhat rude interruption in July, by an order directing the Battalion to revert once more to its normal and original role as an infantry battalion. This was received on 19th July 1943, and during the first week of August the change-over was carried out. The animals were handed over to the 7th Battalion The Baluch Regiment, and the vehicles were distributed to units and formations all over the Division. Although the order was at first a bitter disappointment after all the hard work done in training with animals and vehicles, it was later realized that the reversion to a normal role

was all for the best, as events proved that the conception of a battalion organized on a half-jeep and half-mounted-infantry basis was fundamentally unsound.

The opportunity was then taken to revert to class companies once more, and from 7th August "A" Company were Sikhs, "B" Company Dogras, "C" Company P.Ms. and "D" Company Pathans.

On 18th and 19th August the G.O.C. Eastern Army inspected units in Shillong, and the diary shows the surprising entry that the 4th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment provided 268 men for the 7th Battalion Baluch Regiment "so that they may look like a complete battalion." While this seems to sound like playing at soldiers for the benefit of the General, doubtless the Baluchis, who had just taken over all the 4th Battalion's animals, were not yet ready to go on parade with them as a reconnaissance battalion. August and September were uneventful, and in October 1943, the Battalion returned to Imphal to join the 17th Division and perform its new role as Headquarters Defence Battalion.

Concurrently with this, a further change in Commanding Officers took place. Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Carter, who had been in command for a year, was appointed G.S.O., 1st Grade, Peshawar District, and Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Marshall was nominated to succeed him in command of the 4th Sikhs. Pending his arrival command devolved on Major C. W. Pearson.

Colonel Carter's departure was a loss to the Battalion and regretted by all. A former Adjutant of the Battalion, he had intimate knowledge of everything to do with it, and his period of command had been one in which he had reorganized and rehabilitated it after its gruelling campaign in the retreat from Burma. His move was however promotion, and the best wishes of the Battalion went with him.

On arrival at Imphal the Battalion was again sent down the road to Tiddim, where our forces were in contact with the Japs in the Fort White area. Here it provided a detachment at a forward post called Peacock, but other than patrols there was no operational activity for the rest of the year.

On 7th November the Battalion was very pleased to receive a visit from Brigadier Arthur Cumming, who had won the Victoria Cross during his leadership of the 2nd Battalion* in the tragic Malayan campaign of the previous year. He was now commanding the 63rd Brigade in the Chin Hills-Tiddim area.

Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall arrived to take command of the Battalion on 19th December 1943.

The Situation in the South-East Asia Theatre, 1943-44

The war was now entering on its second phase in the Imphal—Burma theatre, and before continuing with the 4th Sikhs' story it is necessary here

* See Chapter XIX.

to remind the reader of the developments that had taken place since active operations had ceased on the Burma border in May 1942. In the general war situation in the Western theatres, after Allied fortunes had sunk to their lowest ebb in the summer of 1942, the victories of Alamein and Stalingrad had been followed by advances on all fronts and the entry into the fray in strength of American forces both in Europe and in the Pacific. The story of the campaigns in Western theatres is given in the 1st and 3rd Battalion narratives,* and both these Battalions played leading parts in the British-Indian 4th and 8th Divisions in the Western Desert and Italy. In the so-called South-East Asia Theatre, in which the campaign to reconquer Burma was now about to begin, both sides had been building up forces and preparing for offensive operations, the first of which had been the unsuccessful counter-offensive in the Arakan launched by General Wavell in the attempt to recapture Akyab on the west coast of Burma. Akyab had been evacuated without fighting in our withdrawal from Burma in May 1942, but its valuable, strategically situated air-fields made it of first importance to any campaign to retake Burma. However, while General Wavell's attack in Arakan in the cold season of 1942-43 proved a costly tactical failure, it had a strategic effect of great importance, for it forestalled a Japanese offensive planned for the same season to capture Imphal, break into Assam, and cut the railway to Dibrugarh.† When it is remembered that at this time our forces and bases in North-East India were still weak, and that a Jap attack in 1943 on Imphal and Kohima would almost certainly have succeeded, the comparative insignificance of the minor defeat in the Arakan in February 1943, can be appreciated.

By the spring of 1944 the Allied forces in the South-East Asia theatre had been vastly increased and strengthened. The picture now included :

- (1) The establishment of a South-East Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten as Supreme Commander.
- (2) An enormously strengthened air force based on a fresh network of airfields in Assam and Bengal.
- (3) A major project to construct a road to China from Ledo to support the Chinese forces fighting Japan.
- (4) The organization of special air-maintained brigades to operate in the jungles behind the enemy lines and disrupt their communications. (A brigade was successfully so employed as an experiment in February and March 1943. They were called "Chindits" and were organized

* See Chapters XVI, XVII and XVIII.

† From the interrogation of Japanese commanders in Burma after their surrender in 1945.

by the guerilla leader Wingate, but their story, of which much has been written, has no place here as no unit of the Regiment was involved.)*

(5) Greatly strengthened, well equipped and trained ground forces.†

As regards (1) and (5) the South-East Asia Command embraced the Fourteenth Army round Imphal under General Slim, of which the 4th Sikhs (and 17th Division) was now to become part. With regard to (2) and (3) the American forces that had come to aid this theatre provided much of the effort, and in the air had, with the R.A.F., begun to achieve supremacy over the enemy. The Americans had also undertaken the re-equipment and training of the Chinese divisions evacuated to India in the retreat from Burma, and these were located in the extreme north of Burma covering the project (3) above as the Ledo road progressed.

With this general picture in the theatre (from Arakan through the Chin Hills and Manipur to Ledo) the Allied Command planned a major offensive for the spring of 1944. The first move in this was the dropping by air of the special force of "Chindits" mentioned in (4) above, of the strength of a division, in the jungles of Upper Burma to disrupt enemy communications. This had just been done and the 9th Battalion of the Regiment was engaged (in the 20th Indian Division) in the task of carrying out a covering demonstration on the line of the Chindwin, when the enemy, forestalling our offensive, struck in force across the Chindwin with the objective of Imphal (both via Tamu and Tiddim) and at Kohima farther north via Tonhe and Ukul.

Fort White and Tiddim, 1944

Such was the situation when the 4th Sikhs were in the Tiddim-Fort White area in March 1944. The months of January and February were passed in patrolling and gaining valuable experience and confidence in the men's ability to hold their own against the Japs. This period did much to relegate the dark days of the retreat to the forgotten past. Very soon, however, signs of the impending enemy offensive became clear, and battalions in forward areas received timely warning before the Japs advanced across the Chindwin. As a result of this, the Battalion, which was then holding exposed positions, was ordered on 14th March (much to its disappointment) to withdraw and carry out escort duties on the Tiddim jeep road for the Divisional M.T. Column.

On the 18th the Battalion, still engaged on the above duties, withdrew to Manipur river bridge and came under the 48th Brigade. The next day it was called on to attack an important feature known as Point 6027 which the

* See also, however, the 9th Battalion story, Chapter XXV, where this Battalion was employed in a similar role, but not as a "Chindit."

† See Chapter XXIII, narrative of the 7th Battalion, and Appendix VIII, The 39th Training Division.

enemy had wrested from the 63rd Brigade, and for the operation came under command of that Brigade. Successive assaults on the feature by "B," "D," and "C" Companies from two directions all failed, incurring fairly heavy casualties. On the 20th a further attack was made on Point 6027 at midday, "B" and "D" Companies leading and "A" Company in reserve. "D" Company reached the top but was driven off again, whereupon "A" Company also was committed. The action ended with the feature ringed but still in enemy hands. "B" Company suffered heavy casualties and was reorganized in three platoons. Majors Bowerman and Wallace were wounded.

The situation remained thus, as a stalemate, for two days, when a further attempt was made, "A" Company, "C" Company and two platoons "B" Company attacking from the west, and companies of the 7th Battalion Baluch Regiment and 1/3rd Gurkhas attacking a subsidiary feature called North Pimple from the north. The whole attack was supported by a fifteen-minute artillery concentration. For three hours after the initial advance the companies crept slowly up towards the top, but co-ordination was found very difficult. Finally, as a result of pressing orders from the Commanding Officer, "A" Company charged the top of the hill, but were swept off by automatic fire and grenades. As a reward for his gallantry in this action, Lieutenant Bond received a Military Cross.

At 5.30 p.m. the position was again stabilized, with the summit of the feature close-ringed. Enemy shelling now commenced of Battalion Headquarters on the road near milestone 120, and continued during the evening of the 24th. It recommenced on the morning of the 25th, and Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall was killed and Major Pearson wounded by a direct hit on Battalion Headquarters trench—a dreadful tragedy. Captain Pim and Major Stewart were also in the trench and the former was slightly wounded. Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall was buried in the same trench shortly after the incident. Major P. Stewart, M.C., took command, and at eleven o'clock that night he was relieved by Major Hudson, of the 7th Battalion Baluch Regiment, who was sent to take over.

On the 26th the companies were pulled back off the ridges surrounding Point 6027, leaving patrols in contact. The Battalion now withdrew up the jeep road to milestone 110 to take over the defence of Divisional Headquarters, and on 30th March it was ordered back to milestone 83, where it came under the command of the 23rd Division.

Although the Battalion's attacks on Point 6027 had not been finally successful, the men had fought with the greatest gallantry and had taken heavy casualties. The death of their Commanding Officer was a grievous loss.

The Japanese offensive was now in full swing, and enemy infiltration farther east threatening to cut off the 17th Division was causing a withdrawal up the Tiddim road. It was the old enemy of 1942, the Jap 33rd Division,

and heavy fighting lay ahead, but this time the 17th Division were to exact in the end, terrible retribution.

At milestone 83 the Battalion held a defensive position, while the enemy shelled both the Divisional "box" to the north and later "A" Company's sector. This was on 3rd April and caused considerable confusion in Battalion Headquarters. Prompt action however by Captain Beazley, the Transport Officer, avoided undue casualties to animals and vehicles.

The Battle for Imphal

On 4th April the Battalion was moved by M.T. to a defensive area north of Imphal known as "Catfish Box," and three days later Major A. J. W. McLeod, D.S.O. (3rd Royal Battalion of the Regiment), arrived to take over command.

The enemy offensive had now been in progress a month, and while the Jap 33rd and 55th Divisions were threatening Imphal from the south and south-east, their 30th Division, having crossed the Chindwin farther north, had divided in two columns, one of which was attacking Kohima on the main road L. of C. from Imphal, forty-five miles from railhead at Demapur. The other had turned south and was threatening Imphal from the north.

At "Catfish Box," the Battalion's patrols were in contact with this latter enemy force, but the Battalion was soon ordered back to the 17th Division, where the enemy threat was becoming more dangerous. They arrived at Bishenpur, twenty miles south of Imphal, at the junction of the roads from Imphal to Tiddim and Silchar, on 19th April, and were soon again involved in heavy fighting.

Indeed at four o'clock the same afternoon "D" Company (the first arrivals) were once more called on to put in an immediate attack. It was unsuccessful in attaining its objective, but the enemy advance was stopped and they were forced to dig in. Of this action Major Stewart, the Company Commander, writes as follows: "The Company had been sent as an advanced guard without support to enable it to move as quickly as possible, and gain this high ground overlooking Bishenpur. This was done, but we had the galling sight of a complete company of Japs moving in the open towards us without having even one 3-inch mortar bomb to throw at them. We had to watch them deploy and start to dig in before getting within small-arms range. A quick attack was put in with two platoons but without success; by that time they were in a commanding position holding the ridge opposite us. It was to take many weeks of hard fighting before we were to be able to get on that ridge again. The arrival of the remainder of the Battalion enabled the position to be consolidated, but not before it had been caught between a cross fire of M.M.G. and artillery. However, the enemy advance had been stopped." The Company suffered four killed and eighteen wounded.

The Battalion was withdrawn that night to a commanding position in the rear, and the diary here makes mention for the first time of active support from the air of our "Hurribombers." It signalized the achievement of our air superiority and was the beginning of the end for the Japs. Air attacks on enemy forward troops were now to be almost daily occurrences and were heartening for our men.

The remainder of April called for no further heavy fighting from the Battalion, but active and vigorous patrolling was continuous and resulted in many minor clashes with casualties to both sides. In these, however, it was now becoming apparent that the enemy were suffering the most, and our men gradually were getting the upper hand. One J.C.O. and ninety-one men arrived as very welcome reinforcements at the end of April.

The Battalion's activities continued the same during the first half of May, ambushes being used by patrols as a means to inflict casualties on the enemy. The first signs of the approaching monsoon were now felt with the arrival of heavy thunderstorms. The heavy rain made life unpleasant because of the exposed position. All timber for building bunkers had to be carried up from the valleys and the rain was such that it was difficult to stop subsidence; we had a few fatal casualties as a result of this.

On 20th May an ambush of an enemy convoy was robbed of a full measure of success by heavy rain. Lieutenant Seale's platoon was ordered to attack a Jap position at first light, but when moving in heavy rain to the F.U.P. an opportunity occurred to ambush a Jap column. This delayed the attack, which ultimately had to be carried out in daylight. During this attack, Lieutenant M. J. St. B. Seale and a sepoy were killed and a J.C.O. and ten men wounded. A number of the enemy were killed in the ambush and a further seven Japs were killed before the action was broken off.

On 22nd May a success was registered by "A" Company under Captain Murtough when they were ordered to attack enemy entrenched on the north side of Bishenpur. In driving out the Japs they inflicted fifty casualties for the loss of six killed and eight wounded.

On 1st June the Battalion concentrated at Kheinou, north of Bishenpur, while "A" Company remained in the village. It was the prelude to a series of attacks on enemy positions round Bishenpur which were made with the object of driving them back and removing the threat to Imphal which was closest on this front. The first of these attacks was by "C" Company, covered by air strikes and supported by tanks. It took place on 4th June and was completely successful. The whole position was cleared and consolidated (bits of dead bodies being found in the bunkers). The company had twenty-four casualties.

The next was on 10th June, when "D" Company was similarly supported on a timed programme. This attack was successfully driven home with a bayonet charge. The enemy counter-attacked strongly on this occasion, and was only

repulsed finally by the reserve platoon. The Company lost one killed and twenty wounded, but thirty-one dead Japs, including two officers and a warrant officer, were counted on the spot. The monsoon now broke properly and heavy rain fell for two days from 14th June, reducing the valley to a sea of mud and making unmetalled roads impossible for all vehicles, except jeeps.

The Fourteenth Army Offensive, 1944

Operations however were not to cease. The Fourteenth Army Commander, General Slim, realized the precarious position the Japanese divisions were now in. With monsoon conditions ahead for three months and their attenuated communications lying over unmetalled tracks in mountainous country, their predicament was desperate. He called for an all-out effort from the British-Indian forces to continue attacking the Japs, who were bound to be ravaged also by starvation and disease. The enemy must not escape complete destruction. The 17th Division never gave the enemy respite. The Battalion's next operation was on 17th June, when "B" Company were employed, but on this occasion the attack was abortive.

Intelligence sources had reported thinning out by the Japs in this area and their estimated strength was not more than two weak platoons. The attack went in at first light three platoons up. Initial gains were made on the high ground, but then heavy cross fire from five pin-pointed M.M.Gs., plus a battalion gun, halted the attack. The clearance was such that the F.O.O. could not bring our own artillery fire to bear. The fourth platoon was committed in the hope of forcing the enemy position, but it could advance no farther than the others. The attack was called off with small losses.

During the next few days the enemy counter-attacked the Battalion's positions round Bishenpur, but were repulsed, and only patrol activity continued till 5th July, when the Battalion was relieved in its battle positions and concentrated in rear at Oinem.* The 5th Division was now relieving the 17th Division (having arrived fresh by air from India), and the latter was withdrawn for a well-earned rest and refit.

The Battalion was moved on 23rd July to "XYZ" Camp a few miles north of Imphal preparatory to returning temporarily to Ranchi. At this camp it was able to do some individual training after a period of cleaning up and "maintenance." On 3rd September it left in M.T. down the road to railhead *en route* to Ranchi. The road had been the scene of the battle for Kohima, and had not long been cleared by the British 2nd Division advancing from railhead. The story of this is told in the 9th Battalion narrative, Chapter XXV of this volume. The Japanese 30th Division in this area was now being driven with heavy loss back across the Chindwin.

* The 9th Battalion also took part in the operations at Bishenpur and Oinem, and acquitted itself with great credit (Chapter XXV).

The 4th Sikhs arrived in Ranchi on 16th September and spent the next four months there. Officers and men were sent on leave in rotation, and a full programme of individual and collective training was carried out, with many inspections. These included His Excellency The Commander-in-Chief in India, who met all officers and presented Naik Bagh Ali with the ribbon of his Military Medal.

Burma 1945 : The Reconquest

With the New Year came the call for the 17th Division. This time it was to settle accounts finally with the Japs for 1942 and all that was suffered at their hands in their treacherous onslaught on Burma in that year. In the four months since the Battalion had left Imphal, the Fourteenth Army had driven the broken enemy divisions across the Chindwin to the Irrawaddy where all the fresh forces from the South that the Japanese Command could muster hoped to stand and fight to retrieve the situation. As the Division (and the 4th Sikhs) were now about to enter on the most interesting phase of the campaign, it is worth while to turn for a moment to the general picture and remind the reader of how the forces in Burma stood in January 1945.

By the end of that month, when the 17th Indian Division was once more advancing to the front, the situation was as follows. The Fourteenth Army with the Chinese-American forces from Ledo on its left flank had reached the Irrawaddy, and its left flanking Division (19th) had forced a surprise crossing at Thabeikkyin, thus threatening Mandalay. The rest of the 33rd Corps (the 2nd British and 20th Indian Divisions) had reached the Irrawaddy west of Mandalay ready to force a crossing. On the right flank of the Army, IV Corps with the 7th and 17th Divisions and a Tank Brigade were approaching the Irrawaddy at Pakokku. They were screened by the 11th African Division, who had led the advance down the Gangaw valley; and the fact that the IV Corps had been concentrated on the right flank at all had been concealed from the enemy by a carefully worked deception plan. This included every device (including faked signals and a faked IV Corps Headquarters) that would mislead the Japs into believing that this Corps and with it the main strength of the Army was concentrating against Mandalay on the Army's left flank.

The Japanese were completely deceived and concentrated their forces accordingly against the threat to Mandalay. In the heavy fighting there of the 20th Division both the 8th and the 9th Battalions* of the Regiment and the 14th Battalion of the Frontier Force Rifles were deeply involved and won the greatest credit. Here it was that Jemadar Parkash Sing won the Victoria Cross while sacrificing his life in battle. Their contribution to the vital stroke at Meiktila which now followed, and was carried out by the 17th Division and a

* Chapters XXIV and XXV.

Tank Brigade, must not be forgotten; for they held the enemy by the throat while the death blow was administered. Whilst the Fourteenth Army was advancing to the Irrawaddy, the Japs on the coast in the Arakan were also being driven back by XV Corps and Akyab was captured. The use of its airfields greatly helped the air support to our land forces for the rest of the campaign.

The story of the 4th Sikhs in the capture of Meiktila—the “nodal point of all Japanese communications to their Army and their chief airfield centre”* now follows.

Meiktila, February 1945

The Battalion left Ranchi on 11th January and spent from 21st January till 5th February in the Imphal area carrying out training. It then moved forward via Tamu, and reached the Irrawaddy near Nyaungu on 17th February. Here it was placed at two hours' notice to cross the river.

The assault crossing had actually been made four days earlier by the 7th Indian Division and a bridgehead had been established. With regard to this General Slim wrote: “This crossing was an outstanding example of how such an operation should be done.”† An unlikely spot where the river was 1,300 yards wide had been chosen, which was lightly held by detachments of an I.N.A. Division.‡ There was little opposition and it was not till the 20th February, when the 7th Division had expanded and consolidated the bridgehead, that a Japanese counter-attack began. Even then it was weak, the Jap commander being of the opinion that our crossing was merely a diversion in little strength.

The Battalion crossed on 18th February with its M.T., and harboured in the bridgehead while the rest of the Division and 255 Tank Brigade concentrated for the dash on Meiktila. There was practically no opposition, and the advance started on 23rd February. Taungtha, the maintenance centre for the Jap 33rd Division on the Irrawaddy, was captured by the Battalion with armoured support after a stiff fight. Next day, and on the 28th, the column reached the precincts of Meiktila and the Battalion went into the attack.

As regards the enemy in Meiktila, General Slim wrote: “The Commander had had some days to prepare. He displayed the greatest energy collecting and improvising companies from odds and ends. Even patients from hospitals who could stand were issued with L.M.Gs. and put to hold defences. . . . The strength proved much greater than we anticipated, partly because the bulk of one regi-

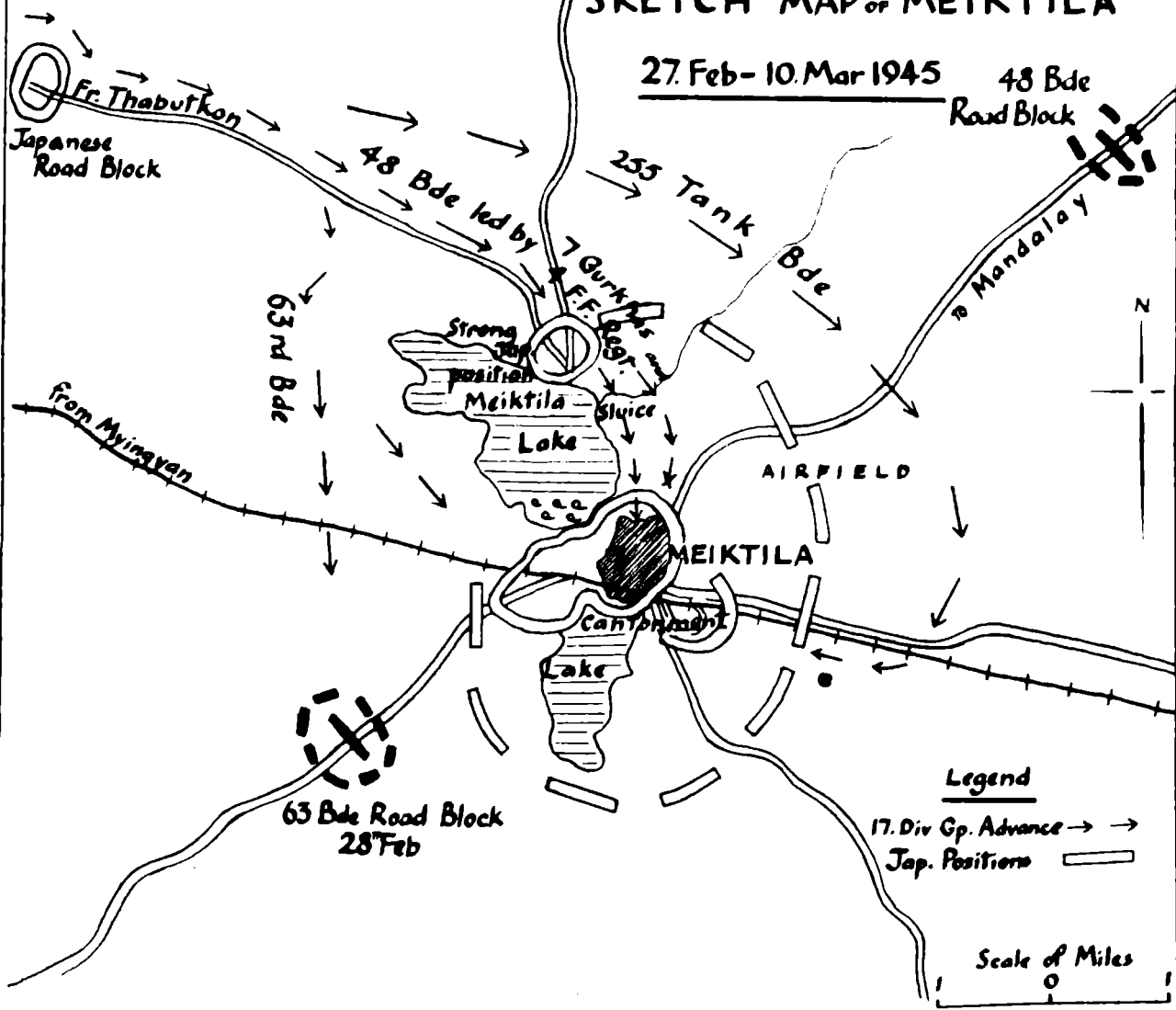
* *Campaign of the Fourteenth Army* (Slim), p. 9.

† *Ibid.*, p. 16.

‡ Indian National Army—a Japanese-sponsored force recruited under duress from Indians taken prisoner, to fight for the Japanese. They were half-hearted and never fought well. They were called “J.I.Fs.” (Jap-inspired Fifth Column) and aroused only feelings of contempt among our men.

4th. Battalion
SKETCH MAP of MEIKTILA

27 Feb - 10 Mar 1945 48 Bde
 Road Block



Legend

17. Div Gp. Advance → →
 Jap. Positions ———

Scale of Miles
 0

ment (i.e. Brigade) of the 49th Division had just arrived there on a forced march to reinforce the Japanese Army." The 1/7th Gurkhas led the advance and quickly cleared the opposition from a heavily mined sluice where the bridge had been blown. This was held while the sappers cleared the mines, and they then took up the advance until pinned down near their objective—a water-cut or causeway just north of Meiktila—by oerlikon and M.M.G. fire. They held on till dusk, and the Brigade (48th) harboured near the sluice.

Next day (1st March) the 7th Gurkhas continued the attack by an encircling movement from the north, but were pulled out that night, having killed 105 enemy and destroyed one oerlikon, two M.M.Gs. and numerous L.M.Gs.

On 2nd March the 4th Sikhs attacked with objective "the Railway running through the town." "A" and "B" Companies led with two squadrons of armour of the Royal Deccan Horse in support and preceded by an artillery and 3-inch mortar concentration. The attack started at 10.15 a.m. and it soon became clear that the whole town area up to the railway line was honeycombed with bunkers and strongpoints. Snipers were also scattered through the area, which was difficult for tanks as it was heavily mined.

Progress was slow but methodical, bunkers being blasted one after the other by the tanks and Japs making individual suicide attacks on the armour. The area up to the railway was finally cleared by 4 p.m., after six hours of bitter fighting. A considerable area of the town south of the railway remained uncleared when light failed and the Battalion went into harbour.

Appraising the 4th Sikhs' work on this day, the 48th Brigade's account of the battle remarks: "To sum up the second day's battle, the main enemy defences of Meiktila had been penetrated and broken wide open, and it remained now to exterminate the remaining Jap garrison south of the railway line."

On 3rd March the 1st Battalion West Yorkshire Regiment completed the task of clearing the town, and by 6 p.m. (again to quote the Brigade account), "the last living enemy in the garrison had been forced to leap into the lake, where they were shot or drowned."

On 4th March the Battalion carried out a sweep of the airfield area, and on the 5th and 6th worked at maintenance while remaining at two hours' notice to move.

The Battalion's next task was on 10th March, with a column of all arms sent back to open the road to the Irrawaddy crossing and escort back the Divisional Ammunition Base. With a vanguard of tanks, the advanced guard was "B" Company mounted on tanks. Six miles out severe opposition was encountered in broken country and a hot fight ensued. Into this the whole column became drawn. The enemy were evidently part of their "build-up" against Meiktila with a view to liquidating the 17th Division. They were well supported by artillery.

The action continued all day, the column harbouring for the night. Next morning "D" Company, who had remained behind, came out as reinforcements and put in an encircling attack which came as a complete surprise to the Japs. This was made in company with sixteen tanks of Probyn's Horse, and was in fact a charge carried out with all the dash characteristic of cavalry—quite regardless of enemy anti-tank weapons and mines. The attack without any supporting arms overran the whole Jap position astride the road, blasting bunkers at point-blank range as they went and flushing Japs all the time.

The tanks finally swept back into our position and the whole column then withdrew to Meiktila. The Battalion's casualties in this highly successful two days' fighting were: 10th March, 5 killed, 26 wounded; 11th March, 4 killed, 21 wounded. The losses inflicted on the Japs (and actually counted by the Battalion) were (killed): 10th March, 130; 11th March, 79. Five enemy guns were destroyed and much equipment with valuable identifications brought back.

Of this action the 48th Brigade wrote: "The fighting was remarkable for the lust of blood displayed by both tanks and infantry, and all concerned fought with the greatest dash and bravery. Although the road was not opened, the slaughter inflicted on the Japs must have gone far to lessening the subsequent enemy attacks on Meiktila, where 17th Division was to all intents and purposes temporarily besieged."

During this period of virtual siege the Battalion was not involved in further severe fighting, most of which took place round the airfield. The enemy, realizing that this was being used for our supply and reinforcement (a brigade of the 5th Division was flown in there by 17th March), concentrated on trying to capture it. They succeeded in denying us its use from the 19th to the 29th March, but thereafter the Japs were driven back after fierce fighting and it was made secure. During the period when the airfield could not be used, supply-dropping was resorted to. The area which the Battalion was holding was used for some of the time as the dropping point. This had unexpectedly dangerous consequences. So much so that a Subadar and a man were killed and eight men wounded by being struck by supplies dropped "free" (i.e. without parachute), and some petrol drums dropped in "C" Company's area exploded, causing a fire which spread to ammunition and other supplies, resulting in further explosions. Two men were injured by these.

By 3rd April the 7th Division and the remainder of 5th Division defeated the Japanese forces that had tried to cut off Meiktila from the north-west and opened the road. 5th Division and the tail of 17th Division advanced, and the battle for Meiktila had been finally won. It had disrupted the enemy defence of the Irrawaddy line and of Mandalay. The Japanese withdrawal now began; and thereafter it became a question merely of time and space. Would the drive reach the coast and capture a port—or Rangoon itself—before the monsoon broke?

To return, however, to the 4th Sikhs' story, while the battle for Meiktila was still being fought, the heartening news of a number of immediate awards for gallantry was received on 25th March. They were:

- M.C. Major J. W. Peyton.
Jemadar Phagga Singh.
Jemadar Qaim Shah, I.D.S.M.
- M.M. Lance-Naik Bashir Ahmed.
Lance-Naik Kaila Ram.
Sepoy Gul Imam.

The Battalion was now called upon for offensive operations to the south-east of Meiktila, where it was decided to clear the enemy from the village of Kandaung. Tank support was arranged and the Battalion attacked the village on the morning of 3rd April, commencing with a feint from the north-east. The position was naturally strong and many bunkers were known to have been constructed.

Three attacks were launched in succession from the south-west, south and south-east, but all failed, the supporting tanks being knocked out each time by anti-tank weapons. The Battalion harboured 800 yards south of the village and suffered some casualties during the night from mortar fire.

When darkness fell the Battalion "soft" vehicles, bringing rations and ammunition, which had left by a cross-country route from Meiktila, had not arrived. This very vulnerable column eventually turned up after dark just as the Japs put in a "jitter" raid on our perimeter.

In the morning the village was found abandoned, the Japs having left behind all their guns and a quantity of other weapons and equipment that they could not remove.

The Battalion lost six killed and forty wounded in this affair.

The Battle of Pyawbwe, April 1945

The general advance south from Meiktila now commenced, and the 17th Division with the 255th Tank Brigade started in the lead, the first objective being Pyawbwe—a town at the junction of the road south from Meiktila with that from Mandalay through Thazi.

This nodal point was of obvious importance to the enemy and he concentrated for its defence. A description of the battle is best taken from the official Fourteenth Army account, for this indeed was where the 17th Indian Division began to settle old scores with the Japs:

"The commander of the Japanese Army hurriedly grouped his three divisions for the defence of Pyawbwe, where he had a good tactical position in which to hold our advance south from Meiktila. . . . But the 17th Division was too fierce in its onrush for the Japanese commander. . . . Every village of tactical

value was the scene of fights without quarter. So skilled at this 'in-fighting' and the use of armour and air, however, were the 17th Division troops that the enemy suffered casualties in men and guns out of all proportion to the delay imposed. . . .

"The final battle for Pyawbwe, which the Japanese commander had ordered to be held to the last, was a brilliant piece of tactical handling by the commander of the 17th Division. A direct assault would have been bloody and slow. Instead he put in his attacks from the north and west co-ordinated with a deep enveloping drive from the south-west by a powerful armoured column whose surprise blow was decisive. The battle lasted three days, 8th to 10th April, and was most fiercely contested. The Japanese died where they crouched in their foxholes and bunkers. This was the most costly defeat the enemy had suffered in a single one of the series fought in this campaign. After the battle 2,200 Japanese bodies were counted in the town and its environs—31 guns, 8 tanks and a quantity of M.T. were captured. . . . The enemy broke contact in disorder during the night of the 10th/11th April and withdrew south."

The task of the Battalion on the first day of this battle (8th April) was to clear the neighbouring villages of Sadaung and Myengon, and for this it was supported by the tanks of "B" Squadron, Royal Deccan Horse, and a platoon of M.M.Gs.

The villages were found to be occupied by 200 and 100 Japs respectively, and the attack went in with one company directed on each village, the attack on Myengon being supported by a troop of tanks and that on Sadaung by the remainder of the squadron. After hard fighting, Sadaung was cleared by 5 p.m., when Myengon was still holding out in spite of heavy casualties. Not long afterwards however, the beaten and disorganized Japs were seen breaking out to the south and west, and were chased by the tanks and leading platoons, suffering further substantial losses as they ran.

The Battalion less one company harboured in Sadaung, and the other company in Myengon. Patrolling continued throughout the night. After this action 130 enemy dead were counted on the ground, while two 75-mm. guns, two 81-mm. mortars, five M.M.Gs., six swords, and many L.M.Gs. were captured. The Battalion's casualties were three killed and one J.C.O. and twenty-nine rank and file wounded.

The next day the Battalion moved on to the Kinda area, and on the 10th was ordered to dispatch one company with one squadron (tanks) of the Royal Deccan Horse to cut the Mandalay road east of Pyawbwe three and a half miles out, thus protecting the left flank from possible interference by enemy formations retiring from the north. "A" Company were assigned to this, but were not opposed. In the final capture of Pyawbwe on 10th April the Battalion was given the stud farm as its objective. During the advance two companies and

Battalion Tactical Headquarters were caught in the open by L.M.G. fire while advancing across paddy-fields west of the Meiktila-Pyawbwe road. Nothing could stop them, however, and in spite of a number of casualties the objective was overrun.

In the meantime the remainder of the Division had fought its way into Pyawbwe, and the Battalion was ordered to occupy and consolidate the Burma Frontier Force lines in the town. This was completed by 7.45 p.m. that evening, and the next day the Battalion moved on to the area east of the church in Pyawbwe.

On the 13th a sweep in the outlying area of Keytte was carried out by "D" Company with mortar support. A few parties of enemy were seen who did not want to try conclusions. A further quantity of arms and equipment was taken during the sweep.

The Drive on Rangoon

With the capture of Pyawbwe, the 17th Division were halted there while the 5th Division coming up from behind passed through and, taking the lead on 11th April, carried on the advance down the main road and rail axis to Pyinmana, Toungoo and Pegu.

Parallel with this the 20th Division, with the 9th Battalion of the Regiment among the leading formations, was driving down the Irrawaddy axis on Prome, and XV Corps on the coast had reached Taungup and were preparing for a seaborne landing.

The 4th Sikhs remained in the Pyawbwe area till 20th April resting, refitting and training, and during this period (on 16th) news came of the award of a M.C. to Subadar Sultan Ali. On the 20th the advance was resumed. The Battalion (in M.T.) reached Takon the same evening, and on the 21st harboured in Pyinmana. Although the 5th Division was in the lead and captured Toungoo on the 22nd, the formations in rear were not in fact clear of contact with the enemy, because all the time broken and isolated formations of Japs were streaming south parallel with our advance. The official account remarks whimsically that "the situation at this stage had an element of the comic in it. The 5th Division was charging down the main road and railway while driven off these, in the hills on each flank, faint but pursuing enemy columns were marching hard in the vain attempt to reach Toungoo first. If the Tokio radio had announced 'our forces are pursuing the enemy rapidly in the direction of Rangoon,' it would have been nearer the truth than usual."*

Wherefore the diary of the 4th Sikhs during the period of mid-April, when the 17th Division was following the 5th Division southward, tells of constant brushes with enemy parties and the laying of ambushes for them whenever

* *Campaign of the Fourteenth Army*, p. 34.

the chance occurred. Under these circumstances the dash into Toungoo of our leading armour was such a surprise to the enemy there that the Jap Army Commander, who had not left, narrowly escaped capture. Even a Japanese military policeman continued to direct the traffic as our tanks rolled in. They failed to obey his signals and ran over him.

Four days after the capture of Toungoo when the leading troops of the 5th Division were 128 miles from Rangoon, the 17th Division passed through and once more took the lead. Brushing aside opposition, they were only eighty miles from Rangoon on the evening of 27th April. Rain-storms now began to herald the approach of the monsoon.

The Pegu Bridge

The Battalion's final scene in the drama of the Second World War was set on a bridge, just as three years before its first major battle had been. The difference was that at the Sittang bridge in 1942 they had to defend, whereas at the Pegu river in April 1945 they attacked. The two actions had, however, this in common: they were both examples of unwavering devotion and bravery—the first in staving off initial disaster, the second in securing the final victory in Burma.

The story of the advance to Pegu is once more best told in the words of the official account, for the movements of the Battalion were mainly at night, and till reaching Pegu on the 30th it participated in no important action. One incident in harbour on the 29th must be recorded, however. A Japanese booby-trap known as a "pole charge" exploded in "C" Company area, killing six and wounding twenty-one men—a tragic disaster in which a Subadar was among the wounded. Of the drive forward, the official account writes as follows: * "On the 29th April a Brigade of the 17th Division with tank support rushed Payagyi against opposition and pushed on to the outskirts of Pegu. At the same time an armoured column was sent on a hook round to the Moyingyi Reservoir . . . and cut the escape road from Rangoon to Mokpalin." "D" Company of the 4th Battalion accompanied this column.

"With three days to the amphibious assault, IV Corps (i.e. 17th Division with the 4th Sikhs in the lead) were just over fifty miles from Rangoon. But between them and the city was the last main Japanese defensive position astride the wide Pegu river which must be forced before the advance could be resumed. The whole of the Jap Rangoon garrison and large numbers of men from the 33rd Army were in this position with orders to hold to the last—orders which they would obey. The battle for Pegu was the battle for Rangoon.

"There were three bridges over the Pegu river which ran across the main line of advance—the road, the main railway, and a diversionary railway bridge.

* *Ibid.*, pp. 36 and 37.

The Japs held both banks with strong positions which they had been feverishly preparing for several days. Our men on present form would, however, have made short work of them had not a great misfortune arrived. On the afternoon of the 29th April a very heavy rain-storm burst over Pegu, followed by other deluges throughout the night—a foretaste of the advancing monsoon. Neither wheels nor tracks could move off the road, all airstrips went out of action, and, worst of all, the Pegu river, up to then fordable in places, rose in spate. The IV Corps was at once placed on half rations.

“During the 30th April our infantry splashing though the mud cleared the east bank in a series of dog-fights. The Japanese blew the bridges and held the west bank while reckless parties of our men probed for a crossing. A company of Indian infantry, crashing under fire over the wrecked girders of one of the bridges, succeeded most gallantly in collecting on the west bank. By a bayonet charge they took the nearest Japanese strong-point and the rest of the Battalion followed them, crawling over the bridge or swimming. A bridgehead had been established.”

In fact the “company of Indian infantry” was “A” Company of the 4th Sikhs, commanded by Major Amrik Singh. The Battalion diary records that the latter discovered by personal reconnaissance that one girder of the southernmost bridge was crossable in single file. He organized a demonstration to attract the enemy’s attention and also called down an artillery concentration on the bridgehead area. Under cover of this, one platoon crawled over the girder by ones and twos. Although suffering casualties, the platoon got across, and its commander, undaunted, collected his men and with his platoon alone put in the bayonet charge. It succeeded in breaking into the centre of the enemy position and held firm there in spite of the Japs now reacting violently and directing a hail of fire on the bridgehead. This, however, prevented a further platoon crossing to reinforce until after dark.

During the night the enemy twice counter-attacked the two platoons in the bridgehead, but were beaten off each time. With a final burst of firing, the enemy slipped away at first light, and the whole area was cleared before 7 a.m.

The action was indeed a magnificent feat and finally opened the road to Rangoon, but the 17th Division were not to have the satisfaction of being the first to re-enter the city for the amphibious landing of XV Corps from the Arakan took place the same morning. Actually the honour of being the first of our forces to re-enter Rangoon went to the R.A.F., for a pilot, seeing a signal* and a Union Jack on the jail roof, landed on Mingaladon airfield, was welcomed by townspeople and went down-river in a country boat to give XV Corps the news that the Japanese had gone.

* The signal, “Extract Digit.” Its interpretation, “Take finger out” or R.A.F. “slang” for “hurry up.” Jargon was used so that the Japs would not understand (and possibly return).

During the course of 1st May the 4th Sikhs pushed on through Pegu and were directed to capture the railway station. This was effected by a smart action in which "B" and "C" Companies put in a co-ordinated attack from two directions. The enemy did not wait but fled eastward, suffering heavily as they crossed the open country.

During 30th April and 1st May, eighty-nine Japs were counted as killed by the Battalion, whose own losses were four killed and twenty-eight wounded.

After the capture of Pegu railway station the Sappers took in hand the repair of the bridges, and the first elements of the Division began to cross by 12 noon the same day (1st May).

To return for a moment to the story of 29th April: information had reached Intelligence that some 400 of the prisoners taken by the Japs in 1942 were being moved from Rangoon to Moulmein, and efforts were to be made to rescue them. "C" Company was accordingly dispatched to a village south of Pegu where the prisoners were reported to be arriving, thereby cutting the escape route of the Jap escorting party. The latter did not wait on the approach of our men and the prisoners were rescued. They included Americans and British. Many were half starved and in rags; some were even barefoot. There were also some who were men of the 17th Division captured in 1942, and they now found themselves back in their old formation.

Burma 1945-46

Although the war in Burma did not end with the capture of Rangoon, the Battalion was not called on for further serious operations. There were, however, minor brushes, ambushes, and constant patrolling in the areas where it was located, until the Japanese national surrender in August 1945.

Our forces were now strung out over several hundred miles on two roads: the Mandalay-Rangoon road (on which the Battalion was located in the Pegu area) and the Yenangaung-Prome-Rangoon road (the 9th Battalion was on this road). The Japs, of whom there were still some 50,000 in the country, were in three groups. The first, about 8,500 west of the Irrawaddy, were the defeated remnants of two divisions from the Arakan; the second between the Irrawaddy and the Sittang, about 12,000; and the third east of the Sittang totalled some 30,000. All these had retreated before the Fourteenth Army.

While the large third group above was able to withdraw fairly safely to the east, the other two groups were in a precarious position. They could only use bullock-cart transport and were likely to suffer increasingly as the monsoon developed, from lack of supplies and sickness.

The object of our forces now was to intercept these groups in their efforts to infiltrate eastwards and, if not destroy them, cause the maximum of loss. To this end the 17th Division was given the southern portion of a north and south cordon along the line of the main road and Sittang river. The Battalion

remained in the Pegu area till 9th May, when it moved north sixty miles to Nyaunglebin, stayed there five days and moved to Daiku. Its task all this time was patrolling and laying ambushes when information indicated the presence of parties of Japs trying to escape eastward across the cordon. On 16th May, at Daiku, General Messervy, the Corps Commander, inspected the Battalion and addressed all ranks in Urdu. On the 27th the Battalion moved to the Pegu area again and was distributed in detachments, continuing the work of intercepting and ambushing the Japs whenever opportunity offered. The success achieved varied. A report for 1st May claimed sixty-five enemy killed and three prisoners for "our light casualties," and another for the 14th records fourteen Japs killed without loss.

A victory march through Rangoon was now arranged for 12th June, and the Battalion sent a representative detachment. Lieutenant-Colonel MacLeod, D.S.O., and Major Harbans Singh Virk, D.S.O., attended with the party, which was made up of all classes in the Battalion.

On 19th June the Battalion returned to Daiku and took over its former area for outposts and patrols. Japs were now for a while very infrequently contacted. The monsoon was in full flood and all vehicles were road-bound. Attempts to move on wheels elsewhere resulted in their becoming bogged, and on one occasion elephants had to be employed to extricate some trucks.

On 16th July Lieutenant-Colonel MacLeod went on three months' leave and Lieutenant-Colonel Elsmie (2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles) was posted to command the Battalion.

At the same time, the Battalion moved again, this time with a troop of 166 Regiment Royal Armoured Corps under the Battalion commander. It went to Painzalok, fifty-five miles north of Pegu. Here on the 20th and 21st the Battalion met on a larger scale an attempted break-through by the Japs collected in the Pegu Yomas. No concentrated action took place, but all detachments had brushes with and took heavy toll of the enemy. Tanks and the artillery co-operated, causing great execution. A total of 199 killed and 23 prisoners was reported by the Battalion on 21st and 22nd July for a loss of one killed and six wounded.

This was the final clash of importance. On 15th August came the surrender of Japan, and the Second World War was over. The 4th Sikhs had good reason to be proud of its achievements. It had lived, served and fought up to the highest traditions of the Frontier Force, and no higher praise could be desired.

During the campaign for the reconquest of Burma in 1944-45 the Battalion inflicted the following losses on the Japanese: Killed, 1,801; wounded, 37; prisoners of war, 63. Its own casualties (for the whole war) were: Killed, 195; wounded (including remaining at duty), 848; it was retribution

indeed for a savage and wanton aggression, and for atrocities that have been adequately described in other histories.*

The work of the Battalion overseas was not yet completed, however, and much remained to be attended to as an aftermath of the war. Another twenty months were to elapse before the Battalion returned once more to Jhelum.

Last Days in Burma and the Return to Jhelum

Five days after the surrender of Japan, the Battalion was withdrawn to the Pegu area, and harboured once more in Payagyi. Its first task was the construction of defences of prisoner-of-war cages. At the same time training was recommenced, but with more attention to peace-time requirements, one of the first being ceremonial. The month of August ended in fact with a ceremonial inspection of the Battalion by the Divisional Commander.

The month of September was uneventful and was devoted mainly to training. On the 1st the welcome news came of two further immediate awards. They were Military Medals and the recipients Lance-Naiks Jittan Singh and Chabbu Khan.

On the 6th a platoon had to be sent to an outlying village near where 100 Jap Commandos were reported to be located in the Pegu Yomas, and unaware of the armistice. They were brought in.

On the 24th surrendered Japanese began arriving to go into the cages at Payagyi. A camp specialist staff had already arrived to receive them, and they carried out searches of all personnel before admitting them. "A" Company were detailed as camp guard.

Early in October the Battalion was relieved at the prisoner-of-war cages, and on the 6th moved to Rangoon. There it embarked in four landing-craft for the journey to the East Burma coast at Tavoy. They sailed on the 9th and disembarked at Pyintha Taung bay on the 11th, being ferried on from there to Tavoy. One company was earmarked to go on to Victoria Point, but had to wait for the necessary sea transport. A detachment of one company was also ordered for Mergui. At Tavoy the Battalion was at once engaged in collecting and guarding Jap surrendered personnel, and these were all concentrated by 18th October. Three days later a ceremonial Victory Parade was held by the Battalion, when the Union Jack was hoisted, followed by the Royal Salute. The Commanding Officer then received the Jap commander's sword from the latter, who was on the parade for the purpose in person. He was Major-General Minami. All local services were represented on this parade.

There followed three days' holiday from 22nd to 25th October. The month ended with the receipt of an order giving the names of members of the Battalion mentioned in despatches for gallant and distinguished service between

* The official *Eastern Epic*, Compton Mackenzie, gives many examples.

16th May 1944, and 15th August 1945. They were:

Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. W. MacLeod, D.S.O.

Major H. R. Hugo

Major Zora Singh

Captain V. I. Murtough

Lieutenant C. L. Charnalia

Jemadar Sitar Khan

Naik Nawab Khan

Naik Umraz Khan

Naik Sarnu Ram

Sepoy Razim Khan

Life now became uneventful, and was punctuated chiefly by visits from higher formation commanders and senior officers. The chief of these was the Supreme Allied Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who arrived by air on 29th November at 9.45 a.m. A guard of honour of a company under Major A. J. H. Bowerman was provided, and both the Brigade Commander and the Commander of the 17th Division were there to meet him. After seeing all officers, Lord Louis drove through the town of Tavoy. He left at eleven o'clock and the Battalion later received the following message from him: "I congratulate you on the smartness of your men and the arrangements made for my visit to your area. Thank you for the hospitality shown to me and my party at your Mess."

The first months of 1946 continued without incident at Tavoy. The award of a C.B.E. to Brigadier Edward, who had commanded the Battalion in the retreat of 1942, was noted with pleasure on 8th January.

During this month, dumping of Japanese ammunition in the sea was carried out and the Battalion was employed to load it in civilian shipping for the purpose. The work was tedious. February and March passed and in April the company at Victoria Point was withdrawn, leaving the Battalion concentrated at Tavoy with one company at Mergui. In September, with the end of the monsoon, the Battalion was warned for a move to an area where disturbances were reported. The move took place in the first week of October 1946, to the Mokpalin-Martaban-Thaton-Kyaikto area, where it was distributed in detachments as aid to the civil power. Detachments were however left in Tavoy and Mergui. At the same time, Lieutenant-Colonel P. N. Higham arrived to relieve Lieutenant-Colonel Elsmie in command of the Battalion, who left on 12th October to join the 4th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles.

There were no developments of importance in October or November, and on 23rd December the Battalion was moved to Meiktila. Before the move an officer (Lieutenant C. L. Charnalia) was sent to represent the Battalion at a ceremony at the War Graves Cemetery at Thambuzayat. This was on the infamous "Railway of Death" connecting Siam and Burma on which the

Japanese forced our prisoners of war to work in 1943 and 1944, with terrible loss of life from disease, exposure or starvation.*

The 48th Brigade was now concentrated in the Meiktila area to deal with dacoity and civil disturbances which had broken out in Upper Burma.

The Battalion was employed there in a series of patrols and flag marches which continued into March 1947, without any incident of note. On 5th April the Battalion provided a raiding column of two companies to search a labour camp where arms were reported to be hidden, but though mine detectors were used nothing of consequence was found.

This proved to be the Battalion's last task in Burma. Next month it left for Rangoon, and on 14th May 1947, sailed for Madras, arriving there on the 18th.

The 4th Sikhs were the last to leave Burma after the Second World War, and arrived at Jhelum on 29th May 1947.

* See Chapter XIX, narrative of the 2nd Battalion.

CHAPTER XXI

THE GUIDES INFANTRY IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR THE MIDDLE EAST

India, 1939-41—Iraq and Persia, 1941-45.

In India, 1939-41

IN March 1940, the Guides Infantry left Mardan and moved to Bara Fort and the Khajuri Plain posts, west of Peshawar. After nine uneventful months the Battalion was ordered up the Khyber and remained four and a half months, unable even to carry out training. However, in April 1941 they were moved to Secunderabad, which had become a training area for new methods and weapons and of intensive M.T. instruction for those who were shortly to go overseas.

This preparation for active service was only to last till September, when the Battalion left for Paiforce (Iraq and Persia Command); but before proceeding to the story of the Battalion's doings in the Middle East, there are a few events to record of its officers who were serving in other places.

In October 1939, Major W. J. C. Duncan, D.S.O., M.C., died suddenly of heart failure. He had received his first commission in the Australian Forces in 1915, and served with them in France from November 1916, to November 1918, winning the Military Cross at Messines on 17th September 1917, the D.S.O. for conspicuous bravery in the defence of Villers Bretonneux, and a bar thereto in the operation south-west of Bouchavesnes in August 1918—an amazing distinction of three "immediate" awards.

At the end of April 1940, Major M. H. H. Baily and Captain A. C. S. Moore were suddenly ordered to leave India for the United Kingdom, their destination being Norway. Owing to the gradual setback there, only Baily actually reached that country and was attached to the Irish Guards, gaining great distinction and being awarded the D.S.O. in the withdrawals from the mountains. This expedition to Norway, which took place before Dunkirk, was doomed to failure, for there were few fit and trained troops, no "services," and no possibility of adequate air cover.

In October 1940, the news was received with a shock by the Battalion that Major H. A. Barnes, C.I.E., had been murdered in the Zhob by a disgruntled tribesman. "Barney" had joined the Political Department after seven years' service with the Battalion and in the Tochi Scouts. He had escaped with

his life on more than one occasion during the "Red Shirt" troubles in the Peshawar Plain and thereafter had made a name for himself in Waziristan as the Political Officer dealing with the Mahsuds.

Iraq and Persia, 1941-45

The Battalion left Secunderabad for Bombay *en route* to Basra on 5th September 1941. Although by then all fighting in Iraq and Persia had ceased and the Allies had established firm control of this vital area, which had been threatened by enemy infiltration, the role which our troops had still to carry out there was of the greatest importance.*

Particularly was this so in regard to Persia, which was riddled with German agents, and whose ruler, Riza Shah, was markedly pro-German. In August, therefore, the country had been occupied by British Indian Forces advancing from the south and west and by Russians from the north. The Persians offered only token resistance.

Riza Shah abdicated in favour of his son (who is still ruler as this story is written) and went to Mauritius, where he died soon afterwards.

The Persian situation was now vigorously taken in hand, and the existing railway from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea was developed by the Americans to the greatest extent that the mountainous nature of the country would allow, in order to provide an effective "life-line" to Russia.

Such was the situation when the Guides Infantry arrived as part of the 6th Indian Division to share in the occupation of Persia. By the time they arrived in the Middle East, the early disasters to the Russian forces and the rapid advance eastward of the victorious German armies made the threat to the Caucasus, if not to Persia itself, take very real shape, and all energies were bent on preparing for the defence of this area.

After a short period of intensive training in Basra, the Guides Infantry moved to Kermanshah. After a short stay there the Battalion, less two rifle companies, left for Senneh, some ninety miles to the north. Senneh is the capital of Persian Kurdistan, and Lieutenant-Colonel Rich (the C.O.) found himself practically a political officer and an intermediary between the Persians and their very dissatisfied subjects, the Kurds. This portion of the Kurdish country has always belonged to Persia, but had never been brought under very effective control. It had felt the disruption of the First World War. Under the reborn Persia of Riza Shah, this section of the Kurdish race was gradually brought under a more effective Persian control than formerly. The Persians, however, had not been wise and relations between the tribesmen and the Government machinery were none too cordial, and there was often cruelty. Good behaviour was enforced by taking hostages and by heavy garrisoning, while the badly

* For an outline of events in the Middle East leading up to the summer of 1941, see Chapter XVIII, narrative of the 1st Battalion.

paid Persian officials had their own pockets to fill. There was therefore an atmosphere of deep hatred for anything Persian.

During the short Allied-Persian hostilities, the Kurds had tried to get their own back.

In this difficult atmosphere into which the Guides were plunged, only one point was paramount, that order must be maintained and the communications of the Allies properly secured.

Senneh had already been occupied after a forced march over the mountains by a battalion of the 5th Royal Gurkhas, as a Russian force also was approaching and it was not desirable that Senneh should be in their zone.

On the night the Battalion arrived, Colonel Rich received a request from the leaders of a gathering of some hundreds of Kurds for permission to attack the Persian Garrison of Senneh. While he replied telling them to go home, the Persian Governor of the District went to parley with them and was promptly taken prisoner. The Kurds demanded a ransom of 5,000 tumans (about £550), but tactful handling secured the release of the Persian Governor, none the worse (*mirabile dictu!*) for his experience.

The Guides patrols now toured the country and were happily received by the Kurds, while relations with the Persians were also cordial. During their stay at Senneh a partial reunion with the Cavalry of the Corps took place, in that Colonel Rich had under his command "A" Squadron (Dogras) of the Guides Cavalry under Major W. A. Gimson, M.C.

At Senneh all was quiet enough till an unfortunate happening on 10th-11th December, when a patrol sent out by Major Baily was attacked by Kurds fifty miles north of Senneh and Subadar Sardar Khan and one driver of the R.I.A.S.C. were killed. Four transport vehicles stuck in the snow and had to be abandoned, but were recovered later in February, after several attempts.

Most of Persia is a high plateau, broken by mountains, and the Senneh Valley at 6,000 feet had a severe winter. The troops were well enough equipped with *poshteens* and Gilgit boots, but motor vehicles could only be used with chains and extraordinary precautions were necessary to protect them against cracked cylinders. The rank and file had been got under roofs and a liberal supply of oil stoves issued. The officers' mess and the Headquarters offices were accommodated in the upper storey of the Hotel de Ville, while the Persian authorities continued to use the ground floor. This arrangement helped the increasing liaison and cordial relations between British and Persians, and Persian troops were actually saluting British officers. This cordiality, unfortunately, was not always in evidence elsewhere in the country, despite every effort on the part of the British and the Indian troops.

In December came the news of Pearl Harbour and the Japanese entry into the war, bringing a vista of even more extended operations than before. As the winter wore on, the order to move down to Khaniqin on the Iraq border

for training with the rest of the Brigade was welcome, and the Battalion spent six weeks there in March and April 1942. But on 14th April orders unexpectedly came for the Brigade Group to march to Sultanabad. The sojourn there was short, and on 14th May, the Battalion left for temporary duty at Baghdad, marching at three and a half hours' notice. This was no mean tribute to the efficient state of the Brigade, when a unit can start on a 400-mile march with so short a time of preparation.

The march down through the Persian spring was beautiful, but the prospect of hot and dusty Baghdad and local duties was none too attractive.

The Battalion arrived in Baghdad on 17th May to relieve a Gurkha battalion and take over Advanced Base guards of all kinds. Training was impossible and the shoddy surroundings of the Arab capital were boring and expensive; so when orders came to move to Musayib in July, they were at first received with relief. But if Baghdad was bad, Musayib was worse. Located on the Upper Euphrates, near the Hindiah Barrage, it was being developed as the main base for Paiforce and was as hot, dirty and dreary a spot as troops from the Persian upland could well ask for. It consisted of a huge dump of army stores of all kinds, base hospitals and the like. There was an immense amount of valuable stores, very attractive to that prince of thieves the local Arab, who was quite reckless of life in the attempt to get rich quick. It should be realized that motor tyres alone were fetching about £100 apiece in the Baghdad bazaar.

When the Guides marched in, this enormous area was guarded by some untrustworthy Arab "chowkidars" and 200 inexperienced "first reinforcements" from a near-by camp. A few weeks before the Battalion had arrived, a well-planned and well-executed raid had taken place and some thirty or forty camel-loads of loot were carried away, including nearly half a million rounds of S.A.A. Gossip said that the raiders had even brought a party complete with dancing girls for the delectation of some of the sentries. One could hardly blame the guards, as it transpired at the Court of Inquiry that some of the unfortunate sentries had had only one night a month off duty.

The raid had naturally caused a stir, and the despatch of the Guides Infantry to guard Musayib was the sequel. The Battalion killed four Arab thieves their first night and many more in the course of the next few months. Shooting to kill was the only answer to thieves of the skill and audacity of these pastmasters in the art. It was a thankless task and very arduous for the men. During August 1942, they were having two nights on guard and one off, though every possible man was pressed on to the roster. The officers slept out in the various depots along the perimeter. Conditions gradually improved, but in July and August, the heat was intense, and in October, when the rain came, the salt pan in the centre of the area became a sea of glutinous mud. Thanks to a staff muddle, the Battalion was camped in that particular spot

and had the unusual experience of living in a dust-storm while wading about in a sea of mud! The only thing in favour of Musayib was that there was good black-partridge and duck shooting, which helped to relieve the tedium and the beastliness of the place.

If Musayib was a penance (and all the time the Battalion was eating its heart out to join the desperate battles now being fought in the Western Desert) it brought the opportunity for a joyful reunion with the Guides Cavalry. Recently returned from the Western Desert and Egypt, they came to camp twenty miles away. A grand party was held and it was recalled how, a quarter of a century earlier, in the First World War, at Hinaidi near by, at almost the same time of the year, the Cavalry, joining what was then the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force (M.E.F.), had met the Infantry going down the Tigris to sail for Palestine. (See Chapter VI.)

On 5th December the Battalion was thankful to be relieved by the 4th/8th Punjab Regiment, but alas, it was not in order to join in the battle. While Rommel was being chased to Tripoli by the Eighth Army, the victorious German armies in South Russia were still at the gates of Stalingrad and were threatening the Caucasus and Turkey. The menace to Iraq and Persia was still very real, and though the "turn of the tide" at Stalingrad was imminent, it could not yet be foreseen.

The Guides Infantry returned to their old place in the 27th Brigade in Persia. It was now at Kasr-i-Shirin, training amid the bitter cold and snow of winter. Exercises away from camp always seemed to coincide with a new storm, but despite this, the men were healthy and cheery; indeed, anything was pleasant after Musayib.

On 23rd January 1943, to everyone's regret, the Subadar-Major, Honorary Lieutenant Rur Singh, I.O.M., Sardar Bahadur, left on transfer to the Machine-Gun Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment. A dignified figure with a white beard (which had earned him the title of "Hajji" from the local Persians), the Battalion was very sorry to lose him and gave him a hearty farewell. He was succeeded by Subadar-Major Chowdri, Sardar Bahadur, the first Dogra to hold the post in the Guides Infantry.

Another loss to the Battalion followed in June when Lieutenant-Colonel Rich, who had brought it through the long years of important but disappointing work in Persia and Iraq, left to take up the appointment of Inspector Quartermaster-General to the British Military Mission to the Iraq Army, an appointment for which he had many qualifications, notably that of having served with the same mission in its earlier days from 1925 to 1928. Colonel Rich was the only British officer left with the Guides Infantry who had served in the 1914-18 war. The command now passed to Major M. H. H. Baily, D.S.O.

The stay at Kasr-i-Shirin was succeeded for the Battalion by a year of moves up and down the whole length of Persia and Iraq. It was again detached

for army duty at Kifri, north of Baghdad, a hot and dusty assignment to maintain internal security in the area. This was followed by a short move to Kirkuk to take over the care of oil-fields from the Poles. These latter had been brought from Russia and equipped for service with the Allied Forces—a story now so well known that it needs no repetition here. The take over by the Battalion from these complete strangers was not without its amusing side, for it is related that one hot night a junior staff officer at Headquarters in Baghdad was rung up with the news that the Poles had refused to hand over one of their piquets and that a bloody battle was about to ensue. This apparently boiled down to a message that a Polish general would attend the ceremony and bring a band. That however the Battalion was fain to decline, as they could produce neither of these military show-pieces to balance the compliment.

In December 1943, the Battalion moved down from the Kurdish border to Baghdad, where two companies were left, and once more to Musayib—of unpleasant memory—to find it a very different place with proper hutting and roads and with a defensible wire fence, electrically fitted and booby-trapped. Even then the Arab thief was persistent, and on leaving again in February the Divisional Commander congratulated the Battalion on being the only one to defeat all attempts.

In February 1944, the Battalion once more rejoined its brigade, and in March, to their great excitement, the whole formation went in M.T. to the Lebanon, there to go through a strenuous mountain-warfare course, a prelude, it was expected, to a move to join the army in Italy. The fact that Lieutenant-Colonel Baily and other C.Os. were flown to Italy—first for a course at the tactical school* and then on a liaison visit to the front—lent colour to this pleasing belief.

The Lebanese roads were very narrow and damaged by heavy rain, and some of the Battalion's drivers displayed great nerve in staying on carriers half over a drop to keep the brakes on. One N.C.O. was crushed to death under his vehicle which went over.

The training school in Lebanon was most efficient and the course stringent, hardening and interesting, while the men much appreciated the mountain air and the green hillsides.

When the six weeks' strenuous training terminated, the Brigade, to their consternation, were ordered back to Iraq and the Persian railways instead of Italy, the reason being that the situation in Burma had apparently brought about a decision to earmark all surplus troops for India if required. The Brigade

* Here Baily found Macnamara also undergoing the Tactical Training Course at Benevento. At this time the latter was commanding the 3/15th Punjab Regiment in the 8th Indian Division, and after the course Macnamara was able to take Baily to the front on a visit to his battalion. This was then holding a position close under the Cassino Monastery, and Baily had his first whiff of the "real thing" since he won his D.S.O. in Norway.

then re-embussed, going via the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon to Duroud, where they arrived on 23rd May and took over from the 24th Infantry Brigade, who now moved over to the Lebanon.

The disappointment that was felt when the Lebanon training did not bring the expected move to Italy was not lightened by this move to the trying but important task of guarding a sector of the trans-Persian railway.

As already noted, the importance of this task lay in the fact that the railway was one of the routes carrying vital war supplies to Russia and was being run and administered by the Americans. The protection of the line, however, was a British responsibility carried out by static troops reinforced by a brigade from the 6th Indian Division. The American personnel, though nominally soldiers, were all technical civilians, and the American organization also included large motor convoys. It was a first-class organization with excellent canteens, and once a fortnight a train of Persian "artistes" was brought down the line. American canteens were officially dry, but the usual subterfuges allowed of sufficient drink appearing when necessary.

The variety of Allied nationals on the line was noticeable; the Russians formed the guards on the train, the Americans the operating staff, British and Indians guarded the line, Poles (on their way to being re-formed for further fighting) travelled down it, and the Persians controlled the passenger traffic under the over-all direction of the Americans. The duty of guarding the line was an unpleasant one, for although in the upper section below Sultanabad the climate was better and orchards and fields abounded, malaria was very prevalent and of the malignant type. The lower reaches of the line were also extremely hot and trying, though streams with fish, to be caught by line, by net, or even dynamited, gave some diversion to the men.

The line guarded by the Brigade ran from Teheran to Telezang, and beyond the Guides' left was a war-raised battalion of the Regiment, the Afridi battalion,* later to become the revived Khyber Rifles. They were chiefly concerned with protecting telephone lines from copper-robbers, a delightful illustration of the poacher-turned-gamekeeper !

The actual sector held by the Guides Infantry ran from below Sultanabad to Bishe, twelve miles in all, the Battalion Headquarters with one reserve rifle company being at Duroud. The modern Indian soldier, like the modern Atkins, fraternized readily, and the Guides and the American railwaymen got on well, especially where one of the Battalion knew some English, and the amenities of life were readily shared and exchanged. But when their period of three months of malaria, mepacrine, and heat came to an end, it was gladly exchanged for duty in Iraq.

Various items concerning officers at this time are worthy of record.

Subadar-Major Chowdri, Sardar Bahadar, left for the Regimental Centre

* See Chapter XXVIII.

after thirty years' service. He was the last man who wore the medals of the First World War, and was succeeded by Subadar Sadhu Singh, I.D.S.M.

Macnamara had achieved the eminence of a brigade command in Italy, and Watt also went there as second-in-command of a battalion of Indian State Forces. Moore was posted to the Tochi Scouts as second-in-command after his repatriation leave as an ex-prisoner of war.*

The Guides Infantry remained on the Persian Railway till September 1944, and when the above description has been recorded of their surroundings and the nature of their duties there, nothing more remains to be said. The period was uneventful.

On leaving the Persian Railway the Battalion returned once more to the Baghdad area, but remained under the 6th Indian Division for training in preparation for Burma. This included training in "jungle warfare," carried out near Kirkuk.

In the early spring of 1945 the Brigade carried out an interesting flag march through a disaffected Arab area in the middle Euphrates. This was followed by a second and pleasanter tour with a similar object in Northern Iraq.

The War in Europe was now over, and when the Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir Claude Auchinleck, passed through Baghdad in June on his way to Delhi by air, he promised that the Guides Infantry should be the next unit to be called back. At this time the war with Japan had yet to be won and the Battalion was still training in jungle warfare. Orders to return to India were received in July. Before they moved, however, came the news of the Japanese surrender, and in September the Guides Infantry marched down to Basra and reached India in October. On arrival they went to Kohat, where leave was granted to all ranks till December.

* He was captured in the Western Desert when Staff Captain to an Infantry Brigade.

CHAPTER XXII

THE 6TH BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

INDIA AND THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER

Inception and Early Days—Waziristan, 1941—Wana, 1941-43—Kohat, 1943-44, and Disbandment.

AT Sabathu on 8th August 1940, Lieutenant-Colonel C. R. Hughes started the difficult task of raising the Regiment's second* war-time battalion. To assist him the following officers reported their arrival:

Major P. B. Janson (1st Sikhs).
Major R. A. K. Sangster (3rd Sikhs).
Captain K. M. Sheikh† (4th Sikhs).
Lieutenant R. G. Hutchinson (Guides).
Second-Lieutenant N. d'O. Finnis (3rd Sikhs).
Second-Lieutenant A. F. V. Beck (1st Sikhs).
Second-Lieutenant I. R. E. Shaw (1st Sikhs).
Subadar-Major Haq Dad Khan (2nd Sikhs).

At the same time 115 men from the 1st Sikhs, 111 from the 2nd Sikhs, 110 from the 4th Sikhs and 115 from the Guides also arrived, together with four clerks from the 10th Battalion. To this nucleus of 464 of all ranks, drafts of recruits from the Training Battalion were added, and occasional arrivals from active battalions followed.

Sabathu, being in fact a "hill station" for British troops to occupy in the hot weather, was hardly suitable as a training ground for a newly raised battalion. When therefore the 6th Battalion was moved to Jhelum at the end of September, the change was welcomed by everybody. On 5th October 1940, six days after the unit arrived in Jhelum, the strength had reached 704; stores, arms and ammunition were flowing in; the Battalion was on its feet.

On 18th December 1940, leaving only a temporary depot at Jhelum, the Battalion moved up to the North-West Frontier for the first time. It was located at Mir Ali, the modern post in the Tochi Valley of Waziristan, and it provided detachments to guard the Shinki Defile. These were two platoons each at Saidgi and Khajuri. The Battalion marched up from railheads at Bannu, leaving on 21st December and spending one night at Saidgi.

* The 7th Battalion raised on the 7th August was the first.

† Lieutenant-General K. M. Sheikh, Pakistan Army.

The reader will recollect that the Government's policy of pacification and development of the tribes of Waziristan that had proceeded so successfully up to 1936 had been rudely interrupted by the hostile activities of the Faqir of Ipi. (Ipi Village was one mile from Mir Ali.) His adherents had continued to raise the tribes against the Government ever since, and it was known that Ipi was now being financed by German money via Kabul. Waziristan therefore was not being allowed to settle down, and road protection by Khassadars alone was not yet possible. This therefore was the Battalion's first live role, and during the ensuing month the unit carried out its first road protection and camp duties. On its way the Shinki posts and Khajuri permanent piquets were occupied on 22nd December, and the remainder of the Battalion took over a sector of the Mirali defences on arrival there the same day. Several shots were fired into Mirali camp that night and were the baptism of fire for many of the recruits.

The Battalion's tour in Waziristan at this time was however short-lived. On 19th January 1941, after only one month there, it returned to Jhelum, where it was able to carry out recruit and specialist training without further interruption for five months. At the end of that time it was once more sent to Waziristan—this time for a more active role in that still disturbed area.

Waziristan, 1941

The Battalion left Jhelum on 7th May 1941, and after training for one month with the 7th Indian Division at Bakrial, was ordered to move to North Waziristan. On arrival in Bannu, orders were received to move up to Damdil on 15th June. Accordingly the Battalion moved off in M.T., detaching "D" Company (Pathans) under Second-Lieutenant C. W. Tassie at Tal Fort (in Tochi). The Company was sniped while unloading stores below the Fort, but without casualties. The remainder of the Battalion went on to Damdil to take over the camp from the 4th Sikhs, who joined Razcol for operations.

The Battalion's responsibility at Damdil was to protect a sector of the main road from Bannu to Razmak (in co-operation with Tochi Scouts and Khassadars), and while there it had a minor action against raiding tribesmen. What happened was as follows:

On 24th July 1941, a day on which the road was open for convoys to Razmak, the Battalion was out on road protection. Intelligence had reported a hostile gang of about a hundred in the area south of the road. There were two features there, called Lizard and Armoured Car Ridge—Lizard being a permanent Khassadar piquet. The Battalion moved out with M.M.Gs. and Post artillery in support, and it was immediately noticed that no Khassadar's flag was flying from Lizard. "C" Company set out at once for Lizard, followed closely by "B" Company making for Armoured Car Ridge. As "C" Company was crossing the intervening Khaisora Nullah and "B" Company was in a

dip in front of Armoured Car Ridge, the tribesmen opened a heavy fire. "C" Company, moving extremely well, dashed to the top of Lizard, where it opened fire with its L.M.Gs. on the retreating hostiles, inflicting at least one casualty. "B" Company also reached their objective, Armoured Car Ridge, and opened L.M.G. fire. In the meantime M.M.Gs. and the guns had opened from features in rear. After the first few minutes of this, only sporadic sniping was attempted by the hostiles, which died away completely after half an hour. "C" Company had three wounded. This was the only occasion the Battalion was in action while at Damdil.

Wana, 1941-43

The Battalion left Damdil on 27th August 1941, and after another month of road protection and camp duties at Mirali, received orders to move to Wana, where the Depot from Jhelum had already arrived.

The duties in Wana were fairly heavy and columns quite frequent, but the Battalion was able to carry out valuable specialist and company training and was also able to devote a little time to sports. A matter for congratulation was the news that on 1st January 1942, Subadar-Major Haq Dad Khan was promoted to the honorary rank of Lieutenant. He had received the O.B.I., 1st Class, with the title of Sardar Bahadur, in the previous year's honours.

From 10th to 14th March 1942, the Battalion proceeded with the Wana Column on a short promenade which was quite uneventful until, on the return to camp, one of the "D" Company (Pathans) piquets was fired on while being withdrawn by the rearguard. There were, however, no casualties, and no need for a counter-attack.

In April 1942, Major L. B. H. Reford arrived and took over Second-in-Command of the Battalion—an appointment in which he was to remain until final disbandment.

The Battalion now received a continuous flow of officers, and by June 1942, there were no less than 27 on the strength. Two however, were now posted to the 3rd Sikhs in Mid-East, and several went to extra-regimental appointments.

In 1942 sports in the Battalion reached their zenith, and the unit carried off the Wana Sports Trophy, which it was well on the way to retaining the following year when an abrupt move (recorded later) necessitated the cancellation of fixtures. In the winter of 1942 the Battalion was even able to raise a rugby football side of officers which took on the rest of the Brigade with even results.

In November 1942, the G.O.C.-in-C., North-West Army, Lieutenant-General C. D. Noyes, K.C.S.I., C.B., C.I.E., M.C., visited the Battalion, accompanied by Major-General F. Buckley (late 4th Battalion), the District Commander. The rest of the year was uneventful.

The year 1943 started with a very cold spell, which gave the unit a good chance to get used to the novelty of battledress. This had recently been issued and no one was accustomed to it. In March the Wana Column went out without the Battalion, which sent however a composite Dogra and Sikh company. This fulfilled the role of independent company. On 18th March the Battalion received 20 Kumaonis in a draft from the Training Centre. They were the first in the Battalion, but they soon settled down and became very popular with all ranks.

On 5th June 1943, the Battalion moved out with the Wana Column for the last time. The heat was unusually great and heat-exhaustion casualties amounted to 216 in five days, of which 23 came from the Battalion. Otherwise the Column was uneventful.

On 10th August the Battalion moved to Manzai. Here duties were so heavy as practically to eliminate training. After three months devoid of incident except for occasional sniping of Wana convoys (which did not involve the Battalion), the Battalion was once more on the move, this time to Kohat.

Kohat, 1943-44 and Disbandment

The Battalion left Manzai on 30th October 1943, and going in M.T. via Bannu, arrived in Kohat on 31st October. With the exception of watercraft at Khushalgarh, training was confined to Frontier warfare, and the Battalion was able to give several demonstrations to the rest of the Brigade. During a battle inoculation exercise, consisting of a brigade advance under an artillery barrage, the Battalion received its only officer casualty. Captain Tassie had his left wrist broken by a shell fragment. The following week the Battalion was sorry to record the death of Sepoy Mir Afzal of "B" Company, who was drowned at Khushalgarh while doing waterborne training.

On 18th December 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel C. R. Hughes, after watching the Battalion grow into an efficient unit since he raised it at Sabathu, relinquished command. All the "Piffers" in the station attended a farewell party in the mess, and all ranks were present at the station for his send-off. In his place the unit welcomed Lieutenant-Colonel G. E. Vosper of the 3rd Royal Battalion, who arrived from G.H.Q. (I) to take over command.

On 20th December the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, G.C.I.E., C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., O.B.E., visited the Battalion and inspected all ranks on parade. On 14th January 1944, the G.O.C.-in-C., North-West Army, Lieutenant-General Sir H. Finnis, C.B., M.C., also visited the unit and, being an ex-3rd Sikhs, was able to recognize many of the veterans. With Lady Finnis he dined in the Officers' Mess, which was situated in his old bungalow and first abode in Kohat.

On 4th March 1944, the Battalion marched out of Kohat on a ten days' column, but was recalled after only three days. The march from Hangu back

to Kohat, 26½ miles, was accomplished in just under ten hours without a man falling out, in spite of the heat and the fact that sixteen three-month recruits were marching with their companies. High hopes were entertained of a move to an operational area, but the reason for the recall was to prove very different. The Battalion was to be disbanded in order to provide trained reinforcements for the other active battalions, all of which were in war brigades. The demand for recruits exceeded the supply which the Centre was trying hard to maintain. The news was a bitter disappointment to all, particularly those who had served with the Battalion since its infancy. The whole unit went to Sialkot in May and after slow disintegration was finally disbanded on 5th July 1944.

The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel G. E. Vosper, went out to Italy to command the 1st Sikhs, and the Subadar Major and Honorary Lieutenant Haq Dad Khan, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I., retired on 2nd July 1944, after thirty-two years' meritorious service. The Battalion's last contribution to the Regimental Magazine was the farewell speech of Wolsey to King Henry VIII. It is also a fitting close to its Regimental History :

“Farewell! a long farewell to all my greatness!
This is the state of man; today he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope, tomorrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honour thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost;
And he, when he thinks, good easy man, full surely
His greatness is a-ripening, nips his root,
And then he falls, as I do.”

THE 7TH BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Quoth the Spirit of the Japanese Soldier :

*"Say, where did the Frontiersman learn his trade?
for he thrashed me out of the Burmese Jungles."*

(With apologies to the shade of Rudyard Kipling.)

Raising and First Eight Months in Shillong—The Khajuri Plain, the Khyber, and Kohat, 1941-43—The 39th Training Division—The Curriculum—The Battalion's Achievement.

Raising and First Eight Months in Shillong

THE 7th Battalion was destined to become the jungle-training unit for the battalions of the Frontier Force. No one however could foresee this when it was one of the first war battalions to be formed on the first expansion of the British Indian Army in the Second World War. It was raised by Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Cumming of the Guides on 7th August 1940 in Shillong.

As was the case with all war-raised battalions, the nucleus was found from officers, J.C.Os. and men provided by the active battalions of the Regiment—except that none came from the 3rd Royal Battalion, which was already in the field in the Sudan.

The following were the first officers of the 7th Battalion and the battalions from which they came :

- Lieutenant-Colonel W. J. Cumming (Guides).
- Major D. J. Bryceson, M.C. (4th Sikhs).
- Captain H. Hullock (1st Sikhs).
- Captain R. F. S. Milanes (2nd Sikhs).
- Lieutenant P. I. Burrows (1st Sikhs).
- Lieutenant J. C. Kapur (4th Sikhs).
- Lieutenant Fazal Muqeem Khan (4th Sikhs).
- Second-Lieutenant T. M. Bishop (2nd Sikhs).
- Second-Lieutenant R. N. Sandes (Guides).

The class composition was the same as for the Regular Battalions, and initially there were class companies as follows :

"A" Company	..	..	..	..	..	Pathans
"B" Company	..	..	..	..	..	P.Ms.
"C" Company	..	..	..	..	..	Sikhs
"D" Company	..	..	..	..	..	Dogras

H.Q. Company contained a proportion of all classes.

When later it became necessary to supplement the strength of Dogras in the Army with Kumaonis, a proportion of these were also taken into the Battalion.

In addition to the nucleus of trained soldiers, strong contingents of recruits who had received the normal amount of training to enable them to join an active battalion also arrived, so that by 1st January 1941, the unit was able to parade for the traditional New Year's Day ceremonial as a battalion for the first time.

For the next two months all energies continued to be bent on individual training, and the only happening of note was the sudden departure, on being transferred to other active battalions, of two senior officers under Colonel Cumming—Major Bryceson and Captain Burrows. This was a serious handicap, as the Commanding Officer was left with no senior field officer as Second-in-Command until Major Marshall was posted to the Battalion in March 1941.

The Khajuri Plain, the Khyber, and Kohat, 1941-43

On 7th April the Battalion was moved across India to the North-West Frontier to Fort Salop on the Khajuri Plain west of Peshawar. The men were barely fit for frontier duty, but at Fort Salop the role was mainly that of garrison troops and the Battalion was not likely to be required for mobile columns. Moreover, at this time the Afridis were quiescent and active operations on the Tirah border were unlikely.

Accordingly, on the Khajuri Plain from April to November 1941, the time was devoted to more advanced training. This proceeded uneventfully, and by the autumn the Battalion had attained a fair standard of efficiency in spite of the handicaps imposed by shortages of weapons, vehicles and equipment of all kinds.*

In the meantime, however, in June, the war had taken an unexpected turn with Hitler's attack on Russia; and by November the sweeping victories of the German armies in Russia gave every promise of a repetition of 1917, with Russia capitulating and allowing German armies free passage to Persia and the Middle East. Such a contingency would place not only Iraq, Persia and Afghanistan within reach of a German drive, but also the North-West Frontier of India.

As has been recorded,† prompt measures had already succeeded in securing for the Allied cause Iraq, Syria and Persia, and now defences were being constructed to stop the German armies should they cross the Caucasus and

* For a detailed discussion of training problems in the British Indian Army at this time see Chapter XIX, narrative of the 2nd Sikhs.

† See Chapter XVIII, narrative of 1st Battalion.

threaten Baghdad. In concert with these precautions a comprehensive scheme for the defence of the gateways to the North-West Frontier of India was also drawn up, and work was put in hand on defences to stop a modern force of all arms in this region also.

Happily of course, the tide turned in 1942, and Russia staved off defeat at Stalingrad, Leningrad and Moscow. The defences in the Khyber and on the Khajuri Plain were redundant, but the 7th Battalion did much work on them in the winter of 1941-42. Every battalion in the Peshawar district took its turn at the digging, and the 7th Battalion's work was done on the Kabul River sector, where it camped for the purpose.

At the end of November 1941, the Battalion moved to Landi Kotal, and took part for the first time in exercises and columns in tribal territory. While the Battalion was here the event occurred that was to bring in its train the change in the Battalion's role that makes this chapter of special interest to students of warfare in tropical regions—the Japanese entered the war on the side of our enemies. Eighteen months and two disastrous campaigns were, however, to be endured before the realization came that a man required special training before success in the jungle could be expected.

In the meantime the Battalion continued the even tenor of its way in the Khyber, gaining in efficiency and hoping always for the order to mobilize and go to the front.

Early in 1942 the Battalion was inspected by H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester, who at that time paid an official visit to India. At the same period it was also visited by the Chinese General Chiang Kai-shek, whose two armies (of division strength) had just been defeated in Burma and had been evacuated to India.

The Battalion's time in the Khyber continued without incident till in August 1942, Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming was succeeded in command by Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall, who had been Second-in-Command. Shortly afterwards, in October, the Battalion marched back to Peshawar, where it remained throughout the cold season. The chief event during this period was the filming of the military film "Tarraqi," in which the Battalion was called on to take part with the actors. It was a considerable enterprise and called for much hard work. The filming took two months to complete.

On 14th March 1943, the Battalion moved by route march to Kohat and remained there throughout the hot weather.

The 39th Training Division

All ranks welcomed a stay in the home of the Regiment. The Battalion took part in all brigade and division columns and training exercises held throughout its stay in the station. The men were all very fit and well trained by this time.

Everyone wished and expected to proceed with the Battalion on active service, when suddenly orders were received that it would join 39th Indian (Training) Division and reorganize as a training unit. On 14th September the Battalion entrained at Kohat, and arrived at Badshahi Bagh, its new station on the bank of the Jumna River at the foot of the "Siwaliks," on 16th September 1943. That this was a bitter disappointment no one could deny; but when it was realized how important this role was, and that individuals would still have their chance of going on service with another active battalion of the Regiment, they felt better, and all ranks settled down to the new work with a will.

The reader should now understand the nature of the 39th Training Division, as it was indeed an entirely new and somewhat revolutionary idea when it was formed.

There is no doubt that the impact of the Japanese soldier in the Second World War, and the standard of individual fighting set by him, more particularly in jungle warfare, came as a shock. By early 1943, when we had suffered for the third time a severe handling in jungle-covered terrain (this time in the Arakan), it was clear that special measures were necessary to give the soldier who was going to fight the Jap in Burma a particular course of training. This had to be in jungle country such as he would meet on the Burma border, and must be additional to the course he went through as a recruit. It must cover all reasonable aspects of formation as well as individual fighting, manœuvring and weapon handling *in the jungle*, as well as a certain amount of administration and interior economy in the same conditions.

If thorough training with such a wide scope was to succeed, nothing less than a large formation properly organized throughout, with an establishment fully experienced in the work, could meet the case.

A division (called the 39th*) was therefore assigned specially to the task, with an establishment of battalions to make up its brigades. The commanders and staff of this Division, and the brigade and battalion commanders were permanencies. It was only the men who came to be trained and went on to active battalions who were the fluid material constantly passing through.

The Division was constituted in August 1943, and was entrusted to Major-General Frank Moore, † late of the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment.

It was as one of the permanent battalions of this Division that the 7th Bn. Frontier Force Regiment was now selected, and the importance of the role allotted to it requires no emphasis—it was vital. Anyone who has read the story above of the 2nd and 4th Sikhs and has noted the difference between the 4th Sikhs' campaign in Burma in 1942, and later in 1944-45; also the stories

* Appendix VIII. The 39th Training Division (a note, from material supplied by Major-General Moore).

† Major-General F. M. Moore, C.S.I., C.I.E.

which follow below of the performances in 1944 and 1945 of the 8th, 9th and Machine-Gun Battalions, must realize that the difference was not altogether attributable to better air support, more artillery and more modern weapons. None of these things either singly or together would put the individual fighter who was not specially trained in and accustomed to the jungle on terms with one who was—particularly when the latter had also the Japanese military tradition ingrained in him to the point of suicide. Yet our soldiers, both British and those from all parts of the Indian continent, fought and beat the Japanese in all departments of the military art, from individual combat to organized manœuvre, movement and endurance.

Let no one underrate the share taken in such an extraordinary success by the 39th Training Division and the work done by its units in producing jungle-trained fighters. To return however, to the 7th Battalion, let us see the manner in which it set about the task of bridging the gap, for the young soldier, between the comfort and security of barracks and the barrack square and the discomfort, unexpectedness and noise of war. For this indeed was the essence of its role, and the whole organization it assumed and the training it afforded were designed to this end.

As regards organization, this was readjusted in so far as one of the companies became a “drafting and holding” company, and the other rifle companies dealt with the infantry aspect of training while the H.Q. Company trained the specialists.

Leave was completed before the trainees joined the 7th Battalion, so that once with the Training Division men were liable to be drafted to an active battalion at short notice.

The Curriculum

The curriculum of training was as follows. In the first instance emphasis was on jungle training, not only to accustom the men to conditions that few if any had previously experienced, but also to initiate them to the tactics to be expected when in contact with the Japanese.

The training fell under the following main heads :

Jungle lore.

Silent movement by day and night.

Jungle clearing and building of “bashes” and shelters.

Cooking, etc., under jungle conditions.

Construction and neutralizing of booby-traps.

Battle inoculation.

Patrols and movement, both through jungle and on tracks and roads.

Watermanship, and construction of improvised boats and rafts.

Simple exercises in attack and defence.

A full-scale brigade exercise involving a river crossing (carried out with ball ammunition and with artillery and tank support).

Lectures and demonstrations.

Museum, showing enemy uniforms, arms and equipment and how they could be used if captured.

The area allotted to the Battalion consisted of about 6,000 acres of hilly, jungle-covered country ideally suited to its needs. A good road passed through and it was flanked on one side by the River Jumna. The area was subdivided into sub-areas, and to these much thought was given in preparing them with the necessary atmosphere, features and "sets" to illustrate the lessons to be taught. Tracks were cut, various types of "basha" and shelter were constructed, "enemy positions" were prepared and suitable places found for practising the surmounting of (improvised) natural obstacles.

Since realism was the keynote of all the training, the battle inoculation theatre and "lanes" required particularly careful siting and preparation. The whole, including a jungle "classification range," was made to look as natural as possible.

That the provision of competent and suitable instructional staff was a difficulty was inevitable. At the start only a proportion of the officers and N.C.Os. available had war experience in the jungle, while others had attended a course at the Central School of Jungle Warfare. Later, as battle casualties and other experienced J.C.Os. and N.C.Os. became available from the Regimental Centre, it was possible to exchange the less-experienced instructors for men who could teach from personal knowledge and experience.

In addition, the Battalion had a call on the invaluable services of Jim Corbett,* who had a roving mission to teach jungle lore throughout the 39th Division. What he did not know about the *flora* and *fauna* of the jungle was not worth knowing. He taught how to spend days in the jungle without the normal supply of food and water, the antidotes to sickness, etc., to be found growing there, and how to poach game.

The sepoy's main curriculum occupied six weeks, and during this he was kept more than fully occupied. Afterwards he passed into the Holding Company ready for dispatch on field service. His training continued, but the tempo was somewhat eased. Opportunity for recreation was provided, and if time permitted, additional leave was also allowed.

Throughout the curriculum an "operational atmosphere" was maintained. Each phase of training was tougher and more intensive than the last, and each contained the essential element of battle inoculation. Above all, the personal initiative and enterprise of the individual was the quality sought out for emphasis and development.

* See also Appendix VII. The 39th Training Division.

That a percentage of the men would not be of a standard to develop satisfactorily under these searching conditions was foreseen. Wherefore certain physical and mental tests were also instituted, so that where necessary the few who did not achieve the requisite standards could be weeded out and either relegated or drafted to a unit on the L. of C.

Specialists spent a slightly longer period in the Training Division. Signallers, medium machine-gunners, mortar men and M.T. drivers did the first two or three weeks of initial jungle training, and then concentrated on the aspect peculiar to their particular role.

As regards M.T. drivers, a very useful driving test was evolved incorporating a hazardous jungle track, passing through smoke and burning buildings, and negotiating both wet and dry river-beds.

To sum up, at no time were troops allowed to move or behave except as they would in proximity to an enemy; on or off parade, this was insisted on. Moreover, apart from the set-piece battle inoculation exercises—i.e. at other schemes, working parties, patrols, etc.—they were subjected to unexpected sniping. Finally, examples of the “jitter”* tactics employed by the Japs were periodically put on at night, all of which aimed at giving the young soldier confidence or self-reliance under all the conditions that he was likely to encounter when he went into the field alongside seasoned troops.

Indeed the aim of the training and tutelage given by the 7th Battalion to the men it sent to the Regiment's active battalions might well be exemplified by Rudyard Kipling's immortal lines written of Sir Francis Drake. When the four winds asked where he learnt his trade :

“The North Sea answered, ‘He's my man,
He came to me when he began.
I caught him young and I used him sore,
So you never shall startle Frankie more.
If you can teach him aught that's new,
I'll give you Bruges and Antwerp too,
And the ten tall churches that stand between them!
Storm along, my gallant captains
All round the Horn.’ ”

In the campaigns of Imphal and Burma in 1944 and 1945, if anyone was startled it was the enemy.

The Battalion's Achievement

The surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, was the signal for the gradual disbandment of the units of the 39th Training Division. By the end of January 1946, the training companies had closed down; all the men had been transferred to the holding companies, and surplus permanent staff had been dispatched to the Regimental Centre.

* See note, 2nd Battalion narrative, Chapter XIX.

Shortly afterwards the 7th Battalion ceased to exist. During its life as a jungle training unit it had trained and sent to active battalions in the field the following officers, rank and file, and followers :

Battalions	Officers	J.C.Os.	I.O.Rs.	Followers
1st	11	4	606	16
3rd	11	3	520	15
4th	9	10	844	31
5th	4	4	140	2
8th	13	10	530	37
9th	14	19	907	12
14th	5	0	69	10
M.G. Battalion	11	5	315	21
To other Frontier Force Battalions and Miscellaneous	29	22	911	51
Total	107	77	4,842	195

It had done a vital task and done it well without publicity or limelight. It had reason to be proud.

The following officers served with it during its life as a Battalion of the 39th Training Division :

The Commandants in succession as shown :

Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Marshall, Commandant up to September, 1943 (killed in action with the 4th Sikhs).

Lieutenant-Colonel A. S. Lewis, Commandant up to January 1945 (proceeded on active service to command 1st Burma Regiment).

Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Pearson, M.C., Commandant up to October, 1945 (transferred to 14th Battalion).

Lieutenant-Colonel P. N. Higham, Commandant from October 1945, to date of disbandment.

Major K. M. Sheikh (transferred to 8th Battalion, which he later commanded, rising to the rank of Lieutenant-General in the Pakistan Army after Independence).

Major F. H. B. E. Wilding (transferred to M.G. Battalion).

Major D. B. Morgan (transferred to State Forces).

Major Atma Singh.

Major H. G. Gage.

Major W. H. Kennedy.

Major W. J. Hogarth.

Major W. P. MacG. Cargill (transferred to Regimental Centre).

Major Z. M. Penty (transferred to The Guides).

Major P. Greenhalgh.

Major J. Wallace.

Captain J. Fowler.

Captain F. W. Bullock.
Captain J. S. Nicoll (killed in action).
Lieutenant M. J. Seale (killed in action).
Lieutenant R. E. Saul (S.S.O. Saharanpur).
Lieutenant D. M. Milne.
Lieutenant Bakhtawar Singh.
Lieutenant J. P. Soper.
Lieutenant M. A. Aziz.
Captain S. A. Lateef.
Captain Sultan Ali.
Captain F. M. Willan.
Captain Prem Singh.
Captain A. B. Thompson.
Captain H. Surinder Singh.
Captain H. L. Browne.
Lieutenant Shahzada.
Lieutenant Aziz Ahmed.
Lieutenant Stevenson.
Lieutenant Burford.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE 8TH BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

BURMA

**Raising and Early Days—Training in Southern India—The Burma Campaign, 1944-45—
The Attack on Mandalay Fort—Operations towards Taunggyi—The Advance into
Lower Burma—Operations towards Mawchi, East of Toungoo—The Battle of the
Break-Through—The Aftermath and Return to India.**

Raising and Early Days

THE Battalion was raised at Bareilly by Lieutenant-Colonel J. E. Redding on 1st April 1941, the nucleus being an adjutant, Lieutenant D. D. Slattery, a Quartermaster, Lieutenant N. K. Lal, two J.C.Os. and three sepoy. The C.O., Second-in-Command and Adjutant were all "Guides."

Four days later the first party, "milked" from other battalions of the Regiment, arrived. It was 11 J.C.Os. and 43 rank and file. This was followed by further parties during the next three weeks as follows:

From 7th Battalion	.. ..	30 rank and file on 11th April.
From The Guides	.. ..	30 rank and file on 13th April.
From 1st Sikhs	.. ..	31 rank and file on 15th April.
From 2nd Sikhs	.. ..	1 J.C.O. and 30 rank and file on 15th April.
From 4th Sikhs	.. ..	1 J.C.O. and 29 rank and file on 16th April.
From 6th Battalion	.. ..	27 rank and file on 16th April.
From Training Battalion (10th)		183 recruits on 16th April.
From Training Battalion	..	32 trained sepoy on 26th April.

(The 10th Battalion parties had only three months' training and had still to fire their rifle classification.)

The Battalion was thus over 400 strong before the end of the month, and the Second-in-Command, Major G. F. Taylor* arrived on 25th April.

Intensive training proceeded at once, but was somewhat hampered by unusually severe heat which caused a number of heat-stroke cases during May

* Later to lead the Machine-Gun Battalion throughout the Arakan campaign and in Sumatra, 1944-46 (Chapter XXVII).

and June. By the end of July the first attestation of recruits took place, and training was placed completely under company arrangements, thereby for the first time giving the Battalion its shape as such.

In mid-July also two civilian lorries were hired for teaching driving and maintenance. The reader would do well here to refer to Chapter XIX (in the 2nd Sikhs story), where the question of training at this particular stage of the war is fully discussed and the difficulties made clear.

By this time the monsoon had arrived and the diary records that health at the end of July was very good.

For the next two months training proceeded without incident till on 27th September the Battalion moved to Delhi. It was now given the target date of January 1942, to be "ready for action." It is to be remembered, however, that at this time no one had any idea whatsoever that by then we should be fighting the Japanese—and in the Burmese and Malayan jungles.

While training progressed in the Battalion itself, specialist and tactical training and teaching of new weapons was catered for by courses outside the Battalion; and a full allotment of vacancies on these courses was given to the Battalion for officers, N.C.Os. and men from time to time.

While in Delhi the Battalion was inspected by His Excellency the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir A. Wavell, and paraded to march past the Chinese General Chiang Kai-shek. Otherwise its time was uneventful, all energies being concentrated on training.

On 12th March the Battalion moved to Ranipet (85 miles west of Madras, on the railway to Bangalore). While the men went by rail, the Battalion's twenty vehicles completed the 1,500-mile journey by road—an indication of the progress so far made in driving and maintaining M.T.

Training in Southern India

In April the raid of the Japanese fleet on Ceylon,* followed by the bombardment of Madras, caused the Battalion to stand to on 11th and 13th April, but nothing transpired.

At this time the Battalion was still short of equipment. There were only 25 per cent. of bayonets and two L.M.Gs. per company. Deficiencies were now however rapidly being made up, and the 98th Brigade, of which the Battalion now formed part as a trained fighting unit, became one of the three brigades of the 19th (Dagger) Division. With this Division throughout its famous campaign in the reconquest of Burma in 1944-45, the Battalion was later to see its active service in the Second World War, and to show itself true to all the traditions of the Frontier Force that this Volume records.

The summer of 1942 passed uneventfully, the threat of Japanese invasion

* See narrative of 9th Battalion, Chapter XXV.

coming to nothing. In June His Royal Highness The Duke of Gloucester visited the Battalion and saw it on parade.

As time passed, the progress in training enabled the Battalion to proceed to more advanced exercises, and in the latter half of the year it was taking part in collective schemes with other units of the Brigade.

On 22nd February 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel Redding left the Battalion to command the Regimental Centre. His departure was a great loss, for he had raised and trained the Battalion from its infancy; but it was promotion for him, as the command of the Regimental Centre was now a full Colonel's appointment. He was given a great send-off and the good wishes of all ranks went with him.

Early in May 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel C. I. Jerrard, of the 1st Sikhs, recently an instructor at the R.M.C., Sandhurst, arrived to command the Battalion.

During the summer of 1943 the Battalion continued to train with the 19th Division, in the country round Madras. Most attention was paid to jungle training in view of the prospect of having to fight the Japs in the jungles of Burma. "Battle inoculation" was also carried out.

In the autumn the Battalion underwent training for combined operations, as the role of the Division was now expected to include an assault landing by sea. The Battalion carried out both dry-shod and wet-shod training. In December 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel Jerrard was appointed to command the 98th Infantry Brigade, the one in fact in which the Battalion was serving, and Lieutenant-Colonel A. K. Murcott of the Guides was appointed to succeed him in command of the Battalion. The latter however did not arrive until May 1944, and during the interim the Battalion was commanded by Majors Edward Stuart and P. N. Higham in turn.

Training of all kinds, including air transportation, continued, and the Battalion was now completely equipped and trained for any battle role. In June the Brigade was concentrated at Janori camp, near Nasik (Bombay Presidency). The role of the Division was now once more changed and combined operations were eliminated from training. With the prospect of a standard role of land operations (probably in the jungle), the Battalion was issued with twelve Jeeps and forty-one mules as first-line transport.

It was now known that the Division would move shortly to the campaign area on the India-Burma border, and the Battalion was visited on 6th October, before its departure, by the Supreme Allied Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten. It was ready in all respects.

The Burma Campaign, 1944-45

The Battalion moved by rail to Manipur road and concentrated in a brigade box six miles north of Imphal during the first week of November 1944.

By 23rd November the Division had moved forward and the Battalion had reached the west bank of the Chindwin river, six miles from Tonhe.

The reader will recollect that by now the bitterly fought battle of Imphal had ended with the defeat of the Japanese, followed by their retreat during the monsoon back into Burma. The story of the campaign during this period, when the enemy were followed, attacked and harried ceaselessly in spite of the monsoon, is given in the story of the 9th Battalion, who fought right through it with the 20th Division. The reader would do well, therefore, before reading further to place himself in the picture by perusing first the relevant portion of the 9th Battalion narrative.*

For the next three weeks, up to mid-December, the Battalion was engaged in road-making in the Tonhe-Thanan area. On 15th December it moved forward across the Chindwin with the 19th Division, which now went up into the front line on the left flank of the Fourteenth Army. By a series of forced marches via Pinlebu the Battalion reached Kawlin on 21st December. Here the Brigade was in touch with the retreating Japs, and the Battalion's task was to patrol forward, blocking roads where the enemy could be intercepted and cutting off isolated parties. Thus the advance continued, villages being searched for Japs on the way, until on 28th December 1944, the Battalion took up a position and formed a box east of Leiktu village, where the 2nd Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment and 4/4th Gurkha Rifles were in contact with the enemy.

It should be recorded here that maintenance of the Army at this stage was being carried out almost entirely by air, while the land communications (on which the Battalion had been recently engaged) were still being constructed. The great build-up of British and American Air Forces had achieved supremacy in the air, and supply drops were regularly received by the Battalion.

On 1st January 1945, the first clashes with the enemy in strength occurred at Leiktu. "D" Company were engaged and considerable small-arms and mortar fire was exchanged. The Japs retired however that night, and the advance continued next day to the village of Kanbalu, forty miles north of Shwebo. On 4th January the Battalion took over the position of leading battalion of the Brigade from 4/4th Gurkhas. Up to this date the Battalion's casualties were seven men wounded.

On 5th January "B" Company in the lead were strongly opposed by enemy rear-guards, and artillery support was called for. Some of this fell short, causing casualties of one killed and two wounded among the Battalion's leading platoons. The total casualties on this day were two killed and four wounded. The advance continued from 7th to 12th January 1945, and the Battalion was now advanced guard to the Brigade approaching Shwebo. The 2nd British Division was also advancing parallel on the right and touch with their 64th Brigade had constantly to be maintained.

* See Chapter XXV.

On the 13th the Brigade were withdrawn to rest and refit for two days. Thereafter the Battalion went forward again in M.T. to Thabeikyin, where the 19th Division was now forcing their famous crossing of the Irrawaddy and making a bridgehead north of Mandalay.

This was indeed the first major move in General Slim's strategy in the Irrawaddy battle of the next two months, which destroyed the main Japanese armies in Burma. A description of the plan will be found in the 4th Battalion narrative above.* By various means General Slim misled the Japanese commander into believing that our main attack was coming where the 19th and 2nd Divisions were now advancing (i.e. on the left), while in fact the decisive thrust came from the 17th Division (with the 4th Sikhs in the lead) on the extreme right. This captured Meiktila and turned the entire Japanese defence line on the Irrawaddy. To return however to the story, the initial effect of the Thabeikyin bridgehead on the enemy was to cause a violent reaction against the 19th Division. It withstood this in a period of heavy fighting which now followed, and in which the 8th Battalion took part. Apart from its sign of a dagger, the Division's title of "Dagger Division" arises from its tremendous achievement both in this battle and in the capture of Mandalay which followed.

The enemy reaction was not felt at once, and by 18th January, when the whole Battalion was not yet across the river, only minor clashes and patrol activity took place on the divisional front.

On 21st January the 4/4th Gurkhas were heavily attacked from both north and south, and the Battalion sent "A" Company across the river in support. The enemy were now constantly shelling the west beach of the river crossing, but the Battalion suffered few casualties.

The Japanese attacks on the 4/4th Gurkhas and "A" Company continued during the next few days but without success, and up to 2nd February there was no change in the situation.

On 3rd February the Battalion crossed the river and relieved the 4/4th Gurkhas in charge of the bridgehead defences. The situation now was that the 8th Battalion, with two companies of 4/4th Gurkhas and one company of the Machine-Gun Battalion, 11th Sikhs, and a mortar battery of 275 Anti-Tank Regiment (all under its command), were defending the Thabeikyin bridgehead.

On 8th February "A" and "D" Companies were withdrawn to the west bank and sent in M.T. to escort back wounded of the 2nd Welch Regiment. This duty completed without incident, the companies rejoined the Battalion in the Bridgehead on the 10th.

On 13th February the Battalion was divided. H.Q., "A" and "B" Companies moved to Yeshin to take over the Welch Regiment box, while "C" and "D" Companies remained on the bridgehead.

While patrolling on the 19th to locate enemy positions in the Yeshin area,

* See Chapter XX.

“B” Company surprised Japs in a bunker position, causing many casualties for a cost of two men slightly injured. The Company withdrew after bringing down an artillery concentration on the bunkers. The next day “C” Company ambushed a Jap section on patrol, killing four.

The Japs were now steadily withdrawing and by 23rd February the Battalion was once more together again, probing south after the retiring enemy. The dry belt of Burma was now being entered and water became a problem. Also the jungle country was giving place to open land. On the afternoon of the 23rd the advance, with “B” Company leading, was held up by enemy in a well-bunkered position. A planned attack supported by artillery concentrations was put in by “A” Company, who broke into the enemy position and hand-to-hand fighting ensued. By 3.30 p.m. the Japs had been driven out and fled, leaving four dead and much equipment, also some documents. The Battalion advanced and took over the captured position, which was found to have six strong bunkers. The Battalion lost one man killed and ten wounded.

The Battalion was now ordered to move forward and search the area of a village in front for the enemy and try to secure a water point. Jap patrols were met without fighting, but no water was found, and next day the Battalion was withdrawn to the rear.

On 7th March the Battalion was brought forward again to the front line, but progress was very slow owing to high, dense elephant grass and thick prickly bush. Two days later the Battalion took over from the 2nd Royal Berkshire Regiment at 6.20 p.m., and the advance continued, contact with small parties of the enemy being constantly made.

At this juncture Lieutenant-Colonel Murcott left the Battalion to take up another appointment and was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel K. M. Sheikh.*

The Brigade was now drawing near to Mandalay, and on 7th March at Medaya, fifteen miles north of it, the Battalion was ordered to be at one hour’s readiness to lead the Brigade in the advance on the capital of Upper Burma.

The first clash occurred at 7 a.m., when “A” Company were held up. The Battalion carried out an outflanking movement while “A” Company pinned down the Japs. This cleared the position and the enemy retired, leaving five dead. “A” Company lost three killed and four wounded.

The advance continued during the morning without meeting further strong opposition, and three Grant tanks were placed under command of the leading company. Shortly afterwards “C” Company caught a number of Japs breaking cover and killed twenty-five. Two prisoners and a quantity of equipment was also captured, including a M.M.G. This was indeed a field day for the Battalion. Any Japs the Battalion flushed, and who escaped from its front, were accounted for by “C” Company. The bag that day was approximately forty Japanese killed. The Battalion reached the outskirts of Mandalay (Obo railway station) by

* Lieutenant-General K. M. Sheikh, Pakistan Army.

11.30 a.m. and contacted a mobile column called "Stiletto" that had worked round from the west.

The enemy were holding Mandalay hill in strength, and the Battalion formed a box at Lizin near by to the west of it.

The Attack on Mandalay Fort

Next morning, 9th March, patrols were sent to the fort area. They had a brush with an enemy party, killing three, but brought no information of Jap strength on the fort walls. Three companies moved forward to a position west of the Sapper and Miner lines, and that afternoon patrols located an enemy position through Thayeze railway station and drew sniper fire from the fort. They also brought details of the fort walls and moat. This fort was overlooked from Mandalay hill and covered an area of about 20,000 square yards. At that time it contained the palace, Government House, the jail, the club, the polo ground and some other Government buildings. It was surrounded by a moat of unusual width, with a wall on the inner side, which was crossed by a wooden bridge too light for tanks. Each wall had a main gate in the centre set obliquely on the approach leading to it and protected from direct fire by a massive buttress on the moat side. The wall was constructed of brick and was about 30 feet at the bottom, narrowing off to about 12 feet near the top, and forming a ramp protected by brick castellations 2 to 3 feet thick. It was about 23 feet high with a buttress every hundred yards.

On 10th March the following plan for the attack on Mandalay Fort was made by Colonel Sheikh. First, medium guns would be brought up to blast holes in the walls at close range. Next was an artillery concentration with smoke to allow the first company of troops to approach the bridge and, under close support from tanks, to force the crossing and get through the breaches in the walls. A second company would pass through and then secure a firm box inside the fort. If the plan succeeded up to this point, the third and fourth companies of the Battalion were to follow through.

At 8 a.m. the Battalion concentrated forward ready for the attack, and at ten o'clock medium artillery was in position. Unit mortars also ranged on likely target areas round the fort.

By 1.15 p.m. four breaches had been blasted in the walls, and the time for the assault was fixed at 1.55. "D" Company (Pathans) led the attack, with "C" Company (Dogras) on their left, and with two troops of tanks giving covering fire. Simultaneously the enemy opened with small arms and automatics from the area of the bridge and fort walls, pinning down "D" and "C" Companies, though some of "D" managed to get on to the bridge and start removing the wire. For over two hours a position of stalemate ensued with tanks and artillery trying to control enemy fire; but any movement by "C" or "D" Company still brought it down again immediately.

In the meantime the Divisional Commander arrived on the scene and ordered a cessation of the attack* and withdrawal of "C" and "D" Companies. This was carried out successfully under a smoke screen, and by 4.30 p.m. the companies were back in their original positions.

All wounded and dead were recovered, including those on the bridge, the stretcher-bearers carrying out their task with great bravery under enemy fire. The casualties so far were three killed, including Major Kidd, "D" Company commander, and eighteen wounded. Major Kidd was a sad loss.

By next morning, 11th March, the 4/4th Gurkhas had captured most of Mandalay Hill except the southern spur, which was strongly held. Colonel Sheikh therefore sent "C" Company at 9.50 a.m. to outflank the enemy here, and it moved by the north of the Sapper and Miner lines into the cemetery area. Here however it came under heavy fire from the fort wall and Japs still in the cemetery (which had in fact been reported clear by the Gurkhas). The Company withdrew again.

Next morning (12th) the Battalion was ordered to clear this area and a timed programme of artillery fire, with three Grant tanks in support, was arranged. The attack succeeded and the area was cleared by 1.15 p.m.

Mandalay Hill was now clear of Japs and the Battalion was ordered to take it over on the morning of the 13th. The companies were now strung out with "C" Company and two platoons of "D" Company on the hill, the rest of "D" Company in the cemetery area, Battalion Headquarters and "B" Company north-west of Sapper and Miner lines, and "A" Company keeping watch on the fort walls.

The next day (14th) the Battalion was brought into reserve, except "C" and "D" Companies on the hill, which remained under the direct command of Brigade Headquarters of the 64th Brigade. 15th March was spent in patrolling and watchfulness, and on the 16th it was decided that the Battalion would make a night assault on the fort that night. Accordingly it concentrated that afternoon on the north-east side of it.

During the afternoon further breaches were made by 5.5-inch howitzers in the wall, and a heavy air-strike followed at 4 p.m.

To cross the moat the Battalion was given sixteen assault boats, and to support the attack five man-pack flame-throwers. In addition, one platoon of M.M.Gs. was placed under command of the Battalion, and in support were the 115th Field Regiment of Artillery (25-prs.), one battery 5.5-inch howitzers, and one battery of mortars. Once more Colonel Sheikh planned the assault. "B"

* The Divisional Commander was doubtless aware by now of the capture on 25th February of Meiktila, in rear of Mandalay, on which the enemy were based. They would therefore be forced to evacuate Mandalay or surrender, and a suicidal assault on the fort was unnecessary. At the same time the maintenance of pressure against Mandalay was part of General Slim's plan. In his account he refers to the 19th Division and XXIIIrd Corps attacks as the "Hammer on the anvil of Meiktila."

Company were the attacking company, to be followed by "A" Company. The assault was silent and aimed at surprise. It commenced at 10 p.m., and by 11 p.m. "B" Company less one platoon had crossed the moat without drawing fire. Here they were under cover of the bank and about 30 feet from the wall. Sounds of movement in the fort were now heard and Japs were seen on the wall. At 11.15 p.m., as the men moved to assault the breaches, the enemy opened fire both from the wall and enfilade from the flanks. The scene was lit up by fires inside the fort, giving the enemy a clear view of the men. Under the hail of fire which any movement now provoked, the attack was halted.

As surprise had been lost, a further artillery concentration was fired, and with M.M.G. support the flame-throwers assaulted at 2.15 a.m. Two of these, however, got wet crossing the moat and could not be used. The use of the other three was also impeded by an unexpected language difficulty. The O.C. Flame-throwers who could not speak any Hindustani considered that they could not be used against the breaches, and after crossing the moat refused to go any farther. As a result the flame-throwers were in fact never used.

Nevertheless an attempt to rush the breaches was made by "B" and "A" Companies at 2.50 a.m., but a foothold could not be gained on the slipping rubble. The enemy had also wired the breaches made by the "Mediums" and used grenades to check the assault.

As all surprise had now been completely lost and further attacks could only be at heavy cost, the Brigade Commander withdrew "B" Company at 3.40 a.m. The withdrawal was safely carried out by 5.30 a.m. and the Battalion returned to its original position.

"B" Company had suffered nine wounded including the Second-in-Command of the Battalion, Major D. D. Slattery. He was in charge of the operation and was leading the assault when he was seriously wounded by a bullet in the back at a critical stage of the fight. For his gallantry in this action he received a well-deserved Military Cross.

Operations towards Taunggyi

The Battalion rested on 17th March, and on the 18th moved in M.T. to rejoin the 98th Brigade, which had by-passed Mandalay and had reached the area Miniwa.

While the 19th Division had been fighting its way down the east side of the Irrawaddy to Mandalay, and with the 2nd (British) and 20th (Indian) Divisions had been engaging the main Japanese armies on the upper reaches of the Irrawaddy, the decisive thrust to Meiktila from the right flank and the savage battle there* to consolidate our hold on it had succeeded.

The enemy defence of the Irrawaddy line had been broken, Mandalay was evacuated by the Japs on 20th March, and the Japanese forces melted into a

* See Chapter XX, 4th Battalion narrative.

number of separate groups retreating south and trying to escape destruction.

A portion broke away from the main road south from Mandalay and (since Meiktila was held against them) retired eastward into the Shan hills towards Taunggyi, while the rest fled southwards, closely pursued and at times outstripped by the advancing Fourteenth Army.

The 19th Division followed the 17th Division in this pursuit* down the main Mandalay-Rangoon road through Meiktila (which of course was already in our hands) to Pyinmana and Toungoo. In doing so it held off the remnants of the Japanese 33rd and 31st Divisions that formed the group which had retired eastward, and which might threaten the communications of our forces now driving on Rangoon.

The Battalion was now involved in some actions with the above Jap forces between Mandalay and Meiktila before the latter finally retired eastward to Taunggyi. The first was an attack on a small village on 21st March held in some strength by the enemy. A two-pincer attack by "C" and "D" Companies, supported by artillery and air-strike by twelve Hurribombers, drove the Japs out, killing twenty. The same afternoon, Battalion patrols linked up with the 2nd (British) Division operating on the right.

During the next ten days the advance continued, and isolated parties of Japs, with sometimes single men dressed in Burmese civilian clothes, continued to be mopped up and some of these were captured. By the end of the month the Thazi area was reached, and on 6th April the Brigade were held up by enemy holding a bunkered position near Wundwin. The Battalion was given the task of working round behind the position to block any attempt of the Japs to escape south. "C" and "D" Companies, with one and a half platoons of M.M.Gs., were allotted this role, and engaged on the way a party of the enemy, inflicting four casualties. Later they were held up by enemy in strength holding a position on high ground in thick jungle. The Companies halted and dug in. Next morning they were counter-attacked by the enemy who came in with bayonets but were repulsed. However, in view of the denseness of the jungle and the opposition, the two companies could not advance farther and failed to reach their allotted position in the enemy rear.

In the meantime "B" Company had been sent on a similar separate mission to put down a road-block behind the enemy, and also ran into a strongly held, dug-in position in heavy jungle. Attempts to eject the enemy resulted in many casualties and the Company was withdrawn under artillery fire.

All three companies returned by the evening of 8th April.

It was now clear that the Japs were well established in very thick and difficult country, and two companies 1/15th Punjab Regiment were put under command of the Battalion to help drive them out. Artillery support and also a strong air-strike were arranged, and "A" Company with one com-

* See Chapter XX, narrative of 4th Battalion.

pany of the 1st/15th were put in to attack at 2 p.m. on 11th April. A tragic disaster followed. Owing to the very dense nature of the elephant grass and jungle, accurate direction of the artillery support and air attack was impossible. These landed on the attacking companies, causing a number of casualties. In one platoon of the 8th Battalion the commander, the platoon havildar and all section commanders were killed, and two men of the 1/15th Punjab Regiment, one machine gunner and one sapper were wounded. The attack was called off. The Battalion's total casualties in this unfortunate affair amounted to six killed and eleven wounded.

On 12th April the Japs counter-attacked, and both "C" and "D" Companies and the 1/15th companies were heavily engaged, the former suffering one killed and six wounded before the enemy were finally driven off.

The enemy retreat now recommenced, and as the Battalion advanced quantities of equipment were found abandoned. On 15th April this included five trucks and two guns.

The same evening the Battalion, together with the rest of the Brigade, was withdrawn to a rest area near the nineteenth milestone on the Thazi-Meiktila road. Here the Divisional Commander visited the Battalion and promised a few days' halt to rest and refit.

The Advance into Lower Burma

The rest ended on 20th April, when the Battalion was moved in M.T. to Pyawbwe and accommodated in the Burma Frontier Force Lines, with a good bungalow for Battalion Headquarters. It was the first time they had been in anything of the kind for many months. The luxury was short-lived however, and on 22nd April the Battalion moved at 9 p.m., starting on the main road to the south in M.T. without a clear destination. The road, however, was jammed with the tanks and transport of all sorts of the 17th Division moving south in its drive on Rangoon, and the Battalion was held up at the 248th milestone.

The general situation was now as follows: The enemy groups driven from the Irrawaddy and around Meiktila were streaming south on both sides of the two main roads to Rangoon (i.e. the main road from Mandalay and the other farther east from Yenangyaung and Prome). On the former road the leading troops of the 17th Division group (a tank brigade) had outstripped the enemy and reached Toungoo,* while the three infantry brigades of the Division were at Pynmana. On both sides of this Division moving by cross-country tracks were the disorganized remnants of five Japanese divisions trying to escape southwards before being cut off.

* An astonishing performance, see Chapter XX.

Farther east on the other road, advancing parallel down the Irrawaddy axis, was the 20th Division (with the 9th Battalion), who had outstripped in the same way and were heading off to the west a further two badly shaken, though perhaps not so disorganized, Jap divisions.

A third enemy group of two shaken divisions (including the defenders of Mandalay) had retired east from Meiktila to the Taunggyi area and were stationary there.

The 19th Division now allocated the 64th Brigade to watch the last-named group while the other two brigades, with the 98th Brigade leading, followed the 17th Division south to Toungoo.

Operations towards Mawchi, East of Toungoo

To return to the 8th Battalion story; as soon as it was found that the 17th Division were still on the road and had to get clear, the Battalion was taken off the road and halted. While here the 4th Sikhs, who were advancing with the 17th Division, made contact with the Battalion. For a short while all were delighted to obtain a glimpse of old friends.

After a wait of twenty-four hours the Battalion moved again on 24th April, at 3 a.m., but the road was still congested with long lines of transport, and Toungoo was not reached till 27th April, at 5 a.m. The men had been without sleep for forty-eight hours and were tired. Nevertheless patrolling had to commence at once, and the Battalion was ordered across the Sittang river to protect the Army's left flank from interference by Japs to the east, who, as described above, had been moving south parallel with the road.

At 1 a.m. on 28th April the Battalion set out along the Mawchi road across the Sittang by bright moonlight. By 4 a.m. the leading company met the Japs, and a fire fight ensued in which the Battalion lost two men killed and eight wounded. The Battalion dug in.

During the next forty-eight hours the Battalion met several isolated parties of enemy and inflicted casualties, but the country was dense jungle and it amounted to a game of hide and seek.

By the evening of the 29th the Battalion was back in a camp covering the bridge over the river with an entrenched defensive position.

The first rain of the monsoon now came in a heavy shower that soaked the men that night and washed away much of the trenches. The race against its onset to capture Rangoon was on, and though the 19th Division was not participating, its protective role east of Toungoo is acknowledged in General Slim's account: ". . . pushing up the Mawchi road to the east the 19th Division met the Japanese 15th Division trying to come west. The enemy went to ground in very strong positions within artillery range of Toungoo and the main road. Here they were a considerable nuisance. . . . The 19th Divi-

sion, spread out over a wide area, held them with a brigade (the 98th) and even made small tactical gains.”*

Rangoon fell on 1st May and in the first week of May 1945, the weather finally broke with heavy monsoon rains. The Brigade however now commenced a deliberate advance towards Mawchi. Jap rear-guards retired in front of it, but left the road heavily mined and blocked. Sappers had to clear the road before the Battalion, which was now leading, could proceed. Off the road the jungle was so thick that the rate of advance was 500 yards in an hour. By 9th May the Battalion had reached the fifth milestone from Toungoo, and on this day a clash between a patrol and the enemy resulted in two men being killed and one wounded.

The Brigade was now withdrawn to Toungoo and became part of a Twelfth† Army cordon holding the line of the main road from Toungoo southward to prevent the escape eastward of the Japanese now trapped in the Pegu Yomas to the west. The Battalion was distributed with Headquarters and two companies at Kyabwe and two companies at Okhtwin.

Patrolling and ambushing continued till 19th May, when the Battalion concentrated in Toungoo for an operation called “Cracker.” This was in the nature of a longish hook undertaken to outflank the Japanese and establish a block behind them on the Mawchi road in the vicinity of milestone fifteen. The Battalion moved out on man-pack basis. The only supporting weapons were mortars as the Battalion was moving outside field artillery range. There were no tracks except small footpaths.

The 20th was needed for the march, and on the 21st the Battalion was dispatched at 6.30 a.m. by side tracks to the area of the fifteenth milestone. “B” Company was leading and was soon held up by Japs holding high ground across the track. A fierce fire fight developed, with “B” Company pinned down and the Brigade’s mortars and artillery (which had come up) opening on the enemy position. “C” Company, following up, also became heavily engaged, and hand-to-hand fighting ensued at 10.30 a.m. During this, Naik Sulakhan Singh killed two Japs with the butt of his rifle. Both companies were now withdrawn to the Brigade box where the mule transport was concentrated and which the Japanese were threatening. Japanese artillery and M.G. fire caused several casualties among both men and animals.

The fighting around the box continued throughout the 22nd, and on the 23rd after great difficulty the Battalion with the mule transport were withdrawn to the ninth milestone—a battalion of the Assam Regiment being sent out to assist the withdrawal.

* *Campaign of the Fourteenth Army*, p. 36.

† The newly formed Twelfth Army took over the remaining operations in Burma, while the Fourteenth Army was withdrawn to India to prepare for the invasion of Malaya (which never took place because the Japanese surrendered and the war came to an end).

During this arduous operation the Battalion carried its wounded and finally brought them back when it withdrew on the 23rd. From then onwards longer hooks were given up and only more feasible shorter hooks along the Mawchi road were undertaken.

At the ninth milestone the Battalion took over a box from the Welch Regiment, but were almost immediately warned for another "right hook" operation. After some days' postponement because of rain, this took place from 27th May to 14th June, and involved the Battalion in severe fighting most of the time. The operation succeeded in driving the Japs back and the Brigade was established at the eighteenth-and-a-half milestone, patrols reporting the road clear, and no Japs up to nineteen and a half miles from Toungoo.

The Battle of the Break-Through

On 18th June the Battalion was withdrawn again to the Toungoo area, and was about to commence a period of training with some new drafts that had arrived when it was warned for the cordon operations that were later known as the "Battle of the Break-through."

The general situation that gave rise to this has been described in the 4th Sikhs narrative.* The object (as already remarked) was to prevent the large masses of disorganized Jap forces that had been driven south into the Pegu Yomas from escaping across the Sittang to the east. Accordingly, strong forces were organized into a cordon to hold the line of the main road and the Sittang river, and the 19th Division was now assigned to this role.

The Battalion moved to Nyaungchidauk, south of Toungoo on the Sittang, on 22nd June, and was distributed in a sector to hold the river crossings. All boats were collected and a system of patrols organized.

The remainder of the month and the first three weeks of July passed uneventfully, with occasional reports of parties of Japs in the neighbourhood being followed up, but without result.

On the 20th, however, word was received of a probable big break-through by the enemy, and "A" and "B" Companies were sent to a village in the threatened area with a battery of artillery to form a block on the track the Japs were expected to use.

Contact was made early next morning by armoured cars with "A" Company on the main road, and a number of Japs were killed. "B" Company now also made contact and "C" and "D" Companies were moved to the area, with Battalion Headquarters arriving by midday. In the meantime, in a fire fight, "B" Company had killed six Japs and suffered one killed and three wounded themselves. By the morning of 22nd July the whole Battalion was concentrated and advanced, with "B" Company leading, on the enemy who were holding two

* See Chapter XX.

villages. There were some 200 well-armed Japs, and "B" Company attacked them at midday. Driving them from the first village, the Company advanced on the second. Heavy fighting followed, and Major Cameron, Jemadar Indar Singh and four men were wounded. The second village was captured by 5 p.m., when all four companies were engaged and twelve more men had been wounded. Many Japanese had been killed.

The next day the advance was continued with intermittent contact, and a further heavy toll was taken of the Japs. An air-strike was also now in operation and there was difficulty in preventing this from hitting our own leading companies in the dense country.

The Battalion was now clearing villages along the Sittang, and on the 24th and 25th much execution was done on disorganized parties of the enemy. By the 26th Battalion Headquarters was back in Nyaungchidauk with "C" Company. The other companies were still out hunting Japs.

All further trace of the escaping Japs now disappeared, and the whole Battalion was back in Nyaungchidauk by the end of the month. It was estimated that they had accounted for 400 Japs killed in the Battle of the Break-through.

A final brush occurred on 13th August when an "A" Company patrol contacted a party of Japs, killing three, but suffered one killed and one slightly wounded themselves. The next day the news of the Japanese surrender was received and the war was over.

The 8th Battalion had given of its best, and had well earned the honour that was later to be accorded to it—of a permanent future as a Regular Battalion of the Regiment.

The Aftermath and Return to India

On 18th August 1945, the Battalion in Burma held a parade to celebrate what has come to be known as VJ Day—the day of final victory over Japan. The names of all who lost their lives were read out by the Subadar-Major, as also the numbers by classes of wounded, and the names of recipients of decorations. A two minutes' silence was observed. After the parade the Battalion was given a two days' holiday.

All over Burma now the task commenced of contacting and bringing in small parties of Japs that were out of touch with their own formations, and in many cases in hiding. One such party of six was located by "B" Company, and a platoon was sent to collect them. On the approach of the platoon the Japs blew themselves to pieces with grenades—a dreadful sight.

The Battalion led a quiet life during the remainder of August, September and October. Normal training was carried out, and there was nothing of interest to record. At the end of October a 98th Brigade sports meeting was held to select athletes to represent the Brigade in a Divisional meeting. The Battalion

did very well in this, winning most of the events except the tug-of-war, and coming second in putting the shot.

Signs of internal disorder and dacoity now became evident in Burma, and troops off duty had to carry arms. Also training was given in the role of troops as aid to civil power, and how to deal with mobs. No outbreaks, however, occurred in the Battalion area, and the rest of the year passed without incident.

The New Year opened with a warning of an operation against a band of thirty to forty dacoits in the Shwegyin area, and the Battalion moved on 15th January to take part in surrounding them by night. The operation, however, was called off by the Brigade, the dacoits having removed themselves. The Battalion was now split up into detachments with Headquarters and two companies at Penwagon, but on 1st February the whole Brigade concentrated at Shwegyin.

In the meantime, on 28th January, word had been received that the 19th Indian Division was to be broken up and units returned to India. The Battalion did not embark till 15th April 1946, and in the meantime was again split up into detachments for internal security. There were several alerts to deal with reported gangs of dacoits, but though companies were more than once sent out, no contact was made with these elusive scoundrels.

The Battalion landed at Calcutta at 6 p.m. on 18th April 1946, and was met by a Reception Committee. To the men's disappointment they heard that they were not to return to the Frontier immediately. The Battalion was to go to Dhanbad to take over internal security from a garrison battalion of the 1st Punjab Regiment. It arrived there on 23rd April and was distributed with Headquarters and one company at Dhanbad, two companies at Jamshedpur, and one company at Nirsa.

Thus ends the record of the 8th Battalion in the Second World War, for which it was raised and in which its services and achievements were second to none. In an independent Pakistan it holds an honoured position as a Regular Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment.

CHAPTER XXV

THE 9TH BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR IMPHAL, BURMA AND FRENCH INDO-CHINA

Birth of the Battalion and its Early Days—Ceylon, 1942-43—The Japanese Raids on Ceylon, 1942—The Situation on the Burma Front, Autumn 1943—The Kabaw Valley, 1943-44—The Deception Plan for the Introduction of General Wingate's Chindits and the Start of the Japanese Offensive, 1944—Withdrawal through the Hills to the Tamu-Imphal Road—The Battle of Oinam, 22nd to 27th May 1944—Offensive Operations Leading to the Final Crushing of the Japanese Advance, 1944—The Japanese Retreat—Long Range Penetration—Tragic Casualties caused by a Single Shell—Battle of Inza-Yezin—The Advance to Kyaukse on the road and railway to Rangoon—The Drive to the South—French Indo-China, 1945-46—Return to India, and Reconstitution of the Battalion as 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Regiment.

Birth of the Battalion and its Early Days

THE 9th Battalion of the 12th Frontier Force Regiment was raised in Jhansi in the United Provinces of India on 1st April 1941. The nucleus from which the Battalion was formed consisted of men transferred from the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Battalions. None came from the 3rd Battalion as this Battalion was overseas fighting in Eritrea.*

The first Commandant of the 9th Battalion was Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. Blood, who had commanded the 3rd Battalion in the early fighting against the Italians in East Africa, and he brought useful experience of modern active-service conditions to the new Battalion.† Major D. J. Bryceson of the 4th Battalion was posted Second-in-Command. Subadar-Major was Ahmed Khan, an Awan from the 2nd Battalion. He turned out to be the finest Subadar-Major a Commanding Officer or a Battalion could wish for—loyal, brave and efficient, and an example to every sepoy. He served the Battalion as Subadar-Major throughout the war, being promoted Honorary Lieutenant at the end of it.

The Battalion settled down at once and large drafts came from the Training Battalion, which soon raised the strength to nearly full establishment.

The 9/12th Frontier Force Regiment was not the only new unit to be raised in Jhansi at this time. The 14th Battalion of the 13th Frontier Force Rifles and the 9th Battalion of the 14th Punjab Regiment were also formed here. Brigadier F. M. Moore,‡ late of the 2nd Battalion, arrived to command the brigade which

* See Chapter XVI.

† *Ibid.*

‡ Major-General F. M. Moore, C.S.I., C.I.E. (see Appendix VIII).

these battalions formed, and it was named the 100th Brigade. Its sign was “%,” to convey 100 per cent. efficiency, and its motto was one of the great Nelson’s instructions to his sea captains: “If any signal is not clear or not understood . . . no gentleman if in doubt can do wrong if he brings his ship up alongside that of the enemy.”

The record of these well-chosen measures to inspire keenness and high morale in the Battalion from the outset may cause the reader to smile and nod his passing approval at apt and imaginative slogans. Let him read on, however, and consider the valiant and efficient feats of arms performed by both the 9th Battalion of the Regiment and the 14th Battalion of the Frontier Force Rifles. Both these Frontier Force Battalions proved outstanding among the war-raised units of the Second World War. Who can say how much they owed to the seeds of efficiency and self-confidence sown in their early days. Training continued intensively, and the problems it presented that were common to all battalions at this time have been discussed above in the story of the 2nd Battalion.

On 3rd November 1941, Colonel Blood was appointed Deputy Military Secretary at G.H.Q. and Major D. J. Bryceson was promoted to command the Battalion. Major Milanes was transferred from the 7th Battalion as the new Second-in-Command.

Ceylon, 1942-43

On 26th December 1941, the Battalion was moved to Trincomalee in Ceylon (the crossing from Dhanushkodi giving most men their first sight of the sea), and joined the 34th Division that was forming there. The island of Ceylon was at that time a colony under the British Crown and not part of the Indian Empire. Under such eventualities as could be foreseen it was of no strategic importance before the Second World War, and except as the site of a naval base at Trincomalee required no significant garrison. When however the Japanese onslaught in 1941 brought an immediate threat to the Indian peninsula, and enemy naval power seized control of Far Eastern waters, Ceylon became an immediate liability. It was indeed at this time an obvious target for Japanese attack from the sea if not an actual stepping-stone for a possible attack on India itself. Measures therefore had hastily been taken to garrison it and prepare it for defence, and a Brigade Group was formed at Trincomalee.

The duty of this Brigade Group to which the 9th Battalion was posted was the defence of the harbour and the prevention of an enemy landing there. To accomplish this the infantry battalions were allotted zones to defend.

Here however, let us pause for a moment to review the general war situation at this time—how India itself had suddenly changed from being a secure base for the Allied war effort in the East to a war area in imminent danger of

attack. The Japanese successes already recorded in Chapters XIX and XX had brought her armies to India's land frontiers and put her navy in command of the seas around India's coast. The threat to Ceylon at this time was therefore very real.

The Japanese Raids on Ceylon, 1942

Although no actual invasion occurred, the Japs in fact carried out two air raids on Ceylon in April 1942. A powerful fleet raided with aircraft first Colombo, and a few weeks later Trincomalee.

The objective of the latter raid was the Naval Yard at Trincomalee, and the Battalion at this time was encamped at Nilaveli, nine miles up the coast road. So far as could be seen, the raid was carried out by about three squadrons of nine planes each from an aircraft carrier. They were engaged by Hurricanes, light and heavy A.A. batteries in the Brigade Group, and fort defences. The Naval Yard and offices were severely damaged and one of the hangars at the aerodrome with planes under repair inside was hit and destroyed. A warship in the harbour received a near miss, the blast of which was sufficient to kill two or three of the crew. Most of the shipping in the harbour had been dispersed on the previous night in anticipation of the raid, but the Dutch light cruiser *Sumatra*, which was awaiting repair, escaped damage, while a tramp steamer near by, the *Sagang*, was set on fire. Her crew was rescued by small boats in the harbour, and later the Battalion salvaged her, recovering aeroplane parts, beer and lorries which were set upon the road. Curiously enough, or possibly because the Japs thought they might make use of them at a subsequent date, none of the enormous heavy oil containers in Ceylon were hit by bombs. One of the Japanese planes brought down in flames dived straight on to one of these containers, which ignited with a column of smoke and flames which was visible over a large part of the island, and burnt for days.

The only part the Battalion took in the actual raid, which commenced about 7.45 a.m. and lasted about one and a half hours, was to open small-arms and anti-aircraft fire on two Jap planes flying out to sea past the Battalion at the end of the raid, and to rescue the captain and four of the crew of a small Greek steamer which was attacked near the coast about three miles north of Nilaveli.

The day after the raid, and for many days after, the roads going north and towards the centre of the island were crammed with fleeing Trincomalee inhabitants. The public services broke down and personnel of the civilian essential services deserted. The Army was required for everything, and here the organizing ability of Brigadier Moore became apparent. He arranged for the clearing of the Naval Yard, the repair and sand-bagging of the buildings, the digging of slit trenches, the continuance of supplies, the recruitment of local labour, the guarding and re-opening of shops. Largely owing to his efforts, neither the Army, Navy, Air Force nor civilians suffered any serious post-raid discomforts or

privations. The Battalion now had to leave the 100th Brigade to make way for a British battalion under the new organization (which was to include one British battalion in each brigade). All were sorry, as the Brigade was now well trained and had a fine *esprit de corps*.

In July 1942, the Battalion joined the 80th Brigade under Brigadier S. Greeves,* C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., and was to remain under the command of this distinguished officer during most of its fighting period. Moreover, the 80th Brigade was part of the famous 20th Division under Major-General Douglas Gracey,† C.I.E., C.B.E., M.C., which, as will be seen, bore the brunt of so much heavy fighting in the reconquest of Burma in 1944-45.

The Battalion was located in an area about forty miles south of Colombo on the bank of a wide river. Here much training was done in rafting and river crossing, and one man (a Dogra) was drowned—the Battalion's first casualty. Many inter-brigade and divisional exercises were also carried out, but otherwise for many months life was uneventful as the possibility of enemy invasion became more remote.

On 23rd February 1943, the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. Bryceson, left on transfer to command the 3rd Battalion Ajmer Regiment. Major Milanes took over until the arrival of Lieutenant-Colonel D. A. L. Mackenzie of the 1st Battalion about a month later to take command.

The Battalion was sad at the departure of Colonel Bryceson, who had seen it through all the difficult early period of training and built up its efficiency to the high standard that paid such dividends later in Imphal and Burma. The good wishes of all went with him.

During March, April, May and June 1943, intensive training continued, the Battalion having now reached a stage when collective exercises up to brigade level could be undertaken. All these were directed to achieving efficiency and confidence in jungle conditions, and much progress was made that was destined to bear fruit next year in the successes achieved in the Burma campaign of reconquest.

Early in July the Battalion was ordered to Ranchi in Bihar, and commenced a long and wearisome rail journey from Dhanushkodi on 7th July. A programme of physical exercise was observed at all long halts, which was found most beneficial and ensured the men arriving in reasonably fit condition after seven days cooped up in the train.

From 20th to 31st July specialist training was carried out at Ranchi on programmes previously prepared in Ceylon. Courses were arranged for intelligence, stretcher-bearer work, signallers, 3-inch mortars, carriers, engineers, M.T. and

* Major-General Sir Stuart Greeves, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C.

† General Sir Douglas Gracey, K.C.B., K.C.I.E., C.B.E., M.C., later Commander-in-Chief, Pakistan Army.

A.T. personnel, and practically every N.C.O. and man was included in one or other of the classes.

On 20th September the Battalion was warned for active service, and on the 24th the move to Imphal commenced.

The Situation on the Burma Front, Autumn 1943

The Battalion was now about to take part in the campaigns on the North-East Frontier of India that were to end with the utter defeat and destruction of the Japanese armies that had overrun Burma and were threatening to invade India itself. Let us therefore recall for a moment the situation on this front at the time when the Battalion arrived there, and how it had arisen.

The reader will have followed in Chapter XX above the story of the retreat from Burma during the first four months of 1942—a campaign in which the 4th Sikhs fought with such tenacity and devotion against odds almost as overwhelming as those faced by the 2nd Sikhs in Malaya at the same time. (Chapter XIX.)

When the British-Indian Forces finally crossed the Chindwin, leaving behind their vehicles and all their heavy equipment, the Japanese were in no condition to follow them on the road to Imphal. The latter indeed had reached the limit of their communications and supply lines, and they settled down in the monsoon of 1942 to consolidate their position in Burma and build up their attenuated communications. One of their measures to this end was to link the railway system of Siam with that of Burma by building a line through the jungle from Siam, near Bangkok, to the Burma railway near Moulmein. This obviously vital link greatly simplified their supply problem—but the line lay through some hundreds of miles of the worst and unhealthiest jungle in the East, and thousands of Allied prisoners of war were brought to work on it. Many of these were from the 2nd Sikhs, who had been captured in Malaya, and they endured great suffering on this “Railway of Death” as it was called—such was the toll of disease and starvation among those forced to work there in 1942 and 1943.

As the Japanese “build-up” in Burma progressed, their plans for an attack on India matured. Fortunately at this time our Commander in this theatre was Field-Marshal Wavell, whose motto (as we have seen in Chapter XX above) was to attack the enemy whenever opportunity offered. At this time the only opportunity offering was in Arakan on the coast, which was the nearest point to India the Japanese had reached. He had accordingly attacked them there with such forces as he could muster from India, with a view to capturing the important Akyab airfields, but had achieved little or no ostensible success. Without knowing it, however, he had achieved an important strategic interference with the Japanese major plan for the invasion of Assam which was to have been launched early in 1943. One of the Jap divisions needed for the invasion had had to be hastily sent to Arakan to stem Wavell’s advance. This it achieved,

inflicting heavy losses on Wavell's forces in the Arakan, but the initiative on the Imphal front, where the Japanese commander wished to attack, remained with us and the build-up of our forces there in the autumn of 1943 was possible as a result. It was as part of this build-up that the 9th Battalion now went to Imphal as part of the 20th Indian Division.

It was at this time that the South-East Asia Command, under Lord Louis Mountbatten, was set up to launch the Allied counter-offensive against the Japanese in this theatre, and its subordinate formations were the famous Fourteenth Army and the IV and XXXIII Corps. It was to form part of the former that the 20th Division now went to the Imphal area, with the 9th Battalion as part of its 80th Indian Infantry Brigade.

The reader will appreciate, therefore, that while no major operations had been initiated in the area, both sides were in fact preparing major offensives. One experiment, however, that General Wavell carried out in 1943 must be noted since its experience demonstrated the ability of troops, lightly equipped and supplied by air, to operate in jungle country behind the enemy front. This was the "Chindit" Brigade of 1943 which operated successfully in Upper Burma, disrupting enemy road and rail communications and interfering with their plans. Though their story is not for this volume since no men of the Frontier Force took part, the 9th Battalion in June and July 1944, and later in January 1945, used the same technique in long-range penetration missions to attack the Japanese lines of communication.*

The Kabaw Valley, 1943-44

The Battalion arrived in the Imphal area on 3rd October 1943, and at this time, at its first entry into the Burma theatre on active service, the officers with the Battalion were as follows :

Lieutenant-Colonel D. A. L. Mackenzie,				
D.S.O.	..	..	..	Commandant
Major R. J. F. Milanes	..	..	..	Second-in-Command
Captain D. G. Butterworth	..	..	..	O.C. Administrative Company
Captain W. D. S. Fraser	..	..	..	O.C. H.Q. Company
Captain N. C. Rawlley	..	..	..	O.C. "A" Company (Sikhs)
Captain W. J. H. Shephard	..	..	..	O.C. "B" Company (Dogras)
Captain A. J. Kayani	..	..	..	O.C. "C" Company (Pathans)
Captain J. D. Gosling	..	..	..	O.C. "D" Company (Punjabis)
Captain J. C. Jennings	..	..	..	Adjutant
Captain K. S. Rai	..	..	..	Quartermaster

* See p. 493.

Lieutenant H. G. Robertson	.. ..	Company Officer
Lieutenant M. S. N. Dult	.. ..	Company Officer
Lieutenant S. D. Kirloskan	.. ..	Company Officer
Lieutenant A. R. Gurney	.. ..	Company Officer
Lieutenant J. D. Karwal	.. ..	Company Officer
Second-Lieutenant H. K. Shepherd	.. ..	Company Officer
Lieutenant A. M. Khan	.. ..	Intelligence Officer
Lieutenant Mahboob Khan	.. ..	Signals Officer
Lieutenant G. R. Webb	.. ..	Transport Officer
Captain D. Bhalt (I.A.M.C.)	.. ..	Medical Officer (attached)

The Battalion moved forward after three days in Imphal to the Burma border and arrived at Bulldozer Camp on the Chindwin front on 7th October. Its role was now to be watch and ward on the border, and its first location was at Moreh on the main axis of the Imphal-Sittaung road, and the tasks given were:

- (a) To find continuous patrols south and south-east of Tamu.
- (b) To place a standing piquet on the Bailey bridge over the Lokchaw river.
- (c) To prevent enemy movement up the main axis.

By mid-October the men had constructed "bashas" (grass and bamboo huts) and settled into a respectable-looking camp at Moreh. Till November, other than normal patrolling activities, nothing operational of note occurred. On 24th October, however, Lieutenant-Colonel Mackenzie left the Battalion on appointment as Brigade Commander of the 32nd Indian Infantry Brigade. The Battalion were sorry to lose him, but the move was promotion and he carried with him every good wish for his future.

The Battalion now had "B" Company at Mintha and "C" Company at Thanan as patrol bases along the Chindwin from Tonhe to Intabaung, and during November normal patrolling over an area twenty-five miles by fifteen miles continued. On 25th November the Army Commander, General Slim, visited the Brigade area and addressed officers of the Brigade. On the same day Lieutenant-Colonel L. R. Mizen arrived and assumed command of the Battalion. Work now proceeded on the construction of defensive positions at Moreh covering the main axis of the road back to Imphal. On 7th December these were occupied by the Battalion as information had been received that the Japanese were about to commence their invasion. However, nothing transpired and the rest of the month passed without incident.

The Battalion opened the New Year (1944) with some vigorous patrolling on the Chindwin. It was of two kinds—normal watch and ward patrols on the west bank of the river, and aggressive patrols or raids across the river with some specific object. The latter were generally on receipt of information of the presence of parties of Japs in one or other of the villages and were with the object of capturing or killing them.

One such raid aimed at surrounding the village of Sapha, which held some Japs. It was carried out by two platoons of "B" Company under Major Shephard and Lieutenant Walton. They crossed the river in the early hours of the morning of 17th January and found the village occupied by fifteen Japs, who spotted the reconnaissance party. The platoons accordingly lay up during the day and surrounded the village in the evening. In the ensuing fight Major Shephard and a sepoy were killed and Havildar Janab Gul was wounded. Seven Japs were killed and two wounded. The force withdrew across the Chindwin under the command of Lieutenant Walton, who was awarded an immediate M.C.

During January the Battalion took over another outpost of company strength at Myothit. "A" Company (Sikhs) was detailed and went there in lorries on 10th January. The rest of the month passed without incident.

On 3rd February two platoons of "D" Company (Punjabis) under Captain Gosling and Lieutenant Gurney laid an ambush for the enemy on a track behind the village of Intha on the east side of the Chindwin. A party of six Japs under an officer walked into the ambush, the officer being killed and the others all wounded. On their way back the platoons of "D" Company were fired on while crossing the river, one man being killed and four wounded. Covering fire from the west bank silenced the enemy and enabled the party to cross without further incident.

On 9th February the Supreme Allied Commander, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, visited the area, and officers were called up to meet him and hear an address on future plans to deal with the Japs. On the same day a party of Japs tried to cross the Chindwin in "A" Company's area, but were spotted and driven back by fire.

On 13th February the Battalion, less the two outpost companies, moved from its position covering the main Tamu road to the area Mawnwe-Thanan, where a fresh defensive position had to be dug as quickly as possible. This was completed in five days. For the rest of the month patrolling continued without any noteworthy occurrence.

The Deception Plan for the Introduction of General Wingate's Chindits and the Start of the Japanese Offensive, 1944

Intelligence reports received at higher Headquarters had all tended to show an enemy build-up either for offensive or deception purposes, but no evidence was gained on the ground until early March, as described later.

In the meantime, towards the end of February 1944, a most secret operation was planned by IV Corps to assist in the introduction of General Wingate's "Chindits" into the heart of enemy-occupied jungle territory. For this the Battalion came under command of the 1st Brigade of the 23rd Division, whose

task was to create a diversion on the sector Tonhe-Thaungdut to simulate a Chindit crossing of the Chindwin as in the 1943 expedition when the original Chindit infiltration was carried out.

The Battalion remained disposed as before, but a Battalion Tactical Headquarters moved to a commanding position midway between Thanan and Tonhe and alongside No. 1 Brigade's Tactical Headquarters. The Patiala Infantry joined "B" Company in the Thaungdut area and the Seaforths joined "C" Company in the Tonhe area. The 4/16th Punjab Regiment and some tanks remained in reserve in the Kabaw valley. Apart from certain stage-managed deception, the main task during this period was for the Battalion to continue its existing role, and the remaining troops to simulate river-crossing preparations.

Actually the task was by no means easy, as the area became stirred up like a hornets' nest and the Japs immediately began to react. The reaction, however, as we found afterwards, was nothing to do with our planned diversion, but was part of the forward Jap move that, as part of their major offensive, was soon to take place. Plans had been framed by Corps Headquarters for such a contingency, and 1st Brigade was to crush the enemy in the Kabaw valley if he penetrated in force.

The main Jap activity appeared to be on the east bank in the Settaw area, where M.T. began to be heard, Japs were seen and Jifs* openly shouted to our troops to come and join them. Successful air-strikes were carried out on these concentrations.

The historic fly-in of the Chindit Force started on 5th March, and the uninterrupted roar of aircraft throughout the hours of darkness for several nights on end directly over our positions indicated to the men and officers that something very unusual was happening. Hitherto only the Commanding Officer was allowed to know the object of our diversion. During the night of 13th March, however, 1st Brigade received orders to pull out at once as they were, without waiting for transport: it was obvious that excitement was brewing elsewhere.

What had happened was that 17th Division had been attacked on the Tid-dim road by the Jap 33rd Division, which had crossed the Chindwin many miles away from our front to the south. A change of plan had become necessary as a result, and the decision had perforce been made not to fight in the Kabaw valley. Battalion Tactical Headquarters moved the next day (14th March) and rejoined Battalion Main Headquarters at Myothit.

The Battalion Dispositions ordered by the 1st Brigade at this period were:

Battalion Headquarters	..	Myothit.
"A" Company	.. ..	One platoon Talanyaung, one platoon escort to Mule convoy, Company Headquarters and one platoon Myothit.

* Jifs (i.e. Japanese Inspired Fifth Column). See footnote, p. 418, 4th Battalion.

"B" Company	..	..	Thaungdut area (one platoon Myinthami Taung track).
"C" Company	..	..	Tonhe-Tabaw area (with standing patrol at Tilawng).
"D" Company	..	..	Myothit.
Guerilla platoon	..	..	Zedi.

It will be noticed that these were very dispersed dispositions with no backing, but they were ordered so as to obtain earliest information of any Jap moves when the offensive developed—a recce battalion role in fact.

The change of command and the sudden pull-out of the 1st Brigade left the Battalion without any controlling headquarters below Divisional Headquarters, to whom, however, they were able to report by telephone. To put the Battalion's old brigade, the 80th Brigade, in the picture, an appreciation of the situation in signal form was sent by despatch riders, which reached them as they were retiring on the Sittang-Tamu axis. This appreciation regarded a large-scale crossing of the Chindwin as fairly certain, but could not indicate where the crossings were going to be made.

At about 11 p.m. on 15th March 1944, information was received by telephone from "B" Company that a clash had occurred on the west (our own) bank of the Chindwin between Japs who had just crossed and a platoon of "B" Company at Nanthanyit. This was followed by a report of 500 Japs with mule transport in the same area, who were being engaged by "B" Company.

At about 11.40 p.m. "C" Company Commander reported the sound of firing from Tonhe in the direction of Tabaw, where two platoons of "C" Company were located. He set off with an escort, leaving Lieutenant Harswaran Singh in charge of Tonhe.

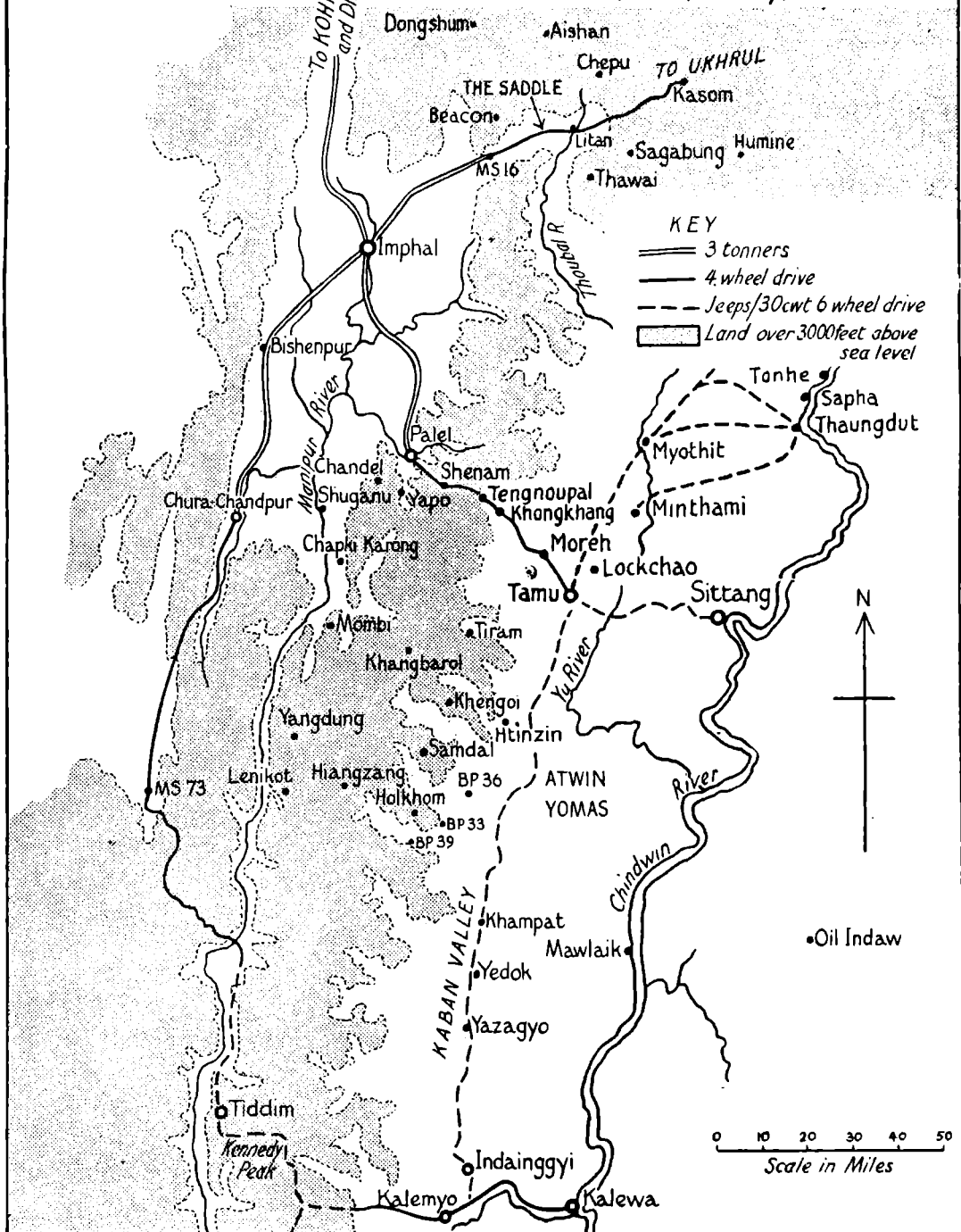
At intervals throughout the night reports from "B" Company confirmed that the Japs had landed some 500 men with mules at Thaungdut and were being engaged by our detachment on the track leading back to Myothit. "C" Company similarly reported a crossing by Jifs and Japs opposite Sapha, where confused fighting was in progress by the detachment there.

From these reports it became clear that at the moment the major threat was from the force opposing "B" Company. This party had thrust fast and was moving rapidly westwards, containing "B" Company to the south meanwhile. At 1.30 a.m. "D" Company, which was standing-by in Myothit, was ordered to move to the position already prepared on the Minthami Taung. It marched through the night, occupied the position, and soon after dawn its forward patrols covering the position encountered the leading Jap elements and battle was joined.

Meanwhile "C" Company, after a series of attacks and counter-attacks

9th Battalion

Sketch map to illustrate Operations
November, 1943, to July, 1944



during the night, was fighting a delaying action back along the track to Thanan. Its post at Tonhe was overrun by superior numbers in the early morning and practically all were killed or taken prisoner. Included among the latter were Captain Batt, the M.O., and Lieutenant Harswaran Singh. The resistance put up by "C" Company had been effective in delaying the enemy advance, and the threat on this axis was less urgent than on that through Nanthanyit and Minthami Taung to Myothit.

However, "C" Company had a much longer distance to cover before it could concentrate at the next battalion position (which had been decided long beforehand), and the remaining troops in hand (one platoon, "A" Company) were sent to Thanan to prevent the Company being cut off and to cover them through.

It was possible in Battalion Headquarters to get a vivid picture of this fighting some fifteen and twenty miles away in dense jungle-covered hills (with few foot tracks) by the excellent line communications which had been laid by our signals over country and distances theoretically impossible. This made it possible to pass to Divisional Headquarters timely reports on the situation and to confirm that the invasion was on.

At about 8 a.m. "B" Company (less detachments already engaged on the track during the night) reported that their position south-west of Thaungdut was being attacked, and later that their route on to the main track had been cut. They were ordered therefore to fight their delaying action back through Talanyaung, where one platoon of "A" Company was in position, covering this potential invasion route.

Soon after this the line was cut and no communication was possible until five days later when they concentrated at the next battalion position—Yangoupokbi.

This platoon at Talanyaung and the standing patrol at Zedi were now out of touch by line or W/T, and it was not possible to find out what their situation was. Arrangements were accordingly made with the Division for a message to be dropped from the air to order their withdrawal.

At 11 a.m. "D" Company reported that they had been actively engaged with the Japs for some time, and though they had inflicted considerable casualties, the enemy was closing round behind them on the track leading to Myothit. The Company Commander was instructed to hang on as long as was consistent with getting his force away in reasonable strength, and the Battalion Headquarters was ordered to complete loading and to be prepared to move.

The situation in "D" Company had now become tense, when suddenly the line was cut and nothing more was heard from them. The Carrier Platoon, under Jemadar Mohd Sher, was sent out to the foot of the hills (in Maunwe area) from which the Company was to retire, with the task of covering the withdrawal and evacuating wounded.

The M.T. and mules available in Myothit were insufficient to move all stocks and equipment, and a second trip was not possible as all M.T. had been ordered to concentrate at Moreh at once to avoid risk of capture by the Japs. Moreover, it looked as if Jap progress would bring them to the Battalion Headquarters area by that evening accordingly, all warlike stores which could be carried were loaded and the remainder, including unserviceable carriers, surplus rations, officers' kit and tentage and officers' mess stocks, were destroyed by burning.

Battalion Headquarters pulled out at about 1.30 p.m. after great difficulty in loading owing to shortage of men, and marched to Yangoupokbi, which was the agreed Battalion R.V. and which covered the exit from the Kabaw valley in this area towards the Imphal valley. Arriving on 20th March, positions here were occupied by the few men of Battalion Headquarters and manned throughout the night. In the early hours of the morning "D" Company came in, very tired but in good heart, having got all their casualties away—a fine performance. They reported that Myothit was now in Jap hands and they had been followed to the Yu river, where they had carried out a successful ambush.

Patrols the next day (21st) failed to contact "C" Company and found Myothit occupied, but otherwise our immediate front was clear. On the next night "C" Company arrived, also very exhausted but pleased at having given a good account of themselves over a distance of forty miles through jungle. Their casualties had been heavy but their depleted strength was a welcome addition to the small garrison. The next day Jap scouts were observed attempting to reconnoitre the position, but were driven off. An attack was expected that night and all positions were fully manned, but it did not materialize. At dawn the Battalion was ordered to withdraw through the hills towards Palel, and "B" Company joined it in time for the move. There had been several casualties and the original platoon that had been engaged with the Japs at Thaugdut was missing.

The strength of the Battalion at this period was about 200 deficient—one platoon "B" Company, two platoons "A" Company missing—in addition to the killed, wounded and individual missing.

Withdrawal through the Hills to the Tamu-Imphal Road

The march from Yangoupokbi was an arduous one. The route was up and down the whole way, some hills being as high as 5,200 feet. The men were tired but in good heart, though water was very scarce. Uncertainty as to the extent of Jap infiltration made each of the many formidable natural positions through which the Battalion had to pass a potential hazard until it had been searched. Occasional bursts of fire gave the rear of the column the impression that our progress was being opposed, but in fact these originated from personnel of attacked units patrolling wide of its path.

The Battalion halted at Lamlong for the night, which passed quietly as far as enemy activity was concerned, though movement within the position continued throughout the night in order to water animals and men from the very limited supply.

The next day the way led through hilly, waterless country which was again a great trial on men and animals, relieved only by the generosity of the Patiala Infantry through whose position the Battalion passed at Sita. Their own supply was limited, but they gave the men enough to keep going until the Battalion reached Tengnoupal on the main Tamu-Imphal road, in the late afternoon of 23rd March. Here the Battalion was met by the Brigade Commander, who complimented the men on their performance and on the verve with which, though tired, thirsty and hungry, they marched in.

The Patiala Infantry again showed the greatest hospitality to all ranks, and the Battalion harboured for the night within their dispositions. Those who were able to keep awake had a grand-stand view of a night engagement in the adjoining hills between a company of the Patiala Infantry and infiltrating Jap forces.

The next day (24th) the Battalion embussed for Lokchaw, where the officiating Second-in-Command and his layout party were waiting. They had an anxious time too, occupying a position designed for a battalion with only a handful of men.

The Lokchaw position covered the Yu river crossing with its bridge, and while the enemy spent much ammunition during the next few days in largely ineffective artillery and small-arms fire, no attack developed. Meanwhile, the Battalion perfected the defences which were part of the Brigade box, and by the end of the month provided mortar- and bomb-proof cover for the troops.

On 1st April 1944, the Battalion was ordered to move to the area of the former Bulldozer Camp to cover the retirement from Moreh of 32nd Brigade, commanded by Brigadier Mackenzie, the Battalion's former C.O. Early in the morning loud explosions and columns of black smoke indicated that stocks were being destroyed, and at 11 a.m. the Brigade began to pass through. Some unexpected shelling from a Jap gun which had infiltrated on a parallel track some miles to the north caused casualties to 100th Brigade and to "B" Company.

The Jap follow-up was slow and both 100th Brigade and the Battalion pulled out successfully. In view of the shortage of defence stores the men pulled up all wire during the hours of darkness and withdrew with it.

On 3rd April orders were received to evacuate the Lokchaw area, and again the Battalion pulled out without being harassed except by some minor long-range shelling. Khongkhang was the harbour for the night and the men could hear the efforts the Japs were making to get along the Mombi track and on to the main road behind the Battalion. At first light a party of "C" Company was dispatched to assist troops already charged with resisting this Jap effort, and the

guerilla platoon, supported by carriers, moved up the main road to see if it was clear. This party encountered an enemy road-block some three miles back, at a particularly winding and steep portion of the road. Lieutenant Patterson was wounded but got his information back quickly, and the C.O. and his recon party were able to have a plan ready by the time "A" and "D" Companies were up. These two companies were put in on the left with very effective tank support. The country was thick and the enemy were dressed in British uniforms, but after about an hour and a half's fighting it was possible to push the Japs away sufficiently to clear the road-block and get the Battalion and the remainder of the Brigade on the move again. "A" and "D" Companies suffered several casualties and Lieutenant Robertson was among those killed.

The Battalion harboured that night in the Border Regiment's position (100th Brigade) at Tengnoupal and in the morning took over from them. The Battalion was dispersed over many hill features, and included within the Battalion area was a hill—Nippon Hill—already occupied by a company of Japs who had captured it from the Borders some ten days ago and had successfully beaten off all counter-attacks. Enemy shelling now became active and, as a result of their having an O.P. in our midst, most accurate. All companies and Battalion Headquarters received a share, but "B" Company, the most forward company, suffered most.

However, a very fine battalion attack by the Devons, supported by an air-strike and heavy artillery concentration, captured Nippon Hill. The company left to garrison it was placed under the 9th Battalion command and was heavily attacked all night after a preliminary Jap bombardment from 5.30 p.m. until 8.30 p.m. The company put up a very spirited resistance, and the Battalion organization backed them up with carriers, ammunition, stretcher-bearers, mortars, etc.

In the morning forty-five dead bodies which the Japs had not been able to get away in the usual pre-dawn final attack were found in the wire.

"C" Company then took over the position and were kept on their toes by entombed Japanese digging themselves out from the mass of dead, wounded and debris inside the hill and attempting to throw grenades and make a bolt for it. The fanatical powers of endurance and resistance of Japanese—even as individuals—was strikingly illustrated at this period. As General Slim has recorded, the finest individual fighter in the Second World War was unquestionably the Jap. Many of these would-be escapees had been buried in an indescribable stench underneath a company position for some four or five days, and without water, food or medical attention. They were, of course, of 33rd Division, and no other Jap formation that the Battalion ever met attained the same standard of tenacity.

It was now evident that the Japs were fully extended and exerting maximum pressure; shelling intensified, tanks were heard, and eventually "B" Company

was pushed out of its position on Morgan's Peak, where the shelling had destroyed all the defences. It lost practically one platoon complete.

"C" Company had also been very heavily shelled on Nippon Hill, and it was decided to replace them by "D" Company, who were fresh and in a condition to cope with the almost certain attack that night. As usual, heavy enemy shelling started at 5.30 p.m. and continued until 8.30 p.m., after which the Japs attacked. There was a brisk fire fight and the Company commander reported the situation in hand. After a while the firing died down and the usual ammunition replenishment was about to be sent up, unasked for, as signal communications had broken down. At that moment "C" Company commander in the adjoining position reported that "D" Company had been pushed off the hill and were now entering his position. The Company commander had been wounded as well as several J.C.Os., but casualties were by no means heavy enough to justify the loss of the hill. Apparently all the men in the trench where the main Jap attack came in were killed, the enemy got into the position and in the combined confusion and reaction from heavy shelling the Company became disorganized and were ejected.

Any further exploitation of success by the enemy was checked by the remnants of "B" Company moving out to the foot of the hill and protecting the road leading into the "C" Company position. It had been a Brigade policy not to counter-attack if Nippon Hill was lost, and for the remainder of the period until the end of August the feature remained in enemy possession.

Enemy attacks on Crete East continued and shelling never ceased, our own counter battery at this time not being able to observe fire. On 17th April two companies of the Devon Regiment were introduced into the position as a preliminary to our relief, and that night a suicide attack on Crete East was beaten off with heavy casualties.

The relief started early on 18th April and was carried out without incident in the forward positions, but some shelling of Battalion Headquarters while the Devon Battalion Headquarters and a company were moving in caused several casualties. The seconds-in-command of both battalions were wounded at this time.

On completion of relief the Battalion moved to Patiala Ridge, which was the third battalion defensive position in the area. Here life was very much quieter for a few days until all were rested. "C" Company was then sent off to garrison Sita, some miles away, where they were periodically attacked, while the rest of the Battalion (leaving sufficient to hold Patiala Ridge until reinforcements were available) was engaged in offensive patrolling. This eventually was focused on what the Japanese radio called "the strategic village of Phalbung," and brisk little actions were fought nearly every day or night here.

The Battalion constantly changed strengths and dispositions, and the tactics adopted reaped a rich dividend, particularly at night, as the Jap continued to

think he could pass parties through to infiltrate behind Palel. There were a few casualties, but the men undoubtedly held up these attempts at getting behind the position in any strength at this time, although the enemy succeeded in this after the Battalion had gone.

On 13th May 1944, the relief of 20th Division by 23rd Division began, and the Battalion pulled out to Palel *en route* to the Ukhrul road, which was a quiet sector and was intended for a well-earned rest. Some shelling during the relief caused casualties, but despite the date the Battalion's luck was in, and the Jap gunners ceased when they had in fact the most profitable target—the whole Battalion on the rear side of the ridge and no cover, having vacated the trenches for the relieving battalion.

A night's rest in a rear area was a very welcome change to all, as was the Battalion location on the Ukhrul road, where they occupied a village, with adequate cover from rain, for the monsoon had now begun.

"A" Company was on outposts in contact with light enemy detachments at Yendoupokbi, and "D" Company held a position overlooking the Kanglasipan air-strip.

As the Japanese offensive had now been in progress nearly nine weeks, and, as has been recorded, the Battalion (and with it the 20th Division) had been continuously withdrawing towards Imphal, the reader will wish here to understand what developments in the general situation had taken place and what had occurred to bring about (a) the retirement from the Chindwin and (b) the need for troops north of Imphal on the Ukhrul road, which was an area not hitherto threatened by the enemy.

Leaving, therefore, the Battalion for a moment on the Ukhrul road, let us recapitulate on the higher level of the South-East Asia Command the events that had occurred since the beginning of March 1944.

The main Japanese offensive had opened in February with a full-scale attack in the Arakan designed to defeat the 7th Division there, and to prevent reinforcement of the Imphal area from the Arakan front. The Jap attack in Arakan was followed in March by a two-pronged advance across the Chindwin on the Upper Burma border :

- (a) By their 33rd Division (victors of Malaya and the Burma campaign of 1942) in the south, where our 20th Division, with the 9th Battalion, were holding the front; and
- (b) By their 31st Division 100 miles farther north directed against Kohima on our main L. of C. from Imphal to India. This meant an advance across mountainous country where only mule transport could maintain supplies for the Japs.

The enemy attack in Arakan failed after desperate fighting, and a Division (the 5th) was transported by air to reinforce the Imphal theatre, where the Jap offensive was more successful. Similarly, their advance at (b) above, being in

fact a strategic surprise, met little opposition before threatening Kohima itself, where finally it was held; but a portion of the Jap 31st Division moved south through Ukhrul and became a further threat to Imphal from the north-east.

By the end of May the Jap forces attacking Imphal from the south had advanced through Moreh and Tamu, and also (by a wide encircling movement) through Tiddim and up the valley of the Manipur River to Bishenpur.

Thus it will be seen that Jap forces were converging on Imphal—the base of the Fourteenth Army (now being maintained by air supply)—from three sides, and that was the situation when the Battalion was ordered on 18th May up the Ukhrul road to Sawumbong, where it took up a defensive position.

However, this was not for long. Three days later the Battalion (less two companies on detached outpost duty) was placed at two hours' notice to move to the help of the 17th Division, hard-pressed by the Jap 33rd Division at Bishenpur, only fifteen miles south of Imphal itself.

Two companies of the Mahratta Light Infantry were placed under command of the Battalion to make it up to four rifle companies, and the move was made that afternoon in M.T. "A" and "C" Companies of the Battalion, who were still on their way, were to join later.

By five o'clock (21st) the Battalion began arriving in the 17th Division H.Q. Box at the tenth milestone, Tiddim road, and was distributed as follows: The two companies of Mahrattas were allocated to a sector of the perimeter, while the Battalion was formed into a mobile striking force inside the box. The Battalion now came under the 50th Brigade of the 17th Division, and for the next ten days were engaged in heavy and continuous fighting to drive back the enemy, whose advance was now a serious threat to Imphal itself.

The Battle of Oinam, 22nd-27th May 1944

On 21st May 17th Division Headquarters on the Tiddim road were heavily attacked, and as all the 17th Division troops were at the time fully engaged, the Battalion was ordered to restore the situation. The composition battalion moved down in M.T. and harboured the night inside 17th Division Headquarters perimeter. After detailed reconnaissance the next morning a plan for a deliberate attack was drawn up. The enemy were in a village north of Oinam, blocking the L. of C., and on Red Hill overlooking Divisional Headquarters.

At 1.30 p.m., preceded by a concentration of the divisional artillery, "B" and "C" Companies went into the attack, supported by a company of 5th Mahratta (the fourth company was engaged on the perimeter of 17th Division Headquarters).

The leading elements of both companies came under heavy enfilade machine-gun fire; Major Fraser, "B" Company commander, was shot through the lung, and several more casualties were caused. A platoon of "B" Company

got through into the enemy-held village, but movement of the remainder was impossible.

The Commanding Officer, who was on the start-line, reorganized "B" Company, ordered it to hold the start-line, and with a smoke concentration on the enemy machine guns sweeping the area, launched "C" Company and the Mahratta Company just as the "B" Company platoon was forced to retire. Lieutenant A. M. Khan, who was with this platoon, had put up a very gallant fight, and, though wounded in three places, returned to the Company after being attended to at the R.A.P. He was awarded a M.C. for his gallantry.

The two-company attack gained its immediate objective and dug in for the night, sharing the objective with the enemy, who of course carried out the usual night counter-attack, but without success. In the morning the battalion attack was resumed with tank support, and under cover of this the L. of C. to the leading brigades of 17th Division was reopened. Fighting was heavy in the enclosed village, but by the late afternoon seven more bunkers were cleared. There were still enemy in the eastern end of the village, but the Divisional Commander decided to withdraw the companies who had done so well, and replace them by two platoons to prevent any further interruption of the L. of C. Just before the orders to withdraw were issued Major Kayani, commanding "C" Company, was killed by a direct hit from an enemy mortar, and command of the Company passed to Subadar Tarlochan Chand (later M.C. and killed in action).

Attacks finally to eliminate the enemy were continued over the next two days, but the Japs hung grimly on, covered by a particularly difficult hill feature. A very gallant effort was made by "C" Company to squeeze the enemy between our main attacking forces and themselves. After a long but very accurately planned night march under Captain Dalip Singh the Company assaulted from behind the enemy. Initial surprise was gained, but little support could be given, and the two forces remained separated by the enemy position. "C" Company could then neither go forward or back and despite skilful efforts by both medium and light tanks, the Company was under accurate aimed fire the whole day. The Carrier Platoon excelled itself in bringing in the wounded under fire throughout the period and in attempting to deliver water and ammunition.

A fresh attack was laid on that night for a Baluch Battalion of 17th Division aimed at eliminating the enemy on his feature overlooking the village, and this made some ground, enabling "C" Company to withdraw, badly battered but cheerful.

"A" and "D" Companies arrived the next day and were used on patrol duties while plans for a whole brigade attack by fresh troops were being made. It had now been ascertained that enemy numbers in these operations were very much greater than the original estimate.

On 27th May the Battalion returned to the Ukhral road for a rest, refit and

much needed reorganization. Casualties had been heavy and reinforcements were far away, so all promotions and transfers had to be carried out with what remained. These administrative adjustments had to be accelerated, as an offensive operation of some six weeks' duration was being planned for 8th June.

At the same time the Battalion had good reason to be proud of its work at Oinam. The Japanese threat to Imphal had been halted, and the Battalion, though lacking two companies, had come through this major action, entailing heavy casualties, with flying colours. For the remaining few days of the month it enjoyed a well-earned rest.

Offensive Operations leading to the Final Crushing of the Japanese Advance, 1944

The battle for Imphal was now in a critical stage. The arrival at Kohima of the 2nd British Division from India had halted the 31st Japanese Division in that area, but elements of it and of the 15th Jap Division had been directed down the main road to Imphal, as well as via the Ukhrul track.

The general picture at the front at this period was therefore as follows :

Imphal-Tiddim Road: 17th Division and a brigade of 5th Division were still fighting fiercely against the final fanatical Jap effort to reach Imphal.

Imphal-Tamu Road: 23rd Division still fighting fiercely against Jap efforts to advance to Imphal, but it was becoming apparent that the enemy had lost his punch.

Imphal-Ukhrul Road: 100th Brigade of 20th Division was engaging continued efforts of 15th Jap Division to advance.

Imphal-Kohima Road: The XXXIII Corps was still battling furiously south from Kohima, and junction had not yet been effected with the 5th Division moving north from Imphal.

It was appreciated at the Headquarters of the Fourteenth Army that the enemy was in fact on the point of breaking, and it was decided to commence a series of bold outflanking movements to cross his L. of C. and finally roll him up.

The 7th Division and the 23rd Brigade of the Chindits were to cut his communications to Kohima from the east and drive south, while the 80th Brigade of the 20th Division (with the 9th Battalion) was to move north-east across country from Imphal and cut the L. of C. of the Japs resisting the advance of the 5th Division. Eventually all were to concentrate in the area of Ukhrul. The 2nd Division (British) was also co-operating with the 7th Division and the 23rd Brigade in its drive from Kohima to open the road to Imphal.

The Battalion was to be on a limited all-pack basis and maintained by air throughout. Appointments at this period were :

Commanding Officer	..	Lieutenant-Colonel Mizen.
Adjutant	.. ..	Captain Jennings.
Second-in-Command	and	
H.Q. Company	.. ..	Major Butterworth.
"A" Company	.. ..	Major Rawley.
"B" Company	.. ..	Major Webb.
"C" Company	.. ..	Major Ker Singh Rai.
"D" Company	.. ..	Captain Gurney.

The Battalion was at the top of its form at the thought of an advance at last in spite of the fact that weather conditions were deplorable. To prepare for this project the first few days of June were devoted to reorganizing the mule transport and learning the method of working the ground procedure for supply drops from the air. This had been the method of supplying the Chindits in the jungles of Upper Burma, and both British and American Air Forces had become fully experienced in it.

Naturally a *sine qua non* of air supply in modern war is the achievement first of air superiority if not actual air supremacy. At this stage in the Burma campaign of 1944 the British and American Air Forces were rapidly achieving air supremacy in this theatre, and the development of supply by air on a large scale became later perhaps the most important single contributory factor that led to the destruction of the Japanese armies in Burma.

By 6th June the 80th Brigade were ready, and the first task given to them was to move by night by hill tracks across the mountains to the main road north of Kanglatongbi, and there cut the Jap L. of C. The effect of this would be to help the 5th Division, who were now counter-attacking the elements of the Japanese 31st Division that had worked down the main road from Kohima and had actually reached Kanglatongbi—only sixteen miles from Imphal itself.

The monsoon had now broken, and heavy rain had soaked the countryside, making the paddy-fields in the valleys into quagmires, the mountain streams into torrents, and the tracks into treacherous and slippery slides.

The Brigade set out at dusk on 8th June and marched for four nights through enemy country, lying up in concealment by day. The Battalion took the lead on the third night and maintained that lead until 1st July. The Brigade concentrated at Molkon and a reconnaissance to Chawai, which was the Battalion's objective, indicated that it was very lightly held. This confirmed an air reconnaissance carried out by the Commanding Officer, and it was decided to strike quickly before the Japs could concentrate. The Battalion carried out a gruelling night march over a narrow, precipitous and slippery track which tried the men sorely. Monsoon conditions had also brought on acute diarrhoea in a large number of the men and officers, which did not help matters. However,

Chawai was secured without opposition before dawn, and after digging in the Battalion was able to enjoy its first sleep for five days.

“C” Company was now sent out on to an adjacent track which was known to be used by the enemy, and in a very short while had a most spirited and successful engagement in which they were very skilfully supported by our mountain gunners. A number of Japs were killed, several taken prisoner, and a large amount of equipment captured. Documents also captured gave the entire enemy L. of C. layout and on this we were able to frame our plans. These now were to direct two companies on to the main Jap L. of C., and to send reconnaissance patrols to places to which we intended to advance.

Before proceeding further with the Battalion story, let us turn again for a moment to the general situation of the battlefield north of Imphal. On 20th June, the advanced elements of the 20th Division now being little more than a day’s march away, and the Japanese evacuating the area and moving east as fast as possible, the Brigade Group was ordered to Leishan in pursuit. Heavy rain continued, hampering both the Japs and ourselves, but no one thought of stopping operations (as in previous years), and General Slim, the Commander of the Fourteenth Army, appreciated what the effect of an unrelenting pursuit would be. He called on all to maintain the pressure no matter what the weather, and the troops responded magnificently.

On 25th June “B” Company, after making a rapid advance across a flooded river (leaving its mules behind), captured Leishan. There was some opposition, and the Battalion joined it there after irksome delay in bridging the flooded river.

From Leishan “A” and “D” Companies were sent forward to Khuntak, a part of which they occupied and consolidated only a few hundred yards from the enemy. They were counter-attacked but held on successfully and were joined after a night march by the rest of the Battalion. An immediate attack was now organized and, under the command of Major Rawley, drove the enemy completely out of the village and dumps, killing many and capturing prisoners, documents and equipment.

On the next day “B” Company followed up and, brushing aside minor opposition, pushed on until held up by a strong Jap position at Shongphel rest-house. Here the Brigade Commander decided to put the 3/1st Gurkha Rifles into the lead and they took over, using “B” Company in their final attack which captured Shongphel.

The Battalion was now due for a few days’ rest and on 1st July 1944, Lieutenant-Colonel Wren (4th Sikhs) arrived to relieve Lieutenant-Colonel Mizen, who was proceeding to join General Wingate’s special force of Chindits operating in North Burma, as Brigadier, General Staff. Lieutenant-Colonel Mizen had commanded the Battalion through its first crucial battles in the Second World War, and this was fitting as he was a regular officer of the 2nd

Sikhs—which was in the end the destiny of the 9th Battalion of the Regiment. Indeed, he had led the Battalion with outstanding success through nine months of campaigning, with much heavy fighting, difficult movement and continual losses, and his departure was a great loss. The Battalion owed him, in a great degree, its efficiency, confidence and high morale in the field; but it was for him well-deserved promotion and he carried with him the best wishes of all in the Battalion.

On 3rd July news was received of the award to Major Rawley of the M.C. By 5th July the Battalion was again back in the front line, and from the 8th to 10th July was engaged in heavy fighting to hold off a series of determined enemy counter-attacks. All were successfully beaten off, though a forward position held by "C" Company was overrun and had to be retaken. On 8th July Lieutenant-Colonel Wren, the new Commanding Officer, was wounded and, tragically, died later of his wounds. He had only been in command seven days—a gallant and brilliant officer. Three other officers were killed in this fighting.*

Major Rawley assumed command temporarily, but on 15th August was also wounded. In the meantime Lieutenant-Colonel H. R. Hugo (also of the 4th Battalion) had been appointed, but in the interim Major Akbar Khan was transferred from the 14th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles to command the Battalion until his arrival. Finally Lieutenant-Colonel Hugo arrived to assume command on 22nd August, and Major Akbar Khan returned to the 14th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles.

The Brigade was now given the task of pressing forward down the road through Tamu to the Chindwin and sweeping the area as far as the river clear of Japs. The latter were in full retreat everywhere. In General Slim's words: "In the bitterly contested and long-drawn-out battle of Imphal the Japanese had suffered what was up to then the most disastrous defeat in their history. Thoroughly outmanœuvred and outfought on the battlefield, having suffered terrible losses in men and equipment, it began a retreat through the jungle-covered hills at the height of the monsoon."

The Japanese Retreat

The advance commenced on 9th August, and the brigade referred to above was a specially formed one under Colonel Tarver, known as "Tarcol." It consisted of the 9th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment and 14th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles only. Tarcol was to operate in mountainous country, and the communications consisted of hill tracks. Neither motor transport nor mules could be taken (the latter because of the difficulty of supplying fodder), and Tarcol had to depend entirely on local porters. To keep these to the minimum they were only used to carry the first-line loads of mortars and ammunition. All replenishments of food, ammunition and clothing were made by air-supply

* Captain Nicoll and Lieutenants Webb and Clowsley.

drops. This was a chancey business at that time of year on account of the monsoon. Frequently when the weather was clear over the Battalion the aircraft did not arrive, having been prevented from taking off from Imphal because thick cloud covered the landing ground. This meant one or more days without a supply drop, and rations had to be husbanded carefully. At other times when supplies were already several days overdue it was exasperating for the troops to hear the aircraft wheeling overhead unable to drop supplies as the Brigade position was covered in cloud, and eventually to hear the aircraft depart without making a drop. Even under such conditions the morale of the men remained remarkably high, and although they were often short of food each man would keep his own reserve of biscuits which he would cheerfully offer to any officer who might be near by. The porters, too, did magnificent work, carrying heavy loads up and down hills. However, they lacked the sanitary discipline of the troops, and as a result many of them got dysentery, and some died.

By 17th August the Battalion reached Kangpat. On this day, Major Rawley was evacuated.

As the advance approached the Chindwin, enemy opposition increased, but never did it amount to more than twenty or thirty at a time. Similarly, evidence of the hurried Japanese withdrawal also increased. Many dead Japs were found on the tracks or in the streams into which they had fallen and drowned, exhausted or sick. This produced an additional water problem, as although at that time of year all the streams were full, water pollution was always possible. Many wrecked lorries and cars also told of earlier successful attacks by our Air Forces.

The three weeks or month during which this operation lasted contained no remarkable exploit of arms, but exemplified remarkable endurance physically, under adverse climatic conditions. The weather varied from heavy rain and cloud to a fierce sun with great humidity. Rations were often short; each officer and man had to carry everything he possessed as well as a share of the rations. Opportunities for washing were very few indeed, and by the end three smells were inescapable—those of perspiration, dead bodies and dysentery.

It was therefore hardly surprising that when the Battalion was withdrawn, and early in September arrived back in Wanjing Camp, there was hardly an officer or man who did not suffer from one or more form of skin disease. On the other hand, cases of malaria and dysentery among the troops were practically negligible. It took till 20th November, with special medical treatment, to remove this trouble, but by then the health of the Battalion was once more satisfactory.

During the Tarcol operation the Battalion was very much below strength, as the casualties suffered earlier had not been replaced. Moreover, it had never more than six officers, and was also short of many J.C.Os. Reinforcements were, however, waiting at Wanjing, and these included some ten British officers. These reinforcements were most welcome, although only a few were experi-

enced. With so large a number of newcomers to fit into the unit, it was fortunate that there now followed a period of several weeks' rest. During this the new arrivals were able to settle down, and it was possible to reorganize the Battalion. Amongst them was Major Hayaud Din,* originally of the 4th Sikhs, who was appointed Second-in-Command.

On 19th September the War Diary records the visit to the Battalion of a Women's Auxiliary Service (B) Canteen, and remarks that the two lady attendants lunched in the Mess. It is also recorded that this was arranged after the Mess was "nearly done out of the privilege" by Brigade Headquarters. Further details, however, of this evident attempt at a dark deed of treachery by the Brigade Staff are regrettably missing—for one feels that thereby surely hangs a tale!

On 24th September a notification was received of the following immediate and well-deserved awards:

Military Cross	.. ..	Lieutenant Amir Mohamed Khan. Captain Kehar Singh Rai. Jemadar Ram Singh.
Indian Order of Merit	.. ..	Subadar-Major Ahmed Khan, Bahadur.
Indian Distinguished Service Medal	.. ..	Naik Jalal Khan.
Military Medal	.. ..	Naik Vakil Singh. Lance-Naik Madan Singh. Lance-Naik Dilbara Singh.

The XXXIII Corps commander, 20th Division commander, and the 80th Brigade commander all sent their congratulations on these awards. The rest of the month was spent in training exercises and demonstrations, partly directed to ambushes and work with aircraft in jungle warfare, partly also to open mechanized warfare. October was spent in similar activities in Wanjing Camp without any occurrence of note.

In November the Battalion was ordered to advance, and on the 30th moved to Yedok. By the 3rd December it reached Kalemyo with all its transport and settled down.

The 80th Brigade now came under the direct command of XXXIII Corps, and the role at Kalemyo given to the Battalion was airfield defence and active patrolling of the area.

As two months had now elapsed since the Battalion was withdrawn from the front, the reader must be brought abreast of the developments during the Fourteenth Army advance. With the defeat of the Japanese Army in the battle of Imphal, the directive from the High Command to the Fourteenth Army was as follows:

* Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J., M.B.E., M.C.

- (a) To seize Kalemyo and Kalewa by an overland and airborne operation.
- (b) To capture Yeu by mid-February.
- (c) To occupy Central Burma to a line Mandalay-Pakokku.
- (d) Consolidate on this line and possibly to the south.

While the 20th Division had been resting (and indeed partly training for the open warfare that (b) above would entail), two other Divisions, the 5th Indian and 11th East African, both brought from the Arakan by air, had carried out task (a) above. As the 20th Division moved forward to the Chindwin, the 2nd Division (from the Kohima battle) was brought up and with the 19th Indian Division formed the alignment against the hastily regrouping remnants of the Japanese Army now gathered in the Shwebo plain beyond the Chindwin.

The whole offensive plan was based on air supply, with the construction of the Tamu-Kalewa road to all-weather standards as the first L. of C. task.

Such was the situation when in early January the 9th Battalion again went forward and the 20th Division began its role in tasks (b) and (c) above. The Battalion however, while it remained at Kalemyo, had no contacts with the enemy, and the month of December was spent in advanced training. This included as a first priority, practice in river crossings, a task that could be foreseen to be important as the advance into Burma progressed.

During this month the Battalion was visited by the Fourteenth Army Commander, General Sir William Slim.

Long Range Penetration

During the first part of the advance into Burma which now began, the Battalion was the rearmost of the Division, and it arrived at Kalewa on 1st January. Here it crossed the Chindwin on what was then the longest Bailey bridge that had hitherto been built. Moreover, this was where our retreating army from Burma in 1942 had crossed into India (see 4th Battalion story, Chapter XX); and the road and locality on the Burma side of the river was littered with derelict vehicles, guns, tanks, etc., that could not be evacuated across the Chindwin.

The Battalion now floated down the river on rafts and in "Dukws" as far as Mankadaw, where there was a ferry, and a supply dump. The vehicles and animals went by road. The supply dump was being pushed forward, and as soon as it was clear the Battalion moved on to Budalin, marching parallel to the river.

Here orders were received to send a company on a long-range penetration mission to work round behind the Japanese front and cut their L. of C. The Company was to be self-contained and live on the country. No transport was to accompany it, and the duration of the task was indefinite.

"C" Company, under Major Moynihan, was selected and was given the code name "Mocol." The column moved in M.T. as far as Wadan and marched from there to the area assigned to it for operations, which was Changlu-

Irrawaddy-Allagappa. To the east were the 100th Infantry Brigade—old friends of Ceylon days and of many a battle since.

On 19th January the Company bivouacked five miles south of Wadan, and moved at 4 a.m. next morning to reach Allagappa-Changlu where the main road could be attacked. By dusk the Company was outside Shweyinma and, continuing through the jungle by compass, the road was reached and a firm base established before midnight. The road was then destroyed during the night at milestone 10½, and next morning Company H.Q. entered Allagappa. Here the loyal headman and his villagers welcomed and entertained them. It was three years since they had seen Allied troops, and they hated the Japanese.

That night an ambush was laid at milestone 8½, but no enemy were seen. On the 22nd, leaving a platoon at Allagappa, the Company Commander took the rest of the Company to lay an ambush at Four-way Junction, about two miles west of Gwebindaw. At midnight a bullock cart, apparently in charge of locals, approached, and a light patrol was sent to investigate. The "locals" proved to be Japs, who fled, leaving the cart with equipment and papers behind. These were captured and sent to Battalion Headquarters.

On 25th January the Company moved to Natyegan and occupied Point 614 after a fight with a party of Japs. This was because 100th Brigade asked for information about a piece of high ground and this could only be obtained by clearing it. Visibility was bad, but with one platoon giving covering fire and one reserve, the other two platoons advanced extended as if beating for game. Several Japs broke cover and were shot down, but the majority held on and hand-to-hand fighting ensued before the position was cleared. In the end thirty-three Japanese dead were counted, while the Company had four casualties in this very successful affair.

The Japanese did not counter-attack, but brought down rifle grenades and mortar fire. As nothing was to be gained, and the Company Commander, Major Moynihan, was himself wounded, a withdrawal was carried out that night.

On the 26th, after evacuation of the wounded, in which the 14th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles greatly assisted, the Company came temporarily under command of that Battalion, who again cleared the position.

The next day the Company moved back to Gwebindaw and rejoined the Battalion at Changlu, where it had now arrived, on the 28th.

Immediate awards as follows were made for this episode :

Military Cross	.. ..	Captain (Acting Major) Moynihan.
Military Medal	.. ..	Naik Amar Sing. Lance-Naik Parbhat Sing. Sepoy Khushal Singh.
Certificate of Gallantry	..	Sepoy Bhup Singh.

Major Moynihan's well-deserved Military Cross was an award for exem-

plary leadership throughout the fight and in hand-to-hand fighting in particular. During this he was wounded twice, but killed a Japanese after a game of hide and seek with him that caused much amusement to the men who witnessed it.

While "C" Company had been on its separate mission, the Battalion had moved up to Wadan on 20th January. From here "A" Company, under Major Butterworth, was dispatched on a similar role to "C," moving self-contained without transport, and living on the country (Mocol 2). It supported "C" Company in its exploit at point 614.

A small party under Naik Mohamed Khan went as carriers with this Company, and when coming back saw about a dozen armed Japs near a pond. Although he had only three men with him he decided to charge the Japs, pretending the while, by shouting and waving, that he had a large party with him. His gamble succeeded. The Japs decamped, leaving three dead, a L.M.G. and two rifles.

Naik Mohamed Khan brought back all the captured equipment from this astonishing little affair, and in doing so he and the two sepoy marched over some fifteen miles of enemy-occupied country. Most unfortunately, he was killed only a few days later when trying to recover a wounded comrade.

While on their mission, "A" Company also had a successful brush with the enemy on 24th January, when Jemadar Diwan Singh's platoon contacted and attacked a party of Japs. The Jemadar was wounded at the outset, but continued to lead his platoon and was bayoneted in hand-to-hand fighting. He was the only casualty, while eight Japanese dead were counted. The rest bolted.

On 23rd January the Battalion (less "A" and "C" Companies, who were on their separate tasks) moved to Chauka on the main road to Monywa and about twelve miles short of it.

The next day "D" Company, under Major Beck, was also sent as Mocol 3 on a long-range penetration task, to operate behind the enemy on their L. of C. in the Naungbyubin area. The Company reached this village on the 25th and set up its base to the north of it. Before, however, it could set about preparing an ambush, it was discovered by the enemy, who opened fire from three sides. The Company appeared to be in danger of being surrounded, and Major Beck asked for an air-strike, but this was impracticable owing to the enemy being so close. He hung on, but by evening enemy fire was causing casualties and Major Beck decided to withdraw from what appeared a dangerous position. At first there was some difficulty in disengaging, but later an organized withdrawal by bounds was carried out. During this Major Beck himself was hit, but refused assistance until he was too weak to continue. He was taken back on an improvised stretcher, managing the while to direct the withdrawal. This was done by compass and the night was spent in safety out of touch with the enemy, who had been between 200 and 300 strong, considerably outnumbering the Company.

The next day the Company rejoined Battalion near Headquarters at Chauka. Its losses had been three killed and three wounded.

For bravery during this withdrawal, Sepoy Mohamed Hussain received the immediate award of a Military Medal and Lance-Naik Mohamed Khan a Certificate of Gallantry.

Battalion Headquarters now made a night march forward from Changlu, a night advance which was across open country without any landmarks. Done by compass, it was a credit to those leading the column when dawn found the Battalion exactly at its correct destination—a deep dry nala and the only cover in the area.

Meanwhile yet another company (“B” Company under Major Jennings) was sent to lay an ambush as Mocol 4 in the area of the Irrawaddy-Chindwin River junction. No Japs, however, were trapped, and this Company (with “C” Company—Mocol 2) rejoined Battalion Headquarters on 30th January.

During these operations two of the main difficulties were supplying the detached companies with rations and maintaining communication with them. Each of these tasks frequently called for independent action by a few sepoy working entirely on their own in an area where there were still comparatively strong enemy forces. Supplies were taken through by night on mules with very small escorts, and several isolated small detachments with wireless had to be placed as links when companies went out of range of ordinary sets. It said much for the moral courage, resource and cleverness of the men concerned, that no one went without rations, that communications rarely failed, and that none of the detachments lost their way or were destroyed by the enemy.

The Battalion, less the two companies out on Mocol tasks, now moved forward to the Irrawaddy at Bwawsaw to give the enemy the impression that a crossing of the river was to be made here. Two villages, Paukadan and Pawzadaw, 1,000 yards apart, were occupied by the Battalion, and in taking them R.A.F. bombing support was provided for the first time in this campaign. The Japs made no effort to recapture the villages, but “jittered” them every night for some days. A platoon of Japs also took up a position between them and remained there for three days in spite of air bombing and artillery fire, eventually slipping away at night unobserved.

During this period there were several patrol clashes with casualties to both sides. It was in one of these, while trying to rescue a wounded comrade, that Naik Mohd Khan, whose bravery in action so recently in the campaign has been recorded above, was killed.

On 11th February “A” Company, with a field company of Sappers and a squadron of the 7th Cavalry (tanks), carried out an operation against an enemy bunker position near a village called Sulegon. It had been found that the tanks could not destroy the bunkers, and the engineers, supported by “A” Company, used “beehives” for the purpose. Enemy snipers were very active and Lieutenant

R. D. Finnis, the Battalion Intelligence Officer, was hit during the action.

A somewhat eerie feature of this operation was that hardly a Jap was seen except by the leading troops. Nevertheless those in rear were at times heavily sniped and no one could tell where from. Early in the day the Brigade Commander and the Commanding Officer were standing watching the troops and tank advance, when a L.M.G. burst landed between them. On glancing down, Colonel Hugo saw that a bullet had hit the magazine of the Sten gun which was slung over his shoulder, with the result that the ammunition was exploding in the magazine. Fortunately no one was wounded, but there were no signs of the sniper.

A R.E. officer, Lieutenant E. S. Wright, was fatally wounded on this day by fire from a bunker; but here Naik Gobind Singh, of "A" Company, greatly distinguished himself by silencing the bunker single-handed and enabling the body of Lieutenant Wright to be recovered. Naik Gobind Singh received an immediate award of the I.D.S.M., which he well deserved.

On 14th February the Battalion was relieved at the Chindwin-Irrawaddy junction by the 3rd Battalion 1st Gurkhas and moved up to the 20th Division bridgehead which was being pushed across the Irrawaddy at Myinmyu.

By now General Slim's plan for forcing the line of the Irrawaddy was ready. While the 19th and 20th Indian and 2nd British Divisions on the left were tying down the enemy opposite Mandalay by crossings on the upper reaches of the river, the 17th Indian Division's deadly thrust on Meiktila from a crossing on the extreme right near Pakokku was about to be made.

Tragic Casualties Caused by a Single Shell

Before the Battalion moved to the Myinmyu area, a most unfortunate incident occurred. The Battalion position had been subjected for some days to intermittent shelling. Some of this fire had been successfully diverted to other unoccupied areas by the expedient of sending patrols to light fires in these places, and so draw the enemy's attention to them. Although it was possible to determine reasonably accurately the location of the enemy guns, no counter-bombardment was permitted so as to avoid disclosing the position of our own guns until they were brought into use to support the crossing of the Irrawaddy. Few, if any, casualties resulted from this shelling as, although it was fairly accurate, the slit trenches provided good cover. When the battalion position was being handed over however, a most unfortunate incident occurred. The Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel Hugo), the Second-in-Command and Major Dodkins, of the 3/1st Gurkhas, were going round the battalion position. They had just arrived at "B" Company headquarters, where they were greeted by Major Jennings, the Company Commander, and the J.C.Os. of the Company. This party was standing talking together in a group when an

enemy gun opened fire from a distance and the first or second ranging round landed in their midst. Major Jennings, Subadar Nur Salem and Havildar Janab Gul, I.D.S.M., were all killed. Colonel Hugo, Major Dodkins, Subadar Kajir Khan (who also later died of wounds) and Jemadar Islam-ud-Din were all seriously wounded. Major Hayaud Din took command of the Battalion, while Major Gosling, who had been in command of "C" Company and was about to be Adjutant, took command of "B" Company. Jemadar Sabit Khan went with him to be senior J.C.O. of the Company. Major Ferguson, who was about to relinquish the Adjutancy to command "D" Company, remained as Adjutant, and Major Rai took command of "C" Company.

Major Jennings' death was a tragic loss to the Battalion. An exceptionally brilliant young man of the best type, he was marked out for a successful career. An award of the M.B.E. for his services as Adjutant of the Battalion was received a few days after his death. A short time earlier he had been offered the appointment of Brigade Major of the 32nd Brigade, but refused it, preferring to remain with his men.

The operations in which the Battalion had taken part since the Chindwin proved to be excellent training for the more severe fighting which was to follow on the Irrawaddy. The new reinforcements had been "blooded" by coming under artillery and small-arms fire for the first time. They had learned not to be afraid of being "jittered" by the Japanese, and the independent actions by detached companies and small groups of men had given proof of their own worth.

On the Battalion's move to the Irrawaddy crossing, Major MacDonald rejoined from the Reinforcement Camp and was given "B" Company, Major Gosling thereon taking over "D" Company.

The Battalion crossed the Irrawaddy on 17th and 18th February to take over the defence of the bridgehead which was increasing daily in size as more troops and stores arrived. The enemy "jittered" a good deal at night without attacking and kept up an artillery bombardment which, however, mercifully did not cause many casualties. On 25th February the Battalion moved to Kanlan Ywathit—the scene of the desperate fighting by the 14th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles, in which Jemadar Parkash Sing won the Victoria Cross.*

The 9th Battalion were also now to take a share in this, but the jaws of the Fourteenth Army trap were already closing on the doomed Japanese forces in Burma. The 17th Division had already broken across the Irrawaddy at Pakokku, and with an armoured spearhead was driving on the vital enemy centre behind their line of Meiktila. † In two days' time its airfields were overrun and airborne troops were being poured in.

* *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 413.

† See Chapter XX, narrative of the 4th Battalion.

Battle of Inza—Yezin

The objective now given to the Battalion was Yezin, with a detachment to be left at Kanlan if unoccupied; but the latter village was in fact strongly held by the enemy, so "A" and "D" Companies were left as a screen and the Battalion withdrew to Kanlan Ywathit.

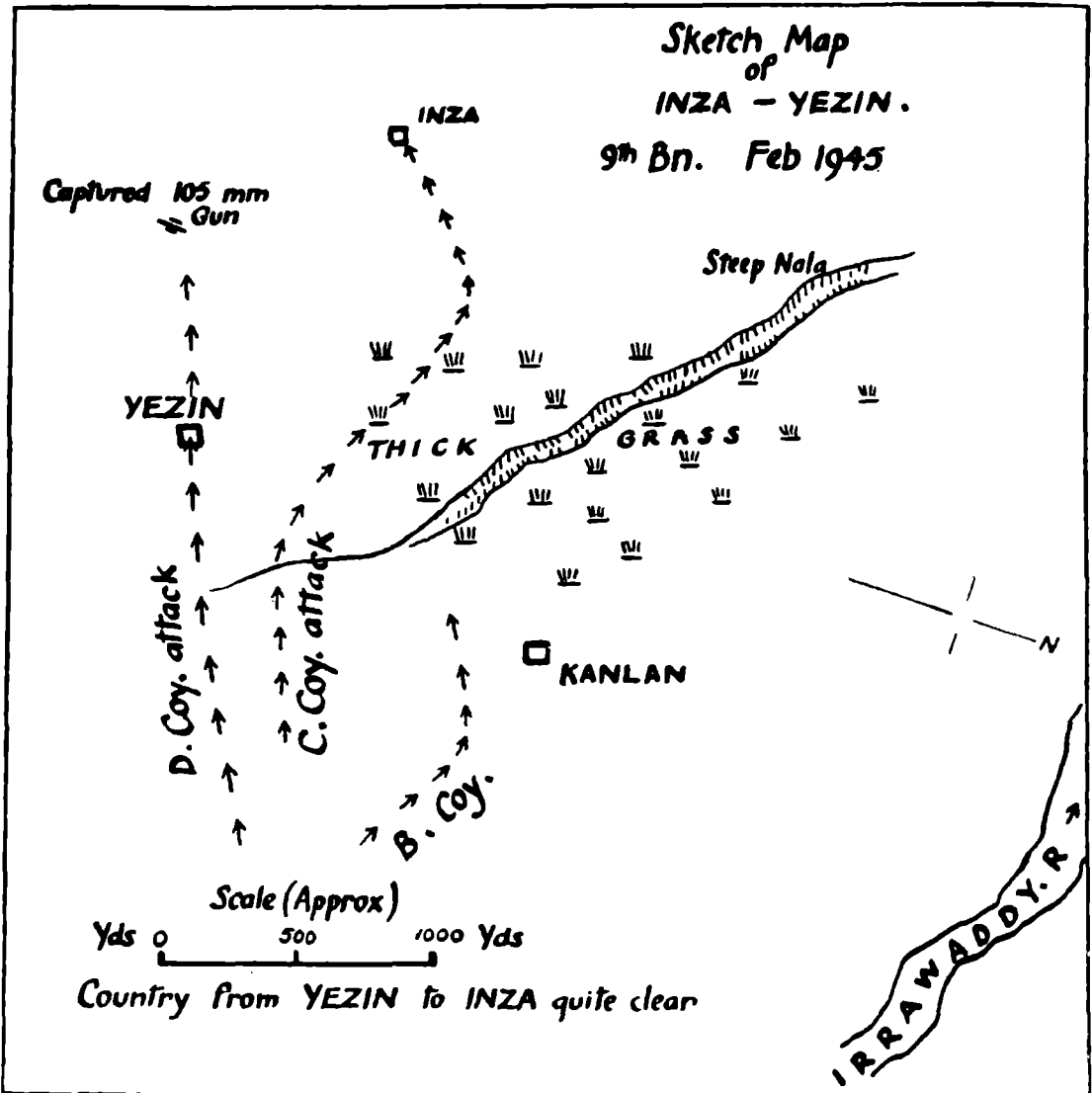
That night (26th Feb.) "A" and "D" Companies were heavily attacked three times with artillery, mortar and M.M.G. fire support. All these attacks were repulsed with heavy losses, but in this the lesson must be recorded that success was largely due to the speedy arrangements made with the supporting artillery for defensive fire support. The forward observing officer (Lieutenant I. M. Ferguson, R.A.) of the 9th Field Regiment completed his D.F. arrangements very rapidly and was barely ready when the enemy attack commenced. He brought down a devastating belt of fire, and after the Jap retreat forty enemy dead were counted, but the actual number killed must have greatly exceeded this figure.

For this outstanding performance the Commanding Officer recommended Lieutenant Ferguson for an immediate award of a bar to his M.C., which was granted. It was an excellent example of co-operation between artillery and infantry and a rare instance of a recommendation for an award to an officer of another arm.

The Battalion was now ordered to capture Yezin and Inza, clearing all Japs from the area between Kanlan Ywathit and Kanlan. This operation was ordered for 28th February and proved to be the Battalion's outstanding achievement in the campaign for the reconquest of Burma. A tank squadron of the 7th Cavalry and the divisional artillery supported the attack. "C" Company with the tanks led the advance, with "B" Company following, and immediately found difficulty in locating the Japs who were well dug in and concealed in elephant grass and tobacco fields. Hand-to-hand fighting ensued, slowing down the advance.

Major Butterworth wrote of this stage of the action as follows: "A Jemadar of 'D' Company had a hand-to-hand fight with a Jap officer and killed him in full view from Battalion Headquarters at Kanlan. A lot of the slaughter was done to the east of Yezin in the nullah, by the tanks and 'C' Company, who stuck to the tanks like leeches. The Japs had anti-tank mines with them which they were clutching to themselves, attempting to blow the tanks up and themselves at the same time. A 105-mm. gun crew fought to the end until they were wiped out by the tanks. They were firing point-blank over the sights."

As "C" Company advanced with the tanks, enemy artillery and M.M.G. fire caused casualties, and "B" Company also became involved in the mêlée in the area south of Kanlan, where the main force of Japs was found to be dug in with strong bunkers, difficult for the tanks to deal with. However, the advance was not held up. A number of tanks were left to mask the enemy in this area



and deal with them, while "D" Company with the remainder of the tanks were ordered to capture Yezin. There was an open space of about 1,000 yards between Kanlan and Yezin which was under enemy observation and fire. "D" Company and the tanks, however, covered by a concentration from our own artillery, dashed across this and captured Yezin, overrunning the Jap positions in irresistible fashion.

After a rapid reorganization in Yezin, the advance was resumed and an assault made on Inza. This time "C" Company led, with "D" Company following and the tanks again in support. The advance was met by heavy fire from

nullahs on the right and left, the enemy holding their fire till the tanks had passed and then opening on the infantry. It again became a case of hand-to-hand fighting, with our men using grenades very effectively.

Before darkness fell Inza was captured—a 105-mm. gun and many light and medium machine guns being taken. The Japs did not delay long before launching a counter-attack, but this was successfully repulsed and “C” and “D” Companies rapidly made Inza into a defensive position for the night. The tanks withdrew to harbour at Yezin.

During the night the enemy made further counter-attacks on both villages, but without success; once some of them penetrated into the perimeter, but all such were killed.

The Battalion casualties in this battle were heavy, particularly during the advance on Inza, 13 being killed and 59 wounded, but the Japanese losses were far greater. No less than 149 bodies, including those of three officers, were counted, and many more were buried in bunkers or killed in outlying positions where they could not be identified.

Among the Battalion’s dead was Subadar Tarlochan Chand, M.C., a tragic and irreparable loss. Jemadar Ram Singh also was wounded, which was yet a further loss for the Dogras.

The Battalion’s success in this battle brought warm congratulations from the Divisional and Corps Commanders as well as the Brigadier. Indeed, while the Battalion was at Yezin the Corps Commander, XXXIII Corps, came in person and congratulated all ranks on their achievement, for this was the last Jap stronghold covering the bridgehead, and the 20th Division was now able to link up with the 32nd Brigade, which had been isolated by the enemy.

A number of immediate, well-deserved awards were made, the chief being the M.C. to the Commanding Officer himself, Major Hayaud Din, M.B.E. As the citation for this throws further light on the whole action and the magnificent way the Battalion tackled it, it is given in full as follows:

“On 28th February 1945, Major Hayaud Din, 9th/12th Frontier Force Regiment, was commanding his battalion during the capture of Yezin and Inza.

“The operation was a very difficult one owing to the fact that the tanks which were supporting the attack could only cross a chaung in front of the enemy position at one place. Previous close reconnaissance of this place had been impossible.

“Early in the operation unexpectedly heavy resistance was met with from the southern flank in an area in which the tanks were unable to operate. This resistance completely held up the advance.

“Major Hayaud Din detailed the necessary party to mask this opposition and handled his battalion with great skill. The infantry storming the chaung secured a crossing place for the tanks and quickly consolidated.

Major Hayaud Din rapidly organized the remaining two companies of his battalion to continue the advance to Inza in an entirely new direction. Inza was captured against strong opposition and an immediate counter-attack beaten off with heavy losses to the Japs.

“It was now nearly dark, but so carefully had the administrative arrangements been previously planned that the necessary consolidation stores were brought up in time, the wounded evacuated and the positions consolidated, enabling all counter-attacks during the night 28th February/1st March to be beaten off.

“During the course of this very complicated operation in which one hundred and forty-nine Japanese were killed and much booty including a 105-mm. gun was captured, Major Hayaud Din displayed the greatest coolness and courage. During periods of heavy shelling his calm and unperturbed demeanour was an outstanding example to all ranks and largely contributed to the success of the operation.”

The other immediate awards were:

Military Cross	..	..	Jemadar Kishen Singh.
Military Cross	..	..	Jemadar Sultan Ahmed Khan.
Indian Order of Merit	..	..	Naik Kamal Khan.
Indian Distinguished Service Medal	..	..	Havildar (now Jemadar) Jagat Ram.
Military Medal	..	..	Lance-Naik Lachman Singh.
Military Medal	..	..	Naik Ali Mohd.
Military Medal	..	..	Naik Dalip Singh.
Certificates of Gallantry	..	..	Sepoy Alam Khan.
Certificates of Gallantry	..	..	Sepoy Bahadur.

The Advance to Kyaukse on the Road and Railway to Rangoon

On 5th March the Battalion was relieved and withdrawn to Gangaw from Yezin to prepare for the further advance southward. While here Jemadar Sultan Ahmed Khan, M.C., was wounded by a shell splinter; and as the advance south commenced, Major Fergusson's jeep hit a mine which exploded, wounding Major Fergusson, who thereupon had to hand over the adjutancy to Captain Willan.

The advance continued with only slight opposition, and on 22nd March the Battalion became the advanced party of the 80th Brigade, leading the advance. While the necessary arrangements in the forward area for the Battalion to assume this role were being made and the arrival of the tanks awaited, a hidden nest of Japs opened fire with grenade dischargers, and, most unfortunately, Major H. R. Macdonald and Subadar Sabit Khan of “B” Company were wounded. This bereft “B” Company of officers and “A” Company had to lead the advance instead.

With the commencement of the advance, it was noticed for the first time that the Jap was becoming reluctant to come to grips, and on the first day over sixty Japs were killed and an anti-tank gun captured.

The same night the Battalion reached the main Mandalay-Myitche road, and "C" and "D" Companies were sent on to lay a road-block. As a result of this a bullock cart with a Jap officer and some hostile Burmans were intercepted. The officer was killed, and some valuable documents and a wireless set captured.

As the advance continued enemy equipment began to fall into our hands, including several lorries, one of which was a mess lorry. But enemy shelling continued and caused occasional casualties. Among these on 14th March were Lieutenant Khan and Subadar Partap Singh, both wounded.

On 15th March the Battalion, with "B" Company leading, were faced with the Panlaing river crossing, the bridge being strongly held by the enemy. The plan for "B" Company's assault on the bridge included a deception move to the left flank by "C" Company to induce the enemy to expect the attack from that quarter. This succeeded and, helped by an artillery concentration, "B" Company rushed the bridge, which however was blown up before it could be captured. Fortunately only one man was wounded in this affair.

The destruction of the bridge was nevertheless troublesome. Only three companies could get across, and no tanks could get over. Battalion Headquarters and "C" Company remained on the west bank. The enemy were quick to realize our predicament and in the evening Japanese tanks returned and shelled the bridgehead, causing casualties. No concerted attack however was made, and the tanks withdrew. Among the casualties were two more officers, Captain Willan being wounded and Subadar Zalim Khan, an outstanding J.C.O., killed.

The next morning "A" Company advanced to reconnoitre the enemy's whereabouts, and encountered strong resistance. In this yet another officer, Subadar Kartar Singh, was killed. He was one of the oldest members of the Battalion and his death was a sad loss, particularly to the Sikhs and "A" Company.

As a result of the Battalion's success at the Panlaing bridge a considerable quantity of enemy equipment, including anti-tank guns, machine guns and transport, was captured. A Certificate of Gallantry and a Military Medal were also awarded for this action, the recipients being Naik Gharib Khan and Sepoy Zari Gul respectively.

On 17th March the advance against the now known enemy position was commenced. The tank support on this occasion was a squadron of Lee tanks from a Royal Tank Corps Regiment. It was the first time the Battalion had received armoured support from a British Tank Regiment, and there were many who doubted the success of the combination. They need have had no

qualms, for no difficulties were experienced and the operation was an unqualified success.

“B” Company followed by “D” led the attack, while “A” Company protected the left flank and “C” was in reserve. By midday the objective, a road junction on the main road, had been taken and heavy losses had been inflicted on the defeated Japs. In the words of a diarist, “everyone got a chance to kill a few Japs, including the C.O.’s escort. His orderly killed a Japanese officer and captured his sword.” The sword was presented there and then on the battlefield to the Squadron Commander of the British Tanks to mark the first time he had been in action, and the first time that his Squadron had worked with Indian troops. It was a timely and courteous gesture worthy of the Battalion and of the occasion.

The captured equipment on this occasion also included two 75-mm. guns, one 37-mm. and one 45-mm. anti-tank gun, one “tankette” and a number of lorries, trailers and tractors.

For gallantry Lance-Naik Tirlok Singh was awarded the Military Medal.

The Battalion was now withdrawn to the bridgehead, the 1st Devons replacing it in the forward area, and from the 18th to the 22nd received a much needed rest.

The weather was now becoming very hot, and as the advance penetrated into the dry belt of Burma, the scarcity of water began to be felt.

The advance of the Fourteenth Army was now rendering the Japanese whole position in Central Burma critical. While the 19th Division on the left had just driven the last Japs from Mandalay city and captured Fort Dufferin,* the 20th and 2nd Divisions were forcing back the enemy centre. At the same time the 17th Division with the Airborne Brigade of the 5th Division were holding on tenaciously at Meiktila in the Japanese rear in spite of an overwhelming concentration of force attacking with intent to destroy them.† But if the battles at Mandalay and Meiktila were critical, the next objective of the 20th Division towards which the 9th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment once more led the way was no less vital. It was the road and rail centre of Kyaukse, described by General Slim as the Japanese “rallying place and maintenance base on the main Rangoon-Mandalay road and railway.”‡

The enemy were holding strongly all the approaches to Kyaukse, and from 23rd to 27th March the Battalion was engaged in clearing all outlying positions prior to the attack on the main position. During these operations Japanese snipers were active and caused casualties, one of these being Subadar Kishen Singh, M.C., who was killed—another tragic loss of a brave and efficient leader. Subadar Mahomed Yusuf was also wounded by a shell.

* See narrative of 8th Battalion, Chapter XXIV.

† See narrative of 4th Battalion, who were in Meiktila, Chapter XX.

‡ *Campaign of the Fourteenth Army*, p. 26.

On 25th March, three days before entering Kyaukse, the Battalion received a very welcome reinforcement of officers. The reader will have noticed what heavy and continuous casualties the Battalion had suffered among its officer ranks, and the new arrivals were more than welcome. With them Captain Miller also rejoined the Battalion and took over the adjutantcy.

As a preliminary to the main attack on Kyaukse, the Battalion cleared the outlying villages of Thimbok and Kegwigye, and in this action Lieutenant Waters was killed. He was a keen young officer who had only recently joined the Battalion.

The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hayaud Din, also was wounded at Kyaukse. He gives the following account of the action: "Actually the attack had gone off very well. The village had largely been cleared, and the Japs were running away fast. The forward companies were going well with Battalion Headquarters behind them. I stopped with the Adjutant, Captain Miller, and the Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Bangash, to look at a map, when a Jap sniper hiding in a bush and not far from us popped up and threw a grenade at us. This landed in the middle of our group, wounding all three of us. However, I was able to continue commanding the Battalion, but sent off Miller and Bangash to the aid post for treatment. Later when the Medical Officer learnt that I had also been wounded he came forward. As I was still bleeding he insisted on taking me back, and I sent for Butterworth to take over command."

Major Butterworth also writes: "We had a bit of trouble next day, but the Japs were clearing out every night. The Battalion was the first to enter Kyaukse. Some of us got up to Maymyo from there, where we got news of the excellent work done there in the Jap hospital by our first M.O., Lieutenant Batt. He had earlier been captured on the first day the Japs came over the Chindwin advancing on Imphal." (See p. 479.)

The Drive to the South

The Battalion was given a further complete rest at Kyaukse, and in view of the heavy casualties it had suffered, particularly among officers, its role was now changed to Divisional Headquarters Battalion. This meant that it would be split up and its companies would have to carry out independent roles attached to the brigades of the Division. The distribution was as follows:

"A" Company was attached to Headquarters, 32nd Infantry Brigade.

"B" Company was attached to Headquarters, 100th Infantry Brigade.

"C" Company was attached to Headquarters, 80th Infantry Brigade.

"D" Company and Battalion Headquarters remained with 20th Divisional Headquarters.

Of this role Major Butterworth wrote:

"This job as Divisional Headquarters Battalion was enormous fun, because it reminded one of the annual divisional training one used to do in peace time.

Everyone chased 'Jifs'* and battalions of them were captured at a time. There were always rafts floating down the river with Japs on them which was always something to shoot at. And all the time there was news of hundreds of Japs being killed by the armoured drive down Burma."

While in Kyaukse the Battalion had a chance to meet the 8th Battalion of the Regiment on its way from Mandalay to Meiktila. The Battalion also took part in Kyaukse in an entirely new task organized by an Army photographic unit that had just arrived. It was asked to re-act the capture of the town for the purpose of a film. "D" Company provided the troops under Captain Gurney and Subadar Nur Zaman. The men advanced on the town as if attacking and all battle "effects" were simulated. The resulting film was later shown to the Battalion at Tharawaddy and was quite realistic.

The Battalion's new role was assumed on 8th April, and by this time the whole Japanese army was in retreat and bordering on a state of disorganization. The remnants of the Jap 15th Army was being pushed eastwards into the foothills east of the Mandalay-Thazi road, and the remainder were being driven down the line of the Irrawaddy to Yenangyaung by the 7th Indian Division. Nevertheless, the Japanese powers of recovery, if given time, were realized and an all-out drive to keep the enemy on the run and capture Rangoon before the monsoon was the Army Commander's order to his divisions.

The role of the 20th Division in this effort was to move rapidly across to the Irrawaddy axis and capture Taungdwingyi, which was the vital point in the enemy communications from the east to the Jap forces in the Irrawaddy valley. For this purpose the 32nd and 80th Brigades were rapidly motorized, and by 13th April it was captured by the 32nd Brigade. It had been held by only I.N.A. troops, who put up practically no resistance. "A" Company records that during this advance Brigade Headquarters were nearly ambushed by the only determined party of Japs and "Jifs" that were encountered. "A" Company and a Squadron of the 7th Cavalry were called on to evict the enemy, and in the action which followed a number of "Jifs" were killed and more captured.

The advance continued and Prome was captured without opposition. By now Rangoon was in the mind of everyone and after the 100-milestone it became a race between the 17th Division, which was advancing down the main Mandalay-Rangoon road, and 20th Division, which were now the leading force, along the Prome-Pegu road. During this period "A" Company records its first experiences of working with the Patriot Burma Forces, and co-operated with them in rounding up fleeing Japs. These forces were given a plethora of names. Originally raised by the Japs, they were named by them Burma Defence Army (B.D.A.), and christened by us B.T.A. or Burma Traitor Army. On our reconquest of Burma they abandoned the Japs and joined us, being then renamed Burma National Army (B.N.A.). This was once again changed to

* See footnote, p. 418.

Local Burma Forces (L.B.F.), and finally their name was changed to Patriot Burma Forces with the picturesque initials P.B.F.

There is little to record of the doings of the various companies during the advance of the 20th Division down the Irrawaddy axis. Their role was principally patrolling and reconnaissance, and, beyond one or two brushes with occasional parties of Japs or "Jifs" that made no effort to stay, there was no fighting.

On 2nd May the 20th Division reached Prome, once the largest river port on the Irrawaddy but now only a shell. On the same day Rangoon was captured by a seaborne landing by XV Corps from the Arakan,* while the 17th Division, performing prodigies of valour, drove out the last suicide parties of Japs sent to defend Pegu, the key to Rangoon.

The 20th Division did not advance beyond the Prome-Tharawaddy area, and the nearest that the Battalion reached to Rangoon during the advance was thirty-one miles. This was "A" Company with the 32nd Brigade.

The Division had indeed another role to perform, and one which now became the most important in Burma. The reader will remember that while the Fourteenth Army was thrashing the Japanese from Imphal to Rangoon, XV Corps (the other component of the South-East Asia Command) was fighting its way down the Arakan coast (see Chapter XXVII). The Japanese forces opposing this advance were their 26th Army, consisting of the 54th and 55th Divisions, part of the 79th Division, and an independent mixed brigade. These had been severely handled while being driven back by XV Corps, and with the capture of Prome by the 20th Division they were completely cut off from their bases in Burma and Siam, since all their communications lay through that place. This Japanese army now became a disorganized mass whose one object was to try and break through to the east and join the remnants of Japanese forces in Burma who were streaming off towards Siam. Their ultimate rallying centre was Moulmein, and it was still possible for those formations in that area not disorganized in the retreat to threaten the Fourteenth Army communications from Mandalay and the north.

While, therefore, IV Corps was given the task of advancing on Moulmein, to deal with the enemy in that area, XXXIII Corps (20th and 7th Divisions) was ordered to hold the line of the Irrawaddy and prevent the Japanese from the Arakan from filtering through to join the remnants of their Burma army.

This therefore now became the role of the brigades of the Division with which the companies of the 9th Battalion were still distributed, and from 3rd May when Battalion Headquarters reached Prome, till the end of June, detachments of the Battalion had brushes with enemy parties trying to cross the Irrawaddy. On May 9th the Battalion Headquarters reached Tharawaddy, having received orders that it was to be the Battalion's station for the monsoon,

* See narrative of Machine Gun Battalion, Chapter XXVII and foot of p. 425.

which was now breaking in earnest. The outlying companies rejoined the Battalion Headquarters at the end of May.

In June reports were received that considerable numbers of Japs were hiding in the Pegu Yomas, north-east of Tharawaddy, a tract of jungle-covered hills, barren of produce and very malarious. They were unable to break out to the east as the line of the Sittang was also strongly held on the far side. In order to obtain supplies they were raiding the villages in the Irrawaddy valley, and the Battalion was directed to counter these raids and confine the enemy to the unhealthy Yomas.

While the Battalion was in Tharawaddy, Lieutenant-Colonel Hayaud Din rejoined, having recovered from his wound. He had been absent two months. Here also Major R. R. Griffith of the Guides joined the Battalion as Second-in-Command.

The work the Battalion had to do in the Tharawaddy area was carried out by means of vigorous patrolling and laying ambushes on the fringe of the jungle, while at the same time villages in the neighbourhood were cleared, and all stocks of rice removed or guarded. This had the effect of making the Japs clear off to the east, and the Battalion was able to turn its attention to reorganization and training for the next phase of operations—whatever they might be.

At this time nearly 300 reinforcements joined the Battalion, and among these were a number of wounded who had been discharged from hospital. It was discovered that these had been sent straight from hospital to the Reinforcement Camp without any attempt at rehabilitation. From the Reinforcement Camp, where no notice was taken of them, they had been drafted direct to the Battalion, and on arrival a large number were found to be quite unfit for service. Some were permanently unfit and had to be sent back; others were given rehabilitation treatment in the Battalion to bring them to fitness again. The matter was strongly represented to Divisional Headquarters, for it might have had serious consequences had the Battalion been engaged at the time in action in active operations.

On 4th July Lieutenant-General Sir Montagu Stopford, the Corps Commander, paid his third visit to the Battalion and lunched in the Mess with the officers. The Divisional and Brigade Commanders, Major-General Gracey and Brigadier Woodford, were also present.

On 31st July General Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India, visited the Headquarters of the 20th Division at Hmawbi. A party of Indian ranks, led by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel M. Hayaud Din, went to meet him. They were Subadar Mohd Yusuf, Naik Jalal Khan, Naik Gobind Singh and Lance-Naik Lachman Singh. The Commander-in-Chief shook hands and talked with everyone.

On 15th August the Battalion was ordered to become Divisional Reconnaissance Battalion. This entailed an increase in signallers and drivers, and a

large number of new radio and wireless inter-communication sets were received. An immediate drive to train the necessary personnel was started, but the whole aspect of the future suddenly changed with the surrender of Japan and the end of the Second World War. However, there was no slackening of training as the future was still uncertain, and indeed before long orders came warning the Battalion for an early move to an unknown destination in Japanese occupation. On 9th September information was received that it was French Indo-China, but no dates were stated and the training drive continued intensively. Most particularly was it found necessary to attend to individual training, and the N.C.Os. promoted in the field were found to need it most of all. Many were quite without the necessary qualifications, and cadre-classes to bring these up to requisite standards and weed out the unfits were carried on with the greatest energy.

French Indo-China, 1945-46

The move to French Indo-China was made by air in two flights on 12th and 13th October 1945, and was enjoyed as a novel experience. Those who had never flown before were greatly thrilled. It was, of course, the first time the Battalion had been moved by air as a complete unit; and in point of fact no similar move by air is recorded as having been carried out up to the end of the Second World War by any other battalion of either of the Frontier Force Regiments. Major Griffiths went ahead to Saigon with an advanced party and met the Battalion at the airport.

The whole of the 20th Indian Division had been moved to French Indo-China to take over the country from the Japanese, restore law and order, and hand over to the French. In this connection it will be recollected that the infiltration there of the Japanese was the first move in their overrunning of the British, American and Dutch colonial territories in South-East Asia; and it was carried out with the co-operation of the Vichy French pro-German Government. The latter were now of course extinct, and the greatest danger existed of chaos.

On 14th October the Battalion was given its assignments, and Battalion Headquarters with the Administrative Company and "D" Company (less one platoon) moved to the Fort du Choy area in Cholon, the Chinese part of the city and the worst affected. However, the Battalion soon cleared it up. On 15th October "B" Company went to take over the Phulam area from the Japanese, and "C" Company moved up to rejoin Battalion Headquarters.

In Fort du Choy a large number of carrier pigeons were taken over. They were now extensively used for intercommunication in the Battalion—an entirely new experience for the signal personnel!

Coinciding with the arrival of the Battalion in Saigon came the news that the Subadar-Major, Ahmed Khan, O.B.I., I.O.M., had been promoted Honorary Lieutenant, and on 13th October a special parade was held in his honour.

All officers and J.C.Os. were paraded when the Commanding Officer pinned Lieutenant's badges of rank on Ahmed Khan's shoulders. The Battalion Mirasis played the march past on dhols and sarnais (it was the first time they had been heard in Saigon), and the Commanding Officer gave three cheers. It was a fitting occasion to honour a J.C.O. who had given outstanding service to the Battalion.

Ten days later, on 23rd October, a further ceremony for the presentation of honours and awards was held, this time by the Divisional Commander, General Gracey, at the Headquarters, Allied Control Commission in Saigon. He presented medal ribbons to the following officers and men of the Battalion :

M.B.E.	..	..	..	Captain Mohd Sadiq
Military Cross	..	..		Lieutenant-Colonel M. Hayaud Din, M.B.E. Major Kehar Singh Rai Major J. D. Gosling
Indian Distinguished Service Medal	..	..	..	Naik Jalal Khan Naik Gobind Singh
Military Medal	..	..		Naik Daleep Singh Naik Ali Mohd Naik Lachman Singh Lance-Naik Mohd Hussain Sepoy Khushal Singh Sepoy Zeri Gul
Mentions in Despatches	..			Subadar-Major and Honorary Lieutenant Ahmed Khan, O.B.I., I.O.M. Subadar Mohd Sher Havildar Desa Singh Lance-Havildar Joginder Singh Sepoy Jalal Din Naik Rai Singh Naik Hari Singh Naik Sarwar Khan Sepoy Bhajjan Singh

In the evening there was a farewell party in the Mess to Lieutenant-Colonel Hayaud Din and Captain Mohd Sadiq, who were leaving the next day by air for Rangoon, the former to be President of the Services Selection Board (for two months) and the latter to join the Indian Army Ordnance Corps.

On the departure of Lieutenant-Colonel Hayaud Din, Major R. R. Griffith



OFFICERS, 9th BATTALION, AT FORT DE CHOY (FRENCH INDO-CHINA)

Top to bottom: Bhatra, Finnis (Annamite Goat); Bond (beside tree at back); Laurie, Gosling; Ferguson, Subedar-Major; A. R. Gurney, Dalip Sing; Kehar Singh Rai, Griffith (Capt. in right foreground unidentified).

took command of the Battalion and Major C. G. Ferguson became Second-in-Command.

Life in French Indo-China, as in other Japanese-occupied territories surrendered after the Second World War, was by no means ordered and peaceful. The aftermath of war had left unrest and the ugly head of communism was raised, causing trouble, sabotage and outbreaks of violence.

The Battalion's duty was to cope with these, prevent arson and damage to public buildings and attempts at looting, and generally to restore order and security in the areas for which it was responsible. The community responsible for these disorders were the Annamites, lawless rebels from Annam, and their methods were sniping, bomb throwing and attempts at arson.

For a month the Battalion was engaged in dealing with the difficult and dangerous task of countering these activities, and suffered several casualties in the process.

On 23rd October the Battalion was ordered to hand over in Saigon to French troops and move to Cap St. Jacques at the mouth of the Saigon river, a welcome change to a pleasanter milieu. The men were able to enjoy some welcome sea bathing.

The Battalion's role in the Cap St. Jacques—Baria area was to take custody of Japanese surrendered troops who were being concentrated there. Sixty thousand were due to arrive shortly, and these included some sixty generals and admirals besides Field-Marshal Terauchi, the Japanese Supreme Commander in South-East Asia. He was an old and sick man and was removed for treatment to Singapore, where he died soon afterwards.

While at Cap St. Jacques, on 16th November a ceremony was held to take the surrender of a party of the Japanese Kempeitai (Gestapo Police). The duty was deputed to the Subadar-Major, Honorary Lieutenant Ahmed Khan, I.O.M., and an escort was provided of one section each of Pathans, Sikhs and Dogras under Jemadar Harbans Singh. The senior J.C.O. of each class was also present. After the ceremony Major-General Gracey, the Divisional Commander, presented Lieutenant Ahmed Khan and each of the J.C.Os. with a Japanese sword.

The 16th of November was also the Id Festival, the first after the conclusion of the Second World War, and the occasion was marked by suitable festivities. After the above ceremony was over the Subadar-Major and Mohammedan J.C.Os. invited the officers and other J.C.Os. to a "Bara Khana," and in the evening a Regimental guest night was held, followed by a Khattak dance.

Life was now uneventful and a certain amount of training became possible. In the first week of February 1946, the 20th Division started to move to India for disbandment. Two battalions were to remain behind: the 2nd Battalion 8th Punjab Regiment in Saigon, and the 9th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment

to continue controlling the Japanese concentration in St. Jacques—Baria. It is not often that troops are given such tasks on the conclusion of a major war, and though it was irksome to all ranks to find their return home delayed, it was a compliment to the Battalion to be chosen for this role.

On the departure of the Headquarters 20th Division, the command of the two Battalions passed to the Supreme Allied Commander's Inter-Service Liaison Mission to French Indo-China. This was under Brigadier F. K. S. Maunsell, D.S.O., O.B.E., and he lost no time in visiting the Battalion to deal with questions of policy regarding the concentration of Japanese.

No clear-cut orders existed, and a growing complication was the arrival of the French to take over more and more area under their control.

As the concentration of surrendered Japanese troops increased, the men of the Battalion had naturally to come into closer contact with their late enemies, and had opportunity to observe them closely. It is recorded that their discipline was first class, and they co-operated and carried out orders 100 per cent. Never was there cause for complaint, and the men grew to respect them and showed a tendency to fraternize.

Many of the Japanese were employed by the Battalion on fatigues. There were also many farms and a fishing industry that the Japs had developed since their occupation of French Indo-China. Parties of officers and men went to see these Japanese enterprises and they were of great educative value. In particular the farms were most methodically run, many having been literally carved out of jungle or waste land. They were indeed the main source of supplies for the Japs in French Indo-China.

As regards the Battalion itself, there was now little or no possibility of collective training of any sort, but route marches were carried out and the opportunity taken to concentrate on education, weapon training, drill and ceremonial.

The Battalion was excellently fed, with the result that the men's health, which was below par after the rigours of the Burma Campaign, rapidly improved, and a high state of physical fitness was achieved.

On 28th February, the first anniversary of the battles of Yezin and Inza was observed. There were religious services in the morning, sports in the afternoon, and a dinner in the evening in the Officers' Mess, to which all J.C.Os. were invited.

The Battalion's time overseas was however, now nearly at an end. In March warning was received that it would shortly return to India, and on 20th March all the French military and civil officials were invited to a farewell dinner party in the Mess.

On 29th March the Battalion embarked at Cap St. Jacques on the H.T. *Islami*, a pilgrim ship. The 2/8th Punjab Regiment also sailed for India on this vessel which was shared between the two battalions. Many Japanese senior officers and men lined the route to say good-bye to the Battalion, and it was a

curious, if not pathetic, scene to find the very men who had fought against us so bitterly, now so manifestly sorry to bid the Battalion farewell.

The voyage to Calcutta was uneventful. There was a two-day stop at Singapore, where to everyone's great surprise and pleasure the Regiment's brass band was found on the quay-side to welcome the Battalion. It led the column on a route march through the town that was carried out during the two days the ship remained at Singapore.

A draft of four officers, four J.C.Os. and fifty men also met the Battalion at Singapore. Among them was Captain Ahmed Khan, M.C., who had been wounded in the battle of Bishenpore in 1944.

For services rendered in Indo-China and Burma the Battalion received a number of awards. These will be found set out in detail under the Battalion heading in Appendix II.

Return to India and Reconstitution of the Battalion as 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Regiment

The Battalion arrived at Calcutta on 11th April 1946, and was met there in person by Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Taker, G.O.C.-in-Chief, Eastern Command, and Major-General Roy Bucher, Bengal Area Commander. Both these officers came on board and went round the ship, meeting all the officers and talking to many men. It was a well-merited gesture from one of the greatest Indian Army leaders of the Second World War,* for the Battalion had been on active overseas service for over three years, had fought and worsted under all sorts of conditions our toughest enemy in the Second World War, the Japanese soldier, and had acquired and preserved a reputation up to the highest standards of the Frontier Force. No greater praise could be wished for or given.

On disembarkation every man was garlanded and given a packet of sweets, and the Battalion was played to Alipore Transit Camp (where it spent the night) by the band of the 9th Jat Regiment. The next day, 12th April, it entrained for Lahore, arriving on 16th April, and was met there by Major A. R. Gurney.

In Lahore Cantonment the Battalion relieved the 26th Garrison Battalion of the Rajput Regiment, taking over all guards and duties. Not long after arrival, important and most gratifying news was received. The 2nd Battalion, whose fight to the death against overwhelming odds in Malaya in December 1941, and January and February 1942 has been recorded above (Chapter XIX), was to be reconstituted, and the 9th Battalion was to have the honour of taking its name.

* Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Taker was the Commander of the famed 4th Indian Division in the North African campaigns of 1942 and 1943 (see story of 3rd Royal Battalion, Chapter XVI.)

Thus, on a date later to be specified, the 9th Battalion would become the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Regiment, with all the great traditions of the Battalion to preserve that the earlier chapters of this volume have recorded. No one could deny that the Battalion had shown itself worthy by the greatest of all tests—valour and staunchness in the field. Its reward was fitting and well deserved indeed.

There were some 200 personnel of the 2nd Sikhs who had returned from Malaya after the Japanese surrender. These were in Sialkot with the Regimental Centre and were to be absorbed in batches.

In order to arrange details of this the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel M. Hayaud Din, M.C., M.B.E., accompanied by the Second-in-Command, Major R. R. Griffith, paid a visit to Sialkot to confer with the Commandant of the Regimental Centre. It was decided that the first party of 2nd Sikhs personnel should arrive in Lahore Cantonment on 28th April, and they duly arrived on that day.

At midnight two days later, 30th April 1946, the 9th War Battalion became the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Regiment. The command of the Battalion was handed over by Lieutenant-Colonel Hayaud Din to Lieutenant-Colonel P. Murray of the 2nd Sikhs.

Although this reconstitution of the 2nd Sikhs from the personnel of the 9th Battalion gave great pleasure at the time, it was, however, to prove only a temporary arrangement. On the Independence of Pakistan and subsequent reorganization of the Frontier Force Regiment, the 9th Battalion was to have the greater satisfaction of becoming a Regular Battalion in its own identity. An account of this will be found in Chapter XXX, "The Frontier Force Regiment in the Pakistan Army."

THE SPEECH OF THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR AND REPLY BY THE GENERAL

Dear General Hayaud Din,

It is indeed an honour and a great pleasure for me to bestow upon you the Cross of "Commandeur de la Legion d'Honneur".

The French Military ceremonies as a rule do not involve long speeches, therefore, in a few short words, I will indicate the reasons which merit this decoration.

For a long time, France has desired to express to you her gratitude for your brilliant conduct in 1945-1946 during the campaign which brought about the surrender of the Japanese forces and the communist elements armed by them in South Viet-Nam.

At the head of your battalion you established bridgeheads, thus permitting the landing of the Allied Forces in the Saigon area; you brought under control difficult regions at the price of heavy casualties; you succeeded everywhere.

Your brilliant leadership became so well known that the Divisional Commander, General GRACEY, chose you to receive the sabre of the Japanese Commander in Chief at the time of his surrender.

By this brave and vigorous action, which put a quick end to a murderous occupation, you spared the lives of numerous of our French Compatriots and of our Viet-Nameese friends, and, in this way, you gave them liberty sooner.

The Government of the French Republic is deeply grateful to you.

The presence here today of His Excellency Aziz AHMED, Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States, emphasises the concurrence of your own Government to this homage rendered to an outstanding Officer who has served so magnificently the cause of liberty, the allied cause, and at the same time, the French cause.

The presence of our American friends shows the high esteem they have of you; your position as Dean of Military Attaches has only increased the number of your friends.

Dear General, with my personal congratulations, it is my pleasure to decorate you.



DECORATION OF MAJOR-GENERAL HAYAUD DIN, H.J., M.B.E., M.C., BY THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.A., AS COMMANDER OF THE FRENCH LEGION OF HONOUR, 10TH JUNE, 1959, WASHINGTON, D.C.

I consider it a great honour to be awarded the Legion of Honour by the Republic of France. It is a great honour indeed not only for me but also for my country. My part in World War II was very small. The credit goes to the men who fought under me, as they are the ones who deserve this decoration.

France and Pakistan have been friends for a long time. In World Wars I and II, soldiers from Pakistan fought side by side with French soldiers in France and other battlefields. Many of them paid the supreme sacrifice and are buried in France. I pray to Almighty God that relations between France and Pakistan, along with our friend U.S.A., grow stronger every day.

I thank Their Excellencies, The Ambassadors of France and Pakistan, along with other friends who have taken the trouble to grace this occasion. I thank again, the Republic of France for this very great honour bestowed upon me.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE 11TH/14TH BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: ARAKAN, THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE GRECIAN ISLANDS

Inception as Territorial Battalion—Peace-time Status—Mobilization and War Status—
Service in India, 1942—Arakan, 1943—Service in Mid-East and the Grecian Islands,
1945-46.

Inception as Territorial Battalion

THE Territorial Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment was originally constituted in the reorganization of the Indian Army in 1922, when Territorial battalions after the pattern of those in the British Army were introduced in British India.

As has been remarked regarding the above reorganization, the number "11" was allotted in all regiments to the first Territorial battalion raised. It was the first number following the Regulars and the 10th Training Battalion, and it was possibly the pious hope of the organizers at that time that military enthusiasm might promote the raising of more than one Territorial battalion in each regiment, when the numbers 11, 12, 13, etc., would be given to successive Territorial units. If so, the hope was still-born where the two Frontier Force Regiments were concerned; but the one battalion raised was in both cases an outstanding success.* This was so both in peace when the battalions were annually concentrated for training, and in the Second World War, when both battalions gave up their limited terms of service to serve and fight wherever needed.

Peace-time Status

In peace the Territorial Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment was annually called up and concentrated at Nowshera for a period of training. For this a cadre of officers and instructors was provided by active battalions.

The Governor of North-West Frontier Province was always the ex-officio Colonel of the Battalion. When Sir George Cunningham became Governor in 1937 he took a very great interest in the Battalion. He always came to see them

* See Chapter XXIV of the *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, in which the amazing story of the Territorial battalion of that regiment is told. It actually volunteered for the Royal Indian Navy and became sailors.

and gave a large sum of money towards raising the Pipe Band. The Battalion showed its appreciation of his help by donating voluntarily one day's pay in 1940 towards the Spitfire Fund which Sir George Cunningham started for the R.A.F. during the war.

A famous previous Commanding Officer of the Battalion was the late Captain (later Brigadier Sir) Hissamud Din, Kt., C.I.E., O.B.I., I.D.S.M., who came from the P.A.V.O. Cavalry and is so well known to many "Piffers." One of his sons, Lieutenant-Colonel Khalid Jan, later commanded the 1st Sikhs after Pakistan became independent.

In 1937 Captain Mahmud Jan, M.B.E., was selected to attend the Coronation of King George VI as representative of 11th Battalion. This officer had earned his M.B.E. in 1930-31 during the Khajuri Campaign when he was on the staff of Major-General Milward.

Mobilization and War Status

The 11th Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment was ordered to mobilize in Nowshera on 4th September 1939, immediately on the outbreak of the Second World War. Its permanent staff was only the Administrative Commandant, the head clerk and seven storemen.

Before the outbreak of war however, the 11th Battalion as a Territorial battalion, had in addition to the Administrative Commandant, head clerk and storemen, the following: Adjutant, two double Company Commanders (officers), two J.C.Os. and eight N.C.Os. These were seconded from active battalions and came for the annual training; but when the Battalion was not embodied for training they were with their normal (active) battalions.

All other personnel were Territorials, and except for Regular officers and some clerks, all were Pathans. They came from the districts of Peshawar, Mardan, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and they included Khattaks, Yusufzais, Mohmands, Khalils, Bangashes, Akora Khattaks, and Bhitannis. It was the only all-Pathan battalion in existence at that time.

Their response to the call was immediate, and in spite of the fact that a great number lived in scattered, outlying and often isolated villages and dwellings, they arrived with surprising speed. Mobilization was completed in the very short time of sixteen days, i.e., by 20th September 1939. It was a demonstration of loyalty and keenness at the very start, and long before the war began really to affect the Indian continent or expansion of the Indian Army took place. It was an earnest of what was to follow, a forerunner of the flood that later formed the greatest voluntary fighting force in the cause of freedom that the world has ever seen or is likely to see. These pages have told some of the story.

On completion of mobilization, the following were the officers present with the Battalion :

Lieutenant-Colonel R. E. F. G. North	Commandant, 1st Battalion
Lieutenant M. Hayaud Din	Adjutant, 4th Battalion
Lieutenant Jamroz Khan	Quartermaster, 11th I.T.F. Battalion
Lieutenant C. W. Pearson, M.C. ..	Double Company Commander, 1st Battalion
Lieutenant M. G. Dewan	Double Company Commander, 4th Battalion
Captain Mahmud Jan, M.B.E.	Company Commander
Captain Zarin Khan	Company Commander
Captain Abdur Rehman Khan	Company Commander
Captain Iqbal Hussain	Company Commander
Lieutenant Abdul Hakim Khan	Company Officer
Lieutenant S. Makhdum Shah	Company Officer

At the end of September the Battalion moved to Dacca in East Bengal. There it took over guards and internal security duties from the 2nd Battalion, 14th Punjab Regiment (D.C.O.). For a year it remained here and carried out such training as was possible with a battalion in an internal security role. This was indeed anything but a sinecure, and just before the Battalion left Dacca, the Brigade Commander, Brigadier D. Whitworth, M.C., wrote as follows to Colonel North, the Commandant :

“Your Battalion has done exceedingly well in Bengal. . . . To have kept a battalion of Pathan Territorials free from all complaints from the local Bengalis is an achievement to be proud of. Further than this, I am convinced that your unit must be far above the average in its standard of training, both tactical and administrative.”

Moreover, during this period Lieutenant Hayaud Din was awarded the M.B.E. This award was for exceptionally valuable services as Adjutant. The notification appeared in the New Year Honours List for 1941, and the award of “Khan Sahib” to Captain Zarin Khan was published in the same list.

Various changes among officers also took place at this time that are of interest. Lieutenant Dewan was relieved by Captain Sheikh (4th Battalion) and Lieutenant Pearson was posted to his Regular Battalion (1st Sikhs). As a Lieutenant-Colonel he was later to command the 14th Battalion.

Lieutenant W. I. Campbell (2nd Battalion) then relieved Sheikh and the latter was posted to the 6th Battalion and later commanded the 8th Battalion in the final stages of the victorious Burma campaign of 1945.* Campbell rejoined the 2nd Battalion when they went to Malaya. A feature of the Battalion’s role in East Bengal was the regular performance of long flag marches

* See Chapter XXIV.

in the districts to show the people there were still troops in Bengal, and also as a form of training. These marches, lasting a week or ten days, were carried out at company strength, and movement from village to village was by steamer, on cycles, or (more rarely) on foot. The Company Commander was responsible for all the administrative arrangements and was expected to form a happy relationship with all local officials. A fleet of pedal cycles was issued to the Battalion and all ranks learnt to ride them. Very many men also learnt to swim and how to handle small rowing boats. These were often used in the many creeks that intersected the country between the large rivers. There were also large deep water-tanks near all the towns and villages, so that to be able to swim or to propel a boat across these was sometimes a useful accomplishment.

On 16th November 1940, the Battalion moved to Quetta, continuing its internal security role in the new station. There was little opportunity for training, and so far as specialists were concerned only a few men were taught the rudiments of M.T. work. In September 1940, the status of the Battalion changed. The men with few exceptions pledged themselves to "full time service at home or abroad for the duration of the war or longer," and the Battalion became a fully fledged war battalion ready for any task or to fight anywhere. It was given the new number and title, 14th (Suba Sarhad) Battalion, Frontier Force Regiment. The title of "Suba Sarhad" was included to preserve the connection of the Battalion with the Frontier Province.

Service in India, 1942

With the start of the new year, instructors began to be available and more intensive weapon training began. At the same time M.T. training became more intense, although the Battalion's allotment of ten lorries did not allow of much scope in this respect.*

Two platoons were sent as reinforcements to the 2nd Battalion in Malaya in December 1941. Both were captured almost at once after arrival. One platoon was Yusufzai and the other Bangash.

In April 1942, the Battalion moved to Bangalore; by this time there had been considerable changes amongst the officers. A number of officers from the British Service were attached:

Lieutenant-Colonel R. E. F. G. North	1st Battalion
Major C. P. Murray	2nd Battalion
Captain Zarin Khan	Adjutant, 11th I.T.F. Battalion
Captain T. G. Harding	1st Bn. South Lancashire Regiment, attached
Captain F. M. Willan	From 10th Bn. Frontier Force Regiment

* In this connection see Chapter XIX, narrative of the 2nd Battalion, where the training problems of the Second World War are discussed.

Captain J. O. C. Beazley	..	..	Posted direct from Cadet School, Mhow
Lieutenant N. Foggie	..	..	Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, attached
Lieutenant J. Brown	..	..	Attached
Lieutenant A. F. Black	..	..	East Surrey Regiment, attached
Lieutenant H. W. A. Ruck Keene	..	..	52 L.I., attached
Lieutenant G. Ruck Keene	..	..	52 L.I., attached
Lieutenant C. J. Hannam	..	..	Norfolk Regiment, attached
Lieutenant H. M. Wyldeck	..	..	Queen's Regiment, attached
Lieutenant A. D. Tansley	..	..	Inniskilling Fusiliers, attached
Lieutenant A. Ensor	..	..	Hampshire Regiment, attached
Lieutenant T. Hilton	..	..	Lancashire Fusiliers, attached.
Lieutenant Taj Mohammed Bangash.			
Lieutenant Abdul Hamid Khalil.			

Both these last two were J.C.Os. in the Territorial Battalion. Abdul Hamid was given a commission in order to be Quartermaster as there was no officer with the Battalion qualified for the post at the time the Battalion left Quetta for service in S. India. After a month in the vicinity of Bangalore, the unit moved south to Talavasal and joined the 20th Indian Division which was training there. A small rear party was left behind to ferry down the new transport which the unit had been collecting in Bangalore.

The only event of real note here was the change of Commanding Officers which took place in the middle of June 1942. Lieutenant-Colonel "Digger" Officer (3rd Sikhs) assumed command, and a tremendous send-off was given to Lieutenant-Colonel North. The Battalion had reason to be grateful to Lieutenant-Colonel North, whose child that Battalion had been from before the beginning of the war. An officer of great keenness and North-West Frontier experience, he had made the Battalion into a thoroughly efficient fighting unit of which indeed the Government might have made more use in the field than they ever did. He now went to command the Mahsud Labour Battalion, a unit administered by the I.G. Frontier Corps, and remained with it, and a second battalion raised by him, until December 1947.

In July 1942, the Battalion moved to Trichinopoly, and had barely arrived there before orders were received to hand over all warlike stores and M.T. to another battalion, and to entrain for the north-west. This was not popular, as it was realized that the Southern Army was then training for something more forceful than the mere passive defence of Southern India; and, as an alternative to this, the Frontier did not sound very attractive.

On arrival in Kohat, however, the Battalion was able to carry on with uncompleted individual training. This was much needed. Moreover, the

Northern Army training team arrived and began to inculcate Frontier doctrine, while selected men went off on animal management courses. This state of affairs did not long continue, and at the end of August the Battalion moved again. This time Havelian was the railhead where they detrained, and thence they marched through Abbottabad to Bhair Kund Camp, where the 7th Division was concentrating. This was a pleasant surprise. Here once more the weapons and stores, which everyone thought had gone for good when they were handed over in Trichinopoly, reappeared, and limited M.T. was issued. At this juncture the Adjutant, Captain Zarin Khan, left the Battalion and was replaced by Captain Tansley.

Barely a month had passed when, at very short notice, orders came at the beginning of October 1942, for the Battalion to move to Fenni, in Eastern Bengal. So far as any eight-day rail journey in a troop train can be without incident, this journey was, but the Battalion's transport was railed separately, and the M.T.O. (Lieutenant H. M. Wyldeck), who travelled in the back of a three-ton lorry on a flat car, took nearly three weeks to arrive.

The monsoon was just over when the unit detrained in Bengal, but plenty of traces of it could be found in the inundated nature of the country in which the new camp was situated. The Battalion now became part of 88th Brigade of 14th Indian Division, and Battalion Headquarters remained in Fenni, while the companies were flung far and wide up and down the tenuous lines of communication. Again this was a task which gave little opportunity for training other than on a company basis. The work of lines of communication protection may be important, but it is very boring!

At this time the Battalion was not up to strength as, apart from a draft of Orakzais received in Trichinopoly, there had been no reinforcements. There had of course, been no casualties either, but there was the usual sickness wastage, coupled with the demands for personnel from Brigade Headquarters for extra-Regimental employment which had to be met.

Nothing of great interest happened during the Battalion's six-months' stay on the lines of communication. Officers went on jungle warfare courses, some leave was opened, and finally, in March of 1943, a small party was sent forward and attached to the 7/15th Punjab Regiment to look at the war in Arakan. This at last was an indication that the 14th Battalion was to be given a chance on active service.

Arakan, 1943

And so it proved, for in the first days of May 1943, orders were suddenly received for the Battalion to go forward to Maungdaw and join the 55th Brigade of 14th Indian Division. At this moment the Commanding Officer was on a course in Calcutta, and the Second-in-Command (Major C. P. Murray) had been sent to 88th Brigade Headquarters and given the task of organizing the

defence of Chittagong. Several other officers were sick or on courses, so that on this, the first occasion when the Battalion had been called into the line, the following officers only were present:

Captain C. J. Hannam	.. ..	Quartermaster
Captain A. D. Tansley	.. ..	Adjutant
Captain T. G. Harding	.. ..	Officer Commanding "C" Company
Captain H. W. A. Ruck Keene	.. ..	Officer Commanding "D" Company
Captain Surinder Singh	.. ..	Officer Commanding "A" Company
Captain F. M. Willan	.. ..	Officer Commanding H.Q. Company

The Signal Officer (Lieutenant M. Bashir) was also present, but was due to go on a course the same day. However, Major Murray finished his work at Chittagong in time to rejoin in Fenni before the Battalion actually moved.

A few days were spent at the transit camp in Chittagong, drawing new kit and collecting stores. Here, the Commanding Officer rejoined.

The Battalion left Chittagong on 8th May 1943, went to railhead, thence by M.T. to Tumburu Ghat (leaving the mules to follow on their feet), and from there (after loading small steamers and a barge with the stores in darkness) by water to Maungdaw. It soon became apparent here that all was by no means well on shore. All heavy stores and unnecessary personnel were being back-loaded out of the port as fast as possible, and all forms of transport were at an absolute premium. It was in fact the end of General Wavell's tactically disastrous (but strategically providential) campaign in the Arakan. The story of his attempt in November 1942, to drive back the weak Japanese forces there and capture the important airfields at Akyab, and how this had forestalled an enemy plan to invade Assam in 1942-3 (that must have succeeded), is outlined above in the narratives of the 4th and 9th Battalions.

The situation now in Arakan was that the badly mauled 14th Indian Division which had carried out the initial attack was retreating before the Japanese 55th Division, and a fresh Division from India—the 26th—was holding a defensive position in the Maungdaw-Goppe-Bawli area to halt the enemy. With the onset of the monsoon the Japanese advance was in fact stopped on the above line, and the position was stabilized there for the next six months.

Before proceeding further, however, the reader must understand the nature of the country in the coastal theatre of Arakan where the Battalion was now called on to serve. The area consisted of a peninsula running down the coast to Akyab with a steep jungle-covered ridge—the Mayu Ridge—along it in the nature of a spine. Parallel with this were a series of river-beds or "chaungs" that were dry in the cold season and filled with water in the monsoon. Both these impeded lateral movement, and the Mayu Ridge could only be crossed at certain places. Three of these were the road from Maungdaw to Buthidaung, and the Goppe and Ngachedauk passes. The former road went through the

ill-famed tunnels at the summit of the Ridge, and the latter passes were between Bawli and the tunnels.

At the time when the Battalion arrived in Arakan the 14th Division were evacuating the line of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road and retiring to Bawli.

After disembarking at Maungdaw on 11th May, the Battalion lay up near the quays and began to sort itself out. It was discovered that there should be enough mules for the carriage of some tools, reserve ammunition, cookers, and rations. It therefore became necessary for gangs to work for the remainder of that day and all night, unloading essentials from the bottom of the aforementioned barge, and reloading the tentage, gas stores, and other unwanted items. The next morning the Battalion left the quay-side, marched a few miles, and began to dig in on the Maungdaw-Bawli Bazaar road.

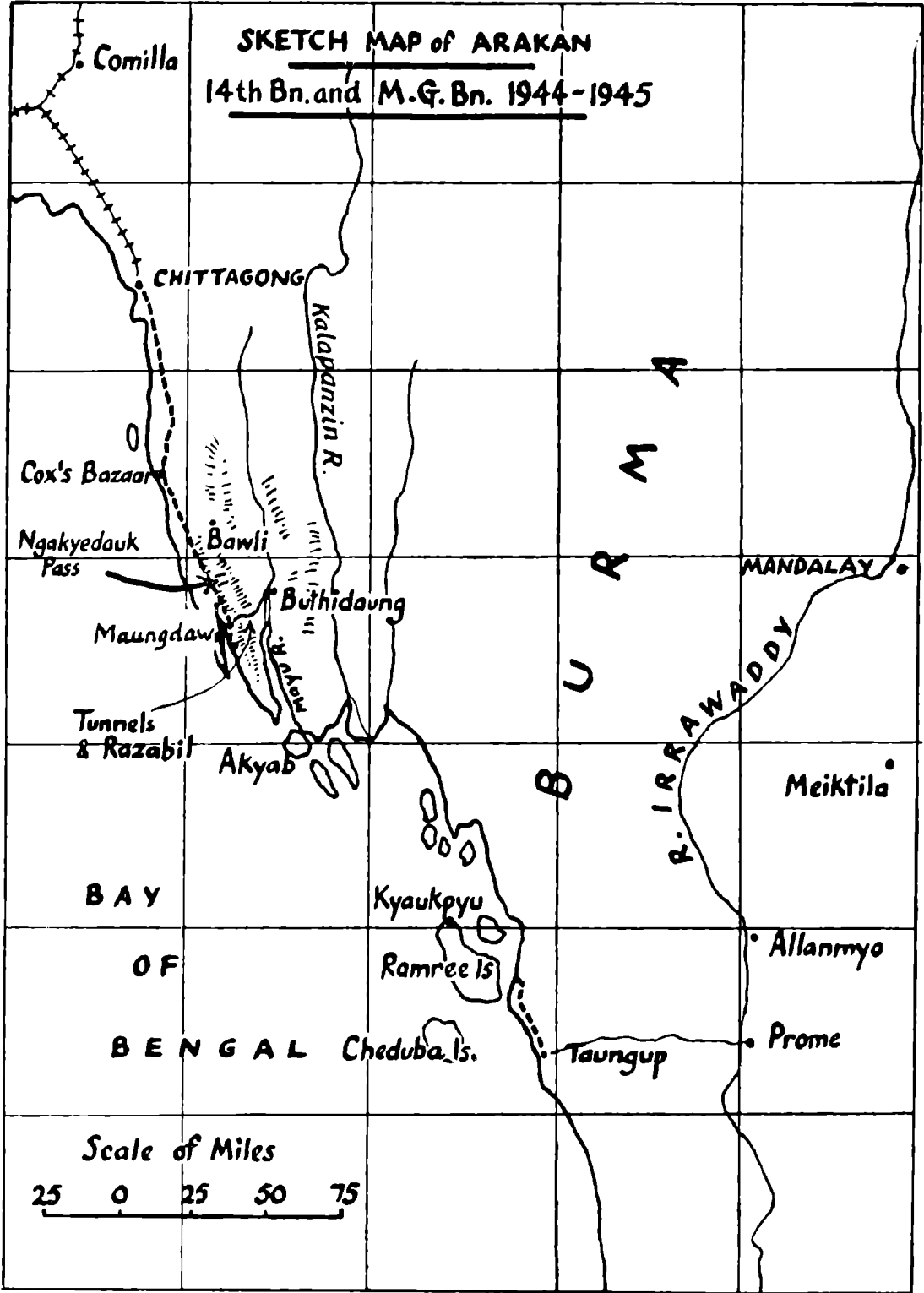
The 26th Division was withdrawing farther, however, and Maungdaw was evacuated a couple of days later. This involved a night march under trying conditions, including the softest of sand to march on. There was no follow up, and the first rain of the approaching monsoon fell on the night of the 13th.

The 14th Division left the Arakan about this time, but the Battalion stayed on and became part of 26th Indian Division. At one time or another, during the next six months it was in each of the brigades forming this Division. It went over the redoubtable Goppe pass twice, occupying the far side of the range for two weeks and carried out patrolling. Then it returned to the Bawli side and occupied alternately the north and south keeps for some weeks in company with Captain Hodson's company of the Frontier Force Regiment Machine Gun Battalion. Apart from a brief visit to Taungbru by sea, to refit at the end of the first three weeks, and a fortnight in Cox's Bazaar in August—in reserve—the Battalion was in the Bawli area, patrolling throughout the monsoon. It finally came back to Cox's Bazaar in October 1943, and remained there while 7th Division took over from 26th Division. During this period neither the enemy nor ourselves initiated any operations of note.

Nevertheless, conditions for the first few weeks after the retirement from Maungdaw afforded excellent practice for the "real thing," in that everything was in earnest, although untroubled by brushes with Japanese. After that, blankets and mosquito nets arrived, and more transport became available—and the monsoon started. Malaria casualties brought the Battalion strength low, but several more officers rejoined, which was welcome. Colonel Officer left the Battalion in June, and Lieutenant-Colonel C. P. Murray assumed command.

The Battalion was sorry to say good-bye to "Digger" Officer, but it was promotion for him as he was going to take up the appointment of G.S.O., 1st Grade, 14th Division.

Captain Hilton, who had joined in Bangalore, became Adjutant, and Captain Tansley went off on a staff appointment. Captain J. A. Howarth took over "A" Company, Captain Venables "B" Company, Lieutenant Harland



became Intelligence Officer, Lieutenant Williams (recently from Paiforce) filled in wherever he was needed, and Captain Hutchinson (Guides) arrived to fill the Second-in-Command's place.

During the monsoon, patrols (about forty strong at first, under an officer, and later becoming a whole company) went forward about fifteen miles from Bawli and established a base some five miles from Maungdaw. This was connected by telephone with Battalion Headquarters at Bawli, and from it efforts were made to excite the Japanese in front of Maungdaw, to locate positions, and to capture a prisoner (at that time highly valued). Although the latter aim was not achieved, the former two were. No effort was made by the Japs to advance during this time, but in September they appeared to be pushing forward along the Mayu range, and "A" Company, who were at that time forward on patrol, had two night battles, during one of which the I.D.S.M. was gained by Jemadar Azim Ullah. Both these took place in the area of the Ngachedauk Pass, and in the latter engagement the enemy set out with three or four strong platoons to destroy the Battalion's piquet there. Two Jap parties made encircling moves, but were unaware that the piquet had been enlarged and reinforced. They walked into the Battalion's right and centre platoons (the latter under Jemadar Azim Ullah), taking severe punishment. They made in all four attacks during the night without any success. Local inhabitants later reported that the Japs had carried away seventeen dead and eight wounded. The Battalion's casualties were nil.

The policy of the Division at the end of the monsoon in 1943 was to hold the Bawli area, of which the Battalion at this time was entrusted with the south keep. The forward patrols were to fall back slowly if pressed, giving advance information of enemy movements. The "garrison" forward was now reduced to one company, pressure having relaxed, and a slightly tense peace seemed to reign as the monsoon died. During these later days a composite platoon of the 7th Battalion Somerset Light Infantry was attached for "Patrol instruction." In October the Battalion handed over the charge of the Bawli south keep to the Somersets and withdrew to Cox's Bazaar.

The Battalion remained there uneventfully for the next three months, and on 5th January 1944, orders came for a move to India, the destination being Lahore, which was reached a week later. Here internal security duties absorbed most of the men, and nearly a year slipped rapidly away. Major Bromhead left in September to take over the 26th Battalion, and was succeeded as Second-in-Command by Major Hardial Singh, who had joined in Cox's Bazaar. In November 1944, the Battalion went out to a Winter Training Camp near Hoshiarpur, and everyone was cheered at the thought of perhaps returning to Burma at the end of it. However, this was not to be, and after a whirl of postings, during the course of which Lieutenant-Colonel Murray left, the Battalion finished its camp and returned to Lahore.

Service in Mid-East and the Grecian Islands

The winter had now passed and Major Venables had commanded the Battalion while waiting for a successor to Lieutenant-Colonel Murray, when on 1st April 1945, the Battalion once more received orders for field service. The new theatre was Paiforce,* and inside ten days the Battalion found itself once more doing internal security duties, this time in the oil town of Abadan in Persia. Here the diary remarks pointedly, "We who considered ourselves 'jungle trained' again have cause to remark, 'Was our journey really necessary?' A battalion from the 'Forgotten Army' finds itself in an Army that has not even the reputation of being forgotten."

Duties and guards in Abadan were heavy, and the hot weather and perpetual smell of oil did not make for comfortable living. The Battalion's stay was, however, mercifully short. With the end of the war in the West, V.E. Day was celebrated, and on 11th May the new Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Pearson,† M.C., arrived. The Battalion now moved to join 60th Brigade in the Hamadan plain and was encamped at Bisitun by 23rd May. Here intensive specialist, and particularly M.T. training was carried out, and the Battalion was "Westernized" and prepared for internal security duties and tribal warfare in a mobile role. New arrivals during this period were Lieutenants Malhauthra, Pathak, Raschpal Singh and Rawley from the Centre, and Major Hardial Singh left.

The summer passed uneventfully and the news of Japan's surrender came over the wireless on 15th August while the Battalion was still in Bisitun. It soon became apparent that the days of Paiforce as a large force were numbered, and in September orders were received for the Battalion to move by road to Haifa, and there embark for Rhodes, again to take over internal security duties and guards.

The Battalion moved in M.T. from Bisitun on 10th October 1945, and, travelling by way of Khaniqin, Baghdad and Rutbah Wells, reached Haifa on 20th October. Four days later it sailed for Rhodes, arriving thirty-six hours later, and took over guards and duties from the Alwar Infantry, who sailed off to India. A month later the Battalion provided detachments of "B" Company (less one platoon) at Leros and one platoon at Cos—both islands in the Dodecanese.

January 1946 passed without incident, but in February a rifle meeting was organized by H.Q. Dodecanese Area. The Battalion entered for the team competition and won it. The first prize for individual marksmanship was also won by Jemadar Adjutant Rakhim Gul.

* Paiforce = Persia and Iraq Force.

† Lieutenant-Colonel Pearson had left the Battalion as a subaltern to rejoin the 1st Battalion in 1940.

In April the first signs of troops returning to India appeared when 150 rank and file were sent off for release.

On 21st May, General Sir Bernard Paget, G.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., the Commander-in-Chief Mid-East, visited the Battalion and was given a guard of honour both on his arrival and departure. Life continued without incident while training proceeded as far as possible till 17th July, when the Battalion once more moved—this time to another island, Rodi, where it took over guards and duties.

The Battalion was now under Land Forces, Greece, and was visited by the Commander, Lieutenant-General K. N. Crawford. A guard of honour was provided for him at the airfield.

On 8th August Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Pearson left the Battalion on long leave, and was succeeded by Major P. C. Garrett, who arrived to take command a fortnight later.

The Battalion finally left Rodi and the Dodecanese at the end of September. Its war service was over, and on arrival at Nowshera, personnel were dealt with under the arrangements for release and resettlement—or for permanent retention in the Army.

The Battalion returned for a time to its original status. It was later disbanded, but re-raised again as 14th Battalion in the reorganization of the Pakistan Army. It subsequently became 1st Battalion Pathan Regiment, a new “Piffer” Regiment raised in 1949.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MACHINE-GUN BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

ARAKAN AND SUMATRA

Raising, Early Days and Training—Arakan, 1943—The Jap Offensive in Arakan, 1944-45—Amphibious Operations, 1945—Taungup and Rangoon—Sumatra and the Aftermath of War.

Raising, Early Days and Training

THE Machine-Gun Battalion was raised in Sialkot under the late Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Taylor, O.B.E., on 15th January, 1942. J.C.Os. and N.C.Os. were supplied by the "milking" of all active battalions, and the sepoy were all recruits who had completed their infantry training in the Regimental Centre. The original intention of training the Battalion to be fit for war within six months of raising was found to be quite impossible,* as all men had to be trained not only in medium machine-gunnery but also in driving and maintenance. The scale of transport on the W.E. was at this time in the region of 120 vehicles. The Battalion trained hard and worked at full pressure throughout the summer of 1942, living for the most part of this period in tented accommodation, and it was not until December that the unit moved to join the 26th Indian Division, then stationed around Calcutta. The possibility of fighting on the Eastern Frontiers had up to this never been considered; it had been generally assumed throughout the Battalion's raising and training period that the Battalion would fight in the Western Desert, as the use of M.M.Gs. in jungle country had previously been imagined in the Battalion to be uneconomical if not actually impracticable.

For four months the Battalion was stationed at Baruipur, twenty miles from Calcutta, living in basha accommodation (i.e. grass huts) in mango groves. The drivers improved tremendously during this period as a result of endless convoy drives through the city, and it was somewhat unfortunate that when on 24th April 1943, the Battalion sailed for Chittagong and Arakan, that it had to leave all its M.T. behind.

* See also Chapter XIX narrative of 2nd Battalion where problems of expansion and training in the Second World War are discussed.

Arakan, 1943

In order to follow the operations in the Arakan throughout which, after June 1943, the Machine-Gun Battalion fought, the reader needs to understand the somewhat peculiar and very individual nature of the countryside that existed in this theatre.

A short description has been given above in the narrative of the 14th Battalion* (which was the only other battalion of the Regiment to serve in this theatre), and this should be referred to with a glance at the map† before reading further. Additionally, it should be remembered that the Maungdaw-Buthidaung Road, built on the track of a disused railway, was not only the sole route across the Mayu Range fit for vehicles, but the only metalled, and therefore monsoon-proof road, in the whole Arakan Province north of Akyab.

By 5th May 1943, the Battalion was established in Maungdaw and had commenced to relieve the forward companies of the Machine-Gun Battalion of the Jat Regiment.

Here, for the benefit of the uninitiated, and to remind others of the somewhat disjointed life of a machine-gun battalion, it may be mentioned that its privilege was to be for ever split up. Indeed, the machine-gun battalion in both world wars was designed to that end, on the basis of a company to a brigade and a platoon to a battalion.

The machine-gun battalion's support by medium machine guns and (when temporarily so equipped) by large-calibre mortars, could only be provided at comparatively short ranges, particularly in close country such as the Arakan, and for this as well as the former reasons given, the Battalion could seldom if ever fight its guns under its own commander. As a result, the fact that companies, platoons and even sections were constantly detached with formations they were assigned to support, makes a coherent narrative of the Battalion's doings as a whole somewhat difficult to compile.

When the Machine-Gun Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment took over from the Machine-Gun Battalion of the Jat Regiment acting in a defensive role in the Maungdaw-Buthidaung area early in May 1943, its company positions were spread over the whole divisional front from the sea across the Mayu Range to the Kalapanzin River. It was at this time that the Battalion received its first experience of bombing and shelling. Unfortunately two companies were unable to relieve their opposite numbers in the Jat Regiment. The enemy had cut the vital Maungdaw-Buthidaung road, split our forces and forced the Division to withdraw into defensive positions stretching from Taung Bazaar to Nhila. Incidentally, the Battalion was organized in class platoons with a platoon of each class in each company—a factor that tended to simplify administrative arrangements to a large extent, in the role of a machine-gun battalion.

* See Chapter XXVI.

† Map of Arakan, p. 523.

The Japanese advance was their final move (before the monsoon of 1943) in their counter-offensive campaign of the cold season 1942-43. This advance had driven back the 14th Division from the point of the Mayu Peninsula with heavy losses, and the reasons for this apparently disastrous, but actually providential campaign, have been discussed in Chapter XX.

The 26th Division had indeed been sent post-haste from India to stem the Japanese advance and relieve the exhausted 14th Division.

By the end of May the Battalion was dug in on a wide Divisional front, by companies in Brigade "Keeps" astride the main communications. No provision had been made in these areas for monsoon accommodation as the withdrawal from Maungdaw had deprived our forces of that which had been planned. The Engineers were unable to cope with the problem in the forward areas, and units were given verbal permission to make whatever local arrangements they could. Somehow contractors were found amongst the villagers in the area, and "bashes" of all shapes and sizes were erected just before the rains started in earnest. Company Commanders had much correspondence subsequently trying to justify large expenditures of rupees on "basha building" in their imprest accounts.

Transport was withdrawn twenty-five miles to the only road that was monsoon-proof, and movement thereafter was by foot, and guns either man-handled or transported by mule.

The Battalion's first monsoon was quiet and rain-sodden. Roads that had previously been swirling clouds of thick, choking dust became muddy bogs almost overnight. Movement between companies and Battalion Headquarters, which were widely separated, was by river steamer or country craft. The rain was heavy and incessant. The Battalion took part in only two offensive actions during this period. The first was a raid on Maungdaw when it supported the 1st Lincolns and covered their withdrawal. The second was a raiding column with the North Staffords, when the Battalion suffered casualties out of all proportion to the strength taking part. This was through no fault of anyone's, but because a chance salvo of enemy machine-gun and mortar fire fell on the rendezvous where the machine-gun section was to receive its orders. The section was quite unprotected and lost three killed and nine wounded. Only ten men of the section remained uninjured, and these managed to bring away all the guns and equipment. One sepoy, hit in three places, refused to give in, and carried the tripod of his gun to safety.

While the wounded were being sent back that night, up the Kalapanzin river by sampan, two died—one the Jemadar (Diwandli) of the section.

In October the Battalion was withdrawn (to rest) from the positions it had occupied throughout the whole monsoon, by march route to railhead ninety miles north. The rest area was Comilla, some one hundred miles north of Chittagong. Here the Battalion changed temporarily on to a new W.E. of 50 per cent.

mortars and 50 per cent. machine guns on a three-company basis. The Sikhs and Pathans, for the main part, became the mortar experts. The Battalion was here visited for the first time by the Supreme Allied Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten, who inspected the Battalion in darkness by the aid of petromax lamps. So impressed was he by these arrangements that they accompanied him throughout the remainder of his tour of inspection. The whole period at Comilla was spent in training the men in the use of the mortar and battery firing until February, when the Battalion moved back to the Arakan with 26th Indian Division.

The Japanese Offensive in Arakan, 1944-45

The situation in Arakan in February 1944, needs to be understood. It was linked with the whole strategy of the campaign on the Burma border that followed in 1944 and 1945. (In this, on the Fourteenth Army front in Imphal and Upper Burma, the 4th, 8th and 9th Battalions of the Regiment played an outstanding part in the 17th, 19th and 20th Divisions).*

It had taken British India, aided by a strong contingent of the U.S. Air Forces and all the resources of the Allied war effort, two years to build up an adequate fighting force, backed by communications and airfields of sufficient capacity, to take the offensive against the Japs in Burma. This was planned for the spring of 1944. The Japanese High Command however, aware doubtless of our preparations, had planned to forestall them by invading Assam. This invasion had indeed been intended for the cold season of 1942-43 when we were ill-prepared to meet it; but General Wavell's attack with the lone 14th Division in Arakan already mentioned above, upset the Japanese plans. Their 55th Division, essential to the invasion plan, had to be diverted to save Akyab, and the invasion had to be postponed.

As remarked, it was to succour the badly battered 14th Division that the 26th Division had come to the Arakan and the Frontier Force Regiment's Machine-Gun Battalion with it.

Now however, nine months later, with the South-East Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten on the verge of launching the offensive that was designed to drive the Japs south and open the road from India to China, the Jap Commander struck first, and his initial blow fell in the Arakan.

His strategy was clear. We had assembled two divisions in this theatre—the 5th and 7th, with two more in Assam, the 25th and 26th, in reserve. Before he could hope to take Imphal and Kohima to the north and advance to cut the Assam rail and river communications, he must try and destroy or at least tie down our forces in Arakan and prevent any of them being sent to reinforce the main Imphal battlefield.

* Chapters XX, XXIV and XXV.

His tactics also were foreseen. They would be the usual encircling moves to isolate our formations—a method to which the Arakan theatre, intersected by the almost impassable Mayu Ridge and the Kalapanzin River, was peculiarly suited. The recent campaign against our 14th Division had shown this.

Measures therefore were taken to meet the above tactics. Any of our formations up to Division strength that might be cut off from its L. of C. by Jap encirclement would stay put. It would be supplied (100 per cent.) by air and would fight it out.

The Jap offensive opened on 1st February 1944, and a concentrated encircling blow was delivered against the 7th Division which was then advancing east of the Mayu Ridge on Buthidaung. The 5th Division had taken Maungdaw and was in the coastal plain south and west of the Mayu Ridge. Simultaneously enemy broadcasts announced, with a flourish of trumpets, that Major-General Sakurai was about to cut off and destroy these two divisions and capture Chittagong.

The Japanese forces worked through the jungles on the east flank of the 7th Indian Division, attacked it from the rear and severed its communications. They attacked frontally from the south at the same time and heavy fighting ensued. The previously prepared plan to meet this situation now came into operation. The 7th Division formed a box and prepared to fight it out, being maintained the while by air supply—for by now the British and American air forces had clear superiority in the air and were working to achieve air supremacy. The enemy, nevertheless, were soon swarming round the 7th Division box, and in the desperate struggle which followed they actually overran Divisional Headquarters, and General Messervy had to fight his way out, reputedly in his pyjamas, with part of his staff.

At this juncture the 26th Division were ordered forward to relieve the 7th Division, whose situation, in spite of all, was serious enough. The 26th Division was to drive through to 7th Division from the north along the Mayu Range, while 5th Division linked up from the west—that is across the Ngachedauk Pass. The Machine-Gun Battalion was ordered back to the Arakan from Comilla, and on return, as the only machine-gun battalion in the Corps, became part of XV Corps troops. On arrival at Bawli Bazaar on 15th February, the Battalion was placed under command of the 29th Independent Infantry Brigade of 36th British Division, which had arrived at Chittagong, and the 29th Independent Infantry Brigade had been rushed to Bawli Bazaar complete with its amphibious equipment (in the shape of Dukws) to take over from 26th Indian Division which was then holding Bawli. On 19th February “A” Company, and subsequently “B” and “C” Companies, of the Machine-Gun Battalion, on the 24th, passed under command of 5th Indian Division. The Battalion, with 5th Indian Division, took part in heavy fighting through the Ngachedauk Pass for the relief of 7th Indian Division, which was accomplished on 29th February. Guns

were manhandled through the thick jungle which covered the precipitous slopes of the Mayu Range and reached positions that would have normally been deemed impossible. On this entry of the Battalion into the final campaign for the defeat of the Japs in the Second World War, the following were the officers who accompanied it:

Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Taylor, O.B.E.	Commandant
Major A. J. W. MacLeod, D.S.O. . .	Second-in-Command
Major J. W. Hodges	O.C. "C" Company
Major J. P. Scott	O.C. "A" Company
Major B. H. Hobson	O.C. "B" Company
Captain R. Peel	Adjutant
Lieutenant G. C. Matthews	"B" Company Officer
Lieutenant A. Mallinson	"A" Company Officer
Lieutenant I. F. Aucott	"C" Company Officer
Lieutenant R. M. Halliday	Quartermaster
Lieutenant Thakar Singh	"B" Company Officer
Lieutenant R. H. Plant	Intelligence Officer
Lieutenant W. P. MacG. Cargill . .	"A" Company Officer
Lieutenant A. C. Deaves	"C" Company Officer
Lieutenant Z. A. Khan	"B" Company Officer
Lieutenant Abdul Karim	"C" Company Officer
Lieutenant O. P. Bahri	Assistant Quartermaster
Lieutenant A. G. Jelley	"A" Company Officer
Lieutenant J. S. Kalyaniwala	"B" Company Officer
Lieutenant Hari Singh	M.T. Officer
Captain M. S. Hassan (I.A.M.C.) . .	Medical Officer

By the time that 5th Indian Division and 7th Indian Division linked up again over the Ngachedauk Pass, the Japanese Tanahashi Force had already begun to retreat. They had budgeted to capture supplies of food and ammunition left behind by our retreating divisions, and when the latter stood firm the ten days' supplies that the Japs had brought with them soon ran out. Tasks for the Machine-Gun Battalion became fewer, and on 29th February the whole Battalion was ordered forward to Maungdaw. As already mentioned, this date marked the final defeat of the Japanese offensive in the Arakan, and the relief of the 7th Division by the leading troops of the 26th Division. These were in fact the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles, and the story of their desperate fighting in this battle is told in the History of the sister Regiment.*

On 10th March a big combined operation was staged by the 5th Division designed to capture the tunnel area on the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. This had been made into a strong defensive position known as the Razabil Fortress.

* *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XV, pp. 190-195.

Both "A" and "C" Companies featured in the attack, "A" firing mortars and medium machine guns into Razabil itself, and "C" providing mortar fire in support of the attack on a feature behind Razabil. The day's operations were successful and all objectives were captured. "A" and "C" Companies, though under fire, suffered no casualties or damage. The battle continued for several more days, and "C" Company earned the Brigade Commander's congratulations for its performance on the 12th. In support of a successful attack, it fired over 18,000 rounds from medium machine guns and 500 mortar bombs.

On the 16th "B" Company were given a task as they were the only company who had not so far had a shoot, and carried it out efficiently.

The Battalion now heard that 5th Indian Division was being withdrawn and flown north* to the main theatre, shortly to be followed by 7th Indian Division. There was much speculation as to the Battalion's future, and amid counter-orders which followed, tentative air-loading tables were prepared. By this time the Battalion felt itself part of 5th Indian Division, for whose efficiency and fighting capabilities it had a great regard, and there was considerable disappointment when final orders were received for it to join 25th Indian Division. This was an untried formation which had been sent in from India to relieve 5th Indian Division.

The Japs in the meantime had not been idle, and by a counter-move succeeded in cutting the road behind the forward Brigade and isolating "B" Company—the latter having been in action in another area to the south. This state of affairs continued until 24th March when the C.O. set out with twenty-five men of "C" Company to try and get through to "B" Company. It was known they must be short of rations, and all attempts to communicate with them had failed.

The expedition succeeded and "B" Company, except for a shortage of fresh rations, were found in good heart. Thereafter an attack by the York and Lancaster Regiment drove out the intervening enemy and restored communications for good.

The arrival of the inexperienced 25th Division caused a pause in the operations in the tunnel area, and fighting came to a standstill. Though this was not an unwelcome respite for the Battalion, who had been on the move continually since arriving in Arakan, it gave the Japs a chance to become a nuisance again, trying once more to cut the Division's rearward communications. They were, however, successfully held off.

For the first half of April the front remained fairly quiet, though "B" Company spent two months in Chiradan overlooked by Japs on the hills above the village. The latter had three 75-mm. guns well dug in, and our 25-pounders

* It was flown to Imphal where the battle was now reaching a crucial stage—see 9th Battalion story, Chapter XXV.

and tanks were quite unable to knock them out. The Company was shelled daily and had two killed (including a havildar), and several wounded. It was really a tribute to the considerable amount of digging that the Company carried out that so few casualties to personnel and none to vehicles were suffered.

Meantime, on 4th April, Major Macleod, the Second-in-Command, was appointed to command the 4th Battalion and had to leave* urgently. This was a great loss, as he had been Second-in-Command ever since the Battalion was raised and his presence was badly missed. However, he was to lead the 4th Battalion during the rest of its magnificent campaign with the 17th Division in the reconquest of Burma, and the reader can judge by reading Chapter XX how important was his new appointment.

On April 18th the Battalion was suddenly called on to send a company speedily to help the 26th Division in the Buthidaung area. "C" Company was selected and crossed the ridge by the treacherous Ngachedauk Pass. This was once more a dangerous manœuvre for the vehicles with the monsoon setting in. It was safely accomplished and the Company were called on for support in the battle for the famous 551 feature.† They were in the thick of the battle for four days, one platoon under Subadar Matti Ullah particularly distinguishing itself. The platoon position was rushed on at least six occasions, but the Japs were beaten off each time with small arms and grenades, suffering terrible losses. So many corpses were left behind that nearly every man collected a trophy of some kind off a dead Jap to remind him of his first big battle.

The Company were lucky in suffering only two killed and four wounded in all.

Subadar Matti Ullah was awarded the I.O.M. for his personal bravery and skill in this action, and Major Hodges and Havildar Falak Sher gained the M.C. and M.M. respectively for their fine performances.

While "C" Company was thus engaged with the 26th Division, "A" and "B" were still busy with the 25th Division. These companies had to advance along the spine of the Mayu Ridge, manhandling their machine guns and cumbersome equipment through heavy jungle and across precipitous hillsides, while the Divisions advanced farther down the coastal plain and dug in. Neither had any fighting of consequence.

With the onset of the monsoon the Companies settled into monsoon positions—"C" Company being withdrawn to Taung Bazaar and had a stiff fight to disengage.

The monsoon months passed uneventfully, neither side interfering much with the other.

* See 4th Battalion Chapter XX. Lieutenant-Colonel Marshall had been killed in action in the Tiddim area during the battle of Imphal, and an experienced Battalion Commander was most urgently needed.

† See *History of the Frontier Force Rifles*, Chapter XV.

The Advance in Arakan, 1944-45

In September the tempo quickened again as a forward advance was commenced. In the main theatre the battles for Imphal and Kohima had been won, and the shattered Japanese armies were reeling back to the Chindwin, having been pursued and attacked relentlessly throughout the monsoon by General Slim's Fourteenth Army.* That the occasion was ripe for an advance on Akyab and its vitally important airfields was clear, and the 25th Division with the Machine-Gun Company in support made the first moves.

"C" Company were again in support of the leading troops, a Gurkha battalion attacking a strongly held feature 1,400 ft. up on the Mayu Ridge. The Gurkhas secured the feature while a platoon of "C" Company's medium machine guns received some unpleasant shelling from a Jap 75. They were lucky to escape without casualties.

The next day (13th) Major Plant went forward with No. 12 Platoon under the command of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. When reconnoitring for a supporting position he and his orderly ran into some Japs. He killed two at close range with his tommy gun, but his orderly was missing after the clash. He was found three days later in the course of a further advance, having lain all that time in the jungle with several wounds from a grenade. He was very weak, but fortunately recovered later in hospital.

In the meantime on the east side of the Mayu Ridge "A" Company had gone forward, and had sent No. 2 Platoon with a task force down the Kalapanzin River. During the night of the 14th/15th, the force's harbour was heavily attacked four times and the Japs actually penetrated the perimeter once, but were driven out by a bayonet charge, leaving behind nineteen dead and fourteen wounded. The task force lost one killed and three wounded, "A" Company's platoon coming through unscathed. The diary remarks: "Our guns were in action and did well. Six dead Japs were found on the barbed wire in the morning."

At the end of September 1944, the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor, was allotted a home leave vacancy and left the Battalion in mid-October. Lieutenant-Colonel Misra was appointed to succeed him.

It was generally felt that he would be given some higher appointment after his leave as his three years in command were nearly over. All ranks were sorry to see him go and the diary remarks on his departure: "he has worked tirelessly since the day the Battalion was raised, and serving beneath him has been of inestimable value to many of us who arrived in India knowing nothing of Indian troops. The fine reputation the Battalion has always had in Arakan is a fitting tribute." It was a valedictory message that concealed a sense of loss felt by all in the Battalion.

* See Chapter XXV, narrative of the 9th Battalion, who fought throughout this monsoon.

The Battalion was now ordered to reorganize again as a purely machine-gun unit (i.e. without mortars), and during October received twenty-four new guns. It was withdrawn from the front line, but remained distributed in the forward area at call in case of need, carrying out its reorganization there as best it could.

This was indeed rather hard on the unit which might reasonably expect, after four months of fighting and four months of bunkers in the monsoon, to be allowed a month or two of rest for its reorganization. The diary remarks resignedly: "as we appeared to be the most vital troops on the front, only the mortar platoons were withdrawn to Bawli to change over to machine guns."

As regards training of the new platoons it adds: "it was first suggested by Corps H.Q. that training should be a fortnight. . . . We pointed out that 50 per cent. of men would have to start from scratch on the machine gun, so it was increased to four weeks." The voice of the battle-seasoned machine-gun expert adds: "it will be rather interesting to see what sort of gun-number emerges after a highly concentrated but extremely elementary course of four weeks' duration."

Operations during October were at a standstill, but it was with pleasure that the Battalion learned that Major Plant and Subadar Karam Singh had been awarded M.Cs. for the September operations.

The Battalion was now at last withdrawn and concentrated (less "D" Company*) under the 26th Division in its combined operations training area at Rejukhal Beach. This was a delightful spot, and in mid-November was a bracing climate. After a week of complete rest and sea bathing the men were in excellent fettle for their new training.

An unexpected loss, however, occurred when Lieutenant-Colonel Misra was suddenly ordered to leave and take command of the 2nd Battalion Ajmer Regiment. The order was quite unexpected, but the Battalion felt happy again when it was known later that the new Commandant was to be none other than Major Hodges—who had been with the Battalion all its time and knew every man. Indeed, no one had dared hope for this, as it was known that many majors in the Regiment waiting for battalion commands were senior to him.

On the Battalion's temporary withdrawal from Arakan its connection with the 25th Division ended, and it is fitting to record the complimentary messages the Brigade and Divisional Commanders sent it. Space, however, forbids reproduction of these documents. They were very gratifying, and it is not often that a unit earns from a commander in the field the remark that "it is a privilege to have the support of such fine troops."

* "D" Company had left in mid-November for Coconada to carry out "wet shod" training with a Brigade of the 26th Division that was to be the assault brigade for the attack on Ramree Island—a well-kept secret.

Amphibious operations, 1945

Training for combined operations continued through December, and on the 6th the Battalion had an opportunity of a reunion with the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles—football, a Khattak dance and an uproarious guest night were all enjoyed.

The new training engendered the greatest keenness, the men vying with each other in handling new equipment and working with landing craft.

On the 19th December Lord Louis Mountbatten visited the Battalion and at a small parade presented decorations (ribbons)—among them Subadar Matti Ullah's magnificently won I.O.M.

The Japs had now evacuated the Mayu Peninsula and Akyab—the 25th Division following on their heels. The retreat of their broken armies from the Imphal and Kohima battlefields to the Irrawaddy had rendered their withdrawal in Arakan inevitable, and they were shortly to be driven from the line of the Irrawaddy also.

Meanwhile the amphibious operations for which so much training had been done now came into the picture for the Battalion. From the 8th January to the end of the month it was moved to Chittagong (where "D" Company rejoined the Battalion from Coconada). It later embarked and landed on Ramree Island—the only surprise was that the landing was virtually unopposed.

The Battalion in its troop transport had a grand-stand view of the preparations for the assault. On a perfect dawn, it was an exhilarating sight to see first of all a squadron or more of majestic Liberators sweep overhead to drop their bombs in the known Jap positions, and then the battleship *Queen Elizabeth* and several destroyers lying close in to the shore fire salvo after salvo on to shore positions. The landing craft of the infantry ran in with inspiring precision, and Kyaukpyu was ours. The main object in capturing Ramree was to provide a forward airfield to support our further operations south to Rangoon, and Kyaukpyu was later transformed out of all recognition into a vast R.A.F. station.

The Battalion was soon split up again ("*more suo*" of a machine-gun battalion). "B" Company went down the west coast of the island; "D" Company held Kyaukpyu for a while, and then accompanied a force to capture Cheduba island, and "A" Company carried out a similar task on Sagu Island at the southernmost tip of Ramree. Of these only "B" Company met opposition to speak of and acquitted themselves well. "C" Company remained with the garrison of Kyaukpyu. All this was carried out without the Battalion's full complement of transport, as only eight jeeps with trailers and three weapon carriers for the whole Battalion could be embarked on the landing craft. The rest was still at Rejukhal awaiting transportation.

At this time the diary mentions two aspects of a machine gunner's life in

war that are perhaps worth recording. The first is satisfaction that the Battalion was now under one Division alone (the 26th)—“and one [it writes] that has really gone out of its way to help us. . . . We no longer feel that we are nobody’s baby.” The second is the inevitable comment on unequal opportunities gained by companies and platoons. It writes: “There is a tendency among J.C.Os. (and some officers) at present to feel that they are only carrying their guns around the country and will never get a target. Honour and glory will never be theirs. . . . I am sure that their little day will come. . . .”

In actual fact it came (and brought hard work) for nearly everyone during the course of February 1945, when operations continued all down the coast. The most noteworthy was a “Chaung-blocking” exploit carried out by No. 9 Platoon, for which the guns were mounted on landing craft. The results of the experiment were highly successful.

For the rest it was now clear that the enemy’s chief concern was only to clear out in safety, and the general feeling was to make the most of all opportunities and (to use Colonel Taylor’s favourite expression) not “be baulked by a handful of ragged-arsed Japs.” In fact to quote the diary once more at the end of February “every man is at the top of his form, convinced that he is invincible, and that this Battalion is the finest that ever came out of India.”

Taungup and Rangoon

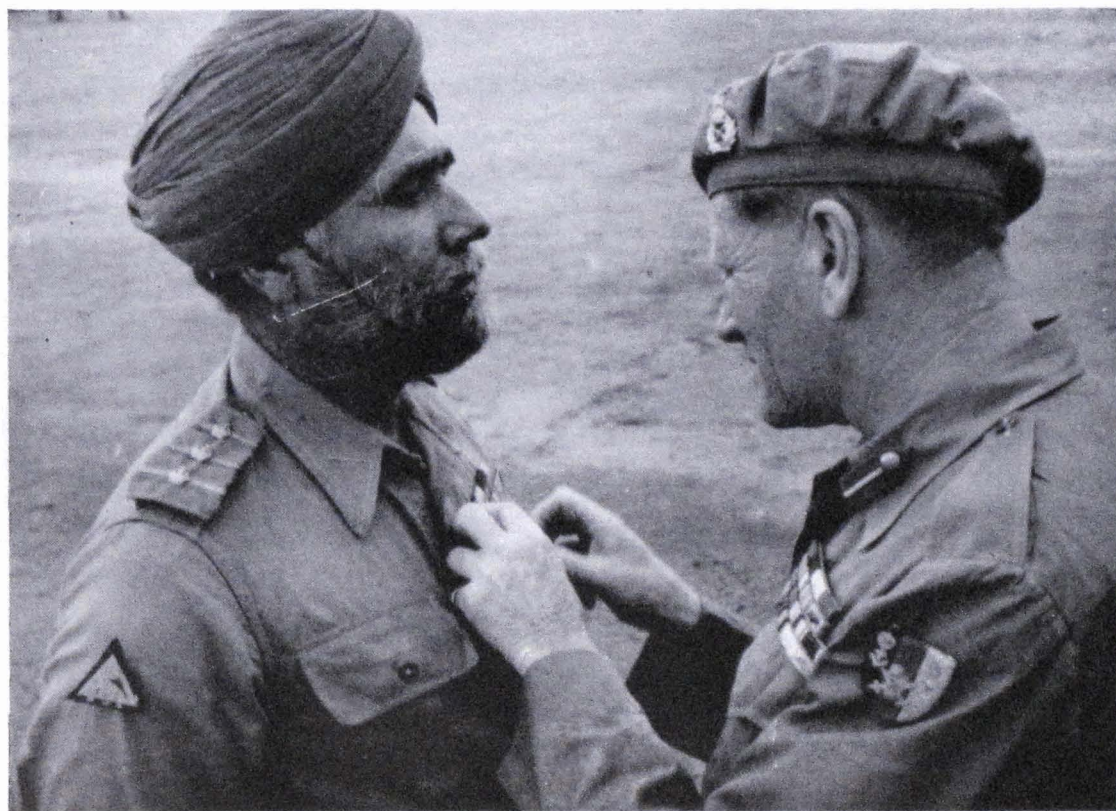
The Battalion’s next landing operation took place in March when Ramree Island had been finally cleared. This was an assault on to the mainland at Letpan with the capture of Taungup, forty miles south, as the final objective. Taungup was the western extremity of the Taungup-Prome pass, the way into central Burma. The operation was carried out from hundreds of small craft through chaungs and mangrove swamps; beaches were non-existent, rivers flowed at a great pace with dense jungle on the banks and beyond. “C” and “D” Companies were with the assaulting companies and were soon well on the road to Taungup with 4th Brigade of 26th Division. Heavy fighting followed before Taungup was captured, in thick impenetrable jungle. “C” Company carried its guns from Letpan to Taungup with the leading infantry, a remarkable feat in view of the nature of the country. Havildar Mohd Khan was decorated with the M.M. for acts of bravery in front of Taungup.

By the end of April 1945, the Battalion learned that the Division was to return to India and (more important) the Battalion was to accompany it and not be passed on to some other division to continue fighting with them, as had happened so often in the past. “A” and “C” Companies sailed for Madras on 28th March 1945, and everyone looked forward to a rest in India before the next landings. Unfortunately this was not to be; at Madras the ships were sent



1st SIKHS, TIARZA COLUMN, WANA, 1934

T. E. Macgregor; Davi, I.M.S.; R. Lawrenson; R. North; R. M. M. Lockhart; Brooke, R.T.C.; A. H. A. Empson; O'Donnel



**SUBEDAR-MAJOR SULAKHAN SINGH DECORATED BY FIELD-MARSHAL
AUCHINLECK WITH THE M.B.E.**

back to Ramree as there was one last operation to do. The Battalion concentrated on Ramree Island with 26th Division. Here Sir Oliver Leese addressed the Division and said that there was to be this one more operation before it rested.

On the last day of April the Battalion embarked in ships and landing craft and sailed for Rangoon.

The monsoon was once again approaching, but the forecast was still favourable. Nevertheless the weather broke and the landing on the river banks was carried out in torrential rain, beaches were thick mud and progress was across paddy, knee deep in water. "A" Company had travelled from Ramree in infantry landing craft and "B" Company did a twenty-five miles run in from the troop ships in assault craft—perhaps the longest of any such seaborne landing.

"A" and "B" Companies landed on the east and west banks of the Irrawaddy south of Rangoon with the assaulting brigades to clear the way up the river for the final assault on Rangoon itself. Shortly after the assault brigades had landed, it was discovered that the Japs had left the town, and "D" Company with the follow-up brigade sailed up the river in landing craft and landed at the docks. "D" Company were thus in fact the first company to enter Rangoon. It may be of interest to record that Rangoon was in a very sorry state. Refuse and debris littered the roads, all public services had obviously not been working for years, and the Japs had made no attempt to restore the town to normal after the British evacuation. Rice was rotting in go-downs with roofs open to the skies, and a general air of decay and desolation hung over the town. The Japanese had put nothing in, and taken almost everything worth having out. The rest had been damaged or plundered by marauding thieves. So much for the vaunted Japanese "sphere of greater co-prosperity."

Progress was now swift, and in a few days the Division had linked up with 14th Army advancing from the north.*

On 2nd June 1945, 26th Division sailed for India from Rangoon leaving the remainder of the task of dealing with the disorganized Japanese Armies in Burma to the newly formed 12th Army.†

The Battalion was stationed forty miles from Bangalore. Everyone went on a well-earned leave before getting down to further training for the next landings which were to be Malaya and Singapore. These were never carried out as peace was declared. During the Battalion's stay in Bangalore it managed to carry off a handsome silver cup, the prize for winning a rifle competition held by the Infantry Battalions. (If you don't know how to shoot with a rifle ask a machine gunner to show you the way!)

* For the story of the reoccupation of Rangoon see Chapter XX (narrative of the 4th Battalion).

† The 4th, 8th and 9th Battalions took part in this.

Sumatra and the aftermath of war

On 4th November the Battalion was again on its way overseas with the 26th Indian Division, this time the destination was Medan, Sumatra. Here for the first time in the Battalion's career the men were housed in good accommodation. Medan was a well laid out Dutch town with good roads and bungalows. The first task allotted to the Battalion was the protection of the R.A.P.W.I.,* of which there were 9,000 with many women and children in the area, against terrorists. Patrolling, searching, raiding, became the order of the day. Operations were chiefly against Indonesian extremists whose slogan was: "Indonesia for the Indonesian. Let us murder the Dutch our taskmasters, burn down their houses, loot murder terrorize boycott and intimidate, capture kill and kidnap anyway anyhow anywhere."

Towards the end of the month the situation deteriorated rapidly. The extremists and terrorists were gaining the upper hand and the Indonesian Governor could not control them. Shooting was taking place at all hours of the day and night and it was most unsafe to move anywhere without an escort.

It was time to act with a firm hand and General Christison, the Commander of the Allied Forces in Sumatra, did so. Hitherto, the order had been use minimum force to keep order and maintain security, for this was now substituted: "use maximum force" and a dusk to dawn curfew was enforced. Offensive action was also taken by raiding houses, etc., where arms were suspected of being concealed or where snipers were active.

In addition Colonel Hodges started to raise a Dutch Police Force in the Battalion's own area and managed to get in touch with the Dutch ex-Chief of Police in Medan. With this excellent fellow's help the scheme succeeded, and by 19th December the situation had greatly improved, so that the Battalion was able to have a merry and cheerful Christmas for its first after the war.

Apart from the difficult and exacting role the troops had to carry out in Sumatra, conditions of life there were in some respects quite extraordinary. For instance there was no currency. Dutch currency was unacceptable. Indonesia hadn't any and so Japanese money worth only the paper it was printed on was the only purchasing agent. Japanese guilders were issued free to all ranks for local purchase, etc. Its purpose value for some commodities was large, for others small.

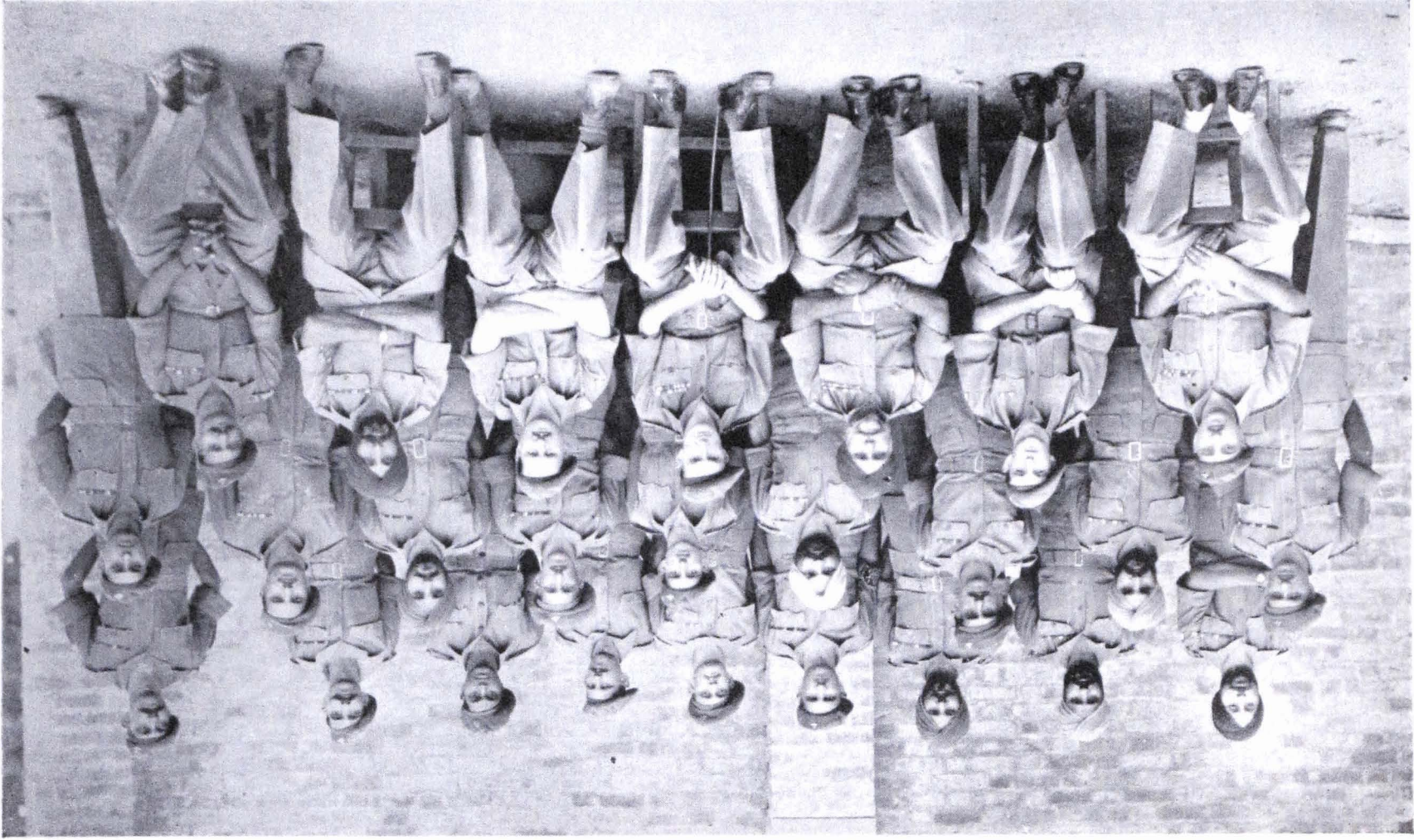
Barter in the early days was the real medium of exchange. Old clothes, blankets, sheets and cigarettes, etc., commanding a very high price. Fountain pens, typewriters, watches, bicycles and gramophones being the chief catches.

The Mess was run on Japanese money which cost no one anything and the officers fed like fighting cocks.

Dances and various entertainments took place nightly and the Mess became a really luxurious place.

* R.A.P.W.I.=Repatriated Allied Prisoners of War and Internees.

OFFICERS AND V.C.O.S. OF THE M.G. BATTALION THE FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT, NOVEMBER 1946



Back row: Sub. Phuman Singh; Jem. Bahadur Singh; Sub. Ujagar Singh; Sub. Duran Shah; Sub. Karam Singh, M.C.; Jem. Bhagat Ram; Capt. R. R. Chaudhuri, I.A.M.C.; Jem. Bhim Sain; Sub. Gopal Chand.
 Centre row: Sub. Ghulam Rasul; Jem. Izzat Khan; Jem. Shiv Singh, M.B.E.; Lieut. Modh Sarwar Khan; Sub. Mati Ullah, I.O.M.; Capt. Hari Singh; Capt. Mohd Ali; Capt. O. P. Bahri.
 Front row: Capt. Mohd Latif; Major D. S. Foster; Sub-Major Sulakhan Singh, M.B.E.; Lieut.-Colonel W. I. Moberly, O.B.E.; Major F. H. B. E. Wilding; Major Thakar Singh; Major Habib Khan.

The J.C.Os. Mess also started in earnest and it was said they were living so well that they never would want to return to India.

The Battalion continued as part of the garrison of Sumatra till the autumn of 1946.

While never called on for concerted operations of any size, small raids, ambushes and escort duty were continuous. Only on one or two occasions were sub-units of the Battalion required for a task that entailed functioning as a machine-gun formation. Even then the tasks were of little importance and merit no inclusion in the restricted space of this History.

During its period in Sumatra the Battalion was visited by the Army Commander, General Stopford, and the Supreme Allied Commander, Lord Louis Mountbatten.

In April Lieutenant-Colonel Hodges fell ill and was evacuated to India. Shortly afterwards he was nominated to the Staff College which meant that he would not return. This news was received with great regret, as he had been with the Battalion throughout its life, and had worked untiringly in its interests. At the same time for Lieutenant-Colonel Hodges it was the road to advancement and a great opportunity—the good wishes of all went with him.

He was succeeded in command by Lieutenant-Colonel W. I. Moberly, of the 3rd Royal Battalion.

The Battalion left Sumatra on the withdrawal of the 26th Indian Division in November 1946, and returned to India by sea.

It was disbanded next month as the result of a policy decision to concentrate all machine gun battalions in two regiments.

During its last difficult period in Sumatra when it had been employed like the rest of the 26th Division to maintain order during the upsurge of Indonesian nationalism, it had been converted to the role of an infantry battalion without entirely abandoning its machine guns. With admirable versatility the Battalion functioned as a dual purpose unit during this phase, and closed its magnificent if short career with an efficiency and reliability under most difficult and trying circumstances that was fully in keeping with the standards and traditions of the Regiment. It was one more chapter under new conditions and in a strange part of the world to add to the laurels of the Punjab Frontier Force.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE AFRIDI BATTALION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

THE MIDDLE EAST

Raising and Early days in India—Duties in the Middle East—Return to India and Reconstitution as the Khyber Rifles.

Raising and Early Days in India

THE Battalion was raised in Peshawar by Lieutenant-Colonel G. Brown (of the 14th Punjab Regiment) at Sialkot on 1st April 1942, nuclei being provided by Frontier Corps.

The following officers formed the original staff of the Battalion :

Lieutenant-Colonel G. Brown	..	..	..	Commandant	
Major R. N. Bacon	..	..	..	Second-in-Command	
Captain L. E. J. Luker	..	..	..	Wing Officer	} Joined the Battalion overseas
Captain Foster	..	..	..	Wing Officer	
Captain Redman	..	..	..	Wing Officer	
Second-Lieutenant G. Wontner-Smith	..	..	..	Quartermaster	
Captain J. Letts	..	..	..
Captain H. W. Watson	..	..	..
Captain R. V. E. Hodson	..	..	..	Adjutant	

The Battalion was composed of the following classes of Afridis: Malik Din Khel, Kamar Khel, Aka Khel, Kamarai, Kuki Khel, Sipah, Zakha Khel. Most of the J.C.Os. were selected from the N.C.Os. of the Frontier Corps units and Frontier Constabulary and promoted J.C.Os. Expansion was effected by recruitment in Tirah through the good offices of P. A. Khyber.

After the hot weather of 1942 had been spent in placing the Battalion on its feet and providing elementary training, it was ordered overseas to the Middle East. Leaving India in August 1942, the Battalion sailed for Suez six officers and 740 Indian ranks strong. After landing it went to Aleppo for a month to replace an Australian battalion, and then moved in M.T. to Persia. Here it was at first located at Paitak and carried out its first collective training by companies.

Duties in the Middle East

Life at Paitak was uneventful except for thieves who were very active and even broke into the Commanding Officer's and Quartermaster's tents. On 25th September 1942, the Battalion was moved in M.T. to Duroud, took over camp defence and trained as guerillas. Here also there had been recent robberies and raids by Luris and Bakhtiaris. As both were known to be war-like tribes (very different from the Persians) the Battalion was put on its mettle to guard the camp.

On 10th October the Army Commander arrived at Duroud to inspect, and that night the British and Indian Supply Sections and Field Supply Depot were raided. Some kits were stolen, but a thief was killed, and when the raid was repeated the next night, another thief was captured. The men were becoming alert.

A further raid on the night of the 20th resulted in a marked success, for the thieves were spotted entering the camp. The guards opened fire, killing five, wounding two and capturing one. Several of these proved to be members of Persian gendarmerie.

There was one further attempt on the 30th, but again the Supply Depot guard was too alert for the single thief who tried to enter. He was wounded, but got away leaving much blood on the ground.

After this raiding on the camp ceased, and October, November and December 1942, passed uneventfully till 29th December when the Battalion was moved again. This time it left Persia, and entraining at Khaniqin went by rail via Baghdad to Musayib in Iraq. Here it had to take over the entire garrison guards, a duty that entailed 275 rank and file excluding the Battalion's own guards on its camp area.

Here also there were expert thieves around (this time Arabs), and within a week of the Battalion's arrival a patrol of "A" Company encountered three thieves close to the wire of the Ordnance Depot. The patrol shot and wounded one (who was captured), but the others escaped. At the end of January 1943, the Battalion was relieved of some of the garrison guards by the 75th Cavalry preparatory to a further move.

This proved to be a return journey to Persia once more, and the Battalion left by rail on 17th February for Qasr-i-Shirin. After detraining at 7.30 a.m. on the 18th at Khaniqin, it completed the journey in M.T. the same day, arriving at Qasr-i-Shirin by 4 p.m. Local thieves lost no time in exploiting the Battalion as a new arrival, and successfully stole a sepoy's kitbag with all his personal clothing the very same night.

On 11th February, in accordance with an order from P.A.I.C.,* the Battalion reorganized on a new establishment as a Commando Battalion consisting

* P.A.I.C. = Persia and Iraq Command.

of four Rifle Companies and a H.Q. Company. The latter had an Administrative Platoon, a Signal Platoon, and a "Destruction Platoon."

Apart from getting accustomed to this rearrangement and training as quickly as possible the Battalion led an uneventful life for the rest of the month, except for a burst of heavy rain from the 22nd to 25th which made all but the metalled roads impassable. The Battalion was now brought direct under command of 3rd Corps H.Q. as Corps troops, but no special tasks resulted from this.

On 8th March Major E. E. French, M.C., arrived to take over command of the Battalion. Lieutenant-Colonel Brown returned to India, and the best wishes of all ranks went with him.

On 23rd March the Battalion was once more ordered to move—the destination being Kermanshah which was only a road move. Heavy rain, however, rendered the road impassable, and the Battalion did not arrive at Kermanshah till 29th. There it came under command of 12th Division.

April 1943 was uneventful, the only happening of interest being a "flag march" through Kermanshah on the 7th which went off peacefully.

On 5th May yet another move was ordered—this time right away to the Syrian-Turkish borderland. Accordingly, after handing over guards to the Royal Sussex Regiment, the Battalion moved in M.T. to Khaniqin on 16th May and entrained next day. A party with the unit M.T. vehicles moved by road all the way.

The Battalion spent two days in a rest camp at Baghdad and went on by train to Tel Kochek on 20th May. It arrived next day and embussed to Hassetche on the 22nd, to Deir-ez-Zor 23rd, and arrived at Raqqa on the 24th. Here it was encamped next to two Greek Brigades, but moving on next day via Aleppo, arrived at Aafrine at 8 p.m. on the evening of 25th May. One lorry is recorded as having "crashed," injuring twelve rank and file, on the 23rd.

The Battalion was now given the task of holding a series of posts on the Syrian-Turkish frontier and took them over from the 1st Jaipur Infantry. There were eight platoon posts, requiring two full companies. "A" and "C" Companies were detailed. The work was purely frontier control combined with intelligence duties (Turkey being entirely neutral during the war), and Lieutenant-Colonel French was placed in charge as Frontier Commander. No one was allowed to cross the frontier without proper passes, and anyone attempting to do so or arriving at a Frontier Post without papers was arrested and sent to Area H.Q. for examination. On 14th June on the receipt of a code word, the Battalion closed the frontier and held up all movement. Three German saboteur-agents were believed to be attempting to cross into Syria; but no contact was made at any of the Battalion's posts, and the frontier returned to normal on the 17th. The remainder of the month passed uneventfully.

Early in July 1943, the 9th Army Commander visited the Battalion and foreshadowed an early return to the normal infantry battalion's organization. The change recorded above in the previous February had been with a view to the Battalion's undertaking a commando role should the Germans advance on Persia through the Caucasus.* With the removal of this threat, such a role was no longer likely.

The Battalion at this time was very short of officers—J.C.Os. commanding companies as a result. The Army Commander promised to take the matter up. The difficulty was to find officers who knew Pashto.

A feature of the life on the Turkish Frontier was the difficulties experienced with M.T. on the dangerous roads of the Taurus mountains. On 29th July 1943, an empty ration lorry returning to Aafrine from Aleppo crashed, badly injuring the Battalion Quartermaster Havildar and three sepoy. This was only one of numerous minor accidents.

Early in August the Battalion was again warned for a move. This time to Innsariye to come under the medical authorities for malaria research. It had been on mepacrine suppressive treatment since the previous May.

Accordingly on 27th August 1943, the 2/7th Gurkhas relieved the Battalion and took over frontier control. The Battalion then moved by train from Qatma via Tripoli and Beirut to Innsariye, arriving on the 29th.

The anti-malarial orders came into effect next day. Half the Battalion were to remain on mepacrine treatment, the other half came off. One platoon (No. 9) was placed on "pammequin."†

The whole of September 1943, was thus passed with no role other than to remain under malarial observation. At the end of the month the total number of cases recorded was twenty-three, with only half the Battalion under suppressive treatment. This appeared to furnish the medical authorities with all the information they required, and on 3rd October 9th Army ordered the Battalion back to the Syrian-Turkish frontier to resume frontier control.

The Battalion did not move however, till the 30th. It detrained at Qatma Station on 1st November and companies marched to the Frontier Posts separately. Battalion H.Q. took over responsibility for frontier control from 3 p.m. on 3rd November.

During November increased vigilance was directed on this frontier to guard against infiltration of enemy agents. The Battalion however, was not to continue long on this duty. On the 24th it was relieved by the Alwar Infantry, and moved to Mosul in Iraq by road.

This time the journey was carried out without contretemps; the diary re-

* See Chapter XVIII. narrative of the 1st Battalion.

† Mepacrine and Pammequin were anti-malarial prophylactic substitutes for quinine when supplies of the latter fell into the hands of the Japanese with their conquests in South-East Asia.

marks "owing to no rain." It being early December, having dry weather was indeed fortunate for that part of the world at this time of year.

Mosul however, was not to be the Battalion's destination, and immediately on arrival there it was ordered on to Persia once more—in fact back to the Duroud area which it had left almost a year ago, where it again took over guarding the railway.

Moving in two halves, the Battalion reached Duroud on 9th December 1943, and took over protection of the railway—the vitally important link between the Western Powers and their Russian Ally,* on which so many Piffer battalions stood guard in the years 1942-45. For the Afridi Battalion there were thirty-eight posts to take over. The detachments moved out to them by rail and all were in position by 13th December. Heavy rain, already overdue, now descended and continued intermittently till mid-February 1944.

On 27th February a tragedy occurred when three men of a platoon patrol from one of the posts were drowned in a spate on the River Ab-i-doz. Only one body was recovered.

The rain also caused damage to the road, and parties from the Battalion that were not in railway posts were continually out working on road repairs.

From the end of February 1944, for two and a half months the Battalion continued on the trans-Persian railway without any major incident to record. An occasional attempt to snipe a post or interfere with the line found the men very alert, and the few such incidents that occurred resulted either in the capture or wounding of one or more of the miscreants by the Battalion's piquets or patrols. After March these attempts practically ceased altogether.

On 15th May the Battalion was ordered to reorganize on a new war establishment as a Garrison Battalion, and three weeks later, on 4th June, was relieved on the railway by the Machine-Gun Battalion of the Dogra Regiment. It moved to Tureh, where it spent a few days reorganizing as above, before moving on to Teheran, the Persian capital, where it arrived on 10th June. While here it had to provide detachments for guards on wire at Teheran, Kangavar, Hamadan and Kazvin.

June, July and August 1944, were spent in this area, the chief preoccupation being to safeguard road and railway property from wire thieves. With the Battalion's past experience in dealing with such activities, they were again more than a match for the would-be robbers, and one or more of them were shot on 15th and 17th July, and also on 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 6th August (this last one up a telegraph pole).

At the end of August the Battalion was relieved by the 17th Battalion, Baluch Regiment, and concentrated for training. The losses of wire during its time on this protective duty were small indeed. September 1944, was spent in

* See Chapter XVIII.

camp at Tureh training. The first three weeks were restricted to section, platoon and company exercises, and from the 23rd Battalion training was carried out. On 9th October the Battalion was visited while training by the General Officer Commander-in-Chief in Persia. He expressed himself pleased with what he saw.

Training continued throughout October, but on the 21st, "A" Company was detached to guard a sector of the railway once more. It took over from Sultanabad to Baqak with intermediate posts.

On 12th November His Excellency Sir George Cunningham, Governor of the North-West Frontier Province, visited the Battalion and very shortly afterwards the remaining companies were also reallocated to protective duties—this time at Hamadan and Kermanshah to guard vehicle parks. The Battalion was thus once more split up, and Battalion H.Q. moved to Hamadan on 25th November. It remained so till the end of the year, December being passed without incident.

Return to India and Reconstitution as the Khyber Rifles

Early in 1945, the Battalion was once more moved, this time to Khorramshahr, near Abadan on the Persian Gulf, where it took over guards on petrol installations. This was its final assignment overseas and, with the surrender of Germany in May 1945, it was warned for return to India, moving to Shaiba camp near Basra in preparation for the move.

Shortly afterwards three companies were flown to India by air and later the fourth company reached Karachi by sea in November 1945.

The Battalion assembled in Ferozepore preparatory to sending all ranks on sixty days' leave, after which it was moved to Sialkot for disbandment and final release of its personnel.

The Battalion, however, was not to become extinct. Although it had never been called on during the Second World War to fight in the field, it had rendered long and efficient service in many foreign lands, often under trying conditions. Its reward came with the news that it was to be revived as the resuscitated Khyber Rifles, a corps that had been, in years before the First World War, the guardians of the Khyber Pass. After the Third Afghan War the great importance of that northern gateway to the Indian continent had rendered necessary a garrison there of Regular troops, and a whole Brigade was for years located in Landi Kotal, with detachments at Landi Khana and Shagai. Now once more the famous pass and caravan route were to be protected by men drawn from the surrounding tribal territories. No more suitable mission for the future could have been found for the Afridi Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE GARRISON BATTALIONS AND GARRISON COMPANIES

The 25th Battalion F.F.R.—The Bombay Explosion, 1944—The 26th Battalion F.F.R. Iraq, 1942—The Garrison Companies—312 Garrison Company—512 Garrison Company.

The Garrison Battalions and Garrison Companies

THE policy of raising Garrison Battalions for the purpose of taking over static guards and protective duties in India (or elsewhere when the need arose) was soon implemented once it was realized that the Allies' resources of manpower and material would be strained to the uttermost to defeat the Axis Powers in the Second World War.

The personnel of such battalions were recruited from pensioners, ex-soldiers, low medical category and over-age applicants for recruitment. The classes normally enlisted in a Regiment were adhered to in finding the personnel for the garrison battalions of that regiment, and for the Frontier Force Regiment, therefore, Dogras, Pathans, Punjabis and Sikhs were enlisted. Of the Pathans the Khattak, Orakzai and Yusufzai clans were selected; and where Sikhs were concerned, no discrimination was made between any Jat Sikh, whether Manjha, Malwa or Doaba.

Two Garrison Battalions were raised in the Frontier Force Regiment during the Second World War—the 25th* and 26th Battalions, and both these gave staunch and valuable service that released active battalions to fight in the field.

As will be seen from the narrative that follows, the call to the pensioner and ex-soldier was readily answered, and the time taken to collect the required numbers was short. Moreover, being in most cases already trained and with a background of discipline and regimental tradition, they required much less work to bring them into shape as soldiers than the young recruit. The over-age and low medical category recruit could similarly be more quickly trained through being in association with old hands who already "knew the game" and helped along those who didn't.

The story of these two Battalions offers no excitement to the reader, for there was none in the work they had to do. Let no one, however, underrate the value

* It was decided to allot numbers from 25 upwards to Garrison Battalions throughout the Army.

of their services. They answered the call when the future was dark and no one knew how the war would end. They carried out an endlessly fatiguing duty for years—one indeed that the Regular soldier, when called on periodically to do it, dislikes more than anything else.

Here then is their story:

The 25th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment

The 25th Battalion was raised at Sialkot on the 1st April 1941, by Lieutenant-Colonel L. R. Knight, M.C., of the 5th Battalion (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides).

Lieutenant-Colonel L. R. Knight, M.C., 5/12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides)	Commandant
Captain Saad Ullah Khan, 6/12th Frontier Force Regiment	Second-in-Command
Second-Lieutenant J. L. Papworth, 4/12th Frontier Force Regiment	Adjutant
Second-Lieutenant Atma Singh, 7/12th Frontier Force Regiment	Quartermaster
Second-Lieutenant W. G. Sturrock, 5/12th Frontier Force Regiment (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides) ..	Company Commander
Second-Lieutenant Gurdial Singh, I.D.S.M., 3/12th Frontier Force Regiment (Retired Honorary Captain and Subadar Major)	Company Commander
Subadar-Major Bagh Ali (Retired Subadar of 1/12th Frontier Force Regiment)	Company Commander
Subadar Sohan Singh (Retired Subadar of the Guides)	Company Commander
Subadar-Major Sapuran Singh, S.B., O.B.I. (Retired S.M. of the Guides)	Subadar-Major

Recruitment went ahead rapidly, and by 15th June the authorized strength of 25 J.C.Os., 656 rank and file and 57 followers had been reached.

This was the signal for the employment without delay of the Battalion in order to release active troops for training or fighting in the field where (as this volume has already shown) they were at this time badly needed. Accordingly on 24th June the Battalion left by train for Bangalore, where it relieved the 2nd Bn. The Hyderabad Regiment as guards over prisoners of war camps.* These camps were a source of some concern to the authorities, as India had no experience in dealing with large numbers of European war prisoners, and several

* The numerous Italian prisoners taken in the Western Desert, Eritrea and Abyssinia (see Chapter XVI) were brought to India and accommodated in large camps in the Bangalore area.

senior general officers came to visit them. As a result, between July and November 1941, the Battalion was inspected by the Deputy Quartermaster-General, G.H.Q., the Army Commander and the District Commander. All expressed themselves pleased with what they saw, which goes to show that the well-trained soldier (and certainly the Piffer) does not easily forget his trade.

In January 1942, a fifth company for the Battalion was raised for affiliation to the Regimental Centre at Sialkot. It was to serve as a company to train and dispatch reinforcements to both Garrison Battalions of the Regiment. As such it filled an obvious need, for there was inevitable wastage, and the Regimental Centre had no organization to deal with it. Its existing training companies were affiliated to the active Battalions only.

The second Garrison Battalion of the Regiment, the 26th Battalion, was raised almost immediately afterwards, at the end of February 1942, and the 25th supplied a draft of 2 J.C.Os., 137 rank and file and 4 followers.

A year later the Battalion's spell as guards over prisoners of war ended, and on 19th February 1943, it left Bangalore for Bombay, where it was employed as guards and escorts—chiefly in connection with the many important installations that the war was bringing to India's chief port.

For the rest of the year there is little to tell of the exacting rounds of guards and duties which fell to the lot of a Garrison Battalion. In a unit, however, where Senior J.C.Os. are re-employed, promotions in the Order of British India are the well-merited reward that many of these fine old veterans can reap. During 1943-44 the following were gazetted:

Subadar-Major Sapuran Singh, Order of British India First Class with the title of Sardar Bahadur and Honorary rank of Lieutenant.

Subadar (now S.M.) Bahadur Jang, I.D.S.M., Order of British India First Class, with the title of Sardar Bahadur.

Subadar Khushia, Order of British India First Class with the title of Sardar Bahadur.

Subadar Shakar Mehdi, Order of British India Second Class, with the title of Bahadur.

The Bombay Explosion, 1944

In February 1944, the Battalion was inspected by his Excellency the Commander-in-Chief in India, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, who expressed himself satisfied with the Battalion's turnout and its work on guards and escorts.

Two months later Bombay was the scene of a terrible disaster when a 7,000-ton steamer carrying a large cargo of munitions, the bulk of which was high explosive, caught fire in the docks. Before she could be moved the fire reached the explosives and the ship blew up.

The explosion was of such intensity that the entire area of docks in the

vicinity was devastated. The ship itself was lifted right out of the water and lay on its side on an adjacent quay, and a large built-up area of Bombay City adjoining the docks was set on fire by burning fragments from the explosion.

The disaster created an emergency of the most acute and dangerous type, and the Battalion was called on to give all the help it could to save life and property while local fires were still burning. Later it helped to clear debris, etc., pending reconstruction of the dock area by the engineers.

In this work the Battalion greatly distinguished itself and earned the personal congratulations of His Excellency The Viceroy, Field-Marshal Wavell, for the work it did.

On 19th December Lieutenant-Colonel Knight, who had raised the Battalion, took leave pending the completion of his tenure of command and retired. He had worked hard for the Battalion and a great deal of its success was due to his efforts. All ranks were sorry to see him go.

He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel J. V. Gordon, of the 11th Sikh Regiment.

The Battalion remained in Bombay, continuing efficiently to perform its duties till August 1945, when, the war at last being over orders were received to release (by wasting away) all pensioners and "C" category men. Some worthy veterans of over fifty were ready enough to go back to their homes for a well-deserved rest. Nearly half the Battalion was affected by these orders.

Next month, the Battalion was warned to go to Multan to guard ex-I.N.A.* personnel—a distasteful duty. It arrived there on 1st November 1945, and its first task was to help No. 596 Indian Field Company build cages for these prisoners. These were ready by 24th December when the latter were moved into the cages from the British Barracks. The operation was entirely under the care of the Battalion and passed off without incident.

It must be recorded that this wholly unpleasant guard duty, which lasted three months, was a strain on the men, and the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Saadullah Khan, who had succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon, writes of it as follows: "The I.N.A. personnel made it very difficult and humiliating for the *jawns*, but the latter remained absolutely loyal throughout." Needless to say they had strict orders not to mix with the prisoners.

During the first three months of 1946 the Battalion was twice warned to move to Hyderabad Sind, but this transfer never took place.

Early in April came orders for disbandment, and the 25th Battalion moved to Sialkot where, on 20th May 1946 it ceased to exist.

The Battalion had carried out five years' arduous and exacting work of

* I.N.A., the so-called Indian National Army raised by the Japanese by methods of duress, and sponsored by Subhas Bose, to fight against us in Burma.

the kind that every soldier dislikes most. It had done it well and truly, and its final task over the I.N.A. prisoners had been recognized in a letter of appreciation from the Area Commander. It had maintained the standards and traditions of the Regiment and the Frontier Force.

The 26th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment

The 26th Battalion was raised at Sialkot on 1st March 1942, the first Commanding Officer being Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Sher Mohd Khan, C.I.E., M.B.E. The other officers at this time were Major Iqbal Hussain, an officer from the already embodied Territorial Battalion,* and also Captain H. S. Kandheri.

Originally the Battalion was organized in two wings, right and left, the right wing consisting of the P.M. and Dogra Companies, the left wing of Sikhs and Pathans. Companies were initially commanded by J.C.Os.

The first duties of the unit during 1942 were railway protection on the main line from Ludhiana to Jullundur, including the Beas and Sutlej bridges. At this time the internal situation was eminently satisfactory in the Punjab and life was uneventful.

It was not so satisfactory however elsewhere, and the subversive elements in the country who were ready to work with any power so long as they secured the downfall of the British administration in India, had already allied themselves with the Japs. Under guidance from them disturbances broke out at this time in Bihar, and attacks were directed against the main Allahabad-Calcutta Railway line at the one vulnerable bottleneck between Mogul Serai and Arrah. These attacks, in fact, interrupted the line for a time causing considerable dislocation, since the entire supply L. of C. for the army on the Burma border, both from Bombay and the Punjab, had to use this line.

Railway security therefore, was of considerable importance and though the work was boring and dull, it was in fact the first important assignment entrusted to the Battalion. It did not, however, last long; and the Battalion being up to its authorized strength by October 1942, it was at once earmarked to go overseas.

Iraq, 1942

Accordingly the unit proceeded to Iraq in December 1942, disembarking at Basra on the 23rd. The 25th Battalion remained in this area of South Iraq throughout the remainder of the war, carrying out static roles as guards and escorts. At first it was located at Ma'Qil, which is the docks area of Basra, on the Shatt al Arab slightly up-stream of Ashar, which is really the waterfront of Basra.

* See Chapter XXVI.

Early in 1943 the unit moved out from Ma'Qil to the Zubair area, which is about fifteen miles west of the Shatt Al Arab, and out in the desert proper, well clear of the river and palm belt. Zubair and Shaiba were two great military camps out in the desert adjoining one another. Shaiba was north of Zubair and had a station on the main line between Ma'Qil and Baghdad. Incidentally, it was the scene of the first major battle of the Mesopotamian Campaign of 1915-16, in which the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the Regiment were so heavily involved.*

Throughout 1943 the unit continued with garrison duties; now however, combining them with a more mobile role, involving an occasional desert column against marauding Arabs.

In September 1944, the first Commandant of the unit retired, the command of the Battalion was taken over by Lieutenant-Colonel E. de G. H. Bromhead, from the 14th Battalion.

By this time the Battalion was stationed at Shaiba, in excellent lines. The duties of the unit were still garrison duties: guarding such places as No. 7 Base Ordnance Depot and a large number of smaller installations. In addition the unit was liable to be called upon to carry out a mobile role, including that of railway protection up beyond Ur of the Chaldees, 120 miles up the railway to Baghdad.

In the Spring of 1945 the unit was fortunate in being able to run two training camps. The first was at Andimishk in Persia at the foot of the Persian hills where the railway and the road from Khorramshahr to Teheran leave the plain and climb up into the hills. All who knew this great highway at this time will carry memories of long convoys roaring up the road with "supplies for Russia," and the railway with long freight trains similarly engaged. It was indeed these vital supplies and munitions that enabled the Russians first to save Stalingrad, and later to launch the counter-offensives of 1944 and 1945 that finally drove the Germans out of Russia.

This great road was engineered and maintained by the U.S.A., who had camps all along this L. of C. The railway, a standard gauge one, was originally built by the Germans and was now manned by U.S.A. engineers.

The second training camp was at Ur of the Chaldees, and was a great contrast to the roar and traffic of the camp at Andimishk. It took place later in March and April of 1945. It was completely quiet, and although right out in the desert, with not a tree or bush in sight, it was very much appreciated by the men. There was a permanent staging post located here, rations etc. were excellent, the local Arab town of Nasariya on the River Euphrates kept up a regular supply of fresh vegetables and ice, and a fresh-water canal from the Euphrates ran past the camp. The camp was about two miles from the ruins of the ancient

* See Chapter VI.

city of Ur, whose brick-built ziggurat stood up as practically the sole landmark in the vast desert. It was round these ancient ruins that training was carried out.

The summer of 1945 was spent in Shaiba, a long hot weary summer with heavy guard duties. Its monotony was broken with an unusual and, it is believed, unprecedented rainstorm at the end of July. Such a thing had, apparently, not been experienced before in the long hot dry summer of Iraq.

During 1945 the Battalion started sending men on leave to India, and quite a number were able to proceed, some by sea and some by land convoy through Persia to Baluchistan.

In addition a certain number of men, including the Sikh Company complete, were sent up to the Indian leave camp at Karina in Persia. For officers, Paiforce as the British Forces in Iraq and Persia were known at this time, ran a leave camp at Beirut on the Lebanon coast. Several officers were fortunate in being able to enjoy this camp, which gave opportunity for seeing Palestine, Cyprus, Syria and the Lebanon, and even Egypt. The journey across was by convoy from Baghdad via Rutbah Wells to Mafraq in Transjordan, and thence northward to Damascus. By this time there was a metalled road right across the desert.

The Victory Days, VE and then VJ found the Battalion still in Shaiba. The end of the war made little difference. The work of guards and duties went on just the same.

The winter of 1945-46 passed in the same way, all wondering when the Battalion would go, and then in February of 1946 came the orders to leave. It was a very cheerful unit which packed up and moved, first to an old convalescent depot at Zubair and then on 2nd February 1946, to embark at Ma'Qil on the *Varsova*. The long, weary days of guards and duties were at last finished and the Battalion was on its way to India travelling in comfort, in almost pre-war conditions.

The Battalion disembarked at Karachi on 7th February 1946, a red carpet, bands and a pleasant reception awaited it. The Battalion had not even left the dock area when the 3rd Royal Battalion arrived on the *Carthage* with units of the 4th Indian Division. For them it was a homecoming after five and a half years of campaigns in the Sudan, Eritrea, the Western Desert, Sicily, Italy and Greece.

The Battalion spent a pleasant few days in Karachi, and then home to the Depot at Sialkot where it arrived at about 9 p.m. on 15th February 1946.

The Diary ends with the following words of farewell: "The job is done and now we are busy demobilizing ourselves. Soon the men will all have gone their several ways, to their villages, other employment, and the autumn of their lives.

"We wish them well, we haven't done much, certainly nothing spectacular, but the long weary hours of watching and guarding through all the extremes

of the Iraq climate, will ever be a tribute to the discipline and patience of the *jawan*."

It may be added that the Battalion's four years' good and faithful work was one more tribute to the Regiment and the Frontier Force.

The Garrison Companies

These were raised during the Second World War for work similar to that described above for Garrison Battalions. They were also recruited from similar categories of personnel. Seven such companies were raised in the Regiment and six were given numbers 1 to 6 with the Regimental number of 12 suffixed; thus the first called 112 Company and the sixth 612 Company. The seventh was numbered 85.

Five of the six, i.e., Nos. 112, 212, 412, 612 and 85, were all raised by Colonel Redding at the Regimental Centre, Sialkot, during the course of the war, and carried out their prescribed role of guards and duties in various locations in India. They were also similarly disbanded at the end of the war.

The remaining two, Nos. 312 and 512, were retained permanently after the war and their records are as follows:

312 Garrison Company

This Company was raised at Drigh Road, Karachi, by Captain Abdul Rahman, as 39 Garrison Company, in 1942. It became 312 Garrison Company in 1945. It was composed of four Pathan Platoons and one Company Headquarters Platoon, all provided by the Regimental Centre.

It remained at Drigh Road during 1942 and 1943, and moved to the Sukkur-Rohri area in 1944 and to Malir Cantt in 1945. Thereafter it served during the post-war period in Southern India at Vizagapatam and the Nilgiris. Captain E. C. L. Jones succeeded Captain Abdul Rahman in command in 1947.

512 Garrison Company

Was originally "D" Company of No. 1 Labour Battalion, which was first commanded by Major Robinson and raised on 1st February 1941. The Battalion was ordered overseas to Iraq on 6th November 1941, and on the following 16th April at Basra, the Company was separated from it and rechristened No. 67 Garrison Company, being placed under the command of Major Taylor.

It remained in Basra till 23rd February 1944, when it returned to India, but went overseas again on 14th April—this time to Persia, where it performed guard duties on the trans-Persian Railway, bridges and ammunition dumps. After a course of training in field duties at Baghdad, the Company went to

Abadan on guard over the oil refineries in April 1945. Next month it was given the name of 512 Garrison Company, Frontier Force Regiment, and in April 1946, it moved once more to Basra. The following February it returned to India, and after the establishment of Pakistan, was located at Bannu on the North-West Frontier.

CHAPTER XXX

THE FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT IN THE PAKISTAN ARMY

Independence and the Partition of the old Indian Army—2nd Battalion (Guides) (old 5th Battalion Guides)—3rd Battalion (old 1st Battalion P.W.O. Sikhs)—4th Battalion (old 2nd Sikhs)—5th Battalion (old 3rd Royal Battalion Sikhs)—6th Battalion (old 4th Sikhs)—13th Battalion (old 8th Battalion)—14th Battalion (old 9th Battalion)—Conclusion.

Independence and the Partition of the old Indian Army

THE History of the Frontier Force Rifles, to which this is a companion volume, ended in 1946—a hundred years after the Punjab Irregular Force came into existence. It was completed when historians were still too close to the achievement of independence by Pakistan and India in 1947 to recount any of the events of that time with certainty, or to show the final shape of the Frontier Force units after the old British Indian Army had been divided between the two countries.

With the elapse of a decade since “Independence,” it is possible to rectify this omission, and this chapter therefore aims at giving some account of the Battalions of the Frontier Force Regiment and their doings since July 1947, when the new State of Pakistan came into being as a partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

When the two self-governing and independent States of India and Pakistan were constituted and took over the Indian continent, the division between them was based on the preponderance of religion. This led to the State of Pakistan being divided into two separate areas over 1,000 miles apart. This geographical anomaly was to have considerable effect on the lives of the military units of Pakistan, as will be seen from the narratives of the Battalions of the Regiment.

The upheavals that accompanied the establishment of the States of India and Pakistan and the double-headed problem of refugees from the two countries are the concern of this History only in so far as individual Battalions of the Regiment were called on to deal with the emergency. To that extent only will they be referred to here. A crucial difficulty was the fixing of the boundary in the Punjab between Pakistan and India, and as an offshoot of this arose the question of who should have Kashmir—a problem that after fifteen years seems no nearer solution. As, however, it has led to a state of armed readiness being maintained by both India and Pakistan and the possibility that the Regiment

might at any time be involved in hostilities in that region, the reader should understand how the State of Kashmir came to be a bone of contention.

When the last British Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, was organizing the hand-over of British India to the two independent countries of India and Pakistan he decided that the rulers of the Indian States (who were in fact already independent and not part of British India) should be allowed to “accede” to either Pakistan or India according to their geographical position and other relevant considerations. The Maharaja of Kashmir, a Hindu Ruler over a predominantly Moslem state, decided to accede to India and himself fled to Delhi. The Pakistan Government opposed this decision and Pakistani tribesmen invaded Kashmir. The Indian Government flew in troops and checked the invasion at the entrance of the road from Pakistan to the Kashmir Valley near Baramula. A position of stalemate supervened with each side holding the territory it had occupied and although the arbitration of the United Nations Organization has been sought, no solution of the problem acceptable to both sides has been found up to the time when this volume is going to the press.

To return, however, to the events immediately following partition and independence in 1947, the first military problem confronting G.H.Q. and the British Government in New Delhi when the decision to create the twin independent States of Pakistan and India was taken, was how to deal with the great Indian Army as yet not partitioned—fresh from its victories in the Second World War and the finest voluntary military force in existence at the time in the whole world.

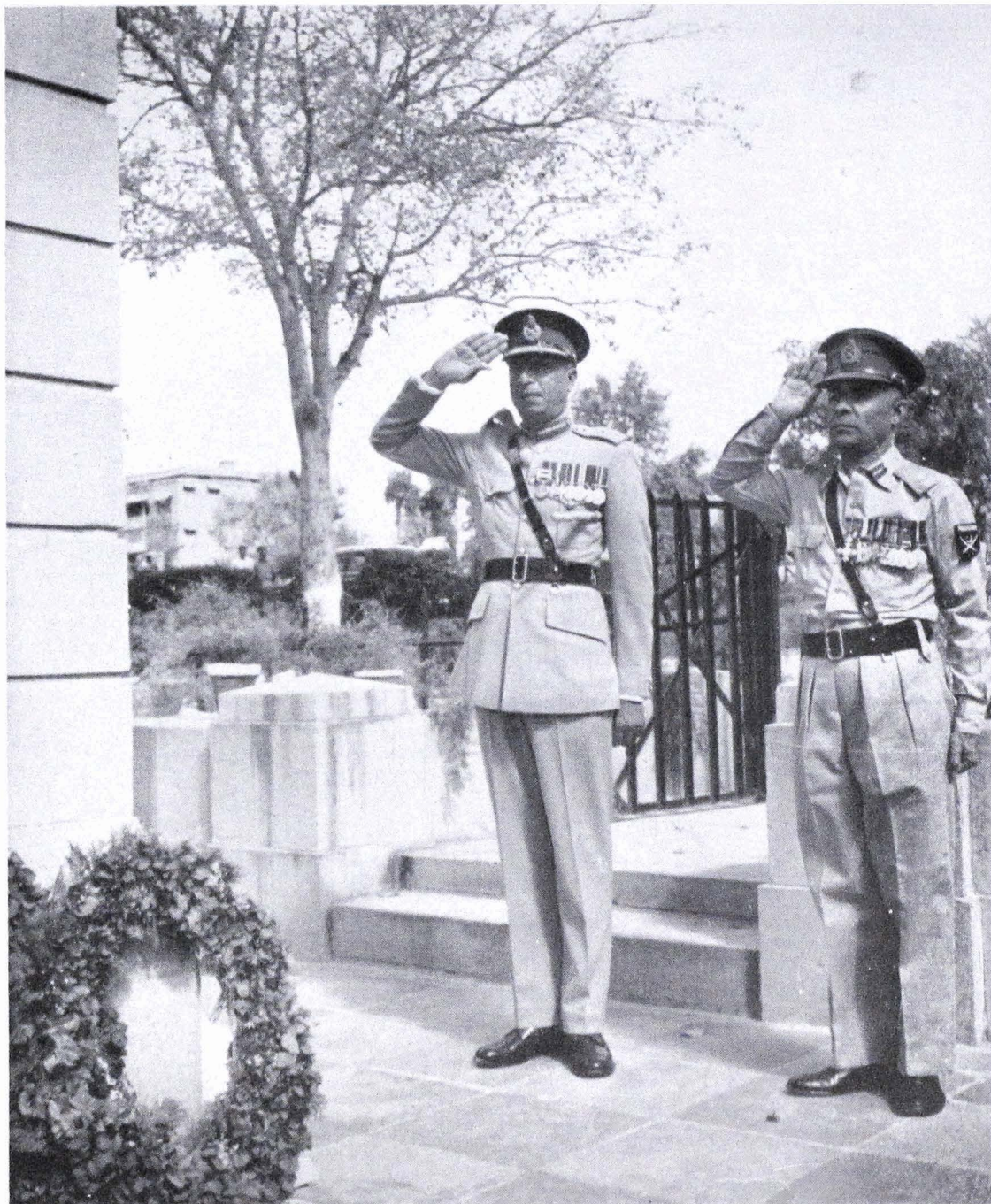
That it must be divided between the two countries was inescapable, and where units composed of men entirely from either Pakistan or India were concerned the problem was obviously simple. The unit was allocated en bloc to the Army (Navy or Air Force) of the country from which its men came—thus, Gurkha, Mahratta, Rajput, etc., regiments became naturally part of the army of the new State of India.

In the case of Pakistan however it was not so simple. Hardly any regiments were composed entirely of men drawn from the territories of the new State of Pakistan, and many of mixed composition had half their men from India (of Hindu or Sikh persuasion) and half Muslims from areas that were now to be Pakistan. To cut these units in half and send officers and men who had formed ties, traditions and brotherhoods on many an arduous campaign or field of battle to what must have been a new world was heartrending enough. When it had to be done under the conditions that resulted from the haste with which the two new states had been formed, only those who had to struggle with the situation could tell the tale—and it has yet to be told in full.

The units of the Frontier Force Regiment came naturally into this latter category, and they had to bid farewell to their Sikhs and Dogras whose future lay with India's Army and to whose units they went. The Regiment received in



UNVEILING OF SECOND WORLD WAR PLAQUE, P.F.F. MEMORIAL, KOHAT



UNVEILING OF SECOND WORLD WAR PLAQUE, P.F.F. MEMORIAL, KOHAT

Lieut-General Nasir Ali Khan, Major-General M. Hayaud Din after the unveiling

exchange Muslim personnel (from regiments allocated to India), who had been recruited from districts that would now be Pakistan.

In the individual accounts of the doings of Battalions in the Pakistan Army that follow in this chapter, a description is given of the unprecedented conditions in which these movements were safely carried out.

In 1948 the Pakistan Army was under the command of General Sir Douglas Gracey. This was in pursuance of the Qaid-i-Azam's (Mr. Jinnah's) policy of obtaining all the help possible from British officers. As soon as all the necessary moves had been completed and readjustments made, the work of rebuilding units and brigades commenced and was carried out largely under newly appointed Pakistani commanders, though a number of British officers were retained on a temporary basis for several years. Both the Frontier Force Regiment and the Frontier Force Rifles were included. An Appendix* also shows the renumbering that subsequently took place, from which it will be seen that several of the war-raised Battalions of the Frontier Force Regiment were retained in the Pakistan Army as permanent Regular Battalions. Among these was the 9th Battalion which, as has been seen in Chapter XX above was at first allocated to the rebuilding of the 2nd Sikhs, but later became a separate Regular Battalion (additional to the 2nd Sikhs) in the Regiment.

The story now is best continued in the individual narratives of the Battalions, the thread being taken up at the location where each found itself when independence was proclaimed and the new State of Pakistan was formed. At the same time it will be noted that these narratives include only those of the old Frontier Force Regiment, commencing with the present 2nd Battalion (Guides). (The present 1st Battalion was formerly a battalion (The 6th Royal Battalion) of the Frontier Force Rifles whose stories are not included in this volume.)

2ND BATTALION (GUIDES)

(OLD 5TH BATTALION QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN CORPS OF GUIDES,
FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT)

At the time of partition the Battalion was stationed at Razmak and the class composition was:

"A" Company	..	..	Pathans.
"B" Company	..	..	Sikhs.
"C" Company	..	..	Punjabi Muslims.
"D" Company	..	..	Dogras.
H.Q. Company	..	..	25 per cent. each class.
Administrative Company	..	..	25 per cent. each class.

* Appendix X. Changes in titles of the Frontier Force Regiment 1846-1956.

When the time came to opt for either dominion the Sikhs and Dogras, naturally, opted for India and their place had to be taken by other Muslims.

Accordingly on 5th August 1947, the Dogra Company left to join 3rd Indian Grenadiers, who were stationed at Thal. Before the departure the Dogra J.C.Os. were entertained in the Officers' Mess, followed by a formal dining out in the J.C.Os. Mess and then a "bara khana" for the Dogra Company. Finally a ceremonial parade was held and heavily garlanded, the Dogras were given a great send off.

They arrived safely in Thal, and here it should be mentioned for the benefit of those without knowledge of the conditions of insecurity that prevailed at this time, that the lives of Hindus and Sikhs, soldiers or civilians, were in great jeopardy in Pakistan (just as those of Muslims were in the East Punjab Province of India) and elaborate protective measures were necessary. This was acutely to be felt, when very soon afterwards the 3rd Indian Grenadiers commenced their journey from Thal to India. The Battalion arrived safely as far as Kohat, but as they continued their journey to the Indus crossing at Khushalgarh their train was attacked by a large mob of Adam Khel Afridis and other Pathans. The Guides Dogra Company was heavily involved in the fighting that ensued and in which the Pathans were beaten off with heavy losses; but the Dogras also suffered tragic casualties amounting to six killed and twelve wounded. The Indian Grenadiers were commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Shebbeare formerly of the Guides Cavalry and a grand nephew of the gallant winner of the V.C. at Delhi ninety years before.* Lieutenant-Colonel Shebbeare was himself wounded in the attack on the train.

The Muslim companies of the Guides were terribly shocked when the news of this occurrence reached Razmak, for the Sikh Company was still with the Battalion and its safe transfer to India was a matter of much concern as it had still to be carried out.

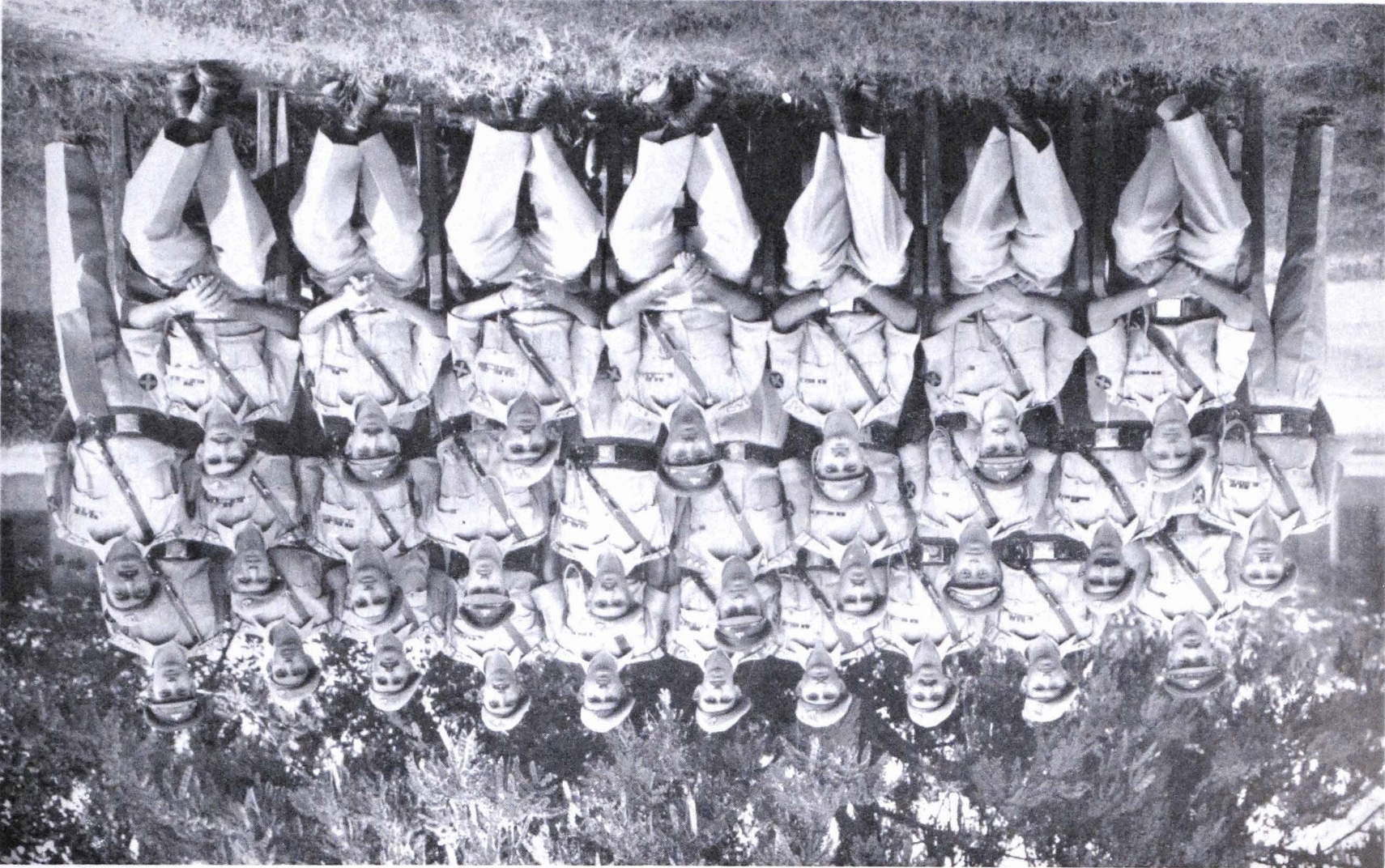
Fortunately farewells and a "bara khana" for the Sikhs had already been held and on 9th October when the Battalion was detailed for duty on the road to the Razmak Narai for normal "road opening," no one but the Commanding Officer knew that when the Battalion returned the Sikhs would be gone. They were rushed through in hooded lorries, and not even a farewell word, handshake or wave could be given to these staunchest of warriors to wish them God speed to their new country and independence.

On the return of the Battalion to Razmak the news that the Sikhs had reached Miranshah and been flown thence safely was received with great relief. The Company ultimately joined the 7th Battalion 11th Sikh Regiment at Jubbulpore.

The Guides Infantry were now at half-strength, but a company of Punjabi Muslims joined from the Rajput Regiment and became "B" Company of the

* See Appendix IX.

LAST GROUP PHOTOGRAPH OF OFFICERS AND J.C.O.s, 2nd BATTALION (GUIDES) THE FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT IN THE ORIGINAL GUIDES SILVER BELT AND CUMMERBAND



First row in chairs—Sub. Gul Hassan; Major Khwaja Javed Elias; Major Mohd Hussain Qaisrani; Lieut.-Colonel Ishtiaqul Rahman Khan, *psc.*; Sub. Shah Wali; Major S. A. R. Durani; Sub. Mohd Afsar.
Second row standing—Jem. Spm Gul; Sub. Gulistan; Capt. A. Malek; Jem. Fatah Haider; Capt. Aftab Ahmed Khan; Sub. Jahan Dad; Lieut. Jamsahid Burki; Sub. Khalilur Rehman; Sub. Mehrban Khan; Sub. Wisal Mohd.
Third row standing—Capt. A. Shamsul Zaman; Jem. Mohd Khan; Jem. Mohd Sadig; Jem. Nur Khan; Jem. Sher Hassan; Jem. Amir Khan; Jem. Aftab Khan; Jem. Allah Dad; Jem. (H.C.) Sultan Mohd; Jem. Ghulam Abbas; Capt. H. A. Baig.

Guides. The remaining deficiency was gradually made up by drafts from the Regimental Centre.

On 6th November the Pakistan Government announced its decision to evacuate Razmak*—since it was clearly too expensive a commitment for a small state like Pakistan to maintain. For a period of some thirteen years after its establishment it served its purpose well, for during the early thirties Waziristan settled into such a degree of general security that movement on all of its roads without special protection was the daily routine. That Razmak was responsible for this cannot be doubted, and only the mishandling of the events (both politically and militarily) that led to the rise of the Faqir of Ipi, followed by the outbreak of the Second World War, destroyed this unique state of affairs. There is much to be learned from the story which is told in the narratives of the Guides Infantry in Chapter XI, and of the 6th Royal Battalion Frontier Force Rifles in Chapter XIII of the Frontier Force Rifles History.

To return to the story of the Guides Infantry in Pakistan, the Battalion left Razmak on the latter's evacuation in December 1947. Arriving at Bannu on the 30th, it camped on the golf course, and was entertained by the 2nd Sikhs (now the 4th Battalion). Its destination was Kohat where it arrived on 4th January to find the "Cookies" and the 2nd Battalion Frontier Force Rifles in the station. The Guides Cavalry also arrived in Kohat in February thus bringing the old Corps of Guides together again after sixteen years and enabling them to have once more a combined mess.

Life for the next two years followed the normal routine of peace time, and the next event of note was the celebration in Abbottabad of the Piffer centenary in October 1949. Sports accompanied the festivities and the Guides hockey team reached the final where it lost to the Regimental Centre.

In July 1950, Independence Day was celebrated in Kohat with a Piffer Reunion. Besides the Guides the 1st and 2nd Battalions Frontier Force Rifles and the Pathan Regimental Centre were in Kohat and a large number of pensioners were invited. A ceremonial parade was held followed by a "bara khana" and a traditional Khattak dance.

Shortly after this on 24th August 1950, the Guides Infantry moved from Kohat to Abbottabad and were given a great send off by the Cavalry and their sister Battalions the 1st and 2nd Frontier Force Rifles.

In February 1951, the Guides carried out a snow warfare exercise called "Exercise Eskimo" in the Nathia Gali area. On 25th February the Battalion marched from Abbottabad and established a firm base in Bara Gali from where patrols were sent out in various directions lasting from twenty-four hours to seventy-two hours. The exercise being experimental and the first one of its

* For the story of this great British fortress in the heart of Waziristan see Chapter XI.

kind in Pakistan, was witnessed by some V.I.Ps. and officers from G.H.Q. and other formations. Among the spectators were: Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J., M.B.E., M.C., Brigadier M. G. Jilani, Brigadier Allen Block, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., Military Adviser to U.K. High Commissioner.

In May 1952, the Guides Infantry were ordered to East Pakistan to Mainamati. East Pakistan being separated from West Pakistan by over 1,000 miles of Indian territory this was almost the equivalent, from an administrative point of view, of foreign service.

On 24th May 1952, the Battalion began to prepare for the move to East Pakistan. Last details were sent on leave. Deficiencies in men were made up from the Regimental Centre, men's accounts were completed, medical inspections and inoculations were carried out and surplus baggage was moved.

July and August were spent in watercraft training at Ghazi and Torbela near Haripur. More officers joined to bring the Battalion up to strength.

On 25th September the Battalion moved by two special trains from Havelian and arrived at Karachi on 28th September. On 2nd October it embarked on board s.s. *Arona* and disembarked at Chittagong on 11th October, 1952.

On disembarkation the Battalion moved by rail to Mainamati, but within a week was deployed in the Ranipur district along the Indo-Pakistan border to prevent the smuggling of jute.

Battalion Headquarters was established at Kurigram, "A" Company at Chilmari, "B" Company at Rohumari, "C" Company at Phulbari and "D" Company at Nageswari. Besides completely stopping the smuggling of jute the men infused confidence in the border population and made a good impression on them by their devotion to duty and sense of fair play.

In April 1953, due to a financial stringency in the country the Government decided to reduce the strength of the armed forces. In the process which was called "Scheme Axe," the Battalion sent more than 200 men to the Regimental Centre for demobilization. Among those who left was a good old soldier Captain Shahzada Khan popularly called "Shandy," Subadar Mir Ajab, Jemadars Saifur Khan, and Mohd Zar and the Mess Havildar Daud Khan. Losing so many people at a time was a great shock to officers and men and there were touching scenes at the railway station. A great majority of the men wanted to serve on but they could not be kept.

The Battalion's tour in East Pakistan ended in January 1955, when it was relieved by the 2nd Sikhs and embarked at Chittagong on 6th January in the rat-infested *Safine-e-Nusrat*. After an uncomfortable voyage marked by inroads by rats on the men's clothes (and anything else they could find to eat) the Battalion disembarked at Karachi on 15th January and was given a great reception by the 8th Battalion—whose commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Aslam Aziz Sheikh, was an old Guide.

The Battalion's new station was Multan. This had old-time associations for the Guides, for Multan Fort was captured in 1848 by Risaldar Fatch Khan and a party of Guides who drove off the cavalry of Mool Raj. "Mooltan" is to this day one of the Battalion's battle honours. There is an ancient Persian couplet which reads: "Char cheez ast tofa-e Multan. Gard, garma, gada-ogoristan," which has been rendered in English into the following verse:

"Of four things famed Multan's the seat
Graves and beggars, dust and heat."

The last Piffer Battalion to be stationed in Multan before the Guides went there on 21st January 1955, was the 5th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles. The author was in command and painted for the Battalion Christmas card in 1934 a picture showing the Battalion marching through a dust storm in a heat-laden atmosphere with beggars by the road side and the white dome of the tomb of Mool Raj in the distance. The picture is in the Mess of 5th Battalion Frontier Force Rifles—now the 10th Battalion of the Regiment.

In August 1955, a young second-lieutenant, by name Said Mohd, joined the Battalion and became the fourth generation of his family to serve with the Guides, for his three immediate forebears had given successively their life-long service with the Corps.

His father, Subadar Mir Ajab had served with the Guides from 1929 to 1953 and his grandfather, Subadar Khushal Khan, served in the Guides from 1891 to 1922. His great-grandfather, Subadar Rasul Khan, had joined the Guides on the day it was raised and died in 1895 while serving with the Corps.

The following year, 1956, was marked by the creation, on 23rd March, of Pakistan as a Republic. With this the final reorganization of the Frontier Regiments into one and the renumbering of the Battalions came about. Accordingly, from here on in the closing pages of this History the Battalions will be called by their present numbers and titles—the old one being added where necessary in brackets. Thus the Guides Infantry now became the 2nd Battalion (Guides) the Frontier Force Regiment.

On 7th April 1956, the 2nd Battalion (Guides) was moved to Lahore and was welcomed at the airport by the 12th, 14th and 15th Battalions of the Regiment.

While in Lahore the Battalion was selected to find a guard of honour for Mr. Chou en Lai, the Chinese Prime Minister.

The guard numbering 100 rank and file were at Lahore airport at 7 a.m. on 28th December. The Premier's plane developed engine trouble and arrived late by six hours at 1 p.m. The guard remained waiting at the airport, standing all the time to preserve the creases of their uniform. After the inspection the Premier remarked that he had rarely witnessed such a "strikingly smart and attractively turned out guard!" The Governor, Mr. Mushtaq Ahmad

Gurmani, also congratulated the guard, remarking: "a ceremony of this perfection is rarely seen."

The Battalion remained in Lahore up till the time of writing of this record and it provided several further guards of honour for personages of importance, earning high praise from all of them for their smartness in drill and turn-out.

Many also were the successes achieved in the field of sport and athletics during the period covered by this chapter, but for reasons of space these cannot be detailed here.

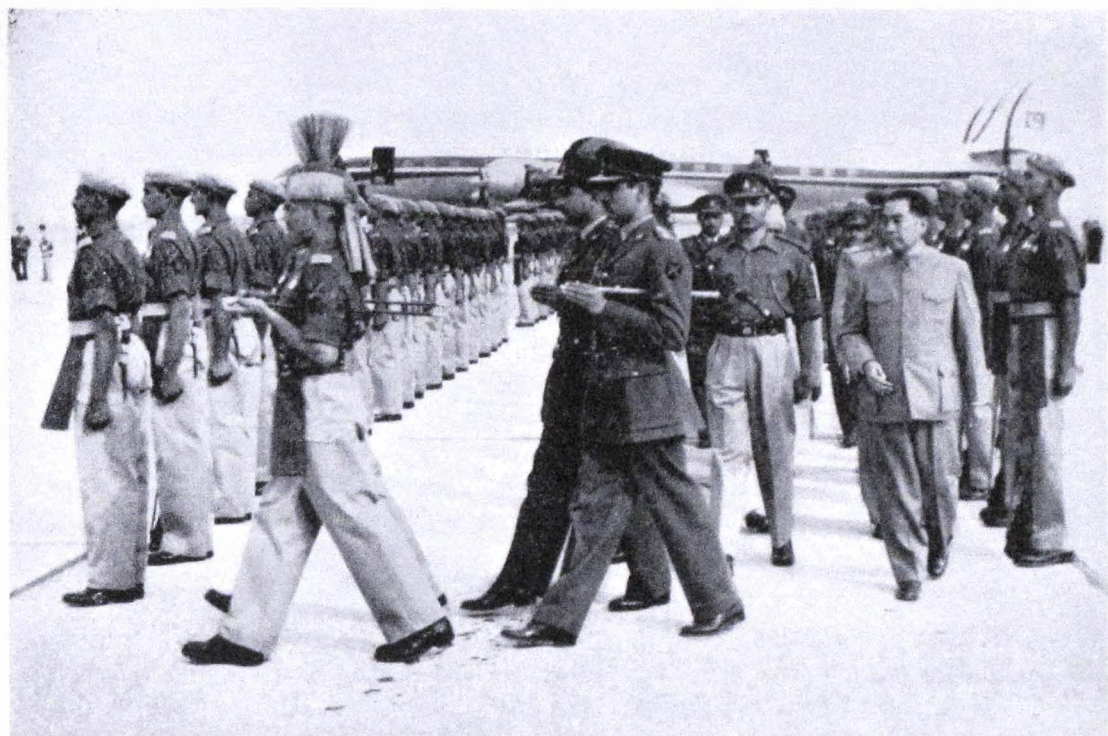
3RD BATTALION

(OLD 1ST BATTALION, PRINCE OF WALES'S OWN)

At the time of partition the 1st Sikhs were stationed in Quetta, but on 16th August the Battalion was moved to Batala in the Gurdaspur district of the East Punjab Province of India and joined the Punjab Boundary Force. This was organized to maintain security as far as possible in the troubled area of the newly demarcated boundary between Pakistan and India—a Herculean task in view of the fact that the East and West Punjab were exchanging an enormous section of their population. All Muslims in the East Punjab were being evacuated to Pakistan while all Sikhs and Hindus in the West Punjab were moving into India. The moves were being made in an atmosphere of mass hysteria among the civil population of both Provinces that made the evacuees (numbering hundreds of thousands) into panic-stricken refugees liable to be attacked at sight as they either crowded into trains or laboured slowly along the roads guarded by such troops as could be allocated to the purpose. To this work came the 1st Sikhs and it is on record that they acquitted themselves loyally and well—unaffected by the disturbing influences that such work and conditions produced. Two sepoys were killed by non-Muslim mobs, while escorting refugees.

From Batala the Battalion moved to Lyallpur in Pakistan on 3rd September and here their task was to protect non-Muslim refugees awaiting transfer to India, and while on this task, on 23rd September, the Sikhs and Dogras of the Battalion left to join the 1st Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment in India.

Lieutenant-Colonel Khalid Jan, the first Pakistan Commanding Officer, took over from Lieutenant-Colonel R. J. Finch on 21st October 1947, and early in November the Battalion moved again. This time it was to Wagah on the Indo-Pakistan boundary and its task was to escort Muslim refugees coming from India into Pakistan. This duty, however, was not of long duration and in December the Battalion moved back to Lahore.



PREMIER OF CHINA INSPECTING THE GUARD OF HONOUR OF THE GUIDES INFANTRY AT LAHORE ON 28th DECEMBER 1956



GOVERNOR OF WEST PAKISTAN INSPECTING GUARD OF HONOUR PROVIDED BY GUIDES INFANTRY ON REPUBLIC DAY, 23rd MARCH 1957

The winter passed without incident and in the spring of 1948 the Battalion was visited by the Commander-in-Chief Pakistan Army, General Sir Douglas Gracey, who presented Major Ataullah with the Military Cross on a ceremonial parade. The Battalion was also visited by his predecessor, General Sir Frank Messervy. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Liaqat Ali Khan (later to meet a tragic death by assassination), also inspected the Battalion at this time.

On 5th July 1948, the Battalion received a complete Pathan company with headquarters and administrative personnel, from the 1/14th Punjab Regiment, and sent in exchange its "D" Company, consisting of Punjabi Muslims.

Three companies of the Battalion were now employed on border defence in the Kasur area and remained so for the next 15 months until the end of October 1949.

During this time the Battalion was paid a visit by General Sir Rob Lockhart, the Battalion's most distinguished officer. With most of the Battalion absent on defence duties, it was difficult to give the General a really suitable welcome, but the visit was much appreciated and all ranks were delighted to see him. The General however remarks that the Battalion gave him a splendid welcome of which he has the happiest recollections.

This visit was followed, in February 1950, by one from Field-Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, another old friend, a former Commander-in-Chief India, also distinguished as Commander of the Allied Forces in the Western Desert in 1941 and 1942. The Battalion was now in Sialkot where it remained for six years till April 1956.

The chief items of interest during the Battalion's time at Sialkot were its successes in competitions in the field of sport, drill and rifle shooting. The Piffer shooting and football championships were both won—the former three years in succession and the latter wrested from "the Cookies" who had held it since "Partition." The Parachute Brigade drill competition was also won more than once, the Battalion achieving a remarkable standard of excellence in this field.

4TH BATTALION

(OLD 2ND BATTALION, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT)

At the time of the birth of Pakistan the Battalion was stationed at Mirali, and Independence Day was celebrated enthusiastically by all ranks. Within a week all Dogras of the Battalion, including Hindu officers, left for Thal on their way to India. The Battalion, excluding Sikh personnel, was then ordered to move to Mianwali district to assist the civil authorities in the evacuation of non-Muslims from that area. In September 1947, the Battalion came back to Bannu

where the Sikhs were awaiting despatch to India, and on 21st September 1947, all the Sikh personnel of the Battalion left for India. They reached their destination safely.

It will be worth mentioning here that as a result of these departures except for a few clerks, the entire clerical staff had left. On 30th September 1947, the Battalion was again moved to Mirali, and Lieutenant-Colonel I. R. Grimwood, the then Commanding Officer, left for U.K. on pension. Major Mohammed Bakhsh assumed command of the Battalion till Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Said joined in early 1948. The Battalion then moved to Bannu.

In March 1948, the Battalion moved to D.I. Khan. Here it had the honour of being selected to present a "guard of honour" to Qaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah who was then visiting D.I. Khan. The Qaid-e-Azam complimented the guard of honour on their turn out and smartness.

The next three years passed uneventfully in normal peace routine. The Battalion moved to Lahore in April 1951, where it received a visit from its last British Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Grimwood. The Battalion was indeed delighted to see its old Commanding Officer, who had come all the way from England and gave him a great reception.

The next move was to Multan in April 1954, under the new Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Malik Sher Afzal Khan, but not for long. In December 1954, the Battalion was ordered to Comilla (East Pakistan). All ranks were pleased with the news in anticipation of new experiences in the other wing of the country. The stay in East Pakistan was very interesting and full of new experiences for the men. The Battalion did extensive training in the year 1955 and in May 1956, Lieutenant-Colonel Malik Sher Afzal Khan was posted away to command the Frontier Force Centre and Lieutenant-Colonel Abdul Latif assumed command. In August 1956, the Battalion saw service in "Operation Service First," in aid of civil power. It was quite interesting and very useful experience for both officers and men. The Battalion did valuable work in this operation. In November 1956, the Battalion returned to Abbottabad from East Pakistan, and in November 1957, Lieutenant-Colonel Abdul Latif was posted away and Major S. N. Shah Khan took over command. In December 1957, the Battalion returned to its old station, Walton, Lahore, in time to take an active part in Divisional training exercises.

5TH BATTALION

(OLD 3RD ROYAL BATTALION, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT)

For over a year after the partition, the Royal Battalion served in the Kashmir area under field service conditions but happily without having to engage in any fighting. No greater tragedy could be imagined than that the

soldiers of the victorious old Indian Army should have to fight against each other. May the new loyalties brought by Independence never demand such a thing!

In October 1948, the Battalion was moved to Lahore and ordered to exchange a company of P.Ms. with the 3rd Battalion Baluch Regiment for a company of Pathans. This was accordingly done and "D" Company P.Ms. was sent to 3rd Battalion Baluch Regiment.

During the winter of 1948-1949, four platoons were committed for duty at a joint check post on the Indo-Pakistan border on the Ferozepore Road, and for five weeks in March the whole Battalion moved out to take up positions as a result of increased tension between Pakistan and India. Nothing, however, eventuated.

In the floods of the next year the Battalion, like others in the Regiment, did yeoman service in saving life and property, and was awarded a certificate by the Punjab Government. In the widespread disturbances in March 1953, when martial law was declared, the Battalion was despatched to Lahore City in aid of the civil power, but three weeks later it moved to Sialkot.

In the large-scale manœuvres of 1954-1955 the Battalion greatly distinguished itself and received the congratulations of the Divisional Commander.

In 1956 came the Battalion's turn for duty in East Pakistan, but before it left by sea from Karachi the amalgamation of the Piffers into one Frontier Force Regiment took place and the Battalion was renumbered 5th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment. This reorganization following on the declaration of Pakistan as a Republic, the Battalion's Royal title was at the same time relinquished.

The Battalion disembarked at Chittagong after a pleasant voyage, on 28th October, and moved to Comilla. Here it relieved the 4th Battalion of the Regiment who gave the men a "bara khana" on arrival; the Battalion returned the compliment a week later when as hosts in their turn they bade farewell to the 4th Battalion on its departure for West Pakistan.

1957 was spent in Comilla, but in December the Battalion was ordered on an assignment to stop smuggling in the districts of Sylhet and Mymensingh. The men took this up with great zest and keenness and after careful reconnaissance the Battalion was distributed with H.Q. and two companies in Sylhet, one company at Mymensingh and one company at Akhura.

Profiting by the experience gained in this work by troops who had been similarly employed the previous year, the Battalion appears to have achieved quite phenomenal success by the measures taken and the efficiency with which they carried them out. The prices of essential foodstuffs fell spectacularly by 40 per cent., with a marked "boost" to the popularity of the troops among the civil population.

As this volume goes to press the Battalion continues its tour of duty in East Pakistan.

6TH BATTALION (OLD 4TH SIKHS, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT)

The post-war story of this Battalion continues where it was left at the end of Chapter XX—i.e., with the Battalion still in Meiktila (Burma) doing internal security duties with its companies in detachments spread over a wide area. But this came to an end at last in May 1947, when the Battalion sailed from Rangoon for Madras, going thence by rail to Jhelum.

Here however, so far from finding a happy homecoming awaiting them, the men found themselves once more involved in dealing with acute civil commotions and the refugee problem that so bedevilled the achievement of independence of the states of Pakistan and India. The Battalion's task was to help escorting non-Muslim refugees to India, and the record describes it as a long and arduous one, and in most cases extremely unpleasant. It adds: The soldiers remained as impartial as was humanly possible, but flesh and blood must revolt at some stage no matter what the state of discipline. Some of the sights which can only be described as beyond words nauseating, eventually made their mark and some communal dissension spread to the ranks. It was nipped in the bud by removing the Sikh and Dogra elements of the Battalion to India in early September. The number of refugees evacuated can only be given as several thousands a day.

In September the Battalion was moved to Peshawar for reorganization and in October a fresh move was ordered to Sialkot where once again the unit was employed in evacuation of refugees. An additional task, however, soon followed when trouble broke out in Kashmir. For quite some time the Battalion looked after the whole Sialkot-Jammu border single-handed.

At this stage one company of Punjabi Muslims from the 7th Rajputs was posted to the Battalion to make up deficiencies in strength consequent on the move out of the non-Muslim elements of the Battalion.

The year 1948 was devoted to training and reorganization. One company of Pathans from the 3/14th Punjab Regiment was posted to the Battalion and one company of Punjabi Muslims transferred to the 3/14th Punjab Regiment in order to reorganize the Battalion on a 50 per cent. Punjabi Muslims-Pathans basis.

The Battalion remained in Sialkot till the month of October 1949. During this period it remained busy on training and providing border detachments at various places. From July to September 1949, following large-scale movement of Indian troops on the other side of the border, the whole Battalion was deployed defensively along the Sialkot-Jammu border, but nothing transpired.

In April 1950, the Battalion moved to Lahore, and in the following

September was deployed in aid to civil power in flood-relief operations. The credit for saving the Shahdara Power House and for relief and repair work over thirty-two miles of major canalway was recognized by the Punjab Government by awarding a *sanad* to the unit. Two N.C.Os. and one sepoy were awarded the Commander-in-Chief's commendation certificates for conspicuous action. A monument plaque was also erected at Chichoki Mallian to commemorate what was indeed a monumental task.

Several demonstrations were staged for visiting V.I.Ps. and an equal number of congratulatory letters found their way into the Battalion's records during 1951.

Early in the year 1952 the Battalion was again moved to the Sialkot area for border defence duties. A reunion took place at the railway station when the Battalion was received by the 1st Sikhs. The unit was also fortunate to come under the command of Brigadier M. Attiq ur Rahman, M.C., one of its old Commanding Officers. Their stay here was however short, and in May the unit moved to Quetta as demonstration battalion at the Command and Staff College. Possibly the then Deputy Commandant of the College, Brigadier Altaf Qadir, M.B.E., another old Commanding Officer, had something to do with this. It was in fact a somewhat strenuous assignment which was to last for four years.

During the course of the numerous exercises and demonstrations the Battalion found time for a month's training in camp on two occasions, and the record remarks that it is perhaps the only battalion to have its annual inspection carried out by no less than sixteen brigadiers and two colonels—all students at the Staff College.

Other events of this period were the amalgamation (on orders from Headquarters) in all companies of Pathans and Punjabi Muslims instead of class companies of each class; the despatch of a company as demonstration company to the Pakistan Military Academy (doubtless the result of the Battalion's reputation as demonstration troops) and the endurance of an unprecedentedly severe winter in 1953. In December 1955, Lieutenant-Colonel M. Hamid Hussain succeeded to the command *vice* Lieutenant-Colonel Zafar Ali Khan posted as Instructor and G.S.O. 1 to the Staff College.

In 1956 move orders to Sialkot, in April, were received with many sighs of relief. On arrival at Sialkot the Battalion was received by Lieutenant-General K. M. Sheikh, another old 4th Sikhs officer. The unit shared lines with a sister battalion, the 3rd Royal Battalion, till their departure from Sialkot.

In June 1956, orders were received amalgamating several infantry regiments into groups. Fortunately the Frontier Force, one in name and spirit already, merely became one in organization. The Battalion assumed its new designation of 6th Battalion The Frontier Force Regiment.

The rest of the years 1957 and 1958 passed uneventfully with the Battalion still in Sialkot.

13TH BATTALION
(OLD 8TH BATTALION, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT)

On its return to India after its victorious campaign in Burma it will be recollected that the Battalion was sent to East Bengal. It was stationed at Tejgaon (Dacca) and was still there when independence was declared in August 1947. On this memorable occasion the Battalion held a ceremonial parade at the seat of government of East Pakistan for the first hoisting of the flag of Pakistan. Thereafter its first task was to provide training cadres for the newly raised East Bengal Regiment.

A year later, in October 1948, the Battalion embarked at Chittagong for Karachi, and on arrival went to Quetta, remaining there for four years. Here it was the first battalion to carry out the task of "demonstration battalion" for the newly created Pakistan Staff College and Infantry School.

In October 1952, the Battalion was moved to Hyderabad Sind, and while there was called to Karachi during the disturbances of 1953 for aid to the civil power. It provided guards for all important government offices and installations in Karachi as long as martial law lasted.

While in Sind the Battalion did a tour of duty at Malir which involved providing the guards of honour at the airport on the arrival of high officials, royalty and other personages. Among these were the Kings of Iraq and Saudi Arabia and Mr. Nixon, the American Vice-President. The Battalion earned many letters of appreciation for its smartness and turn-out.

In 1956 the Battalion was ordered to Fort Sandeman in the Zhob Valley where its stay was all too short, for the assignment was much enjoyed by all ranks.

It was recalled to Quetta in November and warned for service in Egypt as part of the International Police Force. This was hailed by all ranks with the greatest enthusiasm, but to everyone's disappointment it was learned at the last moment that the contingent from Pakistan would not take part after all and the orders were cancelled. It moved to Malir instead.

Finally, after a long three years in Malir, the Battalion was at last ordered to Sialkot where, at the time of going to press, it still is.

14TH BATTALION
(OLD 9TH BATTALION, FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT)

As has been recorded in Chapter XX above, the 9th Battalion that was raised during the Second World War and gave such outstanding service in the reconquest of Burma in 1944-45, was used on its return from the field to resuscitate the 2nd Sikhs, who had in fact been annihilated in Malaya in the

tragic Malayan campaign of 1941-42, and whose remnants remained in captivity after the surrender of Singapore for the rest of the war.

While at the time the opportunity afforded to the 9th Battalion was greeted with joy (disbandment being the fate of practically all war battalions), the decision to re-raise the 9th Battalion under its own identity three years later, on 1st October 1948, was even more welcome.*

By mid-October a party of 184 J.C.Os. and rank and file arrived from active battalions to form the nucleus. Subadar Mehr Khan, Bahadur O.B.I., was appointed Subadar-Major. He commanded this nucleus till the end of October 1948, as no officer had as yet arrived.

On 1st November 1948, the following officers reported on permanent posting:

Major L. S. K. Lodhi, M.B.E., Officer Commanding (from 2/12th F.F.R.).

Captain B. A. Qureshi, Company Commander (from 4/12th F.F.R.).

Captain Shaukat Sultan, Adjutant (from 4/12th F.F.R.).

Captain M. S. Hanif, Company Commander (from 2/12th F.F.R.).

Captain Amir Inayat Ullah Khan, Quartermaster (from 2/12th F.F.R.).

By mid-November 1948, re-enlisted personnel started reporting to the Battalion. By the end of December 1948, the Battalion was practically up to strength, the composition being 50 per cent. Punjabi Muslims and 50 per cent. Pathans. The pioneers of this Battalion were handicapped by many administrative difficulties, as is always the case during the initial stages; but they nevertheless organized the Battalion on a sound and efficient footing. Unfortunately, the Battalion recovered only one subadar and a few rank and file of the old 9/12th Frontier Force Regiment that so distinguished itself in Burma.

On 2nd January 1949, the Battalion left for Peshawar and its outposts. The 9th Battalion remained in Peshawar four years, being visited by the Commander-in-Chief, General M. Ayub Khan, in June 1950. In February 1953, it moved to Lahore, its first peace station, but had not been there a month when disturbances broke out and martial law was declared.

The Battalion was ordered to move out, which it did the same day, in aid of the civil power to restore law and order. It was split up into sub-units and distributed over the various sectors of Lahore City and remained thus till 18th March 1953, when it returned to unit lines with the exception of "A" Company, which remained in the city. On 17th April the whole Battalion again moved out to the city and remained there till 5th May 1953.

* On reading the proofs of this History in 1959, Major-General Sir Stuart Greeves, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., remarked to the author "There can have been few, if any, better battalions than the 9th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment in the old Indian Army, and I was thrilled to read your . . . account of its history . . . [It was a Battalion] which I knew so well, being in Ceylon the whole of the time it was there, and [I was] with it during nearly the whole of the time it was fighting in Burma."

During martial law the record affirms that the Battalion executed its onerous and difficult duties with the utmost loyalty, humanity and impartiality, and adds that this period will be remembered by all as a period of test of the Army in general and for the whole of the 10th Division (in which the Battalion was serving) in particular. The Pakistan soldier completely crushed down his personal sentiments and attachments to follow the path of duty and work for the well-being of the nation as a whole.

During the remainder of its time in Lahore the Battalion provided ceremonial guards and lined the streets for the ill-fated King Feisal of Iraq and King Ibn Saud of Arabia. It was also visited by the Commander-in-Chief, General Ayub Khan, who expressed himself well pleased with its smartness.

The Battalion spent the first three months of 1956 in Bannu, doing the local station duties to enable the Bannu Brigade to go out on training exercises. It finally left Lahore for Shinkari in Hazara (*via* Havelian) on 3rd January 1958.

CONCLUSION

(TO BOTH VOLUMES)

So ends the story of the Frontier Force Battalions from the days when, as part of the old Punjab Frontier Force, they alone kept watch and ward on the North-West Frontier of the Indian Continent, serving on through the years as part of the great Indian Army of pre-Partition days to their present proud position in the Forces of Independent Pakistan.

Throughout their life these Battalions have been models of steadfastness, loyalty and efficiency, but perhaps their peak of achievement has been in the last fifty years when in two world wars their soldiers were a match in all the arts of war for the finest troops of the day, and helped to save the free world from the menace of ruthless dictatorships. These volumes have attempted to record the story.

The final chapter of this volume shows the spirit of the Frontier Force—the old “Piffer” spirit—alive and zealously fostered by the officers and men of Pakistan. Nothing could be more gratifying to the now dwindling band of British officers in retirement, who carried the torch in their day and passed it to the soldiers of Pakistan. Long may the spirit live, flourish and be an example to all.

APPENDIX I

AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

AWARDS OF VICTORIA CROSS AND RECIPIENTS OF ORDERS
AND FOREIGN DECORATIONS FOR SERVICES
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

(Ranks and titles of Battalions given are those at the time of the award)

Victoria Cross (V.C.)

Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming, M.C. 2nd Bn.

Commander of the Order of the British Empire (C.B.E.)

Brigadier D. A. L. Mackenzie, D.S.O. 1st Bn.
Brigadier W. D. Edward, D.S.O. 4th Bn.
Brigadier L. R. Mizen 2nd Bn.
Brigadier C. I. Jerrard 1st Bn.
Colonel P. T. Clarke, O.B.E. Regtl. Centre

Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.)

Lieutenant-Colonel H. E. Cubitt-Smith, C.B.E. 1st Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel G. E. Vosper 1st Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel H. E. Boulter 1st Bn.
Major A. J. W. MacLeod 3rd R. Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel H. W. D. McDonald 3rd R. Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Edward 4th Bn.
Major Harbans Singh Virk 4th Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel A. S. Lewis 4th Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel M. H. H. Baily Guides
Brigadier P. R. Macnamara Guides

Bar to Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.)

Brigadier D. A. L. Mackenzie, D.S.O. 1st Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel A. J. W. MacLeod, D.S.O. 4th Bn.

Officer of the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E.)

Brigadier L. E. Macgregor 1st Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel P. B. KIRRAGE 1st Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Cumming, M.C. 2nd Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel W. I. Moberly 3rd R. Bn.
Major A. R. E. Pollard Guides
Lieutenant-Colonel J. A. Blood 9th Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Taylor M.G. Bn.

Member of the Order of the British Empire (M.B.E.)

Major A. F. Chown 1st Bn.
Subadar-Major Pahlwan Khan 1st Bn.
Captain J. L'A. Bell 3rd R. Bn.
Major E. G. D. Heard, M.C. 3rd R. Bn.

Captain J. H. Chandler	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3rd R. Bn.
Subadar-Major Adalat Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3rd R. Bn.
Subadar-Major Sukh Ram, Bahadur, O.B.I.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Subadar-Major (Hon. Captain) Rur Singh, O.B.I., I.O.M.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	M.G. Bn.
Captain Prem Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	7th Bn.
Captain J. C. Jennings	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Captain Mohd Sadiq	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Lieutenant Mian Hayaud Din	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Subadar-Major Ahmed Khan, Sardar Bahadur, O.B.I., I.O.M.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	11th Bn.
Subadar-Major Hamesh Gul	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	14th Bn.
Subadar-Major Sulakhan Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	M.G. Bn.
Captain R. M. Halliday	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	M.G. Bn.
Jemadar Shiv Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	M.G. Bn.
Captain D. G. Jerrard	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	... Regtl. Centre
Captain V. P. Batra,* I.A.M.C. (and for 2 years Medical Officer of the 9th Battalion)								

Bronze Star (American)

Major R. T. Finch	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3rd R. Bn.
Captain P. C. T. Glenn	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3rd R. Bn.
Lieutenant-Colonel J. L'A. Bell	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3rd R. Bn.
Subadar-Major (Hon. Lieutenant) Pahlwan Khan, S.B., M.B.E., O.B.I.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	1st Bn.

Legion of Merit (American)

Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J., M.B.E., M.C., with the rank of Officer

Star of Nepal (Second Class)

General Sir Rob Lockhart,† K.C.B., C.I.E., M.C.	1st Bn.
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Commander of the Legion of Honour of France

Major-General M. Hayaud Din, H.J., M.B.E., M.C.

(For services as Commander of the 9th Battalion Frontier Force Regiment in French Indo-China after the Second World War.)

* Captain Batra had served as a Regular officer in the Regiment before he became a Medical Officer, and so had a somewhat unique knowledge of and standing in the Battalion. Besides professional skill he had tactical knowledge—an unusual qualification in a Medical Officer. He was most popular and loved by the Battalion.

Awarded for services in connection with the Nepalese contingent in India in 1940, and conferred personally by the King of Nepal at a special audience in Katmandu.

APPENDIX II
AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

RECIPIENTS BY BATTALIONS OF MILITARY CROSS, ORDER OF BRITISH INDIA (FIRST CLASS AND SECOND CLASS), INDIAN ORDER OF MERIT, MILITARY MEDAL, INDIAN DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL AND BRITISH EMPIRE MEDAL FOR SERVICES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

1ST BATTALION (PRINCE OF WALES OWN)

Military Cross (M.C.)

Major Amar Singh	Major D. A. T. Wilson
Major Himmat Singh Sandhu	Jemadar Feroze Khan
Jemadar Nurab Shah	Major D. E. Redsull
Major T. L. R. G. Dodwell	Subadar Sadhu Singh Mallhi
Subadar Mansabdar Khan	Major D. Monckton
Captain Atta Ullah	Jemadar Mohindar Singh
Jemadar Dhanna Singh	Subadar Mian Gul
Lieutenant Harbans Singh, I.A.M.C.	Jemadar Amir Shah

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Makhmud Khan	Subadar-Major Rahim Dad
Subadar-Major Pahlwan Khan	Subadar-Major Sadhu Singh Mallhi, M.C.
Subadar Nurab Shah, M.C.	

Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.)

Havildar Bakhshi Ram	Naik Khan Bahadur
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Military Medal (M.M.)

Havildar Ghulam Mehdi	Lance-Havildar Azam Gul
Naik Sant Ram	Naik Bhagirath
Havildar Aurangzeb Khan	Havildar Kabal Singh
Havildar Sundar Singh	Naik Mohabat Khan
Sepoy Abdul Rehman	Sepoy Gafur Khan
Sepoy Piara Singh	Sepoy Sadhu Singh
Sepoy Mohd Ashraf Khan	Sepoy Prem Singh
Naik Idan Gul	Naik Jit Singh
Sepoy Fateh Mohd	Sepoy Mohd
Havildar Sucha Singh	Naik Beli Ram
Naik Gulab Din	Sepoy Gul Zaman
Sepoy Karam Dad Khan	Naik Tor Baz

Indian Distinguished Service Medal (I.D.S.M.)

Jemadar Muqarrab Khan	Sepoy Makhmad Rasul
Havildar Karam Singh	Naik Habib Ullah
Sepoy Autar Singh	Naik Ujagar Singh
Sepoy Raghbir Singh	Lance-Naik Sajawal Khan
Havildar Isar Singh	Havildar Dilawar Singh

2ND BATTALION

Military Cross (M.C.)

Major G. J. Hawkins
Subadar-Major Rai Singh

Captain J. M. Ricketts
Jemadar Ram Singh

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Rai Singh

Subadar-Major Gul Badshah

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Jemadar Manak Khan
Subadar Fazal Dad

Subadar Mehr Khan
Subadar-Major Surain Singh

Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.)

Subadar Mohd Ali Khan

British Empire Medal (B.E.M.)

Havildar Mohd Shafi

Havildar Shiraz Khan

3RD ROYAL BATTALION

Military Cross (M.C.)

Captain S. H. Raw
Jemadar Nauroze Khan
Captain D. C. R. Stewart
Major N. O. Finnis

Captain E. G. D. Heard
Captain Buta Singh
Captain L. B. H. Reford
Jemadar Santa Singh

Subadar Pahlwan Khan

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar-Major (Hon. Lieutenant) Ali Khan
Subadar Khan Mir, I.D.S.M.

Subadar Bela Singh, I.D.S.M.
Subadar-Major Adalat Khan

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Mohd Sharif

Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.)

Havildar Chhaju Ram

Havildar Mir Hassan
Havildar Khushal Khan

Military Medal (M.M.)

Naik Yar Khan
Lance-Havildar Kanshi Ram
Sepoy Mohd Ditta

Naik Shaista Khan
Sepoy Mir Abdul
Sepoy Gurbuksh Singh

Indian Distinguished Service Medal (I.D.S.M.)

Subadar Bela Singh
Havildar Mir Hassan
Subadar Khan Mir
Naik Din Akbar

Jemadar Shandi Gul
Naik An Mir
Jemadar Sant Singh
Havildar Mehr Singh

4TH BATTALION

Military Cross (M.C.)

Captain S. H. F. J. Maneckshaw	Captain P. Stewart
Lieutenant G. F. Bond	Major M. A. Rahman
Major P. C. Gupta	Jemadar Narain Singh
Major J. W. Peyton	Jemadar Phagga Singh
Jemadar Qaim Shah, I.D.S.M.	Subadar Sultan Ali
Jemadar Udham Singh	Subadar Bika Ram
Jemadar Gul Mohd	Subadar Mada Mir
Subadar Bakhtawar Singh	Major Amrik Singh

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"
Subadar-Major Sukh Ram

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"
Subadar Abdul Rahman Subadar Makhmad

Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.)
Subadar Qalandar Khan

Military Medal (M.M.)

Naik Bagh Ali	Lance-Naik Nur Mohd
Naik Sher Singh	Sepoy Hayat Khan
Naik Bakhshish Singh	Lance-Naik Duni Chand
Lance-Naik Kirpa Ram	Sepoy Sarban Singh
Lance-Naik Chanan Singh	Sepoy Mohd Ashraf
Havildar Sher Afzal	Lance-Naik Sharaf Din
Lance-Naik Kaila Ram	Sepoy Gul Imam
Naik Ahmed Khan	Sepoy Mohd Afzal
Lance-Naik Jittan Singh	Sepoy Chhabu Khan
Lance-Naik Bashir Ahmed	Naik Zarmat Khan

Indian Distinguished Service Medal (I.D.S.M.)

Jemadar Allah Yar Khan	Jemadar Tulsi Ram
Sepoy Karamat Hussain	Havildar Quaim Shah
Lance-Havildar Sher Singh	Havildar Najar Singh
Sepoy Piara Singh	Lance-Naik Pritam Singh
	Havildar Abdul Qayum

5TH BATTALION (QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN CORPS OF GUIDES)

Military Cross (M.C.)

Jemadar Nur Khan

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Rur Singh, I.O.M.	Subadar Sohbat, I.O.M.
Subadar Dost Mohd, I.D.S.M.	Subadar-Major (Hon. Lieutenant) Chowdri

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Sapuran Singh	Subadar Daya Ram, I.D.S.M.
Subadar Habib Khan	Subadar-Major Dad Mohd
Subadar Sadhu Singh	Subadar Fateh Khan

Military Medal (M.M.)

Sepoy Samat Khan

Naik Tor Baz

6TH BATTALION

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"
Subadar-Major (Hon. Captain) Haq Dad Khan

7TH BATTALION

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"
Subadar-Major Said Amir

8TH BATTALION

Military Cross (M.C.)

Jemadar Bakhtawar Singh

Major D. D. Slattery

Captain P. H. Meadows

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Sukh Ram

Subadar-Major Sher Mohd

Military Medal (M.M.)

Naik Alam Khan

Lance-Naik Mohd Akbar

Lance-Naik Makhai Dad

Lance-Naik Jumma Gul

Sepoy Chaudhri Ram

Lance-Naik Khem Nath

Sepoy Ghulam Din

Sepoy Jogindar Singh

9TH BATTALION

Military Cross (M.C.)

Lieutenant T. R. Walton

Major N. C. Rawley

Subadar Tarlochan Chand

Jemadar Ram Singh

Captain A. M. Khan

Captain Kehar Singh Rai

Captain J. D. Gosling

Captain M. J. Moynihan

Lieutenant-Colonel M. Hayaud Din, M.B.E.

Major D. G. Butterworth

Jemadar Sultan Ahmed Khan

Jemadar Kishen Singh

Subadar Kartar Singh

Major C. G. Ferguson

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar Spin Gul

Subadar Misri Khan

Subadar Makhmad Amin

Subadar-Major (Hon. Lieutenant) Ahmed Khan, I.O.M.

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Jaswant Singh

Subadar Mir Hassan

Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.)

Subadar-Major Ahmed Khan

Naik Kamal Khan

Military Medal (M.M.)

Sepoy Mian Mohd
Lance-Naik Madan Singh
Naik Amar Singh
Sepoy Mohd Hussain
Havildar Shangara Singh
Naik Dalip Singh
Lance-Naik Tirlok Singh

Naik Wakil Singh
Naik Dilbara Singh
Lance-Naik Parbhat Singh
Sepoy Khushal Singh
Naik Ali Mohd
Lance-Naik Lachman Singh
Sepoy Zeri Gul

Sepoy Khazan Singh

Indian Distinguished Service Medal (I.D.S.M.)

Havildar Janab Gul
Havildar Jagat Ram

Naik Jalal Khan
Naik Puran Singh

Naik Gobind Singh

British Empire Medal (B.E.M.)

Havildar Gorakh Singh

14TH BATTALION

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Hamesh Gul

Indian Distinguished Service Medal (I.D.S.M.)

Jemadar Azim Ullah

MACHINE-GUN BATTALION

Military Cross (M.C.)

Major J. W. Hodges

Captain R. H. Plant

Subadar Karam Singh

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Habib Khan

Jemadar (Hon. Captain) Ganesh Dass

Subadar-Major Sulakhan Singh, M.B.E.

Indian Order of Merit (I.O.M.)

Subadar Matti Ullah

Military Medal (M.M.)

Naik Falak Sher

Sepoy Mandar Singh

Havildar Mohd Khan

25TH BATTALION

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar Bahadur Jang, I.D.S.M.

Subadar Khushia

Subadar Amir Ali Khan

Subadar-Major (Hon. Lieutenant) Sapuran Singh

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Shakar Mehdi

26TH BATTALION

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Muhammed Shah

Subadar Kaka Ram

Subadar-Major Tara Singh

1ST AFRIDI BATTALION

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Khan Baz

Subadar Bahadur Sher

85 GARRISON COMPANY

Military Medal (M.M.)

Sepoy Maghbula Khan

Sepoy Mir Bad Shah

212 GARRISON COMPANY

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar Alam Gul

312 GARRISON COMPANY

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Lal Mast

REGIMENTAL CENTRE

Order of British India (O.B.I.) First Class, with title "Sardar Bahadur"

Subadar-Major Bindar Singh

Subadar-Major Raja Singh

Subadar-Major Muhammad Khan

Subadar-Major Pahlwan Khan, M.B.E.

Subadar Abdul Rahman

Subadar Mohd Sharif

Subadar-Major (Hon. Lieutenant) Hamesh Gul

Order of British India (O.B.I.) Second Class, with title "Bahadur"

Subadar Ghulam Ali

Subadar Sher Mohd

Subadar Sarfraz Khan, I.O.M.

Subadar Surkhru Khan

**APPENDIX III
JANGI INAMS**

**JANGI INAMS GIVEN AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR TO PERSONNEL
OF THE F.F. REGIMENT**

<i>Battalions</i>	<i>Junior Commissioned Officers</i>	<i>Indian Other Ranks</i>
1st Battalion	11	32
2nd Battalion	7	22
3rd Royal Battalion	12	41
4th Battalion	14	37
Guides	5	15
8th Battalion	5	14
9th Battalion	9	24
14th Battalion	4	12
25th Battalion	1	—
26th Battalion	1	3
M.G. Battalion	5	18
412 Garrison Company	—	3
512 Garrison Company	—	2
Regimental Centre and Extra Regi- mental Employ	5	8
Total	79	231

APPENDIX IV

CERTIFICATES OF GALLANTRY

CERTIFICATES OF GALLANTRY; FORCE COMMANDERS' COMMENDATION CERTIFICATES

CERTIFICATES OF GALLANTRY

Havildar Chain Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Sepoy Karnail Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Sepoy Razim Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Havildar Jarnail Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Subadar Habib Ullah	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	7th Bn.
Sepoy Ghulam Hussain	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8th Bn.
Sepoy Duggal Ram	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8th Bn.
Sepoy Bali Ram	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8th Bn.
Naik Dhani Ram	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8th Bn.
Sepoy Bajar Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	8th Bn.
Sepoy Jalal Din	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Sepoy Fateh Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Sepoy Bhup Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Naik Mohd Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Sepoy Alam Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.
Bahadur	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	9th Bn.

COMMENDATION CERTIFICATES BY FORCE COMMANDER

Subadar Bela Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	3rd Bn.
Jemadar Randhir Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Sepoy Zulphi Ram	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Subadar-Major Sukh Ram, O.B.I.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Subadar Kalandar Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Subadar Surkhru Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Subadar Balwant Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	4th Bn.
Major M. H. Hodson	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Lieutenant-Colonel A. R. E. Pollard, O.B.E.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Captain W. M. Chisholm	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Amir Gul	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Jemadar Swat Gul	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Havildar Mohd Jan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Lance-Naik Ram Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Lance-Naik Nanak Chand	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Chhail Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Piara Singh	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Dholi Ram	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Hukmat Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Gulab Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Gul Khan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Mohd Akbar	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Chinar Gul	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Sepoy Lachi Dan	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides
Naik Kaka	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	Guides

APPENDIX V
MENTIONS IN DESPATCHES

**NUMBERS OF OFFICERS AND MEN MENTIONED IN DESPATCHES
BY BATTALIONS**

	<i>Officers</i>	<i>N.C.Os. and Men</i>
1st Battalion (P.W.O.)	25	17
2nd Battalion	14	8
3rd (Royal) Battalion	25	26
4th Battalion	33	24
Guides	2	3
8th Battalion	6	13
9th Battalion	16	24
14th Battalion	4	5
M.G. Battalion	27	22
Afridi Battalion	1	—
Regimental Centre and Extra Regimental Employ	7	2
67 Indian Garrison Company	1	—
85 Indian Garrison Company	—	1
Totals	161	145

Grand total, 306 Mentioned in Despatches

APPENDIX VI

ROLL OF HONOUR OF OFFICERS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

<i>Rank and Name</i>	<i>Date of Casualty</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Captain J. D. Clark, 1st Bn.	24.7.41	Drowned, Iraq.
Major Amar Singh, 1st Bn.	12.5.44	Killed, Italy.
Major M. A. I. Cowan, 1st Bn.	26.6.44	Died of wounds, Italy.
Captain K. C. Madappa, 2nd Bn.	16.12.41	Killed, Malaya.
Captain B. W. Harvey, 2nd Bn.	3.3.42	Killed, Malaya.
Lieutenant E. C. Pomeroy, 2nd Bn.	28.2.43	Killed, Malaya.
Major R. C. W. Dent, 2nd Bn.	4.3.42	Killed, Malaya.
Lieutenant C. P. Larson, 2nd Bn.	13.2.42	Presumed killed, Malaya.
Lieutenant Isher Singh, 2nd Bn. ... ..	.12.44	Killed, Malaya.
Second-Lieutenant A. M. Playfair, 3rd Bn.	15.4.41	Died of disease, Sudan.
Captain M. S. Curtis, 3rd Bn.	15.6.42	Killed, Libya.
Lieutenant D. C. Baird, 3rd Bn.	15.6.42	Killed, Libya.
Captain S. H. Raw, M.C., 3rd Bn.	15.6.42	Killed, Libya.
Captain W. E. H. Cerely, 3rd Bn.	22.3.43	Accidentally killed, Tunisia.
Lieutenant R. A. Watt, 3rd Bn.	22.3.43	Accidentally killed, Tunisia.
Captain C. H. Gordon, 3rd Bn.	22.3.43	Died of disease, Africa.
Second-Lieutenant A. G. Tomlinson, 3rd Bn.	8.9.43	Died accidental causes, Sicily.
Captain G. Hinds, 3rd Bn.	13.3.44	Killed, Italy.
Lieutenant A. I. B. Cumming, 3rd Bn.	19.4.44	Died of wounds, Italy.
Major T. Deakin, 3rd Bn.	11.5.44	Died of wounds, Italy.
Lieutenant Faqir Shah, 3rd Bn.	14.5.44	Killed, Italy.
Captain I. L. Spalding, 3rd Bn.	26.5.44	Killed, Italy.
Lieutenant C. E. Lockyer, 3rd Bn.	25.7.44	Killed, Italy.
Major J. P. Oakes, 3rd Bn.	8.8.44	Killed, Italy.
Lieutenant W. R. Hunter, 4th Bn.	22.2.42	Killed, Burma.
Colonel J. P. Acworth, 4th Bn.	2/3.3.42	Killed, Malaya.
Captain J. H. Boyd, 4th Bn.	29.3.42	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Marshall, 4th Bn.	25.3.44	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant M. J. St. B. Seal, 4th Bn.	20.5.44	Killed, Burma.
Major M. H. Hodson, Guides	30.10.45	Killed, Sumatra.
Lieutenant-Colonel A. K. Murcott, Guides	24.7.45	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant K. A. Jameson, 8th Bn.	1.3.45	Killed, Burma.
Major J. K. Kidd, 8th Bn.	10.3.45	Killed, Burma.
Major W. J. H. Shephard, 9th Bn.	17.1.44	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant H. G. Robertson, 9th Bn.	4.4.44	Killed, Burma.
Major A. J. Kayani, 9th Bn.	23.5.44	Killed, Burma.
Captain J. S. Nicoll, 9th Bn.	8.7.44	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant M. S. Clowsley, 9th Bn.	8.7.44	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant G. R. Webb, 9th Bn.	9.7.44	Killed, Burma.
Lieutenant-Colonel G. W. Wren, 9th Bn.	9.7.44	Died of wounds, Burma.
Captain J. C. Jennings, 9th Bn.	14.2.45	Killed, Burma.
Second-Lieutenant D. G. Waters, 9th Bn.	26.3.45	Killed, Burma.
Second-Lieutenant R. Score, M.G. Bn.	9.9.43	Died of disease, Burma.
Lieutenant G. H. McDermott, M.G. Bn.	2.4.45	Killed, Burma.

APPENDIX VII

CASUALTIES IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

UNIT	NATURE OF CASUALTY	OFFICERS	J.C.OS.	O.RS.	NON-COMBATANTS	TOTAL
1st Sikhs	Killed or died of wounds	3	3	179	13	185
	Wounded	10	31	793	13	847
2nd Sikhs	Killed or died of wounds	6	15	333	9	362
	Wounded	1	1	59	—	61
3rd Sikhs	Killed or died of wounds	15	8	218	6	247
	Wounded	6	34	726	8	774
4th Sikhs	Killed or died of wounds	5	7	183	—	195
	Wounded	10	38	800	—	848
Guides	Killed or died of wounds	2	1	21	—	24
	Wounded	—	3	22	—	25
7th Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	—	—	10	1	11
	Wounded	—	—	—	—	—
8th Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	2	3	85	1	91
	Wounded	5	9	311	—	325
9th Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	9	11	226	2	243
	Wounded	16	2	533	—	551
14th Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	—	—	18	1	19
	Wounded	—	—	2	—	2
26th Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	—	—	7	1	8
	Wounded	—	—	—	—	—
M.G. Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	2	1	27	3	33
	Wounded	1	—	68	1	70
1st Afridi Battalion	Killed or died of wounds	—	—	17	3	20*
	Wounded	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	Killed or died of wounds	44	49	1,324	27	1,444
	Wounded	49	118	3,314	22	3,503

* Died of sickness

APPENDIX VIII

THE 39TH TRAINING DIVISION (INDIAN ARMY) IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

BY MAJOR-GENERAL F. M. MOORE, C.S.I., C.I.E.

In Malaya, Burma and finally in the Arakan, British Indian troops had been overwhelmed not because they were inferior in quality, but because they had been unable to adapt themselves to jungle warfare. Most had lived their lives in open plains, and all had been trained in open country. They found difficulty in assimilating jungle fighting, where individual self-confidence and the ability to work on a minimum ration were essential.

The somewhat revolutionary plan was therefore adopted of organizing an entire Division for the purpose of giving every officer and man an intensive period of comprehensive training in the jungle, before going to their active units.

This was the 39th Division, and it took up its role as a training division under Major-General Frank Moore* (late of the 2nd Battalion of the Regiment). When the orders for the Division's conversion to a Training Division were received on 9th August 1943, the 39th Division was (as described by General Moore) a monstrosity. Named a "Light Division" it contained heavy A.A. Artillery, Mounted Infantry and other weird units. All these and the British Battalions were in due course replaced by Indian Infantry units. It was then at Ranchi.

By 25th August Divisional Headquarters arrived at Saharunpore and were quickly followed by three Sapper Companies (for water supply), Signals and Workshops.

The Indian Battalions started to arrive on 1st September and training commenced on 1st October but was confined to teaching instructors and giving N.C.Os. and men who were not going to be retained some brief instruction in jungle warfare. By 1st November drafts had arrived from Regimental Centres, and training started in earnest.

Anyone who has read the record of the war in the eastern theatres in 1941-1945 cannot fail to have noticed the remarkable difference between the British-Indian troops that the Japanese overran in their surprise onslaughts on Malaya and Burma in 1941-1942 and their successors that beat the same Japanese both as individual fighters and as organized fighting units two and a half years later.

If it occurred to him that this was a remarkable phenomenon, he probably ascribed it to the provision of more up-to-date arms, our greatly increased air support, mechanization in general and, of course, the superior strategic and tactical handling of our forces by our generals. This was all true, but what of training? Yes, of course, everybody trained their troops† and the training of the British Indian Army in the Second World War had been vigorous and adequate. Jungle training was given too—the Japanese had shown the way there.

If the reader's mind has wandered on such lines as this, let him think back and remember what a squad of recruits from Northern India looked like arriving straight from their villages, how much they knew and what education they had. Then let him read again the narratives above of the 4th, 8th, 9th and M.G. Battalions of the Frontier Force Regiment in 1944 and 1945 and remember that all the up-to-date arms, not only rifles but the L.M.Gs., the M.M.Gs., the mortars, the wireless, the vehicles, the animals and the whole complicated war machine (with themselves as the top-class individual fighters), were worked by these self-same village yokels in dense jungle after only a few months' training.

A miracle?—possibly. A training achievement of outstanding merit?—certainly, and

* Major-General F. M. Moore, C.S.I., C.I.E.

† See Chapter XIX (narrative of 2nd Battalion), for discussion of training problems in 1940 and 1941 before the entry into the war of Japan.

the secret lay to a great extent in the link between the elementary tutelage given at the Regimental Centre, and the emergence of the soldier trained for the special task of fighting in the jungles of the Burma border. That link was the 39th Training Division. As has been remarked, the need for giving every officer and man specialized jungle training before joining his active unit in the field against the Japanese led to the organization of this Division as a *purely training formation*. As a result each battalion in the Division lost its own identity and became a training unit for all Battalions of the Regiment to which it belonged. For instructors with jungle experience it had unavoidably to rely on the active Battalions in the field and here the time-honoured lesson was once more to be learnt—i.e., the Battalion Commanders who sent the Training Division good instructors, and not merely those they wished to get rid of, received well-trained, “jungle experienced” men in their reinforcements. The C.Os. of the Frontier Force Regiment made no mistake in this respect.

Space forbids the writing fully here of the story of the 39th Training Division. A picture of the life and routine in it has already been given in the narrative of the 7th Battalion of the Frontier Force Regiment. A few of the Division’s general features and difficulties however, are both instructive and interesting and are therefore worth recording.

The time spent with the Training Division by each officer and man was a minimum of eight weeks. The Division was allotted the area between Ranipur, near Hardwar on the Ganges, to Badshahibagh on the Jumna for its activities—an ideal training area as the jungle ran along the Siwalik Hills, giving facilities for all types of training. This included everything from hill fighting on knife-edged ridges covered with scrub jungle to assault crossings of large rivers.

From the point of view of the formation and unit commanders who had to organize the training, as well as administer the camps and depots, all manner of difficulties had to be overcome, including problems of water supply and building of depots of all kinds. In addition the numbers in their units rose greatly in excess of their establishment. At times Battalions had as many as 1,200 men of whom very few had even *seen* a jungle, while the establishment allowed was only 850 of all ranks. Yet within six months of the Division’s inception reinforcements of every type of man for every type of unit were flowing from it—evidence of the tremendous effort made by all who were working with it. Virtue is indeed its own reward, but it is nevertheless a matter of regret that no official recognition was made of the work of this Division, particularly for those who could not fail to feel that they were being left behind with it while others at the front reaped all the rewards. Let this volume therefore record its tribute to a formation and a team that carried out a difficult and arduous task with a success that was proved in all the jungles and on every battlefield, from Imphal to Rangoon.

In conclusion, the History of the 39th Training Division would not be complete without mention of that remarkable man the late Jim Corbett*—of him General Frank Moore wrote as follows: “Being an old friend of mine, he wrote asking could I find him a job with the Training Division. He carefully omitted to mention his age, which I knew was about 70! But, when I remembered his incomparable knowledge of jungle lore and how the people of Kumaon always called on him when suffering from the depredations of man-eating tigers or panthers, I felt certain that he would be invaluable as an instructor. G.H.Q. agreed and granted him the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. Perhaps one true story will best illustrate his remarkable gifts.

“He was taking a small class of officers through the jungle and had started the lesson by saying, ‘Once you have learnt what to look for in the jungle, you will never have a dull moment and will never find it necessary to read a “thriller.”’ As they proceeded, he showed them which berries and roots were edible or could be used as medicine; stopped to chatter with monkeys which came together from all sides when he called them; received an answer, when he made the tiger’s ‘mating’ call. All this was thrilling enough for any young officers, but then came the *pièce de résistance*. Jim, who was leading along a narrow path, suddenly stopped, studied the ground carefully and then said to the class . . . ‘Look carefully and tell me what you see.’ The officers replied, ‘There are footprints of a large deer.’ ‘Quite right,’ said Jim, ‘but notice how they suddenly end. We must now try to find them on either side of the path.’ They looked and found them a few feet to one side. ‘I think this has a story,’

* J. Corbett, author of “Man Eaters of Kumaon,” “Jungle Lore,” “My India,” etc.

said Jim quietly. 'You see that tree immediately above where the Sambhur leapt to one side. Now, if my guess is right, a panther was in that tree, jumped on the Sambhur's back and that accounts for that sudden leap sideways. However, we will soon find out. The Sambhur's immediate reaction would be to dash under a low tree, so as to brush the panther off. Let us look round and see if we can find any black, yellow or white hairs on any nearby low bough.' They searched and found the fur and marks where the panther had fallen.

"What a lesson and what a wonderful instructor! Jim Corbett has since died but his jungle lore instruction and the wonderful cine films which he showed will never be forgotten by those who served with the Training Division."

The 39th Indian Division was broken up and its units returned to their parent Regiments after the surrender of Japan, in 1946: but its role and achievement was one of the lessons of the Second World War.

APPENDIX IX

THE VICTORIA CROSS

When Queen Victoria presented the earliest V.Cs. at a parade in Hyde Park in June 1857, the magazine *Punch* published these lines:

*Low born and noble, side by side,
Colonel and private stand today,
Their comrades' boast, their country's pride,
When all were brave, the bravest they.
Knighthood that girds all valiant hearts,
Knighthood that crowns the fearless brow,
The knighthood this bronze cross imparts,
Let Fleece and Bath and Garter bow.*

Below are the records of the acts of gallantry for which five recipients were awarded the Victoria Cross 1857-1956.

CAPTAIN R. H. SHEBBEARE, QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN CORPS OF GUIDES

In the assault on the walled City of Delhi on the 14th September 1857, three of the attacking columns were successful, but the fourth, directed to clear the suburb of Kissenganj, suffered a reverse. The Guides and a battalion of the 2nd Gurkhas were with this column and artillery support for their attack which was promised, failed to materialize. In consequence the assault on the enemy breastworks was met by heavy and well-directed fire which was withheld till the last moment. Both battalions suffered severely and an endeavour was then made by a party of Guides led by Captain Shebbeare to storm a large loopholed courtyard in Kissenganj. Twice Captain Shebbeare charged up to the wall without success and was trying to organize a third attempt when it became apparent that owing to its already heavy losses the Column must retire. Captain Shebbeare collected his party and covered the retreat of the column. During the action he received a bullet through his cheek and a bad scalp wound from another.

For his gallantry on this day Captain Shebbeare was awarded the Victoria Cross.

CAPTAIN A. G. HAMMOND, QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN CORPS OF GUIDES (INFANTRY)

On the 14th December 1879, during the retirement from the Asmai Heights, near Kabul, which had been earlier stormed by the Guides, Captain Hammond showed conspicuous coolness and gallantry in defending the top of the hill with a rifle and bayonet against large numbers of Afghans; and later during the retreat down the hill in stopping to assist in carrying away a wounded Sepoy. The enemy were not sixty yards away and firing heavily all the time. For his bravery in this action Captain Hammond was awarded the Victoria Cross.

CAPTAIN E. JOTHAM, 51ST SIKHS FRONTIER FORCE

(while serving with the North Waziristan Militia)

On the 7th January 1915, in an action against a tribal enemy near Miranshah in the Tochi Valley, Captain Jotham's party of Militia were heavily engaged against great odds after a long march. For most conspicuous bravery during this action in attempting, at the cost of his own life, to rescue one of his men, Captain Jotham was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

CAPTAIN G. MEYNELL, 5TH BATTALION 12TH FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT

(QUEEN VICTORIA'S OWN CORPS OF GUIDES)

On the 29th September 1935, while operating against Mohmand tribesmen, the Guides were directed to secure a feature called Pt. 4080. Captain Meynell was Adjutant of the Battalion, and as the Battalion Commander, during the last phase of the attack, was unable to obtain information from his most forward troops, Captain Meynell went forward to ascertain the situation. He found the forward troops on the objective engaged in a struggle with an enemy vastly superior in numbers. He at once took command of the men in the area, but by then the enemy were closing in from three sides.

Captain Meynell now had at his disposal two Lewis guns and about thirty men. Although they were maintaining a heavy and accurate fire on the advancing tribesmen the overwhelming numbers of the latter enabled them to reach the position. Both Lewis guns were by now damaged beyond repair and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle commenced. In this Captain Meynell was mortally wounded and all his men were either killed or wounded.

Throughout the action Captain Meynell tried by all possible means to communicate the situation to Headquarters, but determined to hold on at all costs and encouraged his men to fight with him to the end. He inflicted on the enemy very heavy casualties which prevented them from exploiting their success. For his gallantry, devotion and self-sacrifice Captain Meynell was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL A. E. CUMMING, O.B.E., M.C.

2ND BATTALION 12TH FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT

On the 3rd January 1942, in Malaya, a strong force of the Japanese penetrated his position while Brigade Headquarters and a battalion were being withdrawn. Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming with a small party of men immediately counter-attacked the enemy and prevented any further penetration of the position until his whole party had become casualties, and he himself had received two bayonet wounds in the stomach. By this brave counter-attack Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming enabled the major portion of our men and vehicles to be withdrawn. Later, in spite of pain and weakness from his wounds, this officer drove in a carrier for more than an hour under very heavy fire collecting isolated detachments of our men. He then received two further wounds, after which, and while attempting to collect a further isolated detachment, he lost consciousness and the driver of the carrier attempted to evacuate him. Lieutenant-Colonel Cumming, however, recovered consciousness and insisted on remaining where he was until he discovered that he and his driver were the sole survivors in the locality. He then decided to retire.

By his outstanding gallantry, initiative and devotion to duty, he was largely instrumental in the safe withdrawal of the Brigade. He was awarded the Victoria Cross.

Note

In addition to the above, three officers of the Guides won the Victoria Cross when serving with the Cavalry of the Corps, and one was awarded it before joining the Regiment.

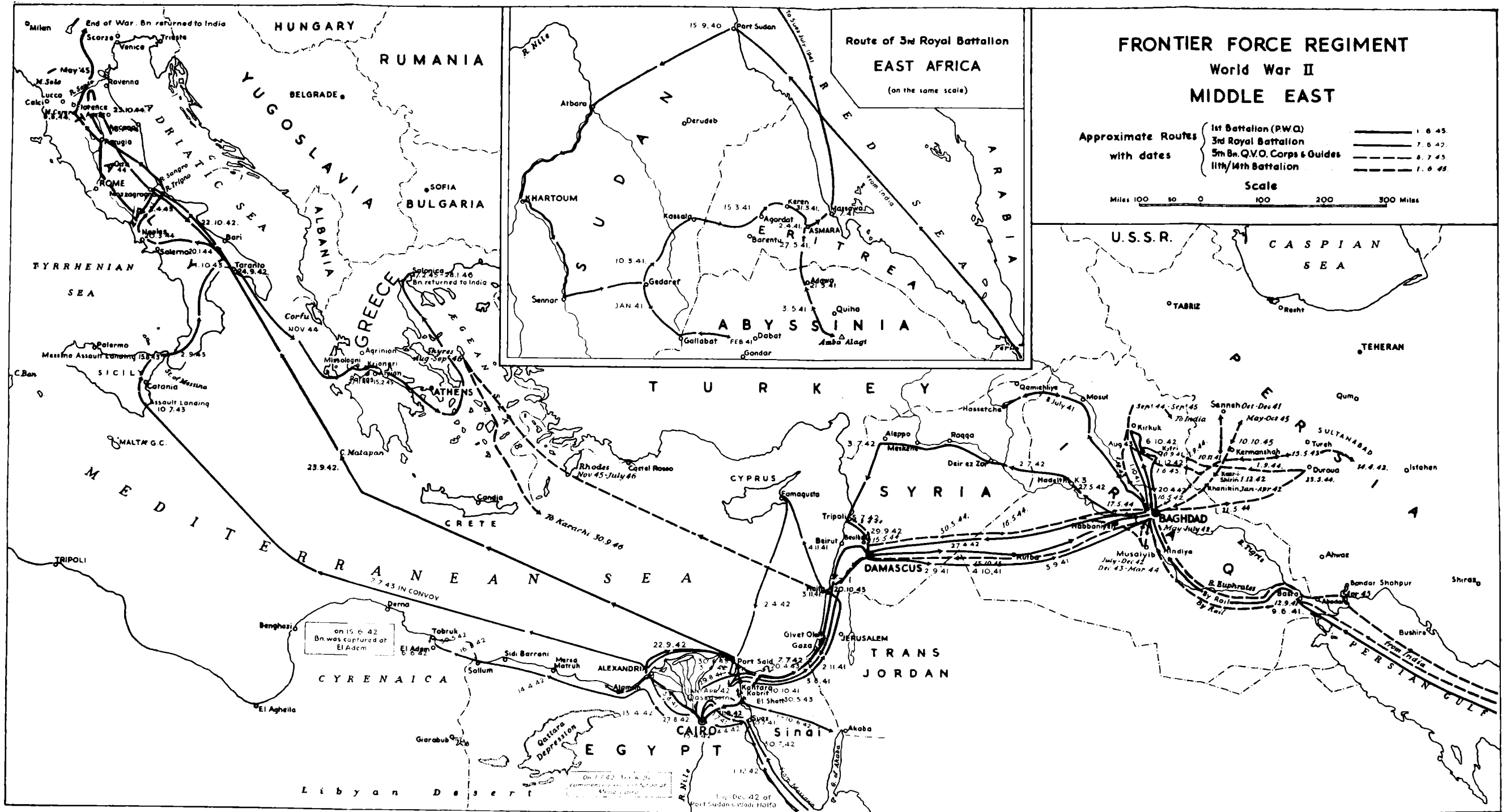
APPENDIX X

CHANGES IN TITLES OF THE FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT, 1846-1956

1846	1865	1903	1921-22	1947 (On Partition)	1956
Corps of Guides	Corps of Guides	Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (F.F.)	12th F.F. Regiment 5th Battalion (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides)	The F.F. Regiment 5th Battalion (Q.V.O. Corps of Guides)	The F.F. Regiment 2nd Battalion (Guides)
1st Sikh Infantry	1st Sikhs	51st Sikhs (F.F.)	1st Battalion (P.W.O. Sikhs)	1st Battalion (P.W.O.)	3rd Battalion
2nd Sikh Infantry	2nd Sikhs	52nd Sikhs (F.F.)	2nd Battalion (Sikhs)	2nd Battalion	4th Battalion
3rd Sikh Infantry	3rd Sikhs	53rd Sikhs (F.F.)	3rd Royal* Battalion (Sikhs)	3rd Royal Battalion	5th Battalion
4th Sikh Infantry	4th Sikhs	54th Sikhs (F.F.)	4th Battalion (Sikhs) Raised in the Second World War	4th Battalion 8th Battalion 9th Battalion 2nd Battalion Pathan Regiment	6th Battalion 13th Battalion 14th Battalion 15th Battalion
			† 10th Battalion be- came the Regimental Centre in 1941	Regimental Centre	Regimental Centre

* Became "Royal" in 1935.

† Raised as the 2nd Guides in the First World War and became the 10th (or Training) Bn.



FRONTIER FORCE REGIMENT

World War II

MIDDLE EAST

Approximate Routes with dates

- 1st Battalion (P.W.Q.) ——— 1.6.45.
- 3rd Royal Battalion ——— 7.6.42.
- 5th Bn. Q.V.O. Corps & Guides ——— 8.7.45.
- 11th/14th Battalion ——— 1.6.46.

Scale

Miles 100 50 0 100 200 300 Miles

Route of 3rd Royal Battalion
EAST AFRICA
(on the same scale)

On 15.6.42 Bn. was captured at El Adem

On 17.42 Bn. was captured at Port Sudan's Redi Halfa

By Dec. 42 at Port Sudan's Redi Halfa

FRONTIER FORCE REGT. World War II BURMA

Approximate Routes with dates	
2nd Battalion	Jan 42
4th Battalion	21.4.41
8th Battalion	7.10.44
M.G. Battalion	14.8.44
9th Battalion	13.5.44
11 th /14 th Battalion	3.7.43

Scale

Miles 100 50 0 100 200 Miles

and MALAYA

Scale

Miles 100 0 100 200 300 400 Miles

