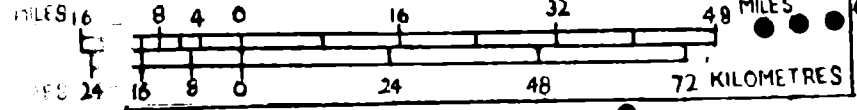


SCALE



LINE OF CONTROL SEPARATING CHINESE AND INDIAN POSSESSIONS ON 7 SEP 62  
 AREA OF DISPUTE REGARDING INTERPRETATION OF Mc MURDO

TIBET  
 KENZÉ MANE  
 THAG LA  
 BUM LA  
 PANGCHEN  
 TULUNG LA  
 CHUNA NYURI  
 TAWANG JANG  
 ROT SPRING  
 WANG CHU  
 SELA  
 SENGÉ  
 NYUKMADONG  
 DIRANG  
 BOMDILA  
 KAMENG FD  
 KALAKTANG  
 RUPA  
 CHAKU  
 DOIMARA  
 BHALUK PUNG  
 FOOT HILLS  
 MISAMARI  
 CHARDUAR  
 BALIPARA  
 MAIRABARI RS  
 TEZPUR

LUSHALA  
 LAMDO LA  
 SHOKA LA  
 HENKAR  
 LAMANG GEL  
 NINGING  
 DOM LA  
 MACHUNA  
 MANGONG  
 TUNG LA  
 TADABE  
 SIANG FD  
 YIU  
 GASHONG  
 10090  
 KARKO  
 RICA  
 PANG IN  
 ALONG  
 KEBANG  
 DWANG OF SIANG  
 PASIGHAT  
 BERUNG  
 DAPORJO  
 MARNIU  
 KALON  
 BASAR  
 GASIGAON  
 TAIPUDIA  
 DULANGMUKH  
 KIMIN  
 NORTH LAKHIMPUR  
 SISI BARGAON  
 DIBRUGARH  
 DIM PUJ

**CHINESE INVASION**  
*OF*  
**N E F A**

By  
*Major Sita Ram Johri ( Retired )*  
M.Sc. (Allahabad), M.Ed. (Leeds).

**FOREWORD**

By  
*General KM Cariappa*  
1st. Commander-in-Chief of The Indian Armed Forces.

**HIMALAYA PUBLICATIONS**  
**KHURSHED BAGH**  
**LUCKNOW—4**

*By the author*

1. **Where India, China and Burma Meet.**
2. **India Accepts China's Challenge.**
3. **Our Borderlands.**
4. **The Indo-Pak Conflict of 1965.**
5. **Chhapamar Yudh Aur Uska Vyuh Kaushal (in Hindi).**

DS  
450.84  
137

FIRST EDITION—MAY, 1968

**Price Rs. 15**

**Printed at**

**Hindustani Art Cottage, Lucknow.**

## PREFACE

In March 1964 I was returning from Lachen-Lachung (North Sikkim) to Gangtok. On the way I stopped in the Singik Rest House for the night. The same evening 18 Indian Army officers also stayed in the same bungalow. All of them were young and bubbling with life. Soon after the last light their mess started functioning. One or two bottles of rum were opened and the chocolate coloured liquid was passed around in glasses. The boys were happy. Some of them became boisterous and talkative. The night passed. I returned to Gangtok and happened to meet the local divisional commander.

“How is it that your young subalterns cannot take a peg of rum even?” I casually asked.

“Surely, drinking is not the only criterion to judge officers with”, came the retort.

“Correct. But those who take drinks should be able to stand at least two pegs of the liquid”.

“What can I do? After all they are the sons and nephews of Panchsheelwalas”.

I am sure the readers are familiar with Panchsheel. It is a by-product of *Ahimsa* meaning non-violence, a weapon used by M. Gandhi to oust the British from India. Later on Indian political leaders prostituted the term to achieve their own selfish ends and in the name of Gandhi they applied *Ahimsa* where it was least required. Gandhi is dead. It is criminal to label him with all sorts of quotations pertaining to non-violence. The very fact that he blessed the Indian Army units proceeding to the Kashmir Valley to expel the North-West Frontier tribesmen who had invaded it gives a clue to what the Mahatma would have done had he lived and served the nation as the Prime Minister of the country in the post-independence era. There is no direct evidence to suggest that the Mahatma would have helped the process of reducing the nation to impotence and making it incapable of defending itself against a foreign invasion. *And that is actually what happened.* The Indian political leaders in power constantly preached what eroded the very foundations on which an army is built and strengthened.

The leaders might have been convinced of the efficacy of non-violence after their success in forcing the British to quit India and considered that they would help the process of ushering in peace in the world through passive means. For them army became a costly but unavoidable institution. They neglected, deliberately or otherwise, the army and its problems. Probably there were other reasons also for this neglect.

The British ruled this country through the Indian Army and the Police. One of the main tasks of the Indian Army was to help civil authority in maintaining law and order in the country. As at present, the Indian Army units very often used to be deployed for the purpose. This was irksome to the Indian public. In 1942 the rulers used the army to suppress the national upheaval in the country specially in Bihar. Thus the army unwittingly invited ill-will of the Indian people and received the treatment as if it was an *army of occupation*. Obviously, our national leaders viewed this institution with a detached feeling. In their weaker moments they might have entertained the idea of clipping its wings. Had our leaders been infused with revolutionary zeal and had fought battles with the two strong arms of the British—the army and the police—they would have had enough of their own trained man-power to replace the old hands of the army after independence. Unfortunately not a single Congressman was fit to get himself enrolled in the armed forces of India. Our leaders, therefore, had to be content with what they got as the administrators of the country. Briefly they tolerated the existence of the Indian Army with suspicion. Any army officer of senior rank who showed signs of independence or initiative or martial brilliance was an eyesore to our administrators.

In 1960 General Thimayya was the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Armed forces. He was loved by the Indian troops. Obviously our leaders might have regarded him as an obstruction to the Congress party to lead the nation to the cherished goal of a *Socialistic Pattern of Society*. General Thimayya and his supporters had to be controlled, if not to be removed from the army. As in dictatorial countries the army was purged (quietly and decently) of such elements as were suspected of challenging the authority of those whom luck had placed at the helm of affairs in the country.

In those days there was a hot rumour in the country and probably abroad also that the Indian Army might stage a *Coup d'etat*. Inexperience in administration gave birth to inefficiency in our leaders which in turn might have produced a feeling of inferiority in them. To overcome that they showed their prowess in interfering in the army affairs. They found excuses to have their way and to install their own team of senior officers in the Indian Army. Thus, for some reason, probably political, Lieut.-General SPP Thorat who was to succeed General Thimayya was superceded. Naturally he retired from the service. This happens in every country and in every army, but here it created more problems than our leaders could solve them. This step created two factions in the army—one was said to be loyal to the country and the other to emoluments. In other words it created bad blood in the army.

General Thimayya was the only Indian general who had fought the Japanese on the Arakan front as a brigadier. His three battalion commanders were Lieut.-Cols Usman, Thorat and Sen. Usman became a brigadier and was killed in the J & K operations in Jhangar in 1948. Thorat became Lieut.-General and retired. Of this team of experienced officers only Sen remained. When the Chinese attacked NEFA Lieut.-General Sen was the Army Commander. Under the new team of officers our army was sent to NEFA to face the Chinese challenge. Briefly the higher echelon of the Indian Army was divided and weak. Can the Indian Army ever dream of gaining power in our vast country where innumerable divergent interests prevail?

A careful examination will show that our army was ill-equipped for any warfare what to say of mountain or snow warfare. Somehow or other we failed to equip the army with modern weapons. After independence the Government of India retained a few British technical officers to advise us on the right lines in increasing the production of arms and munitions. Unfortunately this costly experiment did not function satisfactorily, specially at a time when things were moving fast elsewhere. As a result our army remained ill-equipped. Further, we never thought that China would ever attack the country which did her best to popularise the leadership of Mao and Chao En-lai in the Afro-Asian nations. Consequently our army was ill-prepared for jungle-cum-mountain fighting which it faced in NEFA. Briefly when the Chinese attacked NEFA the

Indian Army neither had the experienced leadership which could handle the task with determination nor was equipped for action in the mountainous terrain covered with forests. The enemy deliberately planned to attack us on a ground of his choice. Circumstances forced the Indian military leaders to meet the challenge held out by China. What was the result? An army which had a brilliant record and which is still a force in the world to reckon with became an object of criticism not only in the country but outside as well. Its brave deeds were overlooked and reverses magnified.

\*

\*

\*

\*

I retired from the army in 1958. The Chinese invasion came in 1962. During these four years I had completely lost touch with military affairs. But fortunately during the Chinese invasion of NEFA I was in eastern India. In October 1962 I was in Nagaland, Ukhrul and Manipur. I witnessed the hectic activities of our government to meet the Chinese on the ground of their choice. In November I was travelling in the Assam Valley. I met many officers and other ranks who had taken an active part in this unexpected conflict. I gathered useful information regarding the India-China war. In course of time I gathered more information on the subject. When the opportunity came, and it came last year, this book was written.

The printing of this book was completed in the last week of December 1967 and it could have been released to the public in the first week of January 1968. But I was not in a hurry. I decided to give a true\* and objective perspective of the India-China war in NEFA. I, therefore, sent copies of the book to General KM Cariappa, Lieut.-General SPP Thorat and Lieut.-General BM Kaul for their comments.

I am grateful to General Cariappa who very kindly consented to go through the book and write a foreword to it. I am sure it must

---

\* Regarding the last line, page 249, and first line, page 250, the facts which have come to my knowledge now are :—The Gorkhas were attacked by the Chinese. While fighting they were ordered to withdraw. During the withdrawal the party was ambushed. It is not certain who laid the ambush—the Chinese or the local people. But it is certain that the local tribals destroyed the bridge by which the Gorkhas were to cross a river. Therefore, it appears that Lieut.-Col Taylor and his party were not the victims of snow but of local treachery.

have been very difficult for the General to spare some of his very busy time for the purpose.

I am also grateful to Lieut.-General Thorat who very graciously read the book and commented upon it.

I am especially grateful to Lieut.-General BM Kaul whose generous and impartial opinion has greatly enhanced the value of the book. Lieut.-General Kaul was one who actually directed the operations in this campaign.

Lastly I should not forget my patron—Shri SN Chaturvedi, Ex-Director of Education, Madhya Bharat and the present editor of Sarswati—without whose help I could not have succeeded in bringing out the book in 1968. I am also thankful to my friend Shri KP Lal, who helped me by his advice.

In the end I request the readers to read this book in the perspective of a universal truth that the army is a vital part of the society and to understand its successes and failures apart from the limitations and weaknesses of the society is not only to confuse the issue but to evade it. Further, they are requested to remember that “soldiers do not make wars; they fight them”.

43, Khurshed Bagh  
Lucknow-4 (U.P.).

*Sita Ram Johri*

1. 5. 68.





## CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
I THE POLITICAL DIVISIONS OF NEFA ..	15
Approaches .. ..	16
II THE RACIAL GROUPS OF NEFA.. ..	17
III THE UNKNOWN NEFA .. ..	20
IV THE DHOLA SECTOR .. ..	27
Defence of NEFA .. ..	30
The Dhola-Thagla Sector .. ..	33
Land Routes .. ..	39
The Dhola Operations .. ..	41
In The South of The Namka Chu .. ..	45
In The North of The Namka Chu .. ..	52
Appreciation & Plan .. ..	55
Chinese Retaliation .. ..	71
V THE SILVER LINING .. ..	89
The Battles of Bum La .. ..	101
The Garhwal Rifles in Defence .. ..	109
A Sad Moment .. ..	119
VI A CONFLICT OF DECISIONS .. ..	124
VII ROUT OR FIGHT .. ..	144
Dirang Dzung Operations .. ..	148
VIII THE FORLORN HOPE .. ..	169
Bomdi La Operations .. ..	173
Comments .. ..	190
IX THE STORM IN THE NORTH-EAST .. ..	197
The Battles of The Walong Sector .. ..	202
The Battle of Walong .. ..	210
The Main Attack .. ..	222
The Withdrawal .. ..	234
X THE REST OF NEFA .. ..	244
Siang Frontier Division .. ..	244
Subansiri Frontier Division .. ..	250
XI THE SOLILOQUY .. ..	255
INDEX .. ..	256

## ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Sketches</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. Sketch No. 1 . . . . . The Dhola Sector	34
2. Sketch No. 2 . . . . . The Tawang Sector	96
3. Sketch No. 3 . . . . . The Jang-Se La Sector	125
4. Sketch No. 4A . . . . . The Bomdi La-Dirang Sector	151
5. Sketch No. 4B . . . . . Indian Troop Disposition in Bomdi La on 12th November 1962	175
6. Sketch No. 6 . . . . . The Walong Sector	213

For NEFA less Lohit and Tirap Frontier Divisions please refer to the map in the beginning of the book.

For Lohit Frontier Division please see Sketch No. 5. at the end of the book.

There was no fighting in Tirap Frontier Division hence no sketch or map of this region is included.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

(Pp 128-129)

### *Killed in Action*

1. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh, Commander 162nd Brigade.
2. Lieut.-Col BN Avasthi, Commanding Officer, 4th Rajputs.
3. Captain Amarjeet Singh, 5th Guards.
4. Lieutenant IS Chaudhry, 5th Guards.
5. Subedar Jogindra Singh, Ist Sikhs.
6. Sepoy Kewal Singh, 4th Sikhs.

### *Serving in the Indian Army*

1. Lieutenant SN Tandon, 4th Garhwal.
2. Subedar Udai Singh Rawat, 4th Garhwal.
3. L/Nk Gopal Singh Gusain, 4th Garhwal.

## F O R E W O R D

I have read this book on the War of 1962 in the N.E.F.A. between us and China with great interest. The author, Major Sita Ram Johri, certainly has put in a great deal of research into this short "War" in the NEFA and has collected a great deal of detailed accounts referring to the tactical dispositions, plans, our successes, our reverses and so on quite thoroughly. It speaks of his thoroughness and keenness for having been able to collect this mass of details in the manner he has and recording them in such a simple readable form as he has done in this book.

There has been a great deal of loose talk in many quarters in our country and elsewhere about this "War" saying that these operations in NEFA in which we did not come off well was a "military debacle". Many uncharitable tongues have been uncomplimentary about the quality of leadership and of the fighting of our brave Officers and Jawans. Looking at this matter in all its aspects I feel the main responsibility for the unfortunate setback to our operations in that area could justifiably be laid at the "political door" and not entirely at the "military door". Our Army was just "a thin green line all along that long inhospitable mountainous, wooded front hardly any depth at all". Our Commanders were starved for complete and timely intelligence about the enemy's movements. We had no fifth columnists but the enemy had I believe persons disguised as Monpas—the locals—to do intensive intelligence work for him. We had no "traitors" helping us with information about enemy concentrations, enemy's plans and so on as China is supposed to have had from some such people in our country. It was not as if our soldiers were less fighters than the Chinese that we could not have had the success we should have had but it was mainly because our fine Jawans were completely out-numbered practically everywhere and the enemy had full intelligence of our dispositions. I know as recorded in this book, there were certain

instances of failures in leadership but that was not common to our Army alone. Much much worse things have happened in other countries in previous wars but of course this is no comfort to us because of similar things happened elsewhere. I say this in fairness to our Officers and Jawans who some unkind people have said were not equal to the standard of the officers and men on the other side. In my opinion our Officers and Jawans are ten times, if not more, more superior than those on the other side. Our Army is still one of the best in the World.

We were of course deficient of some essential equipment. Here again it was not the fault of the Army nor of the army planners. I have always been saying that the strength, the training and equipment of an army are so closely related to the foreign policy of the Government of one's country. As far as I can remember at no time was there any political indication given of any physical threat to the security of our country, sufficiently in advance of time, to enable the Army planners to give serious thought to implement their plans in regard to equipment, weapons, training and so on. On the other hand on occasions the soldier's warnings of things to come were slighted. Nevertheless, with what our Army had in that inhospitable part of our country, with the very small numbers compared to the overwhelming numbers on the other side, I do think we did as well as we could have done in the circumstances. People do not talk of the very fine show put up by our Army on the Walong front nor of the splendid fighting by our Officers and Jawans in the Chushul Area on the Ladakh front.

I congratulate the author, Major Johri, on having written this book which could be read by all Officers of our Services with advantage to improve their military knowledge, in this kind of warfare.

I believe the author who has written this book as a "Private Individual" is NOT obliged to have any "Security Clearance" by any Government authority.

Roshanara  
Mercara (Coorg).  
2. 4. 68.

*KM Cariappa*

## INTRODUCTION (1)

by

*Lieutenant-General SPP Thorat*

Ashok Chakra; Padmashree; D.S.O.

Hon. ADC. to the President of India.

Maj. Sitaram Johri needs no introduction to the student of Military History. He has written a number of very readable books on our Northern and North-Eastern Frontiers.

In the present book, Maj. Johri gives a detailed account of the operations which were forced on us by the Chinese in 1962. He brings out the difficulties of the terrain, the adverse conditions under which our troops fought and gives useful comments on the conduct of operations. Whether one agrees with these comments or not, they show that Maj. Johri has made a detailed study of the operations. This in itself is a valuable contribution, and I hope that it enthruses more writers to study the campaign in greater detail.

I am sure that Maj. Johri's book will be well received as it deserves to be. All those who are interested in Defence of our Frontiers should be grateful to him for the present book. I certainly am.

Indu-Niketan

Tarabai Park

Kolhapur.

23-2-68.

*SPP Thorat*

## INTRODUCTION ( 2 )

by

*Lieutenant-General BM Kaul ( Retired )*

Indian Army

Every author has a right to have his own opinion. So has Major Johri. Though I do not agree with some of his conclusions, I think he has compiled this book with considerable effort and has written it in a simple and a forthright manner. I hope he is widely read not only by those who were eye-witnesses of the events described by the author but also by students of military history (who will, no doubt, form their own judgement). I also hope that more books are written, in time to come, on operations in Nefa—as also Ladakh, where similar military disasters took place—in 1962. The more versions we have, the more we will learn and the better for us.

Delhi Cantt.

*BM Kaul*

Dated 1.1.68

## CHAPTER I

# THE POLITICAL DIVISIONS OF NEFA

“The North-East Frontier Agency is constitutionally a part of Assam with which it will be united when it reaches a sufficient stage of development”<sup>1</sup>.

VERRIER ELWYN

After undergoing many political changes NEFA came to be divided into five divisions. Their names from the west to east are the Kameng Frontier Division (KFD), the Subansiri Frontier Division (SFD), the Siang Frontier Division, the Lohit Frontier Division (LFD), and the Tirap Frontier Division. Their respective administrative headquarters are Bomdi La, Ziro, Along, Tezu and Khonsa. Each division is administered by a Political Officer (PO). POs have also been posted at Tawang (KFD), Pasighat (Siang Frontier Division) and Roing (LFD). Thus Tawang, Pasighat and Roing have attained the same political status as their divisions. It is hoped that in the near future these regions will form separate administrative units. Further, each division is divided into sub-divisions. Thus Sepla and Bameng are the sub-divisions of KFD and Daporijo of SFD. These sub-divisions are administered by Assistant Political Officers (APOs).

The POs and APOs were recruited in the Indian Frontier Administrative cadre. This cadre is in liquidation under the NEFA administrative reforms which are being introduced in the Agency. As a result, the POs and the APOs will be absorbed either in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or in the Assam Civil Service.

At present the North-East Frontier Agency Headquarters is located at Shillong. The Government of India is planning to shift its location. It is a political problem which is linked with the reorganisation of Assam itself. It will not be long before a firm decision is taken by the Government. However, the prospective site for the proposed headquarters is most likely to be Pasighat.

The Chinese invasion of NEFA did not touch the Tirap Frontier Divisions. Hence this division is omitted from the present discussion.

---

1. *A Philosophy For NEFA* by Varrier Elwyn (Shillong 1957. . . . . p. 4.)



## APPROACHES

**KFD** :—The eastern entrance to this division is from Bhutan via Tashigong. There are two alternative routes open to a traveller to enter KFD. Either he can enter the Tawang area along the Nyamjang Chu valley via Blating, the Indian frontier out-post near the Nyamjang Chu-Tawang Chu river junction or he can reach Dirang valley by the Orka La. Shortly Bhutan will be connected with KFD along the latter route. The southern approach to KFD is from Foothill, a NEFA administrative out-post, which is reached from Rangiya railway station on the North-East Frontier Railway by a car drive.

**SFD** :—Kimin is the gateway of the division. It is connected with North Lakhimpur by a motor road. After the Chinese Invasion North Lakhimpur has been connected with Tezpur by rail. Thus the land communications of SFD have recently improved.

**Siang Frontier Division** :—The Tezpur-North Lakhimpur railway line will soon be extended to Rekhawali, a small village on the southern frontier of the division. Beyond Rekhawali a motor road runs to Along via Basar.

**LFD** :—The approach to this division, on account of vagaries of the Lohit river, remains difficult. However, the last railway station on the way is Sekhua Ghat. Here the mighty Brahmaputra is crossed by a ferry to reach New Sadiya which is connected both with Roing and Tezu by motor roads. These roads need major repairs, sometimes new alignment, after every rainy season.

**Air Transport** :—Ziro, Along and Pasighat are provided with air-fields where Dakotas can land. The most popular means of transport to enter the SFD and Siang Frontier Division is by air. A passenger can fly to these towns either from Jorhat or Dibrugarh. Readers should remember that the entry into these divisions still remains selective, restricted to a few only.

## CHAPTER II

# THE RACIAL GROUPS OF NEFA

“Despite the considerable all-round progress, made in recent years, especially after the Chinese aggression, an overwhelming majority of NEFA’s tribal population of 3,30,000 lives in squalor, disease and dire poverty.

This is revealed in a techno-economic survey, completed in December last by the National Council of Applied Economic Research. The survey which took over two years to complete was undertaken at the request of the NEFA administration.

The survey shows that agriculture is so primitive that even ploughs are unknown except in a few pockets. Diseases are so rampant that there is practically no population growth. Commerce and industry do not exist. Despite the construction of new roads, no passenger traffic has developed”.

NATIONAL HERALD 17. 3. 68.

The people of NEFA, though bundled into a single fold—the Mongoloids—, can distinctly be placed into four main groups—the Nagas, the Abors, the Daflas and the Bhotias. Besides these, there is a minority group which migrated during the last two centuries from the Shan States of Burma. The Khamptis and the Singphos of Tirap and southern LFD belong to this group.

The people of the Naga group reside in Tirap Frontier Division with which we are not concerned here.

The Abors form the most important group of the Nefaites. Their main sub-groups are the Galongs, the Minyongs and the Padams (the great). The Boris and a few other groups of the interior Siang belong to the Abor group. The entire group of the Abors inhabits the Siang Frontier Division. In addition the Padams also form an influential community of the LFD.

Akin to the Padams are the Idu Mishmis who are the inhabitants of the Roing region. They are concentrated in the Dibong basin. Another branch of the Mishmis is the Miju Mishmis who inhabit the upper basin of the Lohit river. The lower basin is populated by the Digaru Mishmis.

The Dafla group is the most widely spread in the northern tract (north of the Brahmaputra). The Akas and the Mijis of Kameng, the Daflas, the Tagins, the Hill Miris and the Apa Tanis of the SFD constitute this group. The Khawas (probably from Khawas i.e. the slaves) of the KFD and the Sullungs (locally known as the Chulus), though belonging to the Dafla group, are said to be the erstwhile slaves of the Daflas.

The last is the Bhotia group which migrated to NEFA from Tibet during the Manchu rule in China. The Monpas of Tawang and Dirang and the Sherdukpanis of Rupa and Shergaon of Kameng, the Khambas and the Monbas of the Siang Frontier Divisions belong to the Bhotia group. A sprinkling of this group has also penetrated into some villages of the Walong region of the LFD..

Besides these groups a few families of Biharis and Marwaris are also seen conducting business in the bazar of Pasighat. Similarly a few families of the Nepalis have acquired land for cultivation in the lower LFD.

**Culture** :—The Monpas, the Monbas and the Khambas are Buddhists and economically well-off (comparatively). In fact they are the torch-bearers of culture and civilization in NEFA.

The second group which is well disciplined and well organised, cultured and prosperous is the Abor community. Like the Khasis of Assam, the Angamis of Nagaland, they are the future leaders of NEFA.

In addition there are the Apa Tanis (of the SFD) who are cultured and self-contained. Their number (about 10,000) debars them from being politically ambitious. Regarding the other groups one would not, considering the values of the Hindu culture, like to dub them as animists or primitives.

The most notable group of the Nefaites is that of the Tagins and the Idu Mishmis. They are warlike. They never permitted the Bhotias penetrate into their land. The Tagins remained isolated from the plains but the Idus had religious ties with Assam. They are Shaktas and worshipped Kachcha Khati (eater of raw flesh). The Chinese are trying to befriend these people, specially the Idus.

The area adjacent to the LFD is comparatively low and wooded where high-class Tibetans would not like to migrate. The Chinese

are encouraging the Idus (and some Mijus) to colonize this area. To instill loyalty to the Chinese empire a good proportion of Chinese blood is also injected in the local population. Thus a people of mixed breed and loyal to the Han empire inhabit the valley of the western tributary of the Lohit river (in Tibet). India, therefore, faces a danger in the north-east from this human mass which is primitive and ambitious and has social ties with the Mishmis. Because of these facts the Idus, specially of the frontier region, have many times in the recent past tried to create law and order problems for the NEFA administration. Further, these are the Idus some of whose children have been taken to China for *progressive* education. These children are the potential leaders of the upper Dibouy valley.

### CHAPTER III

## THE UNKNOWN NEFA

“Few nations bordering upon the British dominion in India are less generally known than those inhabiting the extreme north-east frontier of Bengal, and yet, in a commercial, a statistical, or a political point of view, no country is more important. There our territory of Assam is situated in almost immediate contact with the empire of China and Ava (Burma), being separated from each by a narrow belt of mountain country, possessed of barbarous tribes of independent savages, and capable of being crossed over in the present state of communications in ten or twelve days”.<sup>1</sup>

McCOSH

In ancient India very little seems to have been known about the terrain of NEFA. Later Huin Tsiang was the first adventurer-cum-religious scholar who writes in his account about the hills and hillmen of NEFA. While in Assam he expressed a desire to return to China via the hill track of north-east of Assam. He was told :

“To the east of Kamrup (Assam), the description continues, the country was a series of hills and hillocks without any principal city, and it reached to the south-west of barbarians (of China), hence the inhabitants were akin to the Mou and Lao. The pilgrim heard from the people (of Kamrup) that the south-west borders of Szechuan were distant about two months’ journey but the mountains and the rivers were hard to pass, there were pestilential vapours and poisonous snakes and herbs. In the south-east of the country were wild elephants which ravaged in herds, and so there was a good supply of elephants for war purposes”.<sup>2</sup>

It is apparent that in spite of terrain and climatic hinderances Assam had contacts with Szechuan and the Assamese knew the layout of NEFA fairly well. Probably the route to China passed through Rima and Tachienlu and terminated in Szechuan.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1836.

<sup>2</sup> Oriental Translation Fund, New Series, Vol XV, On *Yuan Chawang* Vol II by Thomas Waters.....p. 185.

**Puranic Knowledge** :—This knowledge about the terrain of NEFA specially of the north-east-north of Assam had been compiled in Shastras and Puranas. Whether these scripts were written previous to Huin Tsiang's visit or after, they displayed the adventurous spirit and intelligence of those who composed them. *Kalika Purana* has given a vivid description of the source of the Lohit river.

Originally there was a Kunda (lake), 40 square miles in area. The origin of this Kunda was attributed to the birth of a son, according to a well-known legend of Assam, from Amoga, the wife of Saint Shantanu, by Brahma. Chinese records also speak of the presence of a lake, Chaime, of such a size in this part of the world. The lake was located in a cup-shaped tract surrounded by four mountains. For ages this lake remained unknown till Parasram, an Aryan prince, brought it into prominence. He took a dip in the lake and was cured of the malady from which he was suffering. He decided to benefit the world by bringing down its efficacious waters to India. In his wanderings he discovered the source of the present Lohit in the west of the Kunda. At its very source three rivers—Sirilooicheh, Booda Looicheh and Looicheh or Brahmaputra—took their birth. Probably they were the Iravati (of Burma), Siang and Lohit. The source of these rivers was located in Kailash, the famous abode of Lord Shiva in the Mansarovar region. Parasram brought the Lohit to the Kunda and let it flow to Assam. To facilitate its flow he made a chasm in a mountain ridge. The chasm later came to be known as Kuthara (cut by an axe) and the place as Parasram Kunda. Even today there are promenades at Walong and Manikaran (about five miles south of Walong) which indicate that the ascetics from the plains made their abode in this far off corner of India.

The Assamese pandits and geographers like Montgomery Martin were misled by the mention of Kailash. They thought that Parasram made the Lohit flow from Kailash to Chaime, a distance of about 1,500 miles. The supposition is preposterous. After roaming in the Himalayas I have come to the conclusion that the Kailash of the Parasram legend was located in the north-east-north of Assam itself. This surmise seems to be correct if the practical interpretation of Kailash is taken into account. In Rampur Bushr the highest mountain of the district is called Kailash and in the Tehri State in the

north of the Gangotri glacier there is a Kailash mountain, of which Hamilton also speaks in his book *Hindustan* (1820). The Hindu pilgrims used to visit these sacred places during the month of Srawan (June-July). Further, in Nepal Kailash is synonymous with a mountain peak covered with perpetual snow where gods live. Probably this practice was prevalent in Assam also. The Assamese called the highest mountain in the region Kailash which was the source of the Lohit. That mountain was not far from the Kunda and it was within the engineering capacity of the prince (Parasram) to cause the flow of the Lohit into the Kunda.

Regarding the Parasram Kunda or the Brahmakunda Martin is of the opinion that "Brahmakunda, I have no doubt, is in the mountain of Tibet."<sup>1</sup> Later political conditions coupled with the bloody-mindedness of the locals brought the location of the Parasram Kunda to its present position, a few miles to the south of Tezu.

Briefly the information detailed in the Puranas about the source and the course of the Lohit was derived from actual observation. Modern geologists also conclude that the present Brahmaputra was captured by a river and which made it to flow into Assam. Moreover, the north-eastern region of Assam is geologically a disturbed tract and topographical changes are frequent there. We may, therefore, suppose that geological convulsions brought about the topographical changes which forced the Brahmaputra, the Lohit and the Iravati to follow their present courses.

Later, as a natural development the Assamese defined the boundary of their State. The details of the boundary are described in *Asiatic Research* VOL. XIV p. 373 and VOL. I p. xviii. The boundary has been based on natural barriers like rivers and mountains. The description gives a clear picture of the north-east-northern portion of Assam which is highly mountainous.

**Birth of Buddhism** :—Returning to Huin Tsiang we notice that immediately after his return to China Buddhism penetrated into Tibet both from the Chinese mainland and Nepal. Within a few centuries Buddhist religious centres sprang up all over Tibet and somehow the river junctions came to be worshipped as sacred places. Thus the

<sup>1</sup> *Eastern India* Vol III ☞ Montgomery Martin.....p. 387

Tsari (north of Longju) next to Lhasa became the most sacred region for the Tibetans. From the Ashoka lions in the famous temple of Hajo (Assam) it is fairly evident that once Buddhism prevailed in this State. Naturally the Assamese Buddhists were also attracted to Tsari and proceeded to that far off land via the Tsangpo valley. Thus in addition to the Lohit route the Siang (Brahmaputra) valley also was open for traffic. It is doubtful whether the Subansiri valley ever welcomed visitors either from the south or the north. The Tagins of the upper Subansiri continued to be hostile to outsiders whether they were from Assam or Tibet. Buddhism also made an indent into the seclusion of the hills of Tawang on the Kameng Frontier. Thus the entire NEFA opened up for a limited traffic. Gradually Assam developed trade relations with China across the Himalayan wall via Lohit, Siang and Kameng Frontier Divisions. The eastern Himalayas thus were no more considered to be an impenetrable barrier. During this period there were military expeditions across NEFA.

**Military Expeditions** :—Mohammad Bakhtyar Khilji was the first invader who attempted to conquer Tibet. At the head of several thousand troops he entered the forbidden land of NEFA. His army reached a plateau which was bereft of vegetation. Due to exposure and cold his army suffered untold misery and heavy casualties. Depleted in strength and tired Bakhtyar retraced his steps. The retreating remnants were waylaid near Hajo. Bakhtyar along with his men was killed. In Hajo there is a small bridge over a rivulet where the tragedy is said to have occurred in 1198. A quarter of a century later Assam suffered two more invasions, one from Bengal and the other from Burma. The first was launched by Ghiyas-uddin, a governor of Bengal in 1227; the enemy reached Sadiya and was repulsed. The effect of this attack was transitory. The invasion of Burma had a deeper effect on the history of Assam. These invaders were the Ahoms who gradually united the Brahmaputra valley with the hill districts bordering upon it. The State so formed was named as Assam. The new rulers of Assam elected to become *Shaktas* (a sect of Hinduism). They penetrated into the tribal areas and established their sway over Lohit and Brahmaputra valleys. They established trade relations with Tibet; The Tibeto-Assamese trade passed through Tawang. Thus the process of the conquest of the terrain of NEFA by



Indians began during the Ahom period. It was during this period that the Ahoms despatched military expeditions into the hills and jungles of the Dafla and Mishmi tracts. It is on record that the Daflas and the Miris were recruited in the Ahom army. It was in 1401 that the Ahoms fought a war with the king of Burma. A boundary treaty between Burma and Assam was signed according to which the crest of the Patkoi Range was fixed as the Indo-Burmese boundary.

**NEFA in Recent Times** :—After the Ahoms the British occupied Assam. They were a nation of traders. Captain Cooper tried to explore the possibility of opening the north-eastern route ( along the Lohit valley ) to China. He failed in his mission. After various attempts the British came to the conclusion that from a commercial point of view it was a waste of money and energy to develop the region. Hence they neglected it. The Chinese interest woke them to action; they interfered in the affairs of Tibet and created a frontier awakening in India. Lieut. - Col FM Bailey entered Tibet from the Dibong valley and after exploring the Brahmaputra valley returned to India via Tawang and Dirang Dzong. The next explorer was Kingdon Ward who also surveyed and mapped the Tsari region in 1952. He confirms that in this region the main Himalayan Range is about 30 miles to the north of Migyitung. After Kingdon Ward Kaulback passed through the upper Lohit valley. But none went to NEFA for a detailed survey of the territory. In this state of inactivity India gained her independence. Soon after this in 1948 the Apa Tani plateau in Subansiri for the first time heard the rattle of light machine guns ( LMGs ) and the crack of rifles when the Apa Tanis revolted against the NEFA administration. Then again a detachment of Assam Rifles, about 60 men and a major, was slaughtered to a man by the Tagins in the upper Subansiri valley. These happenings woke up the Defence Department of India of which the Survey of India is a branch. Captain Thukral proceeded to survey the area near Tako ( a Dafla village in Subansiri ). Unluckily a Dafla decided to shoot him with an arrow. The officer was wounded. After this casualty science remained buried for more than ten years. Early in 1959 I was in Dirang Dzong. This was the year when a serious attempt was made to survey the territory. Readers will be surprised to know that till then ( I do not know what happened afterwards ) survey parties

were told not to mark the McMahon Line on the maps. Probably the Government of India did not want to raise a controversy with China over the McMahon Line. During the same period the Dalai Lama came to India. Till then NEFA remained a close chapter from surveyors' point of view.

The information given in the Hindu scriptures about the source and course of the Lohit river was derived from actual observation. At the best the knowledge gained by the Assamese about NEFA was empirical and static. On account of political changes and influences in this part of the country, it could not be developed on this foundation. With the advent of time this empirical knowledge became vague and of little use. It was valuable at the time but lost its worth in this scientific age. In recent times attempts have been made to survey NEFA from different angles. The knowledge so gained is scientific. For political reasons it is kept secret.

During my sojourn in NEFA for about six months I did not notice there adequate arrangements for its defence. Posts of the Assam Rifles had been established much before independence. They were serving the purpose of frontier checkposts. On 31st March the Dalai Lama came to India and the process of organising the defence of the Indian territory was accelerated.

**The Dalai Lama** :— I left Bomdi La in the morning of 1959. I halted at Rahung, Dirang Dzong, Senge Dzong and Jang; in the evening of 30th March I reached Tawang. The Dalai Lama had left Lhasa on 15th March for an unknown destination. Through the process of elimination India was expecting his appearance at a frontier post of Bhutan or NEFA. In Bhutan his co-religionists would have welcomed him so was the case in NEFA. Probably the Dalai Lama's preference was decided by religious considerations. The State religion in Bhutan is Ningpa ( the Red Sect ) and that of Tawang Monastery Geluk Pa ( the Yellow Sect ) of which the Dalai Lama is the head. Naturally the Government of India must have been advised by experts that there were greater chances of the Dalai Lama appearing at the Kameng Frontier posts. The Government of India decided not to be caught unprepared. The NEFA administration prepared, though in a leisurely manner, to receive the Dalai Lama and his entourage. From Dirang Dzong onwards

I saw old huts being repaired and new ones built. Such activity in a country of no change ! However, I did not suspect anything. When I reached Tawang I found that Murti, the Assistant Political Officer of Tawang, had left for Chutangmo. I was surprised to see Harmendra Singh, the Political Officer of Kameng Frontier Division, arriving at Tawang in the evening of April 1. Evidently he came to welcome the Dalai Lama. The local government officials kept the arrival of the Dalai Lama in India completely secret. On 2nd April I left Tawang. I had no hint that the Dalai Lama was to arrive very soon. On my return journey I met the members of the Tibetan government near Nuranang. Still I pushed on knowing nothing about the arrival of such a dignitary in Kameng. When I reached Dirang Dzong I heard the news broadcast by the All India Radio.

On my return to Bomdi La I heard that the Dalai Lama would take a few days' rest at Tawang and then resume his journey onwards. For various reasons I decided to leave Kameng. At the end of the first week of April I left for Shillong for arranging my future programme to visit Siang Frontier Division.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE DHOLA SECTOR

“To launch an offensive with the inadequate means at present at our disposal is not, in my opinion, a justifiable operation of war.....”<sup>1</sup>.

AUCHINLECK

April 26, 1914 was a fateful day for NEFA. On that date the representatives of three nations—the British, the Tibetans and the Chinese—met at Simla. They fixed the Indo-Tibetan boundary in the east known as the McMahon Line.

According to this Convention Tibet was to be divided into Outer and Inner Tibet. Since the Outer-Inner Tibetan boundary, as agreed upon between India and Tibet at Simla, did not satisfy the Chinese, the plenipotentiary of China was instructed not to sign the document; the Chinese plenipotentiary withdrew himself from the proceedings and did not sign the final draft of the Simla Convention on 3rd July, 1914. He was, however, present when the British and the Tibetan plenipotentiaries concluded the Convention as applicable between India and Tibet. China did not ratify the Convention. Thereby she forfeited the rights accruing to her under it.

Recently Alstair Lamb, the well-known British historian, raised an issue over the Simla Convention in his book—*The China-India Border*. He maintains that the Convention could only be binding on the parties if it was “signed and, probably, ratified”. Nirmal Sinha, Director of the Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, has suitably answered the objection in his latest book—*Tibet* (Calcutta, May, 1967)—page 14. “So there is agreement between Britain, Tibet and China re: the fact of signing the Simla Convention. Lamb’s contention based on ‘the initialed text’ loses all force in the face of the Chinese affirmation.”

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Desert General* by Correlli Barnett (London 1960).....p. 74.

The Simla Convention, because of the Chinese policy towards Tibet in later years, has lost its significance. Convention or no Convention and whatever its provisions China will extend her territorial claims over the Indian territories bordering the Indo-Tibetan boundary. Now the Convention is only of academic interest. However, some of its main features are important for our purpose.

1. China wanted to be the neighbour of India so that she could extend her territorial claims over the Indian territory of NEFA. To achieve her aim she agreed to divide Tibet into Outer and Inner Tibet. Lhasa and Chamdo were included in the former and Batang, Litang and Tachienlu in the latter. The Outer-Inner Tibetan boundary was drawn about 20 miles to the east of Rima northwards. In the north it was 300 miles to the east of Lhasa. China was not satisfied with this arrangement. She wanted to push it to further west to include Chamdo so that Inner Tibet could border upon entire NEFA in the south. In 1934 she succeeded in her design; Chamdo was included in Inner Tibet and its southern boundary coincided with the northern boundary of the entire territory of NEFA. Later Inner Tibet was formed into a new province of Greater China. It was named Sikang. Under the arrangement the Indo-Tibetan boundary ran in the north of NEFA. Thus in NEFA India became contiguous to China.

The real and stable boundary between India and China must run along some natural obstacle, specially when obstacles like the Brahmaputra and the highest mountain watershed in the locality are available. The Indo-Tibetan boundary running along the Brahmaputra was the best, because, it would be true historically, politically and geographically also. Even if the watershed principle as is said to have been followed in the Simla Convention is strictly applied the McMahon Line fails to conform to this principle; at places it should lie further north.

2. In the first quarter of this century the main competitor in Asia of Britain was Russia. Consequently Britain suffered from Russiophobia and sincerely believed that if India was ever to be attacked by a foreign power Russia was the country to do so. To thwart Russia in the realisation of her ambition Great Britain tried to make China stronger so that she could be a check to Russia.

And to keep the balance between Russia and China, the former a threatening danger and the latter potential, Outer Tibet was created at the cost of Tibetan solidarity and it was brought within the political orbit of the Government (British) of India. *Thus the Indo-Tibetan boundary known as the McMahon Line was drawn in Simla to serve Britain's imperial interests.* This arrangement, even during the British regime, showed signs of cracking under the impact of Chinese diplomacy aimed at the assimilation of Tibet in the Chinese empire, an omen forecasting trouble for India in the Himalayas.

The McMahon Line was supposed to have run along the crest of the highest ridge in the locality to conform to the watershed principle. In fact the British ignored this 'much talked about principle' and made territorial concessions at many points in drawing the McMahon Line to appease Tibet obviously but in fact China. But China wanted more.

In 1937 Chiang Kai-shek disputed the legality of the McMahon Line itself, and in the early forties he published maps in which NEFA was shown as an integral part of China. The People's Republic of China followed in the footsteps of its predecessor and in 1961 the new rulers of China openly claimed NEFA as Chinese territory.

3. As a result of this claim China took upon itself the duty of liberating NEFA from the Indian yoke ! In other words China made India the oppressor and itself the liberator of the wronged people of NEFA, an irksome situation for India !

Later on the Government of India recognised and confirmed the suzerainty of China over Tibet. China was emboldened by this. She extended her territorial claim over NEFA. The effect of this is that Chinese troops can enter NEFA without a declaration of war, as moving into and staying in one's own territory is neither intrusion nor illegal occupation. On the other hand if Indian troops penetrate into Tibet even by an inch they are called as aggressors. On the basis of this anomaly created by India herself, whenever Indian troops undertake any military action in any portion of their own territory in Tawang against the Chinese they would be regarded to be aggressors ! Who cares for vociferous or the so-called strong

protests of the weak ! Therefore, it is of no use to name the aggressor in the India-China conflict of 1962. As long as the world does not recognise that NEFA is not a part of Greater China, India automatically becomes the aggressor. It appears that China deliberately did not ratify the Simla Convention so that she could find an excuse to create trouble and dictate her terms to India according to her convenience. Therefore, right from the day her forces occupied Tibet in 1950 China's aim was *to dominate the mountain passes of the highest and the last ridge of the Himalayas from the Tibetan side at an opportune moment*. And according to the expectations of Mao and his followers 1962 offered to them such an opportunity.

## DEFENCE OF NEFA

Immediately after the arrival of the Dalai Lama in India things began moving. Before this historical event the frontier outposts in NEFA were limited in number. They were manned by detachments of the Assam Rifles, a local frontier constabulary. In those days one battalion of the Assam Rifles used to look after the extensive territory of two frontier divisions. In conformity with their role of policing the area the outposts all along the frontier were a permanent feature of the NEFA administration. The personnel of the Assam Rifles consisted entirely of the Gorkhas ( or Nepalis ), racially akin to the local population. Hence they were not unwelcome in the locality. Excepting slight breaches of peace in 1949 when the Apa Tanis showed some signs of revolt and in 1953 when the Tagins of upper Subansiri valley killed an army major and his patrol of 60 men the Assam Rifles had an uneventful time. Some of the men were even allowed to keep their families in the forward areas.

In 1959 the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, decided to increase the number of the Assam Rifles battalions. This decision was due not only to the hostility of China but also to the ebullience of the Nagas and the anti-Indian activities of the Pakistanis on the Indo-Pak frontiers. The composition and training of the Assam Rifles battalions also improved along with their expansion. Instead of recruiting the Gorkhas ( or the Nepalis ) only, the recruitment was thrown open to the Garhwalis, Dogras

Kumaonis, Mishmis, Nagas and the other groups of Nefaites also. Further, these recruits started receiving training in the Indian Army Training Centres instead of in their own establishments. The armament of the units of the Assam Rifles was also brought in line with that of the Indian Army battalions.

**The Onkar Operation** :—The introduction of the new measures in the Assam Rifles took some time. While the new units were arriving in Assam the strength of many outposts in NEFA was increased. Thirty-eight new platoon posts—12 in Lohit, 8 in Siang, 8 in Subansiri and 10 in Kameng Frontier Divisions—were established on the borders of the frontier divisions. These posts were manned by the men of the Assam Rifles. They did not have proper lines of communication. They were supplied by air. Although the General Reserve Engineering Force, popularly known as the Border Roads Organisation, had been formed in 1960 yet it took two years for the construction branch of the organisation to come into full swing. By the time the Chinese attack came the Border Roads Organisation had extended the fair-weather Foothill-Bomdi La road to Senge Dzong, on the eastern slope of the Se La ridge in Kameng.

When India was taking measures to strengthen security of NEFA, Nehru in conformity with the Simla Convention declared that the crest of the highest ridge in the locality in NEFA was the Indo-Tibetan boundary. On this principle the Indian troops started patrolling the area up to the McMahon Line, the line running along the crest of the Thagla ridge. Once or twice the Chinese troops intruded into the area in the south of the McMahon Line. They were asked to return to their own territory which they did. The Government of India protested against these intrusions but China evaded to give a straight and specific answer every time. Similar intrusions were also reported from Longju, the Lohit valley in the south of Rima and once from the vicinity of the headwaters of the Di Chu river in the north of the Diphu La. Nehru made a statement in the Lok Sabha on this matter. The Chinese explained away the intrusions by one excuse or other. The fact was that the Chinese wanted to reconnoitre the area where they were planning to operate in future as Chinese soldiers seldom operate on new ground. Repeated intrusions and Indian protests made some frontier pockets



of the Indian Himalayas a subject of negotiation. China is adept in prolonging negotiations with a view to gain time during which she prepares for offensive action. In fact on the one hand China opened negotiations with India to settle the Indo-Tibetan boundary dispute and on the other she made full preparations for an invasion of India. India did not realise the urgency of the matter and continued to go slow. She remained satisfied with the physical occupation of a few frontier outposts. China was planning for an offensive and her foreign policy about India continued to be hostile. India on the other hand displayed a lack of foresight and judgment in her political thinking specially about China. She hoped that she could co-exist with China after a reorientation of her political relations with China. She was wrong as events proved later. The Government of India then realised her mistake and began to act defensively.

**The Indian Army Steps in :—**After the killing of ten policemen in Ladakh in October 1959 the Government of India handed over the defence of NEFA to the Indian Army. Side by side with an increase in the number of outposts in the south of the McMahon Line the Indian Army in its own way started preparing for the defence of NEFA in an eventuality which could develop due to the threatening attitude of Pakistan and China in eastern and north-eastern India respectively.

In October 1959 India moved the 4th Infantry Division to Assam. The division established its headquarters at Tezpur. Gradually the XXXIII Corps Headquarters was also organised at Shillong. One of its brigades, the 7th Infantry Brigade, was sent to Kameng Frontier Division. Its headquarters was located first at Missamari and later at Foothill, an administrative outpost of NEFA. After some time its three battalions were deployed from Foothill to Dirang Dzong. The deployment of troops was kept abreast with the extension of the Foothill-Senge Dzong road. Thus in 1961 one battalion of the 7th Brigade was at Foothill and another at the bridge five or six miles ahead of Dirang Dzong at the bottom of the Nikma Dzong ridge. A third battalion less a company in Bomdi La, the company having been sent forward to look after Tawang. Here it may be pointed out that on account of transport difficulties the logistic build-up of the 7th Brigade took time thus

delaying the concentration of troops in the Tawang area. With the launching of the Onkar Operation the brigade headquarters moved to Tawang. At that time the 14th Punjab, 1st Sikhs, 9th Punjab and 1/9th Gorkha Rifles comprised the brigade. By May 1962 the 14th Punjab was taken out of the brigade and its name never appeared in the Dhola operations. Similarly the 1st Sikhs were detached from the brigade and the 2nd Rajputs were attached instead. At the end of the Dhola operations the 4th Grenadiers also joined the 7th Brigade.

## THE DHOLA-THAGLA SECTOR

The Dhola-Thagla area is a cup-shaped elevated hollow surrounded by impressive mountain ranges or ridges on all sides. In the north-west corner of this sector is the trijunction where the boundaries of India, Bhutan and Tibet meet. The trijunction is itself a massive orographical knot on the Great Himalayan Range from where the other mountain ridges or spurs emanate.

**The Mountain Ranges** :—One mountain range emanates from the trijunction massif. It runs to the south-east and then to the south embodying in it the Me La pass ; let us call it the Me La ridge. After running for about thirty miles to the south it loses height and fades away at the Tashiyangti-Nyamjang Chu river junction in the north of Tashigong.

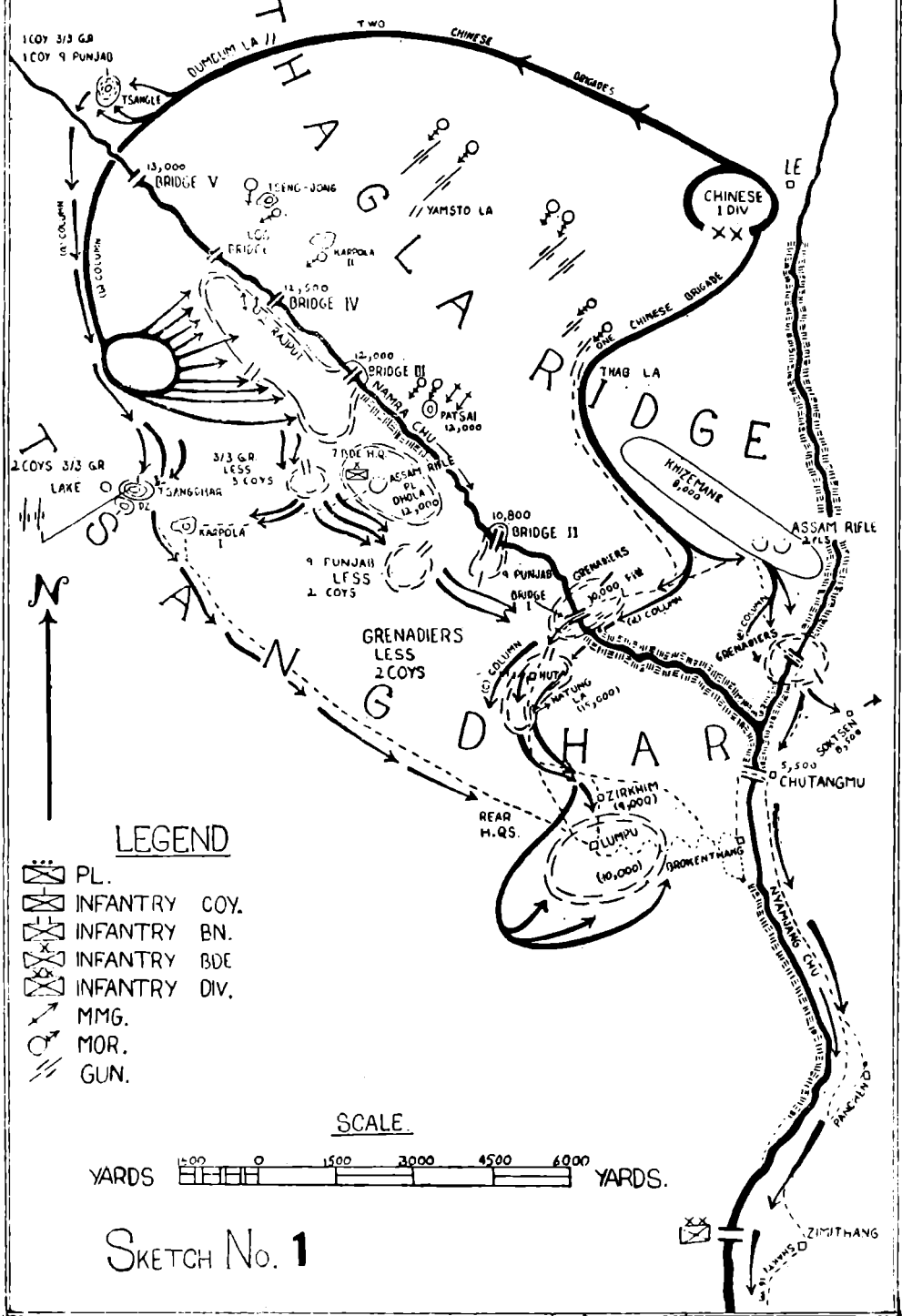
Another range, the so-called Great Himalayan Range\* runs to the south-east of the Me La pass for some distance and is cut by the Nyamjang Chu forming a gorge which extends from Shakti village for about ten miles to the north of Le village. This range is also called the Thagla ridge. The Indo-Tibetan boundary runs along the crest of the ridge. The depressions of the Thagla ridge are the Dum Dum La, the Yumtso La and the Thag La located in the ridge on the western side of the Nyamjang Chu.

The Thagla ridge extends to the east of the Nyamjang Chu to embody the Bum La. The average height of the Thagla ridge is

---

\*If the version of Bailey-Morshead school is believed the main Himalayan Range after Kula Kangri (Bhutan) runs to the north-east and then to the east, almost parallel to 28°30' latitude, and then enveloping the Nyamjang Chu runs to the south to join the Thagla ridge.

# BATTLES OF THE DHOLA SECTOR.



about 14,000 feet. Its southern slopes are steeper than the northern. The area in the south of the ridge comprising the Dhola sector is highly mountainous.

The Thagla ridge is separated from another ridge in the south by the Namka Chu, a small rivulet about 16 miles long. The name of the ridge forming the southern partition of the sector is the Tsangdhar. Its main features are the Tsangdhar and the Karpo La I humps. The Hatung La (15,000 feet) is one of its main depressions. The Dhola post is located on the northern slope of the Tsangdhar ridge about 1,000 feet above the water level of the Namka Chu. The post dominates the Namka Chu valley but it is itself dominated by the Thagla ridge ; the distance between the post and the Thagla ridge is about two and a half miles, as the crow flies. There are some other mountain features such as Paitsai and Tseng-jong between the Namka Chu and the Indo-Tibetan boundary which also dominate the Dhola post. The Paitsai feature is about 1,000 yards to the north of the Dhola post and Tseng-jong just in the north-west of the former.

The Tsangdhar ridge abruptly terminates on the eastern bank of the Nyamjang Chu forming a deep gorge there. The highest point of the ridge is 16,000 feet.

The Dhola sector is separated from the waters of the Tawang Chu by another mountain ridge in the east. Let us call it the Tawang ridge. This ridge seems to be the continuation of the watershed separating the waters of the Nyamjang Chu and the Tawang Chu in their upper reaches. In fact the Tawang ridge from its origin near 28°30' N latitude to its tapering point near Loongla separates the water of the Nyamjang Chu from those of the Tawang Chu.

**The Rivers :—**The Nyamjang Chu is the chief river of the sector. The source of this river is on the southern slope of a mountain range running parallel to and just in the north of the 28°30' N latitude. It flows to the south into a broad valley between two mountain ridges, the ridge on its left bank being higher than the one on the right. After flowing for about fifty miles the river enters a gorge. After the gorge the valley again broadens below Shakti. The river

continues to flow to the south. At river junctions the valley is transformed into a deep gorge ; at other places it remains broad enough to allow traffic. In this valley are located Shakti, Zimithang, Brokenthang and Chutangmo villages and camping grounds. The frontier from Chutangmo is about two miles away in the north. About 1,000 yards to the south of the Indo-Tibetan boundary there is a footpath on the right bank of the Nyamjang Chu which climbs to the Khinzemane grazing ground.

In the south of the Shakti village the Nyamjang Chu takes a south-westerly direction and enters Bhutan.

About one and a half miles to the south of Khinzemane, a small stream, the Namka Chu of the Indians and the Kachilong of the Chinese, joins the Nyamjang Chu. The Namka Chu originates from a collection of some small lakes (one of them being Sechang of the Chinese) filling up a hollow on the southern slope of the Thagla ridge. The height of these lakes is about 14,000 feet and the Nyamjang Chu-Namka Chu junction is located at about 6,000 feet ; the distance between the source and the river junction is about sixteen miles. Evidently the drop of the river is very steep and the current fast. During the dry weather the river can be waded across. During the Dhola operations, there were five bridges over this river, the distance between the first and the fifth bridge being 7 miles. Between the 4th and the 5th bridge a log had been thrown across the streams ; this was called the 'log bridge'. The first bridge was not easily accessible from the Nyamjang Chu-Namka Chu river junction. One had to make a detour through the Hatung La to reach it.

The valley of the Namka Chu is narrow. Trekking along it is full of risks. The gradient of footpaths from the second and the third bridge to the Dhola post in the south is very steep. Similar is the case with the footpath which starts from the first bridge for Khinzemane ; its gradient too is steep. At the headwaters of the Namka Chu are located the Yum La and the Ge La. These passes lead into the valleys of different streams, separated by a watershed. These streams join the Tashiyangti of Bhutan. Thus the waters of the western slopes of the Me La ridge are drained by the Tashiyangti and those of the eastern slopes by the Nyamjang Chu.

The Tawang Chu is another river which touches the sector in the south. Its description will be found in the next chapter.

**Climate** :—The Se La ridge stops the major portion of the monsoon still a substantial amount of rain-laden clouds escapes into the Tawang area. These are reinforced by a second instalment of the monsoon clouds from the south which find their way through the Nyamjang Chu gap into the Dhola-Thagla sector. Thus the two streams of clouds, one entering from the Tawang side and the other from the south, cause a substantial rain here ; the sector gets nearly 40" of mean annual rainfall. The monsoon clouds are finally stopped by the Thagla ridge allowing Tibet to get about 4" of rainfall or about 40" of snowfall. Thus the lower heights of the sector receive enough rainfall and the crests of mountain ranges snowfall ; the crest of the Himalayan Range remains covered with perpetual snow. On the southern slopes of the Great Himalayan Range the snowline, a line covered with snow during summer and from which snow advances down the slope, lies approximately at a height of 16,000 feet. On its northern slopes there is less snowfall, thus raising the height of the snowline by about 3,000 feet. The direction of the sun also plays an important part in the phenomenon, the southern slopes are exposed to the sun longer than the northern, hence the difference between the heights of the two snow-lines. Briefly, the climate of this sector, excepting the Nyamjang valley, is damp and cool in summer and freezing cold in winter. The sector receives snowfall in winter, though there is no snow below 6,000 feet. When the weather is clear the sun is scorching and irksome irrespective of the season.

**Flora** :—The height of Chutangmo, a camping ground, is slightly less than 6,000 feet. It is situated on 27·45 N latitude and its mean annual rainfall is below 40". Naturally its vegetation is subtropical. Here grow the bamboo, the magnolia, the chestnut, the pinus Khasia and excelsa, etc., some ever-green and others deciduous. At 8,000 feet begin the oaks and the rhododendrons flowering to profusion in March-April making forests ablaze with a variety of colours. At 9,000 feet patches of high altitude bamboo (*Bansi*) appear. This variety of bamboo is the wealth of the Monpas who use it for constructing their *bashas* (huts). The vegetation remains unchanged up to 10,000 feet, the subtropical vegetation predominates the

scenery. From here the coniferous growth starts appearing on the hills. Gradually the subtropical vegetation appears giving place to *abies walchiana* or *abies vabiana*, the two coniferous varieties peculiar to eastern Himalayan heights. To a lay man these trees are of the *cedrus deodara* variety but to a botanist they are a variety unknown in Nepal and the western Himalayas, The abies cover a vast region and extend up to 12,000 feet where a stunted growth of rhododendrons appears. This decorative vegetation is mixed with larch, juniper and silver fir trees. The juniper, the silver fir and the abies are the *shupa* of the Tibetan Buddhists and *dhup* of the Hindus. Up to 14,000 feet the growth of the local vegetation is stunted and its density thick ; but after that it becomes sparse and finally at 16,000 feet it is replaced by luscious grass, a boon for yak, sheep and donkey. Thus the Tsangdhar and the Thagla ridges have vast grazing grounds for the use of the Monpas who populate the tract sparsely. In summer these grazing fields become alive with domestic animals, but in winter snow envelops them ; a few travellers through sheer necessity tread across the local mountain passes. The point to be noted here is that the eastern Himalayas unlike the western are traversed by man in winter also.

In the north of the Thagla ridge the countryside is barren. Here and there one sees plantations of poplar and weeping willows near human habitations. Large trees are a rarity here. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that if one were to stand on the crest of the Thagla ridge and face the north he would see barren and undulating ground comprising high mountain ridges running almost parallel to one another in the east-west direction ; if the onlooker were to turn round he would command a view of lush green valleys formed by repeated rows of lateral ridges of varying heights blocking the view of the plains of Assam.

**Fauna** :—This is the country of pheasants. Deep gorges at river junctions are a clear proof that at one time this tract was under the influence of the ice age. In due course the tropical sun melted the ice on the crests of mountains and ridges. This melted mass flowed down to the river junctions ; hidden from the sun it stayed there for a long period and cut deep gorges. Ultimately the entire ice mass disappeared leaving deep valleys in the lower course of

rivers including the river junctions and making them inaccessible. These valleys attract many varieties of pheasants.

In this mountainous region within a horizontal distance of hardly a mile the height of mountain ridges drops or rises by thousands of feet. Thus near Chutangmo, besides the wild hen (*jungle murgi*), the peacock is also found. The same is the case with other animals of subtropical regions. Here roam stags, *takins* (a rare species of deer peculiar to the eastern Himalayas), boars and wild goats etc. chased by the panther, frightened by the sloth bear and disturbed by the inevitable leeches, dim dams and snakes. Here and there ibex frolicks and hares as big as goats run from bush to bush without any fear of man or beast. In the Alpine copses stalk the bear and snow leopard. But in the early sixties there was a commotion in the animal kingdom. In March 1959 peacock feathers were a decorative item in the Monpa houses of the Nyamjang valley, but the government officials who were posted there in 1962 never realized that the peacock was a pet bird of the locality. The clatter of bullets had frightened away the denizens of the animal kingdom of the Dhola-Thagla region to remoter areas.

## LAND ROUTES

**The Indo-Tibetan Trade Route** :—The mountainous part of the Indo-Tibetan Trade Route enters the Thagla sector at Loongla (9,000 feet) which is about 20 miles from Tawang. From Loongla the track descends into the Nyamjang valley and after 18 miles reaches Shakti village. Another 15 miles and Zimithang village is reached. There is a bridge here across the Nyamjang Chu. The route crosses the river and then runs along the right bank for about four miles and reaches Chutangmo where the Dalai Lama was received by the Assistant Political Officer of Tawang in 1959. The track keeps running along the right bank of the river up to a point which is three-quarters of a mile from Khinzemane. Here it divides into two branches, one running along the western bank and the other along the eastern. The track on the right bank ascends the Thagla ridge after passing through Khinzemane (8,500 feet). It descends again and after about eight miles reaches Le village which is more or less on the same level as Khinzemane. After another



ten miles the valley opens. Here is Mangmang where the Dalai Lama in his flight from Lhasa in 1959 thought that he was at the end of his trouble. It was at Mangmang that he waited to know whether he would be welcome to Indians or not. Here the track crosses the river and ascends to the Po La pass (14,680 feet) on the Tawang ridge. After many twists and turns it reaches Tsona Dzong, on the bank of the northernmost tributary of the Tawang Chu. From here it ascends to the headwaters of the same stream, crosses a pass and ascends to a nullah junction. The next pass crossed by it is the Naya La (16,830 feet) after which it descends into the valley of the Loro Karpo Chu to reach Jora. Here it turns north and after crossing a pass reaches Lhuntse Dzong beyond which it turns to the north-west and reaches Tsetang on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and a week's journey from Lhuntse Dzong. From here Lhasa is three days' march across the river. A branch of the Indo-Tibetan caravan route goes to Bhutan from the west of Loongla. After crossing the Nyamjang Chu in the north of its junction with the Tawang Chu this branch reaches Tashigong. It terminates at Devangiri (Devsthan). A bus ride for another forty miles to the south brings the traveller to Rangiya railway station,

**The Footpaths :—**There are many footpaths, as many as the number of Monpa villages, in the region which attained importance during the India-China hostilities. In the south of Khinzemane about three-quarters of a mile away, a bridge across the Nyamjang Chu existed. A footpath starts from here and ascends to Soktsen Gompa. The gompa is joined with Tawang by a hill track which crosses the Tawang ridge and passes through Sumatso village and the Buddhist nunnery, one and a half miles in the north of the Tawang monastery.

On the right bank of the Nyamjang Chu, two miles to the south of Chutangmo, is Brokenthang (5,600 feet). From here a track climbs straight to Lumpu village (10,000 feet). The distance is only about 5 miles but the climb is very strenuous. At places stairways, practically vertical, have been cut into the rock to facilitate climbing. Evidently this path cannot be used by transport animals. There is another alternative route for the use of transport animals. About half a mile to the south of Brokenthang there is

another footpath which is wider and has a less steep gradient; it leads to Zirkhim village (9,000 feet). From Zirkhim to Lumpu in the south the march is not very irksome. The Indian Army constructed a helipad at Zirkhim and used Lumpu as a rear headquarters for forward units. Lumpu is connected with Dhola by a footpath. Zirkhim is on the way up but slightly to the right of the path. The footpath ascends to the Hatung La pass (15,000 feet) and then descends into the Namka valley at various points marked by the bridges already mentioned. There is another footpath from the first bridge which leads to Khinzemane. A branch to the Thag La pass goes from a point situated at a little distance from Khinzemane.

The second footpath starts from Lumpu and crosses the Tsangdhar ridge between the Tsangdhar post and the Karpo La I. These features are located almost in the middle of the ridge. After crossing the ridge the track descends to the Dhola post and also to the 4th and 5th bridges. This route is longer and was seldom used for going to Dhola from Lumpu. At the Tsangdhar post were located a couple of mountain guns manned by Indian gunners. The ammunition for these guns was dropped by air. Thus the Tsangdhar post was provided with a dropping zone and a helipad. The Dhola-Tsangdhar footpath was occasionally used for the purpose otherwise it was a neglected route for ordinary communication.

Besides the above routes there are also two goat tracks which from the western portion of the sector lead to the Ge La and the Yum La at the headwaters of two tributaries of the Tashiyangti of Bhutan. One can reach Tashigong via these tracks after a difficult march. These routes are unfit for caravans or carrying loads.

## THE DHOLA OPERATIONS

“Ask Johri why Tawang cannot be defended,” said one brigadier (A) to another brigadier (B) on 20th April, 1960. It was known to brigadier (A) that I had trekked from Chaku to Tawang in March-April 1959.

“Why can't we hold Tawang?” questioned B.

“In case Tawang is defended, it will be subjected to a three pronged attack. One was to come from the Loongla side, be-

cause Chutangmo being situated on low ground would be overrun by the Chinese hordes; the second from the Bum La side, the Chinese will roll down from the pass to Tawang along the ridge emanating from the Himalayan Range and terminating at Tawang. And the last might come from the Luguthang side along the Tawang Chu," I said.

"Where should we hold the line?"

"Along the Se La ridge."

"If the Chinese attack where will they come first?"

"They will roll down to the Jang bridge (Bridge 4 in 1962)."

"Correct. But then we will bomb them from Tawang," said the brigadier.

"How can you? There are two spurs jutting out between Jang and Tawang which will obstruct our fire," I said.

"Let us see the map."

We went to the wall map. Sure enough the two spurs were distinctly marked on the map.

"It means that in an emergency we cannot make a stand at Tawang," repeated B.

"We cannot," I emphatically said. In order not to disappoint the brigadier I said: "There is an alternative."

"What is it?"

"If we attack the Chinese from the Bum La and the Thag La passes we might succeed."

"When the time comes we will, we will," growled the brigadier. But the time never came.

In these days Army Headquarters was planning to defend Kameng against possible Chinese incursions. It was the same year when, probably for the first time, the Indian authorities consulted the map of NEFA and studied the position of the McMahon Line in detail. Previous to this no Indian military officer of high rank had gone beyond Zero in Subansiri, and Chaku or Bomdi La in Kameng.

Up to March 1960 Chutangmo was our customs post and a checkpoint had been established at Khinzemane. Occasionally our patrol visited the Thagla ridge. To avoid international repercussions the Government of India kept Assam Rifles detachments on frontier posts far to the south of the McMahon Line. Whether it was to appease the Chinese or the international opinion or whether it was lack of confidence in their action, the fact is that the Namka valley was left unguarded.

In 1961 I drew a map (I had to include it in my second book *India Accepts China's Challenge*) and sent it for the approval of the Survey of India. Finally the map was approved. It indicated that the Indo-Tibetan boundary ran along the crest of the highest ridge in the locality and the Namka Chu-Khinzemane area was shown as Indian territory. After the Simla Convention a copy of the map showing the Indo-Tibetan boundary had been handed over to the Chinese Government and another was kept in New Delhi. A copy of this map has been included in an atlas published by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. The scale of the map\* is roughly sixteen inches to a mile and the line representing the Indo-Tibetan boundary is quite thick. The thickness of the line on the map easily covers a width of about a couple of miles on the ground. This drawback in the boundary line on the map provided an excuse to the Chinese to advance their territorial claim to confuse the Indo-Tibetan boundary issue. On the other hand Nehru was not particular about the accuracy of the Indian frontiers. For him 'a mile here and a mile there' was not a valid reason to quarrel with China. Under the circumstances India realised the necessity of occupying the Indian territory in the north of Chutangmo quite late. Consequently the Assam Rifles detachments started patrolling up to the Indo-Tibetan boundary, as explained earlier, after the watershed principle was enunciated by Nehru. The People's Republic of China reacted to this sharply and Chinese intrusions into Indian territory in NEFA increased. India protested ineffectively. In 1961 China officially claimed the entire territory of NEFA as her own. This did not deter the Government of India from the course which they had adopted i. e. to occupy physically the area which they thought belonged to her legally. But India was slow in introducing these measures.

In June 1962 the 4th Division Headquarters designated Tawang as the Divisional Vital Ground. Consequently the 7th Brigade was moved to Tawang to strengthen the defences of the town. The local defence was entrusted to the 9th Punjab.

In February 1962 the Assam Rifles detachments had been posted

---

\*The map which the representatives of Britain, Tibet and China signed was 1-in. to 80 miles. As such it could not show the details of the Indo-Tibetan border areas accurately.

at Dhola, Sumatso, Chuna, Khinzemane and Bum La. The presence of the families of Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs) and soldiers at these posts clearly indicated that India's intentions were peaceful. In spite of this the Chinese started building up stores of rations, ammunition and other war materials at their frontier outposts. They built roads up to their forward posts and concentrated about forty thousand troops (about four infantry divisions) all along the NEFA frontier (in Tibet) and about thirty thousand (about three divisions) opposite Ladakh. They did not give much importance to the central sector—they concentrated about three thousand troops (about a regiment equivalent to our brigade) at Thuling Math to threaten Bara Hoti. In January 1962 the Bhotias of western Himalayas collected in Kalimpong for trade purposes. They freely talked about these concentrations. At this time of the year they were confident of selling their goods in Taklakot (in western Tibet) and they were in constant touch with astray Tibetans who visited Tibet.

In July 1962 a Chinese VIP visited the Thagla ridge. By that time the Chinese had constructed a road up to Le village. Moreover, the Chinese troops had seen the ground up to three miles in Indian territory on excuses like 'the troops lost their way and by mistake entered India' or 'they came to India to collect bamboos for constructing their barracks' etc. Once they entered India and occupied Khinzemane. Under instructions of the higher authorities the Indian troops withdrew to the bridge area below Khinzemane. After a night's halt the intruders vacated the post and withdrew. The Indian troops reoccupied the post afterwards. Such incidents were repeated a number of times. Every time the Chinese came to spend a night or two at Khinzemane the Indians could do nothing except informing the higher authorities, they simply withdrew to the Nyamjang valley. They were not to provoke firing; they were just to wait for the Chinese to return to Tibet and then to reoccupy the post, a humiliating drill for the troops! To live and act at the mercy of an alien is a nerve-racking experience specially for troops! From the Chinese point of view they were rehearsing the act of pushing the Indians at least to the south of the Hatung La, the pass on the last and the next highest mountain ridge from the Tibetan side. The Chinese VIP had come to plan the actual attack for which the Chinese troops had been rehearsing

for a long time. In July 1962 the Chinese were not in occupation of the Thagla ridge ; the Indian jawans could occupy it without any serious opposition. But India did not do so! She claimed the territory up to the crest of the Thagla ridge but did not give a practical shape to her claim, half-hearted policy advocated verbally and in writing but not shouldering any responsibility of giving the undertaking a practical shape! India lost the opportunity. An opportunity once lost is lost for ever. India left the vacuum for the Chinese to fill. In August 1962 the Chinese occupied the Thagla ridge in strength. The Assam Rifles posts were still located at Dhola, Khinzemane, Sumatso, Bum La and Chuna. The Indians were occasionally patrolling the area up to the McMahon Line. The Chinese were doing the same. Luckily the patrols of the two nations did not come in contact at any time. Besides, the 7th Brigade had been concentrated in Tawang, the Divisional Vital Ground. Defence had been laid, trenches had been dug and the three battalions—the 9th Punjab, the 1st Sikhs and the 1/9th Gorkhas—had occupied their respective defensive positions in the ‘Tawang Defence Box’. According to the latest plan a company of the 9th Punjab was sent to Lumpu to serve as screen troops. The brigade was all set to face the challenge of an enemy whether from the west or the east. It was to resist the occupation of Tawan and its vicinity by the Chinese. The Chinese were alarmed at this attitude of a country which swore by Panchsheel! They started seeing the sinister hand of the USA in this game as usual ; for them Nehru became ‘the running dog of Western Imperialism’. China, therefore, decided to nip the trouble in the bud, i.e., to give a crushing blow to the Indian troops in NEFA so that they might not raise their head in future. Besides, her primary or a long term aim, China also framed her ‘immediate aim’. This was ‘to teach a lesson to the Indian forces’ for defying her mastery over NEFA. The Chinese waited and planned for achieving these aims.

## IN THE SOUTH OF THE NAMKA CHU

By the end of August 1961 the Chinese had concentrated one battalion on the Thagla ridge. They sent fighting patrols to the south of the Thagla ridge to probe the Indian defences and to occupy dominating ground in the north of the Namka Chu river.

The XXXIII Corps Headquarters was stationed at Shillong. Under its command was the 4th Division with its headquarters at Tezpur. The 7th Infantry Brigade which was deployed in Kameng was a part of the 4th Division. The 7th Brigade Headquarters with its three battalions—the 1/9th Gorkhas, the 1st Sikhs and the 9th Punjab less one company—was stationed at Tawang, the Vital Ground of the sector. One company of the Punjabis was acting as screen troops at Lumpu. A platoon of the Assam Rifles was at Dhola and another detachment was guarding the frontier at Khinzemane.

On 8th September the sentry at Dhola noticed Chinese troop movement across the Namka Chu. In a few hours the Chinese crossed the river and threatened Dhola which they virtually surrounded. The news was flashed to Lumpu where the commanding officer of the Punjabis was present. The post commander at Dhola was immediately informed that reinforcements were being despatched. In the meantime he was to hold on *at all costs*. Simultaneously the Punjab battalion sent a strong patrol to Dhola to find out the strength of the enemy and the extent of his intrusion into Indian territory.

On 11th September the patrol reported that about 60 Chinese had crossed the river and were threatening the Dhola post. The patrol also reported that the enemy had destroyed the third bridge on 8th September. On the same day, that is on 11th September, the 9th Punjab under orders from the brigade sent another strong patrol direct to Dhola via the Karpo La I route to reinforce the post. After a difficult march the patrol reached Dhola on the night of 13th September. The post was still surrounded, but next day the intruders withdrew to the north of the river to occupy positions within Indian territory. Their deployment was as under :—

One company		Patrolling the area in the south of the Thagla ridge.
One company	at	Yam La.
One company	at	Thag La,
about 60 men	at	a hill feature about 1,000 yards in the north-east of Dhola.
across the river		

The Punjab battalion was also ordered to move to the Dhola post. It started moving from Lumpu at 0400 hours on 14th September. Late in the evening of the same day it crossed the Hatung La and

succeeded in reaching the 2nd bridge at 0800 hours next morning. The battalion had an encounter with the Chinese troops at the bridge. The Indians had been ordered to open fire only in defence. The Chinese, instead of opening fire on them, shouted slogans like 'Hindi Chini Bhai! Bhai! Yeh hamari zamin hai! Tum log wapas jao!' Lieut.-Col Misra, the commanding officer of the Punjabis, kept cool. He left one company at the 2nd bridge and with the rest of the battalion made a detour across the country to reach the post. Thus the battalion reached the Dhola post at 1300 hours on 13th September. Normally it is two days' gruelling march from Lumpu to Dhola but the Punjabis completed it in only thirty-three hours. This was possible only because the battalion continued to advance throughout the night except for a brief rest at the bottom of the pass on the other side.

The job of the Punjab battalion was to clear small pockets of the Chinese from the Indian territory in the south of the Thagla ridge.

Even though the map which the representatives of Britain, Tibet and China had signed at the Simla Convention and the map attached to the relevant documents of the conference provided ample opportunity for creating a misunderstanding in the interpretation of the border regions yet it was not proper for China to take a one-sided action by intruding into territory where complete peace was prevailing and which India genuinely believed to be her own. To add insult to injury China handed over a protest note to the Government of India accusing the Indian troops of intruding into Chinese territory! The Government of India completely denied the charge in their reply saying: "The Government of India categorically reject the baseless allegations made in the Chinese note of 16th September."

However, the 9th Punjab started sending out patrols to the north of the Namka Chu river to probe the enemy defences, if necessary.

On 20th September the brigade commander, Brigadier John Dalvi, reached Dhola and discussed the possibilities of clearing the area of the Chinese intruders. By this time enough information had been gathered about enemy dispositions—the enemy was entrenched in the south of the Thagla ridge in more than a battalion strength in a



jungle-cum-mountainous terrain. Therefore, the brigade commander obviously came to the conclusion that the task of driving out the intruders from Indian territory could not be accomplished by one battalion alone. More troops would be required. Further, he decided to move his headquarters from Tawang to Lumpu along with his two remaining battalions—the 1st Sikhs and the 1/9th Gorkhas.

The same night at about 2130 hours two Chinese soldiers crept up to an Indian post approximately one mile to the east of the Dhola post and threw two hand-grenades injuring three Indian soldiers. The Indian post fired Very lights and saw a considerable number of Chinese soldiers massed some distance away. The Chinese soldiers opened fire on the Indian post which was compelled to return it in self-defence. Intermittent firing continued for about two hours. Thus 20th September night was the first occasion when light machine gun (LMG) fire was exchanged between the opposing troops. On that night two Chinese were killed. After some time the Chinese again opened fire at 0330 hours. This exchange of fire continued till 0530 hours on 21st September. The Chinese again started firing at 0700 hours the same morning. The Indians returned the fire. This exchange of fire continued for a couple of hours. As usual the Chinese were the first to protest. They sent one protest note on 20th September and another on 21st.

“On September 20, 1962, at 24.00 hours, Indian troops in the Chedong area of Tibet, China, north of the so-called !McMahon Line, into which they had intruded, made a sudden armed attack on Chinese frontier sentries standing on guard west of the Chejao (1st or 2nd) bridge. From 24.00 hours on September 20 to 07.00 hours on September 21, the Indian troops on four successive occasions fired rifles and machine-guns, totalling more than 60 rounds, and hurled seven hand grenades. An officer of the Chinese frontier guards was hit and killed and a soldier was seriously wounded. Up to 08.30 hours on September 21, the Indian troops had not stopped firing.”

The Government of India replied to the above protest on 25th September. An excerpt is as under :—

“The Indian note of September 21 has given full factual details to show that the Chinese troops have not only provocatively

crossed the McMahon Line i.e. the Thagla ridge which forms the Indo-Tibetan boundary in this region, but have wantonly attacked Indian troops and inflicted casualties on them. Indian forces in the vicinity of the main Indian Dhola Post are only exercising their legitimate right of defence of Indian territory in resisting the aggressive attacks of Chinese forces on Indian soil.”

After the incidents of September 20 and 21 firing in the Dhola was more frequent and intense. There was intermittent firing on September 22, 23, 24 and 25. On September 28 the Chinese used automatic weapons and fired at the 2nd bridge wounding three Indian soldiers. The Indian troops retaliated. They used 3" mortars for the first time. The enemy suffered casualties, about 14 killed and a few wounded. The Chinese stopped firing afterwards. They were busy in planning for future operations. A point of no return had been reached in India-China political relations.

In the meantime the 1/9th Gorkha Rifles and the 2nd Rajputs\* moved to Lumpu. The intention of the brigade commander was to concentrate the entire brigade here. On account of transport difficulties the job could not be completed in the allotted time. All supplies had to be man-handled for being transported from Tawang to Lumpu. Only about 400 civilian porters were available for the job. In addition to this, the brigade had also been provided with about three companies of the Pioneers. The responsibility of feeding the Pioneers was of the army. Therefore, these Pioneers were a liability to the units to which they were attached for duty. When these Pioneers moved with rations, specially sugar, from one end the other end never received even half of the commodity. Under these conditions it took time for the establishment and completion of the local logistic build-up. In fact enough reserve rations, ammunition and other items of operational need could not be stored in time. When the Indian troops fought the Chinese they were short of these essential commodities. However, by the end of the month two infantry battalions had concentrated at Lumpu and the third was already manning the Dhola post and the 2nd bridge. The 7th Brigade Headquarters was yet to reach Lumpu.

---

\*The 1st Sikhs were replaced by the 2nd Rajputs. The former remained at Tawang to join another brigade which was being raised on an ad hoc basis for the defence of the Divisional Vital Ground.

At Delhi too there was anxiety and activity. If there was any hesitation in the minds of top leaders about confrontation with the Chinese the recent clashes on the Himalayan frontiers removed it. The Government of India was firm in its resolve that a line had to be drawn beyond which the Chinese would not be allowed to advance. But was the country prepared adequately to carry out this resolve ?

The Chinese had been allowed to remain in occupation of Aksai Chin and the upper Chang Chenmo valley in Ladakh because 'no blade of grass grows there.' Could the Government take a similar attitude in NEFA as well ? Here not only grass and trees grow in profusion but a civilised people, the Monpas, inhabit the area. Here our national prestige was at stake. If India let down the Monpas and mortgaged their freedom in Chinese hands who would have confidence in the democratic professions of the Indian nation ? India had already committed the grave mistake of playing with the independence of Tibet, probably in the hope of winning the doubtful friendship of China. She could not afford to commit another such mistake. She had to stop the Chinese somewhere. It is besides the point whether she realised the magnitude of the task and was prepared for it.

Working on the information supplied by agents whose line of thought was the same as that of their bosses the Government of India had arrived at the conclusion that China would not invade India.

"Nehru said he had good reason to believe that the Chinese would not take any strong action against us. This was Nehru's (and Krishna Menon's) belief even as late as 2 October 1962", writes Lieut.-General BM Kaul. Probably this belief was shared by the entire government machinery.

Under the above mentioned notion it was very easy for any government, irrespective of its lack of military preparedness to come to a decision. The Government of India decided to expel the Chinese from Indian territory; the Chinese must be taught a lesson in NEFA ! The Chinese were a bundle of ignorant revolutionaries and they deserved to be pushed out of Indian territory ! This was height of arrogance and ignorance.

The Indian Army was ordered to 'throw out the Chinese' from Indian territory. The chief of Army Staff realised the gravity of the situation. So far the Indian Army had operated against Pak infiltrators (in Kashmir) or Razakars (in Hyderabad) or the pleasure-loving Portuguese (in Goa)—all fanatics but indifferent soldiers. Now it had to face the revolutionary army which was accustomed to bloody skirmishes verging on a full-scale war for the last 30 years. The Government of India's thinking was based on moral grounds while the Indian Army's analysis of the situation was based on practical considerations. Naturally the Chief of Army Staff was cautious. He asked for a "written directive from the Government of India for expelling the Chinese from this (Dhola) area", which was issued (in the absence of the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister) at a meeting in the officiating Defence Minister's room on 22nd September 1962.

After this directive the task of the Indian Army in Dhola was to expel the Chinese from Indian territory at the earliest. On September 24 the decision of the Government was conveyed to the Divisional Commander, Major-General Niranjan Prasad, by the Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Umrao Singh. From now on the energies of the Indian Army contingents (in NEFA) were directed towards driving the Chinese from Indian territory to the north of the McMahon Line. This did not imply that the Indian Army was to enter Tibet which had been accepted as Chinese territory by the Government of India. In these circumstances the objective was not easy to achieve.

Before he could do any planning, the commander of the Dhola post required information about the enemy in detail; he would need to send reconnaissance patrols across the Namka Chu river. On 8th September the Chinese had destroyed the third bridge which was nearest to Dhola. Another bridge was an immediate necessity. This was easily built. There was no Chinese near the 4th and 5th bridges; between them a log was thrown across the river. Later on this bridge was called 'the log bridge.'

During the period a company of the 2nd Rajputs reached the 1st bridge. It was placed under the command of the Punjabis. The rest of the Rajput battalion along with the 1/9th Gorkhas

remained at Lumpu. The logistic build-up could not be completed and the 7th Brigade Headquarters had still not arrived at Lumpu ; it was controlling the operations from Tawang ! On 29th September a strong patrol was sent to Tsangle across the river in the vicinity of the 5th bridge but not far from the trijunction. The patrol returned on October 2 and reported that there were no Chinese in the area ; Tsangle was without any Chinese. A controversy arose on this issue. When the patrol found Tsangle without the Chinese why did it not occupy it ? The army commander and the XXXIII Corps Commander were agreed that Tsangle be occupied but they differed about the plan to be adopted. Differences of opinion in the field even on a minor tactical issue are not to be tolerated. Moreover, the corps commander had expressed the view that the Chinese could be thrown out of Dhola after March 1963 when the XXXIII Corps would be adequately prepared for executing the task successfully and *not before that*. Consequently the corps commander had to be shifted to some other sector. Lieut.-General Umrao Singh along with his XXXIII Corps was given the task of looking after the Indo-Pak boundary and tackling the Naga ebullience in east India. A new corps was to be formed to replace the XXXIII Corps. This Corps was to be committed in NEFA.

## IN THE NORTH OF THE RIVER

On October 3 the IV Corps, under the command of Lieut.-General BM Kaul was formed. The task of this corps was to evict the Chinese from the NEFA territory of which Dhola-Thagla area was a part. The IV Corps then had only the 4th Division comprising the 7th and the 5th Brigades. The 7th Brigade was committed in Kameng and the 5th in the Walong sector. After a few days the 11th Brigade joined the 4th Corps. It replaced the 5th Brigade which was shifted to Jorhat to function as a peace-time formation. Eventually the 5th and the 11th Brigades were placed under the command of the 2nd Division. Thus the IV Corps had the 4th and the 2nd Divisions under its command. The corps remained deficient by one division throughout the NEFA operations. The 4th and the 2nd Divisions were also to be brought up to the standard strength of three brigades each. Briefly, the 11th Brigade under the 2nd Division was operating in the Walong area and the 7th Brigade in the Dhola sector; the 5th Brigade was looking after the

central sector in the south of the Brahmaputra river. Later on the 192nd Brigade was brought under the command of the 2nd Division. Its area of responsibility was the middle sector of the NEFA frontier including the north of Siang and Subansiri Frontier Divisions.

The IV Corps Commander had been told by the Prime Minister and the Defence Minister that India had tolerated the Chinese intrusions too long, and could do so no longer. He was also told that steps must be taken to throw the Chinese out. Nehru was afraid that the Indian public might ask for his resignation if he persisted in his policy of appeasing the Chinese.

On the afternoon of 4th October the corps commander arrived at Tezpur. The Army Commander, Lieut.-General Sen, and the XXXIII Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Umrao Singh met him at the air field. Lieut.-General Kaul was accompanied by a few staff officers of whom two were brigadiers—Brigadier K. K. Singh and Brigadier Pachnanda. Brigadier (Now Major-General) Singh was his Brigade General Staff and Brigadier Pachnanda his Brigadier-in-Charge Administration. Immediately after his arrival Kaul straight-away held a conference with Lieut.-Generals Sen and Umrao Singh. After the conference Kaul decided to proceed to Dhola next morning. For this purpose he gave orders for logistic tie-up at the front. The same night he issued orders to his operational groups to concentrate in the forward area. He asked the 4th Division Commander to meet him at Zimithang (6,000 feet) and accompany him to Dhola (12,000 feet). In the absence of the corps commander from Tezpur Brigadier Pachnanda was to organise the corps headquarters and bring it up to the mark. Next morning the corps commander accompanied by Brigadier Singh and a major took a helicopter for his intended visit to Dhola.

The opening of the IV Corps Headquarters at Tezpur obliged the 4th Division Headquarters to move to Dirang Dzong. Later on its tactical (operational or advance) headquarters was established at Zimithang which is about fifteen miles in the north of Shakti, five miles in the south of Chutangmo and seven miles from the Indo-Tibetan boundary.

Except the above-mentioned preparations there was no indication to show that an armed conflict with the Chinese was imminent. The Prime Minister and the Defence Minister were out of India and in spite of the corps commander's recommendations for air support there was no sign of a combat aircraft.

The corps commander reached Zimithang via Darrang (on the Bhutan frontier) in the afternoon of October 5. The next halt was at Zirkhim (9,000 feet) but the weather was bad and the corps commander was in a hurry; therefore, he directly flew to Lumpu. On his arrival there he found that the 7th Brigade Headquarters had already been shifted to Lumpu; now it was to be shifted to the Dhola area for facility of command and control.

“I ordered the bulk of Headquarters, 7 Brigade, 2 Rajput and 1/9 Gorkhas—awaiting porters to carry their stores—to move the next day to the Dhola area. I told them I would hasten the despatch of their supplies and other material forward as best as I could”, writes Lieut.-General Kaul in his *‘Untold Story’*.

Later on the corps commander told the divisional commander about the orders which he had issued to the lower formations without his (divisional commander's) or the brigade commander's knowledge. In the night of 5th October the corps commander stayed at Zimithang. Next morning he flew to Zirkhim and from there trekked to the Hatung La and descended to the 1st bridge at 2030 hours on 6th October. Next day he walked to the 2nd bridge guarded by the 9th Punjab and from there to the Dhola post.

In the meantime the 7th Brigade Headquarters was established in the vicinity of the 4th bridge (12,500 feet), the 2nd Rajputs and 1/9th Gorkhas were deployed between the 3rd and 4th bridges. Further, the brigade had taken possession of the log bridge, the 5th bridge and Tsangle without any opposition.

Wherever Lieut.-General Kaul went he held conferences of the local commanders. One was held at Dhola. The divisional commander, the brigade commander and the three battalion commanders attended it. The conference was informal and reminded one of a unit darbar though on a corps level. Here the Indian Army was making history!

During the conference there was from the Chinese side a burst of automatic rifle fire from 400 yards. There was no casualty but it shook the participants. After a few minutes' break the conference continued its deliberations. Probably the conference was loudly discussing the plan to evict the Chinese from the Dhola-Tagla area.

## APPRECIATION AND PLAN

The Onkar Operation was launched in February 1962. It must have been planned beforehand. In May and June of the same year the 7th Brigade Headquarters moved to Tawang. Before the move was made the senior military officers must have reconnoitred the area at least two months ahead and planned for meeting an emergency which could be created by the Chinese. It means the Dhola-Tagla area had been reconnoitred in the first quarter of the year and plans drawn up for possible operations there. Besides, after studying the pros and cons of the situation one platoon of the Assam Rifles was posted at Dhola. In the meantime the XXXIII Corps had collected all relevant information and its staff officers had finished the reconnaissance of the area. Thus the Corps Commander, Lieut.-General Umrao Singh was in a position to reach certain conclusions relevant to the defence of the area. He was of the opinion that Tsangle could be held by a company of troops in order to protect the left flank of the Dhola Brigade. In his opinion 1962 was not the proper time to launch offensive operations against China. On the other hand Lieut.-General Sen was firm that Tsangle should be occupied in strength so that it could serve as a stable base for an attack on Chinese positions in the south of the Tagla ridge. Obviously Sen's opinion prevailed and Tsangle was occupied on 4th October without any opposition from the Chinese. This indicates that the appreciation and planning of operations in the Dhola-Tagla sector had been completed long before October 1962. After this difference of opinion between two senior military officers Brigadier John Dalvi reached Dhola on 20th September; in a few days his headquarters followed him. Dalvi also must have thoroughly studied the question of defending the area. Moreover, on 24th September he was informed of the Government of India's intention of evicting the Chinese from the Indian territory in Dhola. In other words, there was no ambiguity in the aim of the 7th Brigade.



It was to clear the Chinese from the area in the south of the Thagla ridge. The IV Corps Commander reached the sector on 5th October. He remained there from 6th to 11th October. He had held many conferences with his senior commanders. He also must have formed his views on the subject. The very presence of the corps commander in the field of operations was enough to confirm that he had approved the operational plan to be launched to achieve the aim of the brigade. One cannot imagine that an officer of Lieut.-General Kaul's calibre and influence could be an idle onlooker of historic events taking place there. Therefore, it is wrong to say that it was the brigade commander's idea to make Tsangle a firm base for the impending operations. In arriving at this decision every senior officer present in the area had a hand in proportion to his responsibility and authority. In the first week of October 1962 Lieut.-General Kaul's presence in the sector makes it obligatory on him to accept full responsibility for the execution of the plan of attack against the Chinese intruders. If the plan was not to his liking he could immediately have stopped its execution. After all he was the corps commander and his word at the time was law in the sector. Lieut.-General Kaul himself admits that he approved "the plan of Brigadier Dalvi". Our objection is against the association in the plan with the name of Dalvi. The moment the plan was approved by the corps commander, the highest authority in the area, it became the corps commander's plan, the Indian Army's plan.

Further, according to Lieut.-General Kaul's version Tseng-jong was occupied on 8th October without any opposition. On that very day the corps commander was holding a conference as stated above. If this date of the occupation of Tseng-jong is correct it implies that the operation had been planned before the date of holding the conference. There is the other side of the story as well.

According to the Chinese Ministry of External Affairs Chihtung (Tseng-jong) was occupied by a batch of Indian troops on 9th October 1962 vide the *White Paper* No. VII p. 106.

Lieut.-General Kaul wrote his '*Untold Story*' after 4 years of retirement. It is quite human that he might have forgotten the exact date of the occupation of Tseng-jong. Otherwise how did it

benefit the Chinese to put the date of occupation later by one day? It is more natural for the hypothetical and suspicious Chinese to back date the event rather than post-date it by a day. Therefore, it seems logical to believe the Chinese version. If 9th October was the date of occupation of Tseng-jong it is evident that Corps Commander Kaul discussed the plan of operation for evicting the Chinese from the south of the Thagla ridge in the conference, otherwise it beats one's imagination why the corps commander was there at all for a week. Briefly, the surmise that Tseng-jong was occupied by a company of Rajputs after the approval of the corps commander is correct and logical.

As regards the plan itself it is evident that the military authorities must have studied the ground and other factors to achieve the aim of the brigade.

The Chinese dispositions could be seen from the Indian positions, and more information could be had from patrols which were a regular feature of the 7th Brigade. The main Chinese concentration was along the Thagla ridge from the Dum Dum La to the Thag La. A spur comes out of the Thagla ridge at the end of which was located the Paitsai post. Probably 500 men, including about 60 posted at the Paitsai picket, were holding the Thagla ridge. The Chinese were well provided with artillery and mortar support. Often these supporting weapons were seen firing from the crest of the Thagla ridge.

Therefore, it was thought feasible to attack the Chinese by more than a battalion. As the distance between the Namka Chu and the Thagla ridge is about two miles in the mountainous terrain covered with greenery, therefore, it was decided to have an advance base from where the operation could be launched. That firm base had to be in the north of the Namka Chu to shorten the distance of advance.

In this operation the local terrain was to be the deciding factor. In the Dhola-Thagla sector the mountain ranges slope from west to east. Therefore, if the Chinese front was to be rolled up from one flank to the other it was easier to do so from left to right rather than run the risk of advancing up-hill from east to west. Further,

at the Nyamjang-Namka river junction the valleys of both rivers are deeply cut, narrow and hence almost inaccessible. This fact alone strengthens the argument of giving up the approach from the right for an attack on the Chinese positions on the Thagla ridge. Regarding the central approach, it should be remembered that the Paitsai spur extending to the south divides the sector into two parts, the eastern and the western. The attack on one flank would have no effect on the other, while the defenders could easily reinforce one portion when the other was attacked. In addition to this the Paitsai spur was held in strength by the Chinese threatening a frontal advance by the attacking column towards the Thagla ridge. Therefore, the central approach was also given up. Evidently by the process of elimination the approach from the left was selected for the offensive which if adopted could roll up the Chinese front from left to right. But for this operation a firm base was required. Tsangle was to be used as such a base.

The same arguments held good for the Chinese retaliation. If the Chinese ever attacked, they would also do so on our left flank. To outmanoeuvre the Chinese in their move the occupation of Tseng-jong was considered essential. Near Tseng-jong there is another dominating feature named Karpo La II. Being in the vicinity of Tseng-jong this also had to be occupied. Tsangle, across the upper reaches of the Namka Chu, had already been occupied by the Indian troops. Briefly the plan was to be executed in three phases:

(i) A detachment was to occupy Karpo La II.

(ii) Tseng-jong was to be occupied and consolidated into a company position. The mountain gun detachment at the Tsangdhar post was to support the occupation. The Karpo La II detachment was also to be given a similar support.

(iii) The final attack on different Chinese positions or mopping up operations were to be launched to evict the Chinese intruders from the area in the south of the Thagla ridge.

But this plan lacked in foresight. It did not make provision for the Chinese reaction which was bound to take place after they had overcome the shock of the surprise. It could either be an immediate reaction or a delayed one but it had to come sooner or later.

**Immediate Reaction :—**China could either (a) resist, or (b) not resist the occupation of Tseng-jong by Indian troops. There was a third possibility too i.e. (c) China might anticipate the Indians and occupy Tseng-jong before the Indian troops moved forward.

(a) In case China decided to resist she (i) might or (ii) might not succeed in preventing the occupation of the posts including the Tseng-jong. (iii) Another possibility was that as a result of the weak resistance of the Indians an operational stalemate might develop. Whether the Chinese reacted immediately or after a day or two it was immaterial because in the mountainous terrain of the operational theatre, where air transport was not used liberally, this short interval could not affect appreciably the logistic build-up.

(i) In case China decided to resist and her movements were successfully executed, the Indian brigade had no reserves of troops, equipment, ammunition or food in the area. Under this limitation the brigade could either withdraw or hold on with the hope of regaining the lost ground after receiving reinforcements. As proper arrangements for sending reinforcements to the Dhola sector on an appreciable scale had not been made the 7th Brigade could not hold on to its occupied positions and had to withdraw.

(ii) If the Chinese resistance collapsed and they were found to retreat what action could the Indian brigade take? Was it to pursue the routed enemy only up to the Indo-Tibetan boundary or beyond it? The gains of an attack lie in the exploitation of the enemy's defeat. Without exploitation the advantages gained by an offensive are neutralised giving the enemy an opportunity to replenish his strength and return to his adversary's territory. The Government of India was firm on the point that Indian troops should not enter Tibetan territory. Therefore, there was no alternative for the 7th Brigade but to withdraw.

(iii) If an operational stalemate developed the Chinese would definitely try to shorten its period for crushing the Indian Army units in NEFA; India's efforts would have proved futile to meet the ultimate Chinese onslaught. Eventually, again, a withdrawal was the only course of action for the Indian brigade to follow.

(b) There was a remote possibility that China would not like to resist the Indian advance to the Thagla ridge. Probably the official view in India was this. The fact is that China has been expanding her empire for the last twenty centuries unchecked. In conformity with her national tradition she was bound to retaliate. The retaliation could be delayed but it was bound to come sooner or later.

(c) The third possibility was that China might anticipate the Indians and occupy Tseng-jong before the latter could move to the forward area for completing the next phase. This would have worked out as discussed under (a) above.

**Delayed Retaliation** :—In any case, in the long run China was bound to retaliate to achieve her long term aim of securing control of the passes in the highest and the last ridge from the Tibetan side, and the immediate aim of crushing the Indian forces in NEFA. She would certainly take counter-measures to dislodge the Indians from NEFA and to humiliate them; she would repeat such attempts again and again till both her aims were achieved. With her teeming millions and with callous regard for their lives China would sacrifice them at the altar of primitive expansionism easily. With such a determined attitude there were two alternatives for the Chinese to follow either to push back the Indian troops to the south of the Namka valley and wait, or to continue the push to drive out the Indians from the Dhola sector altogether. Under the first alternative the withdrawal of the Indian troops was inevitable as already discussed. If the Chinese pushed the attack to the south of the Namka Chu and beyond the Indian brigade had to abandon the Dhola post. The question was whether the withdrawal could be a deliberate operation that is an orderly withdrawal; or the brigade was to let its troops disperse and escape to Tawang or to the plains of Assam as best as they could.

There were no suitable intermediate positions which could help in making the withdrawal orderly. Tsangdhar could never be defended, specially on an ad hoc basis. Hence the disintegration of the Indian troops into small parties to effect their escape to the rear appeared to be inevitable unless the brigade commander, with the help of his superiors practised his troops in the intricate

tactics of mobile defence. As things at the time stood forced withdrawal appeared to be inevitable for the following reasons :

- (a) There was no depth in the brigade defence. The troops were not well-equipped, clothed for mountain warfare or provided with ammunition and communications to face a large-scale offensive or defensive operation, and
- (b) the units were not mutually supporting;
- (c) the troops did not get sufficient time to become a well-knit brigade, the Rajputs had just joined the brigade, and
- (d) lastly they were not provided with adequate fire-power either to support counter-attacks to restore original position or to sustain a long, drawn defence against the enemy's determined onslaught.

The success of the plan appeared to be doubtful. In fact a timely or premature withdrawal from the positions gained by the successful execution of the offensive operations was going to be the lot of the 7th Brigade. Whether the brigade was to withdraw to its present position in the south of the Namka Chu or to quit the sector altogether depended on the form of the retaliatory measures taken by the Chinese. The Chinese had the initiative and the Indian troops at Dhola had no free choice.

Therefore, at the most it could be said that the planning was done on the basis of mopping up of intruders in the Indian territory without making an allowance for possible enemy retaliatory measures. It was merely a police operation. The plan could not have originated from military sources.

**The Plan** :—The plan was to be executed in three phases.

**Phase I** :—A company of the 9th Punjab under the command of Major Choudhry occupied Karpo La II on 8th October without the knowledge of the Chinese.

**Phase II** :—A company of the 2nd Rajputs occupied Tseng-jong unopposed. The mountain guns and the Karpo La II detachment did not play any part in this action.

**Phase III** :—The final attack on different Chinese positions to evict the intruders from the area in the south of the Thagla ridge.

**Battle of Tseng-Jong** :—After the occupation of Tseng-jong the relative strength of the Chinese and the Indian troops deployed in the Dhola-Thagla sector was as under :—

### Indian

1. The 7th Brigade Headquarters between the 2nd and the 3rd bridge.

(a) One company of the 1/9th G.R. at the Tsangdhar post, one company at Tsangle, and the battalion less two companies in brigade headquarters area.

(b) One company of the 2nd Rajputs at the 1st bridge, one company at Tseng-jong, and the battalion less two companies in the area between the third and the log bridge.

(c) One company of the 9th Punjab at the 2nd bridge, one company at Karpo La II, one company at the 3rd bridge, and the battalion less three companies in the 2nd bridge area.

(d) Six platoons of the Assam Rifles deployed as : Two platoons at Khinzemane, one platoon at Blating (Indo-Bhutan frontier), one platoon at Loong-la, one platoon at Lumpu-Brokenthang and one platoon at Dhola.

2. (a) Two MMG's at the 4th bridge with limited ammunition which could last only for half-an-hour at a normal rate of fire.

(b)  $2 \times 3''$  mortars at the 2nd bridge and  $2 \times 3''$  at the 4th bridge. There was shortage of ammunition here too.

(c) There were  $4 \times 75$  mm mountain guns two of which

### Chinese

1. One company strength at Dum Dum La, one company strength at Yumtso La, one company strength at Thag La, and one along the Paitsai ridge.

2. (a) The Chinese were well-provided with MMG's. They also had enough ammunition. Firstly their road-head was at Le village, 8 miles in the rear of their forward defended localities. Secondly they had a labour force which lived off the land. Therefore, the supply of food was not a problem for the Chinese. The

were useless. The remaining two were sparingly used. Their working suffered due to shortage of ammunition.

NOTE : In the immediate west of the Tsangdhar post there was a lake. Between the lake and the feature there was a khad, more than two thousand feet deep. The Tsangdhar post was provided with a dropping zone. Here gun ammunition had to be air-dropped. Most of it either rolled down into the khud or fell into the lake. It took three days to salvage the ammunition from the former. The ammunition which went down to the bottom of the lake could not be recovered.

There were eight heavy mortars available for the use of the brigade. Four of them were left in the rear dump at Lumpu and the remainder were brought to the Tsangdhar post. But under instructions they were never used.

(d) The Indian jawan was equipped with the .303 rifle (bolt action). Each rifle had 50 rounds and each LMG 500 rounds—the field scale. Whether the brigade had ammunition in reserve is doubtful as there was an acute shortage of porters and airdrops were inaccurate.

3. The 2nd Rajputs and 1/9th G.R. had only three days' rations. These units were short of winter clothing as well. Besides, the troops in general were short of boots and winter clothing so essential at high altitudes.

4. There were two dropping zones—one at Lumpu and the other at Tsangdhar post. The

supply of other items was also satisfactory.

(b) Other battalion supporting weapons like the 81 mm mortars and LMG's were according to scale. In addition they had brought RCL's and anti-aircraft guns. These weapons were allotted to infantry units.

(c) The Chinese also had 76 mm automatic guns—mountain guns fed and fired automatically. Obviously their rate of fire was faster than of the ordinary guns. The positions of these guns was exposed by their flashes. The Indian observation post officers (OP's) spotted them easily. These guns had accurately registered their targets hence they could effectively blast Indian positions.

(c) The Chinese had semi-automatic rifles. They had no shortage of ammunition either for their rifles or LMG's.

3. The Chinese ate frugally hence there was no question of shortage of rations for them. They wore cotton-padded clothes and thus were well protected from cold at heights more than 12,000 feet.

4. The problem of porters was solved by conscripting the the local population for carry-



former was meant for the brigade and the latter mostly for the guns. Stores from Lumpu were carried to forward posts by porters usually in three days.

ing loads from the rear to the forward posts. Therefore, Chinese supplies were adequate to meet the needs of their troops.

5. The brigade's communications were poor. Only one telephone line from Tsangdhar to the command post at the 7th Brigade Headquarters was laid. There was no other telephone line worth the name in existence in the whole brigade. The same was the case with wireless sets. The Brigade Artillery Officer had his set with a solitary charging set. Whenever the wireless set was jammed, the commanders had to communicate their orders verbally, or through messengers. In the jungle-covered mountainous terrain this process was laborious and time-consuming. Because of indifferent communications the fighting efficiency of the brigade was much impaired. Here it may be noted that it was the artillery set with which communication with the outside world, specially Delhi, was maintained. When this set went out of order communication with Delhi was cut off.

5. The Chinese had been preparing for this operation for a long time. Therefore, their communications were good. All their posts on the Himalayan front were connected by wireless with their formation headquarters at Tsona Dzong, Tse Tang and Lahsa.

After the occupation of Tseng-jong the Indians were to launch the 3rd phase. This was logical. But did the Indian commanders take part in the accomplishment of the third phase of the plan?

(a) The Government of India's clear instructions were to drive the Chinese out of Indian territory in NEFA. How could the Indian commanders disobey these instructions? Obviously one would draw an inference that the Indians did attempt to accomplish phase III of the plan. If they did they must have attempted to advance on the day on which they occupied Tseng-jong i.e. on 9th

October and their attempt considering the means available to them must have been a feeble one.

(b) If the Indians did not act evidently they hesitated. Probably they waited for the Chinese reaction throughout the day (9th October). Or they might have reviewed the situation and found the task beyond the means available to them. Or tactfully they held the completion of the phase III in abeyance. They were the men on the spot so could be fully aware of the difficulties facing them. Apparently the task was too difficult. The delaying of the execution of the plan was the obvious course. Who was responsible for this inaction is difficult to say. Lieut.-General Umrao Singh had already been transferred for differing with his army commander. Who could be so foolish as to invite the wrath of the corps commander or his superiors by showing the slightest disagreement about the execution of phase III ?

Therefore, there can be two surmises about the matter. One view is that the Indian troops attempted to launch the execution of phase III of the plan and failed and the other they just waited for the next move of the Chinese.

However, whether the Indian troops attempted to launch offensive operations after the occupation of Tseng-jong or not is irrelevant, because the occupation of Tseng-jong was sufficient reason for the Chinese to take strong retaliatory action not only to drive the Indians from that feature but to push them further south.

On the morning of 10th October the Chinese opened an intensive fire on a routine patrol of the Punjabis in the vicinity of Tseng-jong. The Indians fired back in self-defence. Thus there was an exchange of fire between the opposing troops. Soon after, Chinese artillery and mortars started dropping shells on Tseng-jong, the target which had been accurately registered beforehand. No sooner was the fire lifted than about 500 Chinese attacked Tseng-jong from three sides. The Indian mortars and guns did not give any fire-support (the mortars and MMGs were on the 4th bridge) to the men at Tseng-jong. At the Karpo La II a company of the Punjabis had taken up an advantageous position and supported the Rajputs inflicting severe casualties on the enemy. But lack of fire-support

caused the Punjabi company to suffer heavy losses, one of its platoons was wiped out. Indian mortar and gun fire-support would have saved the situation but obviously under the orders of senior officers that was not done. The senior officers, the corps and divisional commanders present there, were ready to take action but they did not want to face the consequences i.e. the escalation of the Tseng-jong episode into a war.

The account given above is the Indian version while that of the Chinese is :

“On 29th October 1962 a batch of the Indian troops which had intruded into the Che Dong area north of the ‘McMahon Line’ crossed the upper reach of the Kachling river to establish an aggressive strong point at Chitung (more than four kilometres north-west of Che Dong). At 0920 hours on 10th October the aggressive Indian troops launched from Chitung (Tseng-jong) a fierce attack on the Chinese frontier guards stationed near Chitung, killing and wounding 11 Chinese frontier guards. The Chinese frontier guards were compelled to act in self-defence; by the afternoon of the 10th, the fighting was still on. At 0940 hours on the same day, the Indian troops which had intruded into and stationed at Che Dong fired provocative shots at the Chinese frontier guards stationed at Paitsai, which is opposite to Che Dong across the river.” (The Chinese note of 10th October.)

“The Indian troops which had intruded into the Che Dong area after crossing the Kachling river occupying Chitung and launching an attack in the morning of 10th October killing and wounding 11 Chinese frontier guards... continued their frenzied attack and killed and wounded 22 more Chinese frontier guards. The Chinese frontier guards having suffered heavy casualties were compelled to strike back in self-defence. The aggressive Indian troops fled to the southern bank of the Kachling river when their attack was thwarted and left behind them 6 corpses and some arms and ammunition. The corpses of the Indian military men have been properly buried on the spot by the Chinese frontier guards.” (The Chinese note of 11th October.)

The statement of the Government of India is :—

“The clash on the 10th October occurred in an area approximately 2 miles to the north-east of the Dhola post. The Chinese threw a grenade at the Indian defence post at 2030 hours on the 9th October. Next morning they followed this up with a severe attack using 2" mortar guns, automatic weapons and grenades. The Indian defence forces had to return the Chinese fire in self-defence. In the fighting that ensued, the Indian forces suffered

17 casualties.” (The Government of India’s note of 16th October 1962.)

Whether the version of China is correct or that of the Government of India, it cannot be denied that there was tension between the Chinese and Indian troops. In such an explosive situation it is difficult to believe that the 7th Brigade took the initiative. The corps commander, the divisional commander and the brigade commander did not want to invite Chinese retaliation. They hesitated. Even if it is granted that the Indian plan was to attack the Chinese positions in the south of the Thagla ridge eventually to expel them from Indian territory, it cannot be expected that the brigade would have definitely carried out the plan. After all it was only an idea in embryo which had already been shelved; the mortars and guns were ordered not to support the defenders. Without fire-support offensive operations are unthinkable. Moreover the Chinese ought to have had more confidence in their strength to know that there was little possibility of an Indian attack. Probably they exaggerated\* events in India and overestimated the importance of political happenings elsewhere\*\*. Whatever might have been the case, the Chinese forestalled the Indian move, and found an excuse to attack Tseng-jong. It may be pointed out that Chinese field intelligence was very well informed. The attack was well planned and executed with thoroughness.

The Rajputs were without any artillery, mortar and MMG support. They were attacked from three sides open to the Chinese. The Chinese first plastered the post with artillery and mortar fire. When enough hammering had been done, the fire was lifted. The Chinese attack came immediately after. When it failed the attacking columns dispersed to rendezvous at a pre-determined point. In the meantime another dose of shelling was administered followed by attack by another column. When sufficient men and materials are available this process can be repeated several times till the defenders are annihilated. In such conditions the Indians could not fight

---

\*The Goa action might have misled the Chinese to believe that India was becoming a military power and in due course might challenge the overlordship of China over Tibet.

\*\*The Russian and American involvement in the Cuban affairs led China to believe that she could make hay while the sun shone.

for long with a limited supply of ammunition and no fire-support. Soon the Rajput company was ordered to withdraw from Tseng-jong to the south of the Namka Chu. The battle was watched by the corps, divisional and brigade commanders. They did not permit the Indian guns and mortars to open fire. They had no extra troops for the battle. The badly mauled Rajputs withdrew to the south of the river. With them were the Punjabis who had fared equally badly.

The Tseng-jong action opened the eyes of the Indian military commanders. They realised that it was an unequal fight. The Chinese were prepared for a large-scale invasion and the Indian jawans though brave were not properly acclimatised and equipped for mountain warfare where guerrilla tactics could be employed with profit. They were neither well-fed nor adequately clothed. There were no reserves which could give resilience to the fighting. The house of cards build by the Indian Army in Kameng collapsed after five weeks.

With the loss of Tseng-jong Chinese superiority in men and materials was established beyond doubt.

**The Pause** :— Lieut.-General Kaul realised the predicament of the troops. They could not expel the Chinese from Indian territory. He, therefore, suspended the orders for attacking enemy positions in the south of the Thagla ridge. Simultaneously he decided to report the situation personally to his superiors in New Delhi and seek fresh instructions. His presence in Delhi was considered imperative because he was in the confidence of the Prime Minister.

Here one is reminded of Rommel and the fighting in the Western Desert. After Montgomery's offensive German forces were rolled back for hundred of miles to the west. Rommel was disappointed. Liddel Hart comments :

“For Rommel himself the decisive blow had been the frustration of his August attack. Following that disappointment, he was so badly shaken that his moral depression lowered his physical state, and he had to go sick, with desert sores, for treatment in Vienna.”<sup>1</sup>

---

1. *The Other Side of The Hill* by Liddel Hart (Delhi 1965) P. 66

Parallel to this was the case of Lieut.-General Kaul. The mauling which the Rajputs and the Punjabis received at the hands of the Chinese destroyed all his hopes of evicting the intruders from territory for which the Prime Minister had specifically sent him. Evidently Kaul was disappointed and wanted to get out of the hopeless situation. Nehru's opinion that the Chinese would not retaliate against Indian troops might have been shared by Kaul also, but the happenings at Tseng-jong belied this wishful thinking. This unexpected disappointment and the knowledge that great disparity existed between Chinese and Indian military forces in Dhola affected his nerves badly. In addition constant marching for days together up and down above 12,000 feet without proper acclimatisation frayed his nerves. A serious trouble in the chest provided the disillusioned corps commander with a valid excuse to escape from the place. When he left the sector he was really a sick man.

In Delhi he attended a meeting presided over by the Prime Minister. The others who were present in the meeting were the Defence Minister, the Army and Air Chiefs, the Cabinet, Foreign and Defence secretaries. He presented a true tactical picture of the Dhola Sector to the distinguished audience. He bluntly said : "If we attack the Chinese, as things stand we are bound to have a reverse". He summarised his arguments to drive home his points and then asked for orders on one of three following alternatives :—

- "(a) Whether I should continue building up this sector and launch an attack on the Chinese despite their superiority and the possibility of a reverse;
- (b) or to cancel the orders for an attack but to hold our positions;
- (c) or to hold a (more advantageous) position elsewhere."

He was told to cancel the orders for the attack and "hold on to our positions". The order could be welcome only if negotiations could be started so as to persuade the Chinese to give up violence and to settle disputes peacefully, or if the period "of holding on" could be utilized for making a thrust elsewhere in the Himalayas to wrest the tactical initiative from the Chinese. The Government of India failed in the first and was not prepared for the second. Therefore, the order was futile and some other course had to be adopted.

India could replace the units in Dhola by the Assam Rifles or some other police formation. In that case there was a better chance of negotiations being conducted on a civilian level. In the meantime as a precautionary measure defence preparations could be completed in the rear. But India decided to act otherwise. She tried to strengthen the Dhola defences further even when she was quite unprepared. The very fact that she was not prepared to use the Indian Air Force indicated her military impotence.

After the fall of Tseng-jong 11th October was a crucial date. If the Indians showed signs of strengthening their defences the Chinese would definitely know the fresh dispositions of their adversary; consequently they would start preparations for final retaliation. If the Indians vacated the Dhola sector or took the reverse timidly the possibility was that the stalemate would continue and negotiations could be reopened. But the Indians started strengthening their defences in the sector. On the same day the advance party of the 4th Grenadiers arrived in the sector. The rest of the battalion was to come soon. Therefore, there was some troop movement around the first bridge. To accommodate the new comers the Rajputs were shifted to the area between the 3rd and 4th bridges.

The Assam Rifles detachment at Khinzemane asked for reinforcements. A company\* of the 4th Garhwal Rifles was despatched from Tawang on 10th October. For some reason the company was held up and reached Zimithang only when the Dhola operation was about to end. The company returned to the Brahmaputra valley via Bhutan.

The position of supplies did not improve much. The state of telephone and wireless communications also remained unchanged. When the tactical position of the Indians became precarious a helicopter with a wireless set was sent to the Tsangdhar post on 20th October. The pilot was killed and the helicopter captured by the Chinese.

---

\*Originally two companies of the Garhwalis were to be introduced into the Dhola sector. But on October 10 orders were changed. Only one instead of two companies left Tawang for Zimithang. The divisional commander did not know about the change in orders till the last day—when the final Chinese attack came.

Lieut.-General Kaul returned from Delhi to the corps headquarters at Tezpur on 15th October. Now he was armed with orders for the cancellation of the previously planned attack and for holding on to the present positions in possession of Indian troops. These orders were passed on to the 4th Division.

Thus the 4th Division was to defend all the positions already occupied in the south of the Namka Chu river by Indian troops. To maintain the brigade defence area the division had to protect the Hatung La pass so that communications with the rear dumps at Lumpu could function normally. The division had a choice whether to hold or vacate Tsangle located in the north of the Namka Chu.

There was some difference about the retention of Tsangle. Being near the boundary trijunction, Tsangle had to be retained by the Indian troops for political reasons. Tactically it was not feasible; it could not be supported adequately by the unit guarding the left flank of the 7th Brigade. Nevertheless, it was decided on 17th October to strengthen it. A company of the Punjabis was sent to reinforce the Gorkha company which was already there.

Unfortunately the corps commander was again down with a serious chest ailment. On October 18 Colonel Lal of Army Medical Corps arrived from Army Headquarters and Kaul was evacuated from Tezpur to Delhi. In his absence, Lieut.-General Harbaksh Singh commanded the 4th Corps from October 23 to October 29.

## CHINESE RETALIATION

Chinese positions on the Thagla ridge dominated the Dhola sector. It was not difficult for them to observe minutely the tactical movements of the Indian units. On 11th October the Chinese noticed the movement of Indian troops. This is evident from their protest note of 11th October. The Chinese commander concluded that the Indian troops would resist an aggressive operation. There might be some people who believe that Indians might have thought of renewing attacking moves against the Chinese. But they forget that the Tseng-jong set-back was a clear indication of the weakness of the Indian troops precluding any such moves by them. It



is surmised that the Chinese were not swayed by such erroneous considerations. At the same time the very idea that the Indians were determined to dispute the Chinese interpretation of the Indo-Tibetan border areas was repugnant to the Chinese commander. He decided to take steps to achieve his immediate aim—*the destruction of Indian forces in Kameng.*

The first step which the Chinese commander took was to strengthen and extend his communications to the outermost forward defended localities. The easiest and quickest approach to Kameng was from the Bum La pass. Therefore, the construction of the Tsona Dzong-Bum La road was accelerated. By 20th October the road reached a point not far from the pass. By the end of the month it crossed the Great Himalayan Range and reached Pekingtang on its southern slope.

The extension of the Le road was considered uneconomical. Therefore, emphasis was laid on the logistic build-up in the Thagla area to maintain new troops for a few days. In fact this logistic build-up had begun in September when it had become clear to the Chinese that the Indians would not take things lying down. Simultaneously the Chinese military bases located at Tsona Dzong, Lhun-tze Dzong and Tsetang were informed to keep their troops ready for moving to the front on short notice.

**Chinese Appreciation** :—With the aim of teaching a lesson to the Indian forces in NEEA it was considered necessary to have enough troops so that they did not fail to achieve the objective due to lack of numbers. At the same time the Chinese commander could not afford to strain his resources by deploying more troops in the field than were actually necessary. Therefore, his judgment about deciding the number of troops for achieving the aim had to be quite accurate. The troop deficiency perceived in the conduct of operations was to be made up by increasing the fire-power. Consequently, he collected as many artillery and mortar pieces as was possible; each weapon was provided with enough ammunition.

In the present appreciation the local terrain did not offer any serious difficulty. His troops were occupying dominating ground in the area. Of course, considering the slope of the mountain ridges in

the locality, it was obvious that the Indian front had to be folded up from west to east. This was also desirable because by 16th October the Indian brigade had strengthened its right flank with the 4th Grenadiers. Therefore, after a preliminary study of the situation the Chinese commander had (a) to decide the number of troops to be deployed for the operation, (b) to find a suitable forward concentration area and lastly (c) to exploit the rout of the Indian brigade.

**Number of Troops** :—Indian troops were in possession of Tsangle; in addition they were lining the southern bank of the Namka Chu. Only on the lower reach of the river there was some depth in the Indian defences, in other places it was thinly held. Further, each unit was isolated from its neighbour i. e. the units were not mutually supporting. The Chinese commander had just to isolate the western flank of the Indians from the rest of the brigade and then annihilate it. The Tsangle and the Rajput positions were quite apart; they could be attacked simultaneously and overrun separately. On the Tsangdhar position the 7th Brigade had placed two mountain guns. With a limited supply of ammunition they could not inflict any severe loss on the attacking troops. Anyway that much risk had to be taken by the attackers. Firstly the extreme left post of the Indian brigade had to be liquidated. Simultaneously with this the Indian battalion guarding the 3rd and the 4th bridges had to be attacked. The other Indian units were to be kept engaged by other Chinese troops and artillery. The same consideration was given to Khinzemane and the 4th Grenadiers' positions; they were also to be tackled simultaneously with those on the west.

The annihilation of the central sector and the 2nd bridge was allotted a low priority, because they could be kept engaged for some time by the Paitsai and other posts located in the north of the river with intensive artillery, mortar and MMG fire. After the collapse of Tsangle and 2nd Rajput positions in the west Khinzemane and the 4th Grenadiers in the east the two Chinese columns would be released for exploitation. These columns might serve as the two arms of the pincers to envelop the central Indian sector along with the 2nd bridge area, if need arose. If not, they might proceed to the south to pursue the fleeing enemy. With this inten-

tion the Chinese commander blocked the passage through the Hatung La and the twin features of Karpo La I and Tsangdhar.

In case the Indians stood their ground in the central sector and on the 2nd bridge the column from the west was to advance to overrun the enemy defences and join the eastern column on the lower reach of the Namka Chu. After the junction the two columns were to proceed south as narrated above, following different routes.

The task given to the different columns automatically necessitated the division of the Chinese force as under :

- (a) A column attacking Tsangle and Tsangdhar,
- (b) another to attack the 2nd Rajputs,
- (c) the third to roll up Khinzemane and the 4th Grenadiers' positions, and
- (d) the fourth column to proceed straight to the Hatung La and block it for the retreating troops.

Apart from the above there was to be a fifth column (e) which had to come down to the Nyamjang valley and then climb to Soktsen monastery; the same column was to enter the Tawang sector after crossing the Tawang ridge and passing through Sumatso and the nunnery, one and a half miles in the north of Tawang.

These columns were to operate in the Dhola sector.

Simultaneously with this there was to be another column (f) for the Tawang sector which could overrun the Bum La pass and attack Tawang from the north.

Considering the strength of the Indian forces the Chinese commander seems to have decided to allot a battalion each to (a), (d) and (e) columns, two battalions each to (c) and (f) columns and a regiment to (b) column. In all about 5,000 troops were to be deployed for the invasion of northern Kameng and another 5,000 were to be kept in reserve. In other words the Chinese commander deployed two infantry divisions along with their full complements of labour and supporting arms. For ensuring success artillery and mortar detachments were concentrated at suitable points in the north of the river.

**Forward Concentration Areas** :— In the Namka Chu sector the most suitable concentration area was in the north of the 5th bridge. The area had an easy approach; here the river could be waded

across specially in the early morning. Moreover, the 5th bridge was not well guarded by the Indians. Therefore, the approach march could be made silently at night. Lastly the area would be a wedge between Tsangle and the 2nd Rajputs positions. Here the two columns, (a) and (b), could concentrate before attacking the objectives simultaneously; one column proceeding to Tsangle and the other, the bigger one, towards the Rajputs. The latter had to wade across the river before forming up for attack behind the Rajputs.

The Thag La itself could be the forward concentration area for the (c), (d) and (e) columns. And lastly for the Bum La pass the troops could be concentrated in the immediate north of the pass itself. These troops were to be brought by transport to the concentration area.

The Thagla ridge provided a natural screen for the Chinese troops to move into the concentration areas un-noticed by Indian troops. Thus the Chinese commander had an advantage in keeping his move a complete secret.

**Exploitation of The Rout** :— The (d) column was to proceed straight to the Hatung La to harass the Indian troops which might try to escape via that route, and to block the pass itself to ensure their annihilation.

Besides, the (b) and (c) columns, after overrunning the Indian posts and completely rendering the central sector ineffective, were to proceed to Lumpu by various routes. They were expected to wipe out astray Indian parties in the way. Similarly the (a) column after overrunning Tsangle was to proceed towards Tsangdhar. After taking the Tsangdhar post it was to proceed to Lumpu. Its task on the way was the same as that of the others.

Ultimately these forces were to meet at Lumpu and overrun the rear headquarters of the Indian units. From here the combined column was to proceed to Tawang via Shakti and Loongla.

**Reaction of The Indian Forces** :— The Chinese commander did not bother about the Indian Brigade's reaction. He expected that

merely protest notes from the Government of India would be sent to his government. These could be disposed of suitably by Peking. At that time he was sure of his success, he believed that the Indian brigade would disintegrate and retire and that his forces would rout the enemy. For him it was only a question of time when he would teach an everlasting lesson to the Indians.

**The Plan** :—The operation was to be completed in three phases scheduled as under :—

**Phase I** :—At zero hour the Indian positions were to be subjected to intensive bombardment. Immediately after lifting of the fire the Tsangle and the 2nd Rajputs' positions in the west and Khinzemane and the 4th Grenadiers' positions in the east were to be simultaneously attacked and overrun.

**Phase II ( i )** :—Immediately after the collapse of the 7th Brigade's flanks the (c) column was to halt and consolidate its positions on the 4th Grenadiers' posts, while the (b) column was to advance to the east to join the (c) column after clearing the central sector. This need might not arise and the Indian troops might vacate the positions voluntarily after the collapse of the flanks.

(ii) Now the (d) column was to start moving and passing through the (c) column was to proceed to the Hatung La pass.

(iii) The (a) column after clearing Tsangle was to come down and then climb up to attack the Indian artillery positions at the Tsangdhar post.

(iv) The (c) column after overcoming the resistance at the bridge below Khinzemane was to start for Soktsen for its advance on Sumatso.

The second phase was to be completed with the capture of Lumpu where the (a), (b), (c) and (d) columns were to meet.

**Phase III** :—The combined column was to proceed from Lumpu to Loongla to clear the Tawang area of Indian troops. The movements of (e) and (f) columns were to be synchronised later.

**The Plan in Action** :— By the evening of 18th October the Chinese troops which were to take part in the battles of the Dhola sector were concentrated at Le. Final check-up and other administrative formalities were completed the same day. Next morning the troops were moved to the Thagla ridge for final deployment.

**The Battle of The Namka Chu** :—According to the Chinese version communicated to the Government of India, on October 20 the Indian troops took the initiative and attacked Chinese positions in the north of the Namka Chu river.

“In the eastern sector the Indian forces of aggression had in the three days since 17th October repeatedly directed vehement artillery bombardments against the Chinese frontier guards in the area between Kalung (Tsangle) and the Sachang lake in the upper reaches of the Kachling river, and the Che-jao area in the middle reaches of the river in the Che Dong area in China’s Tibet region. At the same time a great number of Indian troops had moved continuously to concentrate at Pangkangting south of the Che Dong bridge. At 7 o’ clock (Peking time) in the morning of 20th October the aggressive Indian forces, under the cover of fierce artillery fire launched massive attacks against the Chinese frontier guards all along the Kachling river and in the Khinzemane area”.

On 17th October the Gorkha company at Tsangle was reinforced by a company of the Punjabis. On 16th October a fresh battalion, the 4th Grenadiers, started arriving. As a result of this there was some reshuffling of troops on the three bridges—the bridge below Khinzemane, the 1st and the 2nd bridge. These tactical adjustments provided an excuse to the Chinese to blame India for a fictitious artillery bombardment of their forward positions in the south of the Thagla ridge. It must be remembered that the 7th Brigade had only two mountain guns and a limited supply of ammunition; the Tsang-dhar post received only four airdrops of gun ammunition during the period of Dhola operations. After making allowance for inaccurate airdrops one cannot believe that the 7th Brigade had so much artillery ammunition as to fire it off in a doubtful venture. Secondly the Chinese note does not speak of an attack on any definite position of theirs, the statement is general. It may be accepted that Indian troops opened fire when attacked all along the front but it cannot be believed that they attacked Chinese positions all along the river front without adequate reserves, depth and fire-support. Thirdly,

when the specific orders of the Government of India had been conveyed to the 7th Brigade to cancel offensive operations it cannot be believed that the brigade acted on its own and attacked the Chinese.

Even if the brigade acted foolishly and attacked the Chinese, what could be its aim ? There is hardly any answer to this. Therefore, we summarily reject the Chinese version and state the facts that have come to our knowledge through various sources.

On October 12 the observation post at Khinzemane noticed that about a dozen Chinese came to the area in the north of the Thagla ridge and took up positions. After a couple of hours they returned to the places from where they had come. The information was conveyed to the division. The divisional commander realised the importance of the Khinzemane sector. He nominated the commanding officer of the Assam Rifles battalion, Lieut.-Col Ratan Singh, who by chance had gone to inspect his men and had stayed with them, as the commander of the C sector (Dhola had been designated as 'A' sector and Tawang 'B'). Thus Khinzemane became an independent operational sector. On the evening of 19th October the divisional commander personally visited Khinzemane and conveyed the order verbally to Ratan Singh (the actual order in writing was in transit). In the evening the divisional commander after seeing the place where the Chinese had collected on October 12 was ready to return to his headquarters. Lieut.-Col Ratan Singh accompanied him up to the bridge below Khinzemane. At that time young Lieutenant Roy of the 4th Grenadiers was guarding the bridge. The intention of the divisional headquarters was to make this bridge a battalion position. The divisional commander is said to have told Ratan Singh that soon two companies of the Garhwalis would arrive at the bridge and Ratan Singh could also place his three platoons on the bridge with them. This reshuffling of troops would make the bridge a battalion position. It appears that the divisional commander was not aware of the change of orders which had been effected on October 10 about the Garhwali companies; only one company instead of two was to come. However, on October 19 the task of Roy's company was to prevent the enemy from approaching the bridge and crossing the river to the east bank. The divisional commander rode away towards Zimithang. Immediately after his departure a runner

came and handed over an envelop to Ratan Singh. It was the operational order for which Ratan Singh had been anxiously waiting. He went back to his bunker and read the orders. The next day Khinzemane was overrun by the Chinese. He fortunately tore up the orders before he was taken prisoner. This means that the Chinese commander had issued operational orders on 12th October, and his unit commanders must have finished the reconnaissance of the area before 15th October.

Afterwards the Chinese moved their guns and heavy mortars to the south of the Thagla ridge and placed them on features opposite the 3rd-4th bridge area. On the afternoon of 19th October a Chinese VIP visited the Thagla sector. Probably the purpose of his visit was to finalize the details of the operations. The same evening at 5 o'clock the Tsangdhar post and the 2nd Rajputs saw about 2,000 Chinese troops moving from the Thagla side towards Tsangle. Movements of the Chinese troops in the south of the Thagla ridge were also noticed by the other units of the brigade. The Indians became alert. But what could they do ? Their cry for reinforcements was of no avail. Khinzemane was still waiting for the two Garhwali companies to arrive. Thus the Indians passed the night in anxiety.

At 0400 hours on 20th October the Chinese opened artillery, mortar and MMG fire as a preliminary to the launching of an attack on Indian positions. The fire was intensified at Tsangle on the western extremity and at Khinzemane in the eastern. To watch the effect of the fire the Chinese fired Very lights. Apart from lighting up the area these were a signal for the operation to commence.

The column detailed for attacking the Tsangle post started climbing up. The Chinese artillery and mortar fire continued till the first light. As soon as the fire was lifted the Chinese attacked Tsangle. The Gorkhas and the Punjabis fought as hard as they could. There were many casualties among the Indians. In the end a few Gorkhas and Punjabis escaped through the Ge La and the Yum La into Bhutan. The Chinese overran Tsangle. By 0600 hours the operation was over. Having cleared the area the Chinese came down to their forward concentration area and prepared for



attacking the Tsangdhar post. At 0830 hours they were seen climbing towards their objective.

On the right flank the Chinese unexpectedly reversed their plan. Instead of attacking Khinzemane first they attacked it after taking the bridge down below.

As soon as the artillery fire was lifted 500 Chinese troops descended to the bridge position by-passing Khinzemane. They attacked the Grenadiers from three sides and overwhelmed them. Lieutenant Roy and about 20 men were killed, some were wounded and some were taken prisoner. The few that escaped reached Zimithang somehow.

During this period the Assam Rifles post at khinzemane was kept engaged by the enemy small-arms and artillery fire from the front. It took the Chinese column about two hours to capture the bridge. After this the column moved up. Simultaneously with this column another column advanced from the Thagla ridge towards the Assam Rifles post. Thus Khinzemane was caught between the two arms of a pincer movement, one from the north and the other from the south. The Assam Rifles fought bravely but were overwhelmed soon. Lieut.-Col Ratan Singh was wounded and taken prisoner.

Having finished the operation the Chinese column advanced towards Soktsen. It was now ready to cross the Tawang ridge and proceed to Sumatso.

Unfortunately at 0600 hours the only wireless set in the 7th Brigade Headquarters was hit by a shell splinter and stopped working. This was a great loss to the brigade. It was impossible for the brigade headquarters to send messages to its units by couriers. Hence the units were compelled to act on their own. In the units too command and control, because of unsatisfactory means of communication, had collapsed and there was no sign of any discipline in the whole brigade. Fortunately, the Rajputs had placed their defence in a compact area and fought as a unit.

Simultaneously with the Tsangle attack the Chinese attacked the Rajputs as well from the rear. The Rajputs were preparing for the morning 'stand to', a routine practice in adopting defensive positions

in battle order. They were caught between the frontal fire of the Chinese guns and the main attack from the rear. The very fact that 280 soldiers were killed, 93 wounded, and 80 taken prisoner shows their bravery. Generally the fighting strength of an Indian unit in the field is about 500, therefore, many could not have escaped.

The unit fought a heroic battle, literally to the last round. Among the dead there were many officers. Nearly all the company commanders were killed excluding the Battalion Second-in-Command, Major Gurdial Singh VrC. The Commanding Officer of the Rajputs, Lieut.-Col MS Rikh, was wounded. The Chinese took him to be dead and were going to leave him there but Rikh's men insisted that their CO was alive, whereupon they carried him and thus he was saved. This shows the loyalty of the men to their officers. Rikh survived the ordeal of being a prisoner of war and lived to take part in the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965. By 0800 hours the destruction of the Rajput position was complete.

In the east the 4th Grenadiers were also attacked. They suffered some casualties but a major portion of the battalion escaped to Assam via the Hatung La and Bhutan. On this front also the 1st bridge area was captured by 0800 hours.

By the time the Rajputs and the Grenadiers collapsed three separate Chinese columns, the eastern, the western, and the Tsang-dhar, had swung into action.

The eastern column, after overcoming the Grenadiers' weak resistance on the Khinzemane-bridge 2 route, pushed forward and overran the position of the Punjabis. The Punjabis withdrew before the Chinese could come and after passing through the Grenadiers' positions marched to the Hatung La and escaped to the plains of Assam via Bhutan. The commanding officer of both the units, the Grenadiers and the Punjabis, also managed to reach Assam. As a matter of fact the Grenadiers and the Punjabis resisted the invaders only nominally.

A detachment of the western column advanced towards the central sector. The Gorkhas opposed the advance, but soon the

camp had to be abandoned. The Gorkhas led by Lieut.-Col Ahluwalia withdrew towards the Tsangdhar post. The Tsangle column of the Chinese was already attacking the post. During the battle the Gorkhas joined the picket. They fought as hard as they could but soon they had to abandon their positions and move to the west. Their commanding officer was wounded. Some of his men left him but others remained with him. Late in the afternoon the rescue party was ambushed by the Chinese. Lieut.-Col Ahluwalia along with his attendants was taken prisoner.

Another Chinese party proceeded to the 7th Brigade Headquarters. Lieut.-Col Tiwari of the signals who was staying in the brigade mess was taken prisoner. Brigadier Dalvi along with his Artillery Officer, Major Nijjar, and another officer escaped. The three walked together for some distance, but in the din of firing and the wooded terrain Dalvi got separated from the officers. He took the Hatung La route and reached the Zimithang bridge. Unfortunately the bridge had been blown up by the withdrawing troops. Brigadier Dalvi struggled on and reached Zirkhim where on 21st October he was taken prisoner.

By 1300 hours on October 21 the Chinese advance parties of the eastern and Tsangdhar columns reached Zirkhim. The same evening they were joined by more Chinese troops. The Chinese divided themselves into two task forces. The bigger force continued the advance towards Tawang. The other was left to proceed to Lumpu to clear the area of Indian troops. The Chinese seemed to have decided to complete this task by the morning of 22nd October.

In the absence of the brigade commander the divisional commander climbed up to Lumpu and issued orders to the units to defend the Hatung La and other points. But it was too late. He had to leave the sector in his helicopter.

Major Nijjar and his companion took the Karpo La I route. They reached Lumpu in the morning of 22nd October. They hid themselves in the narrow valley of a nullah which flows in the south of the Lumpu post. While crossing the nullah Nijjar was carried away by the fast current of the stream. Luck favoured him and he was thrown on the southern bank by the current. His ankle was

fractured still he did not lose heart. Along with his companion he reached Loongla. After a harrowing experience of pursuit and escape the two reached the Mukto Bridge, across the lower reaches of the Tawang Chu, and escaped to Bhutan. This was the experience of hundreds of Indian soldiers who braved the difficulties and returned to the Indian plains.

In the morning of October 22 the rear column of the Chinese reached Lumpu and directed its fire on the Indian camp. Still there were some Indian stragglers in the area. Some were wounded and were waiting for evacuation, while others who were mostly non-combatants had assembled together to await further developments. All of them put up a stiff resistance and did not surrender. The Chinese had to make a bayonet charge to overcome these men. Some were killed and some wounded and taken prisoner.

The mere phrase 'escaped to India' does not give any idea of the hardship which these soldiers underwent. They can only be understood by those who have had the experience of trekking on heights above 10,000 feet in such difficult circumstances. Hungry, ill-equipped, some wearing canvas shoes, others bare-foot and hunted by the Chinese these stragglers journeyed to the west to cross the Me La ridge. Some succeeded in reaching the mountain passes but others could not. A majority of the former reached Tezpur to narrate the story of their escape. Others perished in snows of the Me La ridge.

However, the advancing column of the Chinese descended into the Nyamjang valley and took the Shakti-Loongla route. This column caught up with the other column and the combined force repaired the Zimithang bridge and crossed it. Now the Chinese were moving towards Tawang. Before them fleeing the families of the Assam Rifles JCOs, NCOs and men. Women carrying children were running down-hill to save themselves. Many perished in the way and a few reached Tezpur. These families will never forget the experience of their mad rush to the plains for safety.

Thus ended the sad episode of the military collapse of Dhola which later on had its demoralising effect on the operations in Kameng Frontier Division. For Indians it was a humiliating blow. Even

today the Government of India is shy of publishing an official account of the 1962 battles fought in the Himalayan tracts. In war one side has got to lose; there is nothing unusual about it. But there are many instances where a defeated army wins the admiration even of the enemy. The 7th Brigade in Dhola could also have earned our gratitude. It had the opportunity which it could have used to its advantage, but it failed badly.

In the post-independence era the Dhola operations provided an opportunity to the Indian Army to show its mettle, the situation if handled expertly and purposefully could have brought glory to the Indian Army. The sacrifices of those who fought like the 2nd Rajputs were forgotten and defeats were magnified.

**Comments:—**The Dhola sector came into prominence on 8th September 1962 when the Chinese crossed the Thagla ridge and swarmed down the Himalayan slopes to surround the posts of the Assam Rifles there. So far only the Assam Rifles were concerned with the defence of the far flung sector. Except the Assam Rifles personnel and a few surveyors nobody in the Indian plains had heard the name of the Namka Chu. After 8th September 1962 the defence of the sector became the responsibility of the Indian Army. On 15th September morning a company of the Punjabis reached the 2nd bridge across the Namka Chu and by 1300 hours the same day the Punjabis were occupying the Dhola post. Lieut.-Col Misra, the CO of the 9th Punjab, had been in the Namka valley for about a week and in that time he must have had an opportunity of appreciating the advantages and disadvantages of the local terrain in detail for purposes of defence. There is no doubt, as the IV Corps Commander admits, that the Dhola post was not a suitable position for defence; it was dominated by the Chinese posts on the Thagla ridge and in its south. Misra ought to have pointed out the tactical unsuitability of the locality at once but he failed to do so. On 20th September Brigadier John Dalvi arrived in the sector. He too did not oppose the siting of defences in the Namka valley. Later on the corps commander along with the divisional commander was present in the Dhola sector for more than four days. As a routine the corps commander was critical of the Dhola defences but he did nothing to change the defended localities for a better site. Probably there was none. The 7th Brigade had to occupy Dhola and defend it.

The Dhola defences could not be given up simply because they were tactically not sound. If this logic is sound we should not defend any Himalayan pockets because Chinese positions dominate a majority of them. In spite of the tactical unsuitability of the place there were compelling reasons for defending Dhola. One was the infiltration into the area of the Chinese which had to be stopped. The critics might argue that Dhola being within Indian territory could be defended by any armed force other than the army, preferably by para-military units of local recruits. There are many arguments in favour of this idea but a popular one is that the army as far as possible should fight on a ground of its choice or on a ground tactically advantageous to it. It should not have been, therefore, asked to fight the Chinese at Dhola. At the same time we must not forget that the composition of our society is so varied that it is not easy for us to raise para-army units in NEFA, at least for the present. Under this limitation the Indian Army for a long time to come have to defend frontier territory in NEFA against foreign aggression irrespective of its tactical unsuitability. It is also true that during an emergency the enemy will infiltrate, will raid our posts and sometimes will launch full-scale attacks on us. We will have to cope with all these difficulties. There will be disadvantages of every kind, specially when Indians are a people of defensive mentality; but the country will not tolerate operational debacles again and again. The units taking part in frontier skirmishes will have to do better in future to overcome enemy attacks.

It is up to the Army Headquarters at Delhi to plan for wresting the initiative from the enemy by opening a second front somewhere else. This has political and other aspects which are purely the concern of the Government of India. But if the task of resisting the enemy in a particular sector is entrusted to a formation it is its bounden duty to make the best use of the opportunities. At Dhola tactical conditions were not in favour of the defenders still the 7th Brigade had to make the best of the worst situation.

The entire brigade was deployed in the Namka valley by the end of the first week of October 1962. At that time adequate logistic build-up for the formation had yet to be completed and arrangements for its future replenishment to be made. Secondly, proper arrangements for the brigade artillery, mortar and MMG fire-

support and a continuous supply of ammunition were yet to be organised on a satisfactory basis. Thirdly, if the operation was to be viewed from the point of view of tactical mobility a mobile reserve had to be placed at a suitable spot. Fourthly, as the corps commander has pointed out, the terrain was suitable for mountain warfare in jungle-covered country. Such operations were fought in the Arakan Hills. On the basis of these operations of World War II attempts should have been made to dig strong and inter-connected bunkers for each unit. Lastly, good communications are a primary necessity for strengthening command and control and avoiding disintegration of formations. The more efficient the inter-communications are the better the concentrated effort of the fighting elements to resist enemy attacks. Briefly, there were many things to be done that ought to have kept the entire brigade busy for at least ten days. According to this calculation, if the 7th Brigade launched operations before 20th October for evicting the Chinese from Indian territory it could do so at its own peril.

The 7th Brigade in the presence of the corps commander started operations immediately after arriving in the battle area. Failure already stared it in the face. The brigade could not avoid the consequences of its premature offensive. It had to quit the Dhola-Thagla sector. But its losses could have been lighter if more attention had been paid to the plan of flexible and mobile operations beforehand.

Offensive actions cannot be discussed because the 7th Brigade did not have the troops to keep a mobile reserve which could at the proper time hit back at the enemy drawn into a tactical trap. Here we can refer only to the defensive manoeuvres of the troops to reduce their losses.

The second weakness of the brigade was that battalion defended localities were not mutually supporting. Ordinarily there was nothing wrong with this arrangement, specially when the units were placed for arresting the enemy infiltration, an internal security operation. But when hostilities broke out with a foreign power these battalion positions could be overrun one by one. This was more likely to happen when the foreign power was China; Chinese field tactics are to overrun enemy positions one by one. There-

fore, means had to be found to avoid such collapse of the entire front in the face of a Chinese attack. The defence had to be compact to enable the troops to make a coordinated effort to meet the enemy attack. At the same time the brigade could not relinquish its peace-time activities viz stop enemy infiltration into the area in the south of the Thagla ridge. This dual function involved two types of defence, one to cover the area lengthwise and the other to have a compact defence with mutually supporting positions. This required alternative positions for the flanking units.

There was a direct route from Dhola to Lumpu via the Tsangdhar and Karpo La I features. Therefore, if the brigade defences were to be built the brigade locality was most suitable for the purpose. Probably there were limitations imposed by the local terrain, but these could be overcome by hard labour. If the defence had been located as suggested the locality could have provided good escape route to the soldiers. The locality could have been transformed into a box-like defended area from which a better organised withdrawal could have been possible. Briefly, in the brigade locality alternative positions for the flanking units could have been dug where the troops at the proper time could have concentrated and fought the enemy in a body.

On the evening of 19th October 2,000 enemy troops were seen marching towards Tsangle. Combining this information with previous intelligence it could be definitely concluded that the Chinese were about to launch an offensive. Preparations, therefore, could have been made to meet the attack. In the night the flanking units could withdraw to the brigade defended area to occupy the alternative positions which ought to have been ready by then. In that case when the Chinese attacked the brigade's flanks they would have charged at the empty bunkers; the consolidation phase would have kept them busy for some time. The Chinese would have needed some more time to reorganise for a fresh attack on the central sector, the brigade defended area. In this interval the brigade could have arranged for an orderly withdrawal to Lumpu via the Tsangdhar Karpo La I route.

Tsangle had to be given up as a bad case. At the most it could also have been vacated on the night of 19th October if somehow a



message could have been sent to its garrison in time to reinforce the Tsangdhar detachment. In that case the artillery detachment and its escort of the Gorkha company along with the fresh arrivals could have functioned as one body. This combined body of troops, if properly guided, could have helped the retiring brigade considerably and extricated itself from the bad situation. It could have reached Lumpu in better shape.

It appears that tactical direction from the top in the locality lacked force, determination and foresight ; at the crucial moment it failed to manoeuvre troops for a planned withdrawal. It was old fashioned and its rigid tactics could not stand up to the flexible methods of the Chinese. The result was that some units were caught in the enemy trap and some escaped ; the former fought doggedly and were destroyed, the latter suffered much on their way to the plains of Assam. Those who fought to the last were not praised and their heroic deeds in battle were not given recognition. The wave of indignation which swept over the country at that time engulfed their claims to fame.

## CHAPTER V

# THE SILVER LINING

“A well recognised principle of defence strategy is so to organise the defences as to admit of their easy conversion into bases of offensive operation. This involves the limiting of the axis of defence and organising it in depth, for every extension would lead to weakness. The principle appears to have been generally overlooked in planning for defence in Burma.”<sup>1</sup>

BISHESHWAR PRASAD

“What should we do to fight the Chinese?”

This question was put to me by a Congress MP, who later on became a Deputy Minister, at Lansdowne on 24th October 1962, a day after the evacuation of Tawang. I had gone to Lansdowne to attend the first and only Regimental Reunion in the post-independence period.

“Change the leadership of your party.”

“Cannot be done”, was the prompt reply.

“Then you cannot fight the Chinese”, I replied.

“The Chinese really did not want to fight. There was some misunderstanding about a small portion of the McMahon Line as applicable to the Thagla ridge.”

“You will see that they will advance south. There is no misunderstanding. Their aim is to dominate the Himalayan passes. NEFA they have already claimed as their own territory.”

“Tell me some other way to stop the Chinese invasion.”

“Will you do it?”

“It depends.”

“Declare that India will liberate Tibet.”

“How will it help in the present fighting?”

“There will be a wave of enthusiasm over the country. Secondly we will be free to snatch the initiative from the Chinese by opening a second front on a ground of our own choice ; we will be able to enter Tibet according to our tactical convenience.”

Up to that time President Rajendra Prasad had not made any announcement regarding Tibet. I felt that our military operations

---

1. *Retreat From Burma* Edited by Bisheshwar Prasad p.xxviii.

in the Himalayas must be directed towards achieving a higher aim, the liberation of Tibet. Merely to defend the Himalayan borders against Chinese expansion is not only a static aim but also a lifeless one. Because without driving out the Chinese from Tibet there can never be any peace in the Himalayan border areas. *This blunt truth was not palatable to the MP and we parted company.*

From 24th October 1962 things began to deteriorate and the Government of India declared the state of 'national emergency' which is still (in December 1967) in force. What was happening in NEFA in the last week of October 1962? The 7th Brigade had melted away and the Chinese were advancing towards Tawang, the Divisional Vital Ground.

## THE TAWANG-JANG SECTOR

Tawang is a small town situated at about 10,000 feet above the sea level in the northern corner of Kameng Frontier Division. It is perched on a spur five thousand feet above the right bank of the Tawang Chu river which has cut a deep valley extending from Jang village to its confluence with the Nyamjang Chu; near Jang village its height is 6,000 feet and at the river junction 4,000 feet. The source of the river is located in (present) Tibet. Important villages situated in its basin are Tsona Dzong (14,350 feet), Nuri (11,000 feet) (Nyuri and Dyuri astride the local stream together form Mago), Chuna (13,000 feet), Luguthang (11,000 feet) and Jang (7,500 feet).

The Tawang Chu in its upper reaches comprises many streams. Because of this it is difficult to fix the source of this river. The northernmost branch emanates from the north of Tsona Dzong near which another stream coming from the Shang Shang La in the north-east joins it. After running south for about 30 miles it is joined by the Seti Chu which has its two tributaries emanating from the Pen La (17,350 feet) and the Tulung La (17,250 feet). These river junctions lie in Tibet. In India the Tawang Chu receives a stream which has its source in the Kangto massif (23,260 feet). It is the Goro Chu of Lieut.-Col FM Bailey and Goshu Chu of Kingdon Ward. Mago is located astride a stream, the northern tributary of the Goro Chu, emanating from the Tulung La. Luguthang is below in the south-west of the river junction. Further down the Goro Chu joins the Tawang Chu at about eight miles in the north-east of Jang village.

At Jang itself the Nuranang Chu, emanating from the Se La pass, joins the waters of the Tawang Chu. An important tributary of the Nuranang Chu has its source at the Kya La pass; it joins the Nuranang Chu just below the Se La pass. There is another small stream from the Kya La which flows for a few miles in the north-west direction to join the Goro Chu near a camping ground called the Kya La C.G. This C. G. is important for our purposes as shown later.

The Tawang Chu joins the Nyamjang Chu on the boundary of Bhutan. In its course it receives many perennial streams which have their own tributaries. Thus the Tawang Chu basin is criss-crossed by a number of fast-flowing snow-fed streams which have cut deep gorges in their lower reaches specially near river junctions. Every pair of these streams has a watershed of an appreciable height. This fact makes the terrain of the Tawang sector highly mountainous. The most important watershed in the sector is the Se La ridge in the south and the Great Himalayan Range in the north. Besides these there are three important spurs projecting from the latter and running to the south. One is the Tawang ridge which separates the Dhola sector from the Tawang-Jang sector; it terminates near Loongla. The second terminates a couple of miles in the north-east of Tawang. Sumatso village is situated on the western side of the upper portion of this ridge. This ridge may be called the Sumatso ridge. The third spur is the feature which runs towards Jang village and abruptly ends in a cliff at Bridge 4. At its southern end it commands a view of the Nuranang valley up to a long distance.

The Se La ridge emanates from the orographical knot of the Kangto (23,260 feet) massif. It forms the watershed between the Nyamjang Chu and the Bhreli river basins. It runs south-west and terminates in the immediate north-east of Dewangiri (Devsthan). Its prominent passes are the Tse La (15,600 feet), Kya La (14,500 feet), Se La (13,940 feet) and Orka La (13,400 feet). In the northern vicinity of the Orka La the Se La ridge sends out a bifurcation which after separating from the parent feature runs south-east and then east making a curve, the Manda La arc or ridge, which terminates at the Dirang Chu-Rupa river junction. This arc will be further discussed when the Bomdi La sector is dealt with.

The important passes of the Himalayan Range are the Bum La

(14,210 feet) and the Tulung La (17,250 feet). In the north of the latter there is a broad and shallow valley whose average height is 15,000 feet. In the north of this valley is the Pen La (17,350 feet). Geographically and geologically the Pen La is situated on the Himalayan crest.

The climate of the entire region is comparatively warm and moist in summer and moist and cold in winter. The mean annual rainfall of the sector is about 40". In the winter months the tract receives snowfall but normal traffic is never suspended.

**Flora** :—The flora of the Tawang sector is subtropical below 6,000 feet and temperate above it. In the former are included the trees of the chestnut variety while in the latter oaks and rhododendrons of the tall variety abound. At 10,000 feet the rhododendrons and oaks disappear and coniferous vegetation begins. *Abies walchiana* and *abies webiana* are prominent in this. Beyond 13,000 feet the rhododendron of the stunted variety flourishes. Here and there are found firs and junipers. The region is surplus in fuel but good and extensive pastures are hard to find.

**Fauna** :—The region is well populated. Hence on the lower heights one hardly finds any game; on the heights herds of mountain sheep and goats are occasionally noticed specially on the slopes of the Kangto and the Pen La-Tulung La gap. Like the upper parts of the valleys of the Dhola sector the valleys of the Tawang-Jang sector are also the favourite abode of mountain pheasants.

**Routes** :—The previous Indo-Tibetan Trade Route is the present Bomdi La-Tawang road which is motorable. In the 1962 operations it had been made motorable only up to Jang village by the General Reserve Engineering Force, popularly known as the Border Roads Organisation or simply Border Roads. The Chinese extended the Tsona Dzong-Bum La road to Tawang and connected it with Jang. The national highway enters the sector at the Se La pass. After crossing the pass it descends into the Nuranang valley in which is situated Nuranang, a camping ground about 7 miles from the pass itself. About three miles down the stream is the 'open ground' beyond which is Bridge 3. Here the road crosses the river and runs along the left bank. It descends to 'flat ground' and then to the

left bank of the Tawang Chu. It crosses the river by an important bridge of planks thrown over a big boulder lying in midstream. The bridge is 6,000 feet above sea level and is about 500 yards down stream from the Nuranang Chu-Tawang Chu river junction. During the 1962 operations this bridge was named Bridge 4. During the withdrawal Bridge 4 was destroyed by the Indians. The Chinese constructed another bridge about three hundred yards upstream. However, the track crosses the stream. The distance between the bridge and Tawang is 13 miles. Eighteen miles beyond Tawang is Loongla and a bridle path connects the two. From Loongla the Dhola sector begins

The Bomdi La-Tawang route sends out its first bifurcation from the Se La to the north-west. This offshoot after skirting the two glacial lakes, embedded in the pass, on the left descends into the valley of the Nuranang Chu tributary emanating from the Kya La pass. For some distance the track runs along the left bank of the stream and then climbs up the Se La ridge to avoid deep gorges which have been cut in the lower reaches of the river specially near nullah junctions. Thus the track proceeds to the north-west along the highly undulating crest of the ridge. It crosses passes which are more than 14,000 feet in height. In fact, the last, the Trukya La, is 15,000 feet high. Immediately beyond the pass is the deep valley of the Goro Chu. The track after crossing the pass turns to the right and proceeds towards the snow-covered mountains. After a few miles the track reaches the Goro Chu where the valley is wide and the stream a narrow channel. Here it crosses the stream by a wooden bridge. At the near end of the bridge the Tse La track from the east joins the Se La track. The main track crosses the bridge and turns left to follow the right bank of the Goro Chu. Some miles down the stream the track takes a turn to the right and starts climbing the mountain ridge running along the right bank of the river. After climbing a few thousand feet the Chera La is crossed. Beyond the pass the track descends into the valley of a tributary of the Goro Chu and passes through Mago. In the north of Mago is Chuna (13,000 feet) a frontier outpost in summer. The track ultimately leads to the Tulung La and the Pen La beyond which are Tsona Dzong and Lhuntze Dzong. The track used to be difficult and unfit for pack animals ; but the Chinese widened it during 1951-1962 and made it suitable for animal transport. Before coming of the Chinese the track was used by petty traders and the local population only.

The above mentioned track sends out a footpath from the Kya La which descends into the valley in the east of the Nikma Dzong ridge. The footpath sends out its offshoots to Senge Dzong and Nikma Dzong villages. It finally leads to Dirang Dzong. This footpath is mostly used by local graziers.

The Bomdi La-Tawang route sends out another footpath from Jang. This runs along the Tawang Chu and leads to Luguthang and Mago. It is just a goat track and is seldom used by the local people.

Between Jang and Tawang two footpaths branch out to the north and the north-west from the main track. The first bifurcation leaves the main track just beyond Bridge 4. It runs along the Jang ridge on which is situated Landa village. It terminates at Maliktong La (12,500 feet). The second track starts from Tawang. It runs along the crest of the Sumatso ridge and reaches Pekingtang (13,000 feet). It proceeds further to the north and reaches Maliktong La. In fact all these La's are passes which indicate the number of lateral ridges running parallel to the main Himalayan Range. From Maliktong La the track turns to the east and after five miles it crosses the Tongpeng La. From here it turns to the north and crosses another ridge known as the 'Twin Peaks'. Finally it reaches the Bum La and then enters Tibet to end at Tsona Dzong. The alignment of the Bum La-Tawang road which the Chinese constructed in 1962 is slightly different from that of the track. However, when the Bum La operations started only the Bum La track was in existence; therefore, our main concern is with the local track and not the road.

Beyond the McMahon Line there is a lateral ridge running in the east-west direction. It is almost of the same height as the crest comprising the Bum La pass. Let us call it the Raiders' Ridge. The ridge dominates the area for miles in the north. It would have commanded the view in the south as well but for 'Twin Peaks' which are the highest points in the locality. On the forward slopes of the 'Twin Peaks' is an inspection bungalow. Let us call the bungalow area as the IB Ridge.

On the Tawang-Bum La bridle path Maliktong La is an important track junction and a camping ground. The track from Sumatso also meets it here.

All the above mentioned bifurcations of the Indo-Tibetan Trade Route (from Bomdi La to Tawang) fork out from it on its right except two branches which bifurcate on its left. One of these leaves the main track at the Se La pass. It passes through a region in which the 'Twin Lakes' are located opposite Nuranang. This footpath is seldom used.

The other footpath emanates from the main track near Tawang. It runs to the south and descends into the Tawang valley. Here it crosses the river by a wooden bridge called the Mukto Bridge.

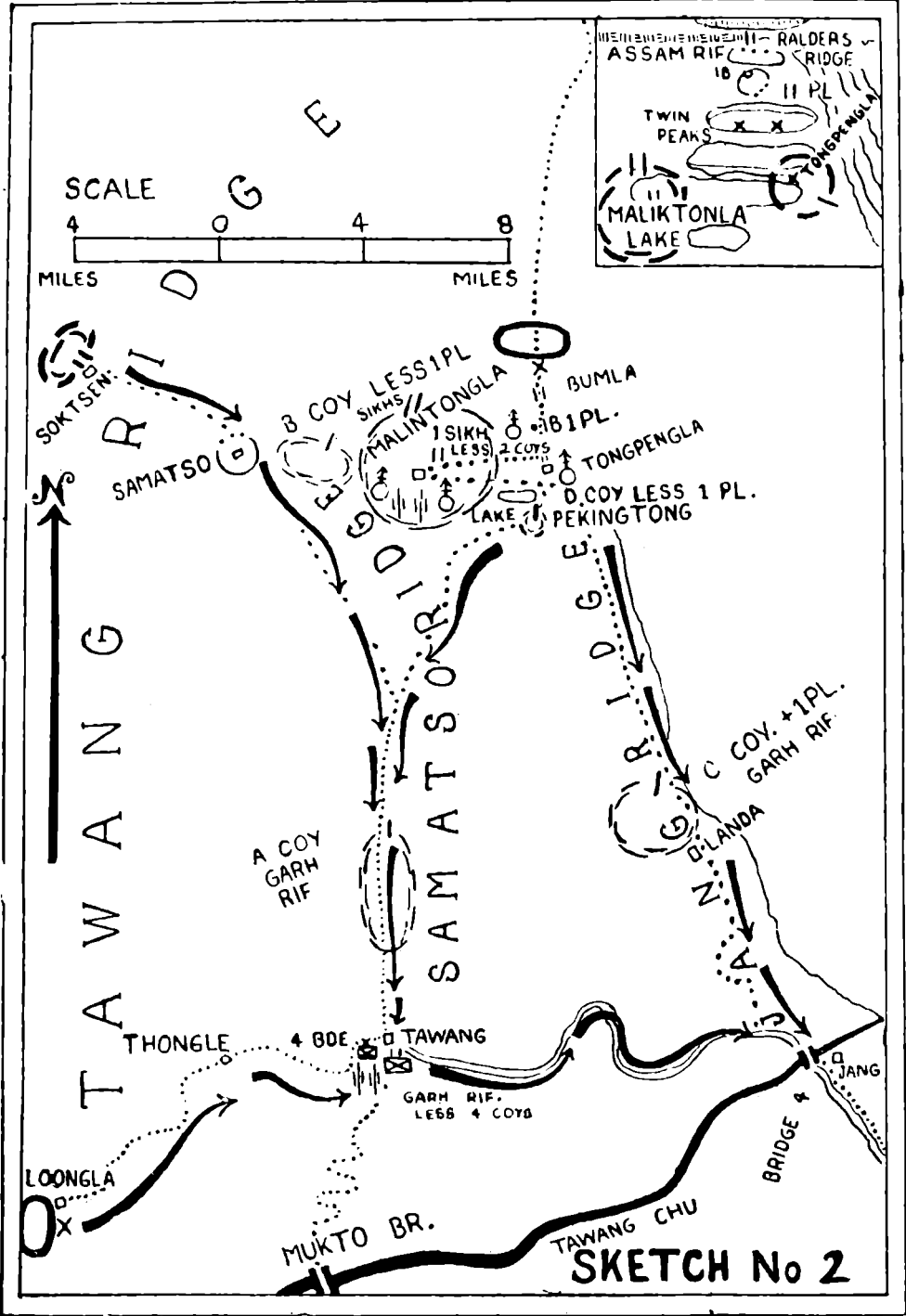
This was the land which had to be defended against the mass invasion of the Chinese. It is evident that Tawang is a track junction where the Loongla, Bum La and Jang tracks meet. The tracks from Sumatso and the Bum La descend from higher ground to Tawang and it is easy for an enemy from the north to attack Tawang from three sides—west, north and east. In spite of this tactical vulnerability Tawang was selected as the Divisional Vital Ground, the ground by the fall of which the whole sector collapses under enemy pressure. Probably political reasons led Indian military authorities to fix upon Tawang as the Divisional Vital Ground. The 7th Brigade was detailed to defend this Vital Ground. When the 7th Brigade moved away to the Dhola sector another brigade was sent to Tawang. This was a temporary arrangement and the brigade was an ad hoc brigade. In fact it was the 4th Artillery Brigade given the work of infantry. It was commanded by Brigadier Kalayan Singh who later on assumed the command of corps artillery with the rank of major-general. The following units constituted the 4th Brigade :

- (a) The 1st Sikhs,
- (b) the 4th Garhwal Rifles, and
- (c) six platoons of the Assam Rifles.

**In Support :—**

- |  |      |               |
|--|------|---------------|
| (a) The 97th Field<br>Battery            | area | Tawang,       |
| (b) the 7th (Bengal)<br>Mountain Battery | area | Maliktong La. |





- |  |      |   |
|--|------|---|
| (c) the 116th Heavy<br>Mortar Battery                      | area | Pamdir, Tongpeng<br>La and IB Ridge<br>with one artillery<br>OP in each of the<br>Pamdir, Twin Peaks<br>Tongpeng La and<br>Maliktong La posi-<br>tions. |
| (d) A platoon of the C Company<br>of the 6th Mahars (MMGs) |      | where required.   |

**1st Sikhs :—**This unit originally belonged to the 7th Brigade. When the brigade moved to the forward areas the 1st Sikhs were attached to the 4th Artillery Brigade. Therefore, the 1st Sikhs were the oldest unit in the Tawang-Jang sector. The Sikhs during their stay in the area for more than ten months had become acquainted with the local terrain. After the 7th Brigade had moved to the Dhola sector there was a time when the Sikhs were the only unit present between Dhola and Bomdi La. Naturally the responsibility of defending Tawang fell upon the 1st Sikhs. Their deployment on October 12 was as under :—

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| (a) Battalion less B and D Companies             | area Malkitong La,                  |
| (b) B Company minus 6th Platoon<br>6th Platoon   | area Pamdir,<br>area Sumatso and    |
| (c) D Company minus 11th Platoon<br>11th Platoon | area Tongpeng La,<br>area IB Ridge. |

The most forward company of the Sikhs was the D Company. Its forward platoon, the 11th Platoon, was located at about 600 yards (half an hour's trek) in the south of the Bum La pass (14,250 feet). Between the 'Twin Peaks' and the ridge on which the pass is situated there is a gap. In this gap there is an inspection bungalow. The 11th Platoon was stationed in the IB Ridge area. It covered the best approach to the 'Twin Peaks'. The task of the 11th Platoon was

- (a) to deny the approach to the 'Twin Peaks' to the invader as long as possible, and
- (b) to enable the deployment of our OPs at the 'Twin Peaks' to facilitate the engagement of enemy concentration areas beyond the McMahon Line.

The enemy could attack Tongpeng La from the east or the west of the 'Twin Peaks' ridge or through the ridge itself. There is a high

cliff on the east; therefore, this approach was not feasible. Of the two remaining approaches the 'Twin Peak' ridge was better.

**The Garhwalis:**—The 4th Battalion, the Garhwal Rifles, was stationed at Ramgarh, Bihar. The Chinese surrounded the Dhola post on September 8 and four days later the Garhwalis received their movement orders for operational duties. The unit reached Tezpur on 26th September. It was given to understand that it would celebrate Dussehra festival at Tezpur on October 8. But the programme had to be changed. On 4th October the A and B Companies moved to Kameng; the rest of the battalion moved next day. Up to Nikma Dzong the unit moved in 3 ton trucks and beyond it in 1 tonners. On the morning of October 8 the battalion was concentrated at Tawang. Next day the unit was asked to send two companies to the Dhola sector. On October 10 the Tseng-jong post in the Dhola sector was abandoned by the Rajputs. Consequently, the order was changed and only the B Company was ordered to Zimithang. On October 19 the Garhwali company was at the 4th Division Headquarters in Zimithang.

On 10th October the C Company left for Landa and the D for Pekingtang. The latter replaced the D Company of the 1st Sikhs which moved to Tongpeng La. Thus the deployment of the 4th Garhwalis was as under :—

(a) The Battalion Headquarters	area	Tawang.
(b) A Company	area	Tawang, on the Pekingtang track.
(c) B Company	area	Dhola sector.
(d) C Company plus one platoon	area	Landa village.
(e) D Company minus one platoon	area	Pekingtang, detailed for patrolling

**The Assam Rifles :**—An Assam Rifles battalion comprises three wings, normally of six platoons each. The deployment of the wing in the sector was as under :—

(a) The Wing Headquarters plus two platoons	area	Tawang,
(b) one platoon	area	Loongla,
(c) one platoon	area	Sumatso,
(d) one platoon	area	Chuna, and
(e) one platoon	area	Dhola.

The task of the 4th Garhwal Rifles was

- (a) to strengthen the rear of the Sikhs, and
- (b) to deny the enemy the approach to Jang village.

**The Preparations** :—The Sikhs were already in position, well dug in and camouflaged. The Garhwalis were the last to arrive in the area. By 14th October they were in position; they started digging trenches and weapon-pits. On 17th October their defences were ready for the company commanders' inspection. The battalion commander finished his inspection of the company defences, including those of the C Company, on 19th October. The finishing touches to the defences and the fields of fire were given next day. By the evening of 20th October the company defences had been completed; the Garhwalis were ready to face the Chinese.

Rumours were afloat about the conflict at Dhola. After 0630 hours on 20th October the 7th Brigade Headquarters' wireless set was jammed and news coming from that area ceased. This silence from the forward area and the rumours which had come before the wireless failure caused anxiety among the Tawang garrison. On the evening of 20th October the battalion adjutant passed on the following instruction to the company commanders of the Garhwalis :—

- (a) to patrol constantly the areas in their front, the patrols being changed every three hours,
- (b) to keep in contact with the Sikhs in their front, and
- (c) to have double sentries at the post.

These instructions were to be followed till further orders. Immediate action was taken on them. A three-man patrol was sent to contact the Sikhs; the sentries at every post were doubled; the company subedars were instructed to see that patrols were relieved every three hours.

In the night nothing unusual was noticed by the sentries. Early in the morning gunfire was heard. Sometimes the sentries noticed flashes in the sky. The intensity of the fire increased but after some time when the sun rose the sound of gunfire ceased. The news reached the company commanders. They rang up the adjutant who had nothing to add. Probably the 4th Brigade Headquarters had heard the sound of firing because the battalion adjutant was in cons-

tant touch with the brigade headquarters. The day passed without any incident; as also the night and the dawn of 22nd came. The whole day the company commanders' telephones were buzzing. Sometimes Lieutenant Tandon, the A Company Commander, was in touch with the Sikhs and sometimes with his adjutant. During these conversations news arrived that on the morning of 20th October the Chinese broke through our defence line in the Dhola sector and were now preparing to infiltrate into the Tawang sector through the Bum La area. In the evening of 22nd October a detachment of the Sikhs passed through the Garhwali lines on its way to Jang. Probably the brigade was planning for a possible withdrawal. The Garhwalis continued to keep a strict vigil in their area.

On that day (22nd October) Lieut.-General Sen (the IV Corps Commander being under medical treatment at Delhi) paid a hurried visit to the brigade and ordered it to withdraw from Tawang and take up a position at the Se La. The Se La line had to be defended. Consequently arrangements for the withdrawal of the brigade were made.

The Garhwali battalion remained in its position ready to meet the enemy. The A Company Commander noticed that local labour did not turn up either on the morning of 21st or 22nd October; those Monpas who came to the camp made some lame excuses and absented themselves from the routine duties. This was unusual. Something must have gone wrong in forward areas! Reliable news was not reaching Tawang. Tandon received a telephone call from the adjutant asking for three Garhwalis to be immediately sent to the 4th Brigade Headquarters for patrol duties. The order was at once complied with. Except this there was no other activity in the lines of the A Company.

**Chinese Advance** :—On the evening of 22nd October the Chinese column at Lumpu started to advance towards Tawang via Zimithang, Shakti and Loongla. This force reached the western outskirts of Tawang in the evening of the 23rd. On this day Lieut.-General Harbax Singh was temporarily appointed Commander of the IV Corps.

Another Chinese column after overcoming the 4th Grenadiers company on the bridge below Khinzemane and capturing the latter

climbed to Soktsen monastery. From there it took the Sumatso route. Crossing the Tawang ridge it passed through Sumatso (the Sikh platoon had been withdrawn) and reached the northern side of Tawang in the evening of 23rd October. The third column of the raiders was operating in the Bum La sector. Its story has to be told in detail, because it met resistance from the Sikhs in the 'Twin Peaks' area.

The strength of the first two columns was about a regiment each and of the third about two battalions; probably the third battalion was kept in reserve across the McMahon Line to be thrown into battle when the need arose.

## THE BATTLES OF BUM LA

**IB Ridge** :—On the morning of 20th October, Jemadar Roy of the Assam Rifles, at the Bum La post, noticed that more than 1,000 Chinese or Tibetan labourers with digging implements arrived on the Raiders' Ridge. The labour force was unarmed but it was accompanied by protecting parties of Chinese soldiers. The pioneers started digging immediately. The Indians kept on watching. The work of digging continued throughout the day. In the evening it was suspended but the pioneers stayed on the ridge. Roy suspected that there would be some trouble from the Chinese. The same morning he had heard the sound of firing to the west in the direction of Dhola and seen some flashes in the sky in the same direction. This new activity of the Chinese just across the McMahon Line aroused his suspicions and alarmed him. In the afternoon he went to see Subedar Jogindra Singh, the commander of the 11th Platoon of the 1st Sikhs, and apprised him of the possible danger from the Bum La side. The JCO at once detailed a section under Havildar Sucha Singh to reinforce the Assam Rifles post. Simultaneously the JCO asked for ammunition from his company headquarters at Tongpeng La.

Hav Sucha Singh along with his section accompanied the Assam Rifles JCO. On reaching the Bum La post the section took position on its right flank. The night passed without any incident.

Next morning the Chinese labourers resumed their digging and construction of bunkers and continued it the whole day. In the

evening the labourers disappeared. Probably the same evening Chinese troops replaced them. But the troops were not seen taking up position. On the morning of 22nd the usual earthwork did not begin; the ridge appeared to be deserted. The Indians became alert.

On the morning of 23rd October at 0430 hours suddenly the Chinese started firing with mortars and anti-tank guns. The latter fired to destroy the Indian bunkers. As soon as the firing ceased about 600 Chinese attacked the Assam Rifles post. The Indian Jawans put up a bold resistance but soon the post was overrun. The casualties in the Assam Rifles were seven killed, the rest being wounded or taken prisoner. A few escaped by the nullah flowing to the south on the right flank and reached Jang to tell the news.

Hav Sucha Singh's section after inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy withdrew to the platoon position at the IB Ridge. The Chinese launched the first attack with a wave of 200 men from the right flank along the nullah at 0530 hours, their objective being the 'Twin Peaks'. They could capture their objective only after overcoming the Sikhs' platoon position on the IB Ridge. The climb from the bed of the nullah to the platoon position was steep. Therefore, the Sikhs were able to inflict heavy casualties on the Chinese compelling them to retire. The platoon commander asked his company headquarters to send more ammunition. By this time the Chinese had succeeded in cutting the platoon's land communications with the D Company Headquarters and had concentrated at Tongpeng La. Even then Sub Jogindra Singh sent a havildar and three men to fetch ammunition from the company. The party managed to reach the company headquarters and brought back ammunition. But how long could this meagre supply of ammunition last? The Chinese were attacking the position in hundreds.

The second attack came from the left flank at 0700 hours. This time the Chinese had thrown in more men so the attack was fiercer. The peculiarity of these attacks was that they were made from very close quarters. Indian artillery could not give fire support to the platoon. It suffered heavy casualties but did not give ground. The Company Commander, Lieutenant Haripal Kaushik, asked Sub Jogindra Singh to retire. The JCO replied that he had lost 7 men and would retire only when he had killed 70 Chinese. He assured the

company commander that the enemy would not be allowed to get through the IB Ridge to climb to the 'Twin Peaks'. "As long as there is life in me no Chinese would dare to advance any further," signalled the JCO. After this message the 11th Platoon lost contact with the company headquarters.

The Sikhs repulsed the second attack but Jogindra Singh was wounded in the thigh. In spite of his wound he refused to be evacuated. Nearly half the platoon was wiped out but the Sikhs did not lose heart; they continued to fight bravely. The third attack came at 0830 hours. It was a frontal attack. This time the Chinese brought in a fresh battalion of about 600 men. They tried to blast the Sikhs out of their bunkers with gunfire. Only four escaped alive. Sub Jogindra Singh and his batman were taken prisoner. The outside world believed him to have been killed. His commanding officer recommended his name for a bravery award and he was given the PVC (posthumous)\*. This was the only PVC awarded on the NEFA front.

At 0930 hours the Chinese were in occupation of the 'Twin Peaks'. They were now poised for attacking Tongpeng La.

**Battle of Tongpeng La :—**On hearing the news of the Chinese activities of the Raiders' Ridge the battalion commander of the 1st Sikhs had reinforced the D Company by an additional platoon under Hav Sarup Singh on its left flank. The right flank was protected by a steep rock. Thus it was difficult and risky for the enemy to approach from the right. Still the first Chinese attack came from the right. Captain Gosel, the artillery OP, accurately directed the artillery fire on the steep rock where the enemy had massed for the attack. The Chinese suffered heavy casualties and dispersed.

The next attack came from the left. Sarup Singh opened fire from close range and the MMGs rained death and destruction on the enemy. Consequently the Chinese were kept at bay. But by this

---

\*Sub Jogindra Singh was kept in the Tsetang POW camp on the bank of the Brahmaputra (Tsangpo). About twenty miles in the west of Tsetang is the ferry point. Across the river is the road-head, a day's drive from Lhasa. In other words the JCO could have easily been taken to a military hospital in Lhasa if the Chinese had cared to do so. Jogindra Singh's wound became septic. He needed amputation of his leg. The Chinese performed the operation in Tsetang under primitive conditions. The brave JCO could not stand the pain and died.



time they had infiltrated from the right along the nullah and were on their way to Tawang.

The order for withdrawal was received at 0900 hours. The D Company was to hold its position and check the enemy till 1500 hours. Afterwards it was to withdraw to Malik tong La, the battalion headquarters, and act as rear-guard in the withdrawal. The 1st Sikhs were to leave Malik tong La at the last light and the D Company was to hold Malik tong La against the enemy till 2315 hours. Afterwards the Sikhs were to concentrate at Jang.

However, the last attack on Tong peng La came at 1130 hours from the front. The battalion mortars rained shells on the enemy. Lance Naik Piara Singh, the mortar NCO, was hit by a shell splinter. The OP at Tong peng La guided our artillery to drop bombs accurately on the target. The enemy suffered heavy casualties and could not penetrate the defences of the D Company.

The enemy tried to by-pass the company position at Tong peng La and attack Malik tong La direct from the east but failed. Thus the D Company proved an iron wall to the enemy. When the appointed time came the D Company withdrew to Malik tong La. During the withdrawal the OP climbed up the hill and directed the artillery fire on the enemy with disastrous effect. Thus the company smoothly broke contact with the enemy and after an orderly withdrawal reached Malik tong La to act as rear-guard to its battalion.

The B Company also arrived at Malik tong La at 1600 hours and the 1st Sikhs left Malik tong La at the last light leaving the D Company to cover the withdrawal.

“Thus it was due to the gallant action of 11 Pl and D Coy at Tong peng La that even though under enemy pressure the Bn was able to keep the enemy out of Tawang, withdraw according to plan with all its persons, weapons and pouch ammunition and remained an efficient entity right till the end.”

Now the D Company was to hold Malik tong La up to 2315 hours. The Chinese continued to bombard the Malik tong La position, but they did not dare attack in the mountainous terrain in the dark. The D Company held the position up to the fixed time and saw

that the battalion extricated itself from Tawang safely. Eventually the D Company withdrew according to plan under the able leadership of Kaushik who was afterwards awarded the VrC. His citation runs as follows :—

“Lieutenant Haripal Kaushik was commanding a company holding the Tongpengla positions in NEFA. At 05:30 hours on October 23, 1962 the Chinese started attacking with a regiment on the Bum La axis with the intention of breaking through to Tawang, but the attack was repulsed with heavy losses by his forward platoon. After the fall of the forward platoon, a second battalion of the enemy attacked on a wide front trying to overrun the company position. Lt. Kaushik moved from one section position to another under enemy fire encouraging his troops. He was a source of inspiration to his men who continued to fight with great determination under his leadership. Eventually, when, under heavy enemy pressure, he was ordered to withdraw, he handled the withdrawal skilfully and managed to clear, in face of enemy fire, all his personnel and weapons, including heavy mortars and medium machine guns.”

The 1st Sikhs, except for a few casualties in the D Company, reached Jang intact. At 0700 hours the entire battalion crossed Bridge 4. The Border Roads had widened the Bombdi La road up to the ‘flat ground’ above Jang village making it usable for heavy vehicles. Here the Sikhs boarded the military transport. By 11 o’clock on 24th October the unit was concentrated at the Se La. Now its task was to protect the approach to Dirang Dzong and defend the Se La Line.

**The Garhwalis :—**On the morning of 23rd October Tawang was attacked from the west, north-west and north as was expected. At 0700 hours when the 11th Platoon of the Sikhs was being pressed by the enemy the Garhwali companies were ordered to withdraw from their existing positions and to report to the battalion headquarters at Jang by 0400 hours on 24th October.

As civil labour was not available surplus ammunition and stores, rations and equipment, were destroyed. Each man was ordered to carry one blanket and field scale ammunition for his weapon.

The A Company Commander was worried about the three-man patrol which had gone to the 4th Brigade Headquarters a day before. The jawans had not returned to the unit. With the permission of the

adjutant two more men were despatched to inform the patrol of the battalion's move.

After issuing the orders the battalion headquarters moved to Jang. The brigade headquarters had already left for the Se La pass. Wave after wave of Chinese troops was approaching Tawang from the Loongla side. The Chinese were at the heels of these withdrawing troops.

The A Company of the Garhwalis on the Tawang track started thinning out at 0900 hours on 23rd October. The position was abandoned at 1100 hours. The Company reached Tawang at 1500 hours. By this time the Chinese had started firing at Tawang. However, the Company continued its march. Eventually it joined its battalion in Jang before 0300 hours. At 0400 hours on October 24 the three men of the first patrol also returned to the unit. The two men who had been sent later to contact the three-man patrol did not return. They were declared missing. Probably they were killed by the enemy.

The C Company also received orders to withdraw, but Major Rai, the Company Commander, was not in a hurry to withdraw. The Chinese had not come into contact with his company. The distance from his position to Jang was hardly 12 miles and the way was also easy. It was downhill right up to Bridge 4. Further there was a risk that his men might be sniped at in daylight. Therefore, he decided to withdraw at night.

At the last light, to avoid accidents in the dark in the mountainous terrain, each jawan carried a lighted conifer branch. The entire company led by Rai marched in single file. The Indian troops located in the south of the Tawang Chu river were misled by the torch procession. They thought that the Chinese were advancing towards Jang. But when the advance was not opposed even at Jang they guessed the truth; peace again prevailed in the sector. The C Company also joined the unit before 0400 hours.

The C Company was concentrated at Bridge 4; the rest of the battalion was deployed around the 'flat ground' above Jang village. Here were located the Border Roads headquarters, an artillery battery

and the ambulance detachment to evacuate casualties brought from the forward areas. On 23rd October all these rear parties and headquarters had been ordered to withdraw. By the time the Garhwalis arrived all heavy equipment located there had been moved to the rear; the remaining personnel were also on the move to the rear. The 4th Garhwal Rifles were now to act as covering troops in area Nuranang for the main defensive position of the 62nd Brigade deployed in area Se La.

At the first light the battalion commander came to the C Company. He made Rai responsible for the defence of the bridge. He left the demolition of the bridge to Rai's discretion. He did not have to seek the commanding officer's permission for the demolition. Major Rak was short of men. He was allowed to enlist the help of those who were withdrawing from the front. Having issued these instructions the CO proceeded to the Se La pass.

After some time a Dogra company moving between Tawang and Dhola arrived. Rai enlisted its support and the company stayed with the Garhwalis for the time being. The Garhwalis and the Dogras were kept busy the whole day in digging slit trenches and making the bridge ready for demolition under the guidance of officers of the Army Engineers.

In the evening just before the last light the C Company was ready for the evening 'stand to'. The sentry on the bridge noticed some movement on the Tawang track. He passed on the information to his NCO. Major Rai also noticed some movement across the bridge. By this time the company had taken up firing positions (as is required in a 'stand to' practice) and the jawans needed only a signal to open fire. The havildar incharge of the bridge quickly withdrew the sentry from the north of the Tawang Chu river to its south and was ready for demolition. The company commander crawled up to him. The Chinese who had taken up kneeling positions stood up. They were about thirty in number and lined up in single file. Rai was certain that the intruders were Chinese and not Indian stragglers. They wanted to cross the bridge. Rai whistled and the bridge was blown up.

It may be mentioned that the Chinese at this stage could not think of crossing to the south of the Tawang Chu river which separated the

Indian troops from the Chinese. In fact they did not try to cross to the south for occupying positions on a permanent basis. With this intention they crossed the Tawang Chu on 16th November 1962.

In Delhi officials were keenly watching the course of events here. In the evening of October 24 it was clear that the Indian troops and the administrative personnel of NEFA had left Tawang and there was no chance of the Chinese crossing to the south of the Tawang Chu river. They announced the fall of the town on the evening of October 24.

After the bridge was demolished the Chinese waited for the debris to settle down which did not take long. Indians and Chinese both opened fire. By that time a battalion of the Chinese had reached the cliff dominating the bridge and the Nuranang valley. Besides, Chinese artillery had also arrived and taken up positions. It started dropping shells on the 'flat ground' where the Garhwalis had been deployed. The enemy fire was accurate. The Indian artillery returned the fire. It was undirected hence ineffective. After some time enemy gun flashes exposed their positions. The Indians turned on them their fire which proved effective. But Indian guns could not shell the Chinese across the bridge because at that place the valley was very narrow. A slight error in the gun data would have endangered the lives of their own soldiers. Both sides continued the bombardment throughout the night. Next day immediately after first light the firing stopped. There were some casualties among the Indian troops. This heavy shelling immediately after the withdrawal produced a demoralising effect on the troops. The 4th Garhwal Rifles could cover the troops of the 62nd Brigade only if they stayed out of the range of the Chinese artillery for a week. The Garhwalis needed a respite from the continuous strain caused by the withdrawal and Chinese bombardment in order to boost up their morale by aggressive and extensive patrolling at first of the no man's land and then of the enemy territory.

Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea had reconnoitred the ground on 24th October. He had selected the area where the battalion was to camp and act as covering troops for the 62nd Brigade. Immediately after the first light on October 25 Bhattacharjea moved the unit to the new position in Bridge 3 area, about four miles upstream from Jang.

Two miles further up there is an 'open ground'. Here the quartermaster's stores, unit kitchens, transport and the anti-tank platoon were placed.

In the meantime the B Company of the Garhwalis also arrived from Tezpur and rejoined the unit. After the collapse of the Dhola sector it had withdrawn to the plains of Assam via Bhutan. Thus the entire battalion was concentrated along the Nuranang Chu. The defences extended to include the two bridges, Bridge 3 and the one over a small stream. The Chinese were deployed on the north of the Tawang Chu and the Garhwalis on the south.

The Indian corps commander was lying sick in Delhi. In his absence Lieut.-General Harbax Singh visited the troops in the Se La sector and found them in good cheer. On October 29 Lieut.-General Kaul returned to Tezpur and resumed the command of the IV Corps. Like General Rommel he wanted to be with his troops in trouble. After his return he inspected the defences of the Se La sector on November 7. Press reporters also visited the Indian defences. They were as usual impressed by the array of military equipment and men. Briefly, the front was quiet though the Chinese were getting ready for the storm which was to sweep through Kameng.

## THE GARHWAL RIFLES IN DEFENCE

**Patrolling** :—As soon as the Garhwalis settled down in the area, patrol activities started on the unit's front. On October 27 a patrol under a havildar proceeded to the 'flat ground' which was the camping ground of the Border Roads previously. The 'flat ground' and Jang had become no man's land. When the patrol was nearing the 'flat ground' the patrol leader heard a moaning sound and he became cautious so that the patrol might not be ambushed. He halted the patrol and crept alone to a point from which he could see the source of the moaning. After a careful reconnaissance he concluded that an Indian soldier was lying there seriously wounded and might be dying. He made sure that there was no enemy around and ordered the patrol to crawl to the spot where the wounded soldier had been seen. When the patrol reached the spot it found that two wounded Indian officers were lying there and appeared to be dying. These officers had been wounded in the bombing of 24th October. The

Garhwalis did what they could for them. They carefully brought them to a safer place from where a jeep evacuated them to the rear. These officers luckily survived. Their names were Captain Bhatia and Captain Bhalla. One was a gunner and the other a doctor.

Thus the Garhwalis were sending patrols every day to the southern bank of the Tawang Chu and were keeping the 62nd Brigade informed about the activities of the enemy. After October they began to hear the sound of the blasting of rocks. This led them to believe that the Chinese were constructing a road to connect Jang with Tawang. They informed the brigade accordingly.

Day by day the blasting of rocks was nearing Jang indicating that the Tsona Dzong-Bum La road had been completed and was being extended to Jang village. India knew all this but could not take timely counter measures. Consequently the Garhwalis continued to provide information about the enemy and the brigade passively continued to receive it. Ultimately the brigade became anxious to get more information about the enemy.

As usual, another patrol under Sub Pratap Singh proceeded towards the Tawang Chu on 31st October at 11 o'clock. The day was clear and visibility was good. The JCO thought that there was some movement about 1,000 yards away down the river on its left bank. He scanned the area with a binocular. A Chinese patrol had crossed the river by the Mukto Bridge and was creeping up the left bank. But the Chinese patrol was spotted by the Garhwalis in time. The JCO at once informed his unit and the Chinese were bombarded. The JCO himself guided the fire. It is not known whether the enemy suffered any casualties, being confined in a narrow gorge, but the Chinese patrol withdrew to the right bank.

The above-noted incident attracted the attention of the 62nd Brigade to the Mukto Bridge. The bridge had to be destroyed otherwise there was a possibility that the Chinese might cross the river and attack the Indian troops in strength.

Major Rai had stayed in the area where a battalion of the Chinese was located now. He knew the ground of Landa. On 1st November

he was called to the brigade headquarters. Major Rai was given the task of

- (a) harassing the enemy,
- (b) destroying the Mukto Bridge, and
- (c) selecting a suitable spot for establishing an Assam Rifles post.

For (a) and (b) an artillery OP, Major Goswami, accompanied Rai. Both the officers moved towards the 'Twin Lakes' area and then to the ground from where they could have a good view of the Chinese in the Landa area. Having reached there they descended to a Monpa village, just above the Mukto Bridge. The village has a gompa; its name is *Merbia*. It is situated on a hillock dominating the Tawang valley. The officers cautiously climbed the hillock. From there they could clearly see the bridge as well as the Chinese battalion deployed in the open across the Tawang Chu. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon and the Chinese were resting after the day's work and waiting for their evening meal. The officers crawled up to a commanding point so that they could get the best view of the Chinese and the Mukto Bridge. They succeeded in reaching a point from which their job could be carried out efficiently. Major Goswami had a wireless set. He called for gunfire. First one or two shells fell on the target. He corrected the range and then the Indian artillery started firing continuously on the enemy. Some guns were trained on the Mukto Bridge and some on Landa village. The officers could not ascertain the damage caused to the bridge because it was in a gorge 3,000 feet below but they saw the Chinese running helter-skelter. The Chinese had never expected well-aimed enemy artillery fire on their position, therefore, they had not made adequate arrangements for such an eventuality. The havoc caused by this bombardment among the Chinese not only found a prominent place in the Indian press but its news also spread far and wide among the Chinese troops in Tibet. Those Indians who had been taken prisoner by the Chinese received the news from their captors and felt happy.

Rai returned to the battalion headquarters on 6th November. The brigade was satisfied with his performance. A standing patrol was posted at *Merbia* to watch the activities of the Chinese at the Mukto Bridge. The Garhwalis were looking after the central sector satisfactorily and by posting a standing patrol at *Merbia* the left



flank of the brigade was also made safe. The brigade instructed the 1st Sikhs to send a patrol towards Luguthang-Mago area to detect Chinese infiltration, if any.

Because of the successes of patrols and artillery bombardment of the enemy position the morale of the Garhwalis rose high and they were now ready to send their patrols into enemy-occupied territory as well. The brigade wanted reliable information about the Chinese. For this purpose it instructed the 4th Garhwal Rifles to send a patrol across the Tawang Chu to capture at least one Chinese soldier. Volunteers were called for this work. 2nd Lieutenant Vinod Kumar Goswami volunteered to lead the patrol.

On 14th November Goswami took the patrol through the thick jungle to the south of the Tawang Chu and established a base. He was detailed to watch the activities of the Chinese in the north of the river and if possible to take a Chinese prisoner. In the evening he saw 20 Chinese soldiers around a hut in *Rho* village. Now his patrol was to cross the river. Goswami selected seven men from the patrol and descended to the river bank. The patrol saw a log of wood floating down the stream. The patrol somehow retrieved the log and managed to throw it across the river. It was a dark night and the work was difficult. The patrol had to climb a cliff to reach the hut. The Garhwalis climbed the rock without any mishap. They came up just at the point where the hut was situated. They became very cautious. They noticed a Chinese sentry standing outside the hut. The hillmen managed to creep up to the sentry. Goswami halted the patrol. Along with a rifleman he proceeded towards the sentry and pounced upon him. Snatching away his rifle he muffled his mouth with a towel. The rifleman caught hold of the prisoner and secured him. The scuffle, however, brought out of the hut another Chinese soldier who fired but Goswami quickly bayoneted him. By this time the whole Chinese camp became alert and started firing. The patrol threw grenades into the hut killing more than eight Chinese. The intensity of the firing increased. The patrol had to return if it wanted to escape annihilation. The prisoner was a problem. As he could not be taken with the patrol Goswami shot him dead and took his rifle. The patrol retired carrying with it the captured rifle. When the patrol reached the bank of the river it was shocked to find that the log of wood had been washed away. The men tried to im-

provide something for crossing the river. They had to wait till the morning for this. Now the patrol returned to the unit in ones and twos. Goswami presented the rifle to the battalion headquarters. The weapon was finally handed over to the brigade. The young officer was awarded the VrC. His citation reads :

“In this action, 2nd Lt. Goswami displayed exemplary courage, initiative and leadership in the tradition of the Indian Army.”

Side by side with the news of Goswami's patrol the 62nd Brigade received information which was not encouraging. The brigade commander decided to hold a COs' conference.

At 1700 hours on November 15 Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea was called to the brigade headquarters to attend the conference to be held next morning. The subject to be discussed was the infiltration of the Chinese on the brigade's flanks. Half an hour after reaching the brigade headquarters Bhattacharjea contacted Major Rai on phone and told him to send a patrol of platoon strength under a JCO to the Mukto Bridge area to find out about the enemy's infiltration. He informed Rai that the brigade had received a message from *Merbia* that some Chinese had been seen moving in the Mukto Bridge area. The patrol was to confirm or contradict the news. Further, the patrol was to proceed immediately and return by 2000 hours the next evening.

A patrol of platoon strength under a Naib Subedar was got ready and sent into the direction of the Mukto Bridge. The patrol proceeded cautiously and just before the first light reached a dominating ground near a Monpa village in the vicinity of the bridge. Soon after the first light it noticed that the Chinese troops were crossing the bridge in single file. Normally this bridge was used by travellers going to Bhutan, but the Chinese were seen climbing the Se La ridge. Evidently they meant either to attack the Se La defences or to cut the lines of communication of the brigade in the Dirang valley or to proceed to Bomdi La to threaten the rear of the 4th Division or they were a part of the pincer movement which was developing to encircle the entire Indian force in Kameng. The intentions of the Chinese were definitely alarming. With this news the patrol commenced its return journey to the unit lines. On its way, it came across a Nepali-Bhotia

who gave valuable information about the movement of the Chinese. The patrol brought the Nepali-Bhotia to the battalion headquarters. This informer was a resident of Tawang where he was employed in the office of the Political Officer. After the Chinese invasion he escaped from Tawang and was living in the Monpa village near the Mukto Bridge at that time. Normally he should have escaped to Bhutan. He instinctively started prying about the movements of the Chinese. He had seen the bridge being damaged by the Indian artillery bombardment; he had also watched the Chinese repairing it. On November 14 the Chinese worked day and night and made the bridge fit for traffic. According to this man's information the Chinese had crossed the bridge at the rate of a 100 per eight minutes or about a battalion per hour, making allowance for completing all the necessary administrative details. The Chinese had continued the movement from 8 p.m. on November 15 to 6 a.m. on November 16. According to this calculation making similar allowances it appeared that a Chinese regiment group crossed the bridge on the 15th November.

The patrol returned to the unit at 1700 hours on 16th November. It took some time to interrogate it. While this was going on a few enemy shells fell on the battalion defences. Soon the intensity of the bombardment increased. Side by side with this a Chinese patrol attacked a forward position manned by a platoon of the A Company under Naib Subedar Udai Singh. The platoon dispersed the attack. From this action it became apparent that the Chinese had constructed a new bridge or repaired the old Bridge 4. It was expected that the Chinese would make the bridge motorable. Therefore, the news of the Chinese crossing the Mukto Bridge and the possibility of their completing a motorable bridge were sufficiently important to be immediately communicated to the brigade headquarters.

The brigade major received the news with alarm. He had received the news of the Chinese infiltration on both the flanks. Therefore, the news of the Garhwalis was more or less confirmed. Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea was also present at the brigade headquarters. He telephoned to Rai and directed him to keep a patrol constantly scanning the area in front of the locality defended by the battalion. He informed Rai that a Chinese attack was imminent that night. Rai carried out the instructions carefully.

Immediately after sending this order Bhattacharjea went in conference with the 62nd Brigade Commander and his staff. It was past 2100 hours. Bhattacharjea was asked to despatch a patrol under Rai to probe the area on the right flank of the battalion. Carrying this order the CO drove down to the unit. He was in such a hurry that he forgot to meet Sub Aswal, the anti-tank platoon commander stationed at the 'open ground'. He reached his headquarters at midnight. The patrol was to leave the unit lines at 0200 hours on 17th November. Only two hours were left for the patrol to get ready.

As soon as Bhattacharjea arrived in the unit he went straight to Rai's bunker. He instructed Rai, his seniormost company commander and his second-in-command, to lead a patrol to probe the area on the right flank of the battalion along the nullah joining the Nuranang Chu near the 'open ground' where the Garhwali anti-tank platoon was stationed. There was some argument between the two officers. Both fully realised that the time had come for a face to face fight with the Chinese. Rai wanted to stay and face the danger with the unit. The CO on Rai's persuasion tried to get the order changed from the brigade headquarters. In the army, operational orders without any pressing circumstances are seldom amended. Consequently Rai had to leave the unit before 0200 hours. The unit subedar major saw the patrol off.

The patrol reached the 'open ground' before the first light but Rai continued moving forward. They entered the valley of the nullah and started climbing. After the first light Rai met Sub Aswal. The men halted for their morning tea. Soon they were again on the move. While departing Sub Aswal requested Rai to return by the same route so that they could meet again.

The patrol resumed climbing, crossing watersheds separating small streams. The party reached the watershed of the main stream. The day was cold and the ground, bare of trees, was covered with frost. The patrol was marching at a height of 14,000 feet and again crossing range after range. There seemed to be no end of the high ranges. The soldiers were tired but continued to advance. It was midday but the end was not in sight. Rai heard the thunder of artillery fire from the direction of Bridge 3. He concluded that the expected clash with the enemy had begun. But he did not tell this

to the jawans. The patrol continued to advance. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon cold wind started to blow. It was very troublesome, but the patrol did not falter, it continued the trek. Slowly darkness enveloped the area, still the end was not in sight. The jawans ate the dry rations which they were carrying. Now they were dead tired. They needed rest but they had only the frost-covered ground to rest on. The patrol stopped and rested for a couple of hours in the freezing cold. Immediately after the first light the patrol resumed its journey. At 0800 hours on 18th November Rai saw a valley ahead. He stopped the patrol and along with his batman advanced further. Sometimes he crawled and sometimes moved in a stooping posture. He reached a high point from where he could see the whole valley clearly. A stream from the Kya La was flowing down below. At the Goro Chu junction it has cut a deep gorge into which it disappears and joins the main stream. Just above the junction there is some open ground on the left bank of the stream coming from the Kya La. This was the camping ground of the Chinese; probably it was a transit camp because Chinese soldiers were coming and going there. Rai had seen what he wanted to see. He retraced his steps and joined the patrol.

On the return journey the patrol trekked the whole day. The field rations were finished. The only items which the soldiers were carrying were a limited quantity of tea, sugar and powdered milk. They had kept it for an emergency. Without stopping for brewing tea they kept on marching. The soldiers were so tired that when they stopped for a moment their legs tottered. But they did not lose courage. Next day they hoped to reach the friendly atmosphere of the battalion and enjoy the comforts granted to those who returned from such strenuous duties. But Rai was not happy. While going up he had heard the sound of artillery fire from the direction of Jang, but now there was quiet on that side. He wondered what had happened. Now and then he seemed to hear the sound of some firing coming from the Se La side or even beyond it. He was not sure; his imagination might be playing a trick. Had the battalion withdrawn to the Se La pass and having a tough fight with the Chinese? Such doubts were troubling him but he was marching with his mouth shut. A day before his departure from the battalion he had received some sweets from home and an affectionate letter from his little son. He was thinking of spending the evening with his fellow officers on

16th November. But the din of the battle and the questioning of the Mukto Bridge patrol had deprived him of the pleasure. Would he meet his brother officers again? Would he see his child who was keeping his mother amused? Rai resigned himself to fate in such circumstances.

The patrol passed the day and night of 18th November in moving towards the battalion. At last it reached the source of the nullah where it had entered that area. The sun had not risen and it was cold on the crest of the ridge. Further, no fuel was available to give them some warmth. The patrol descended into the valley where it was warmer and where fuel was also available in plenty. Sometimes the flight of the blood-red pheasant disturbed the silence otherwise it was quiet on all sides. The patrol stopped at sunny spot to prepare the morning tea. Sentries took up positions and the men started the morning wash. Suddenly a sentry raised an alarm. Every one took up a defensive position in a moment. Soon Rai saw that two men, one of whom was a havildar, were advancing towards him carrying a white flag. They were the Garhwalis of the anti-tank platoon. Soon the anti-tank platoon with his JCO joined Rai's party. This happened on the morning of 19th November, 48 hours after their first meeting.

**The withdrawal of the 4th Garhwal Rifles :—**After sending the patrol Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea warned the subedar major and the adjutant that there was a possibility of the Chinese attacking the battalion. The whole night the Garhwali patrols continued to scan the area in their front.

At first light the Chinese artillery started bombarding the Indian positions. Soon after this the Chinese attacked the forward platoon with heavy mortar and small-arms fire. The platoon (of the A Company) repulsed the attack. At about 0800 hours, the enemy again attacked the platoon position from three directions with increasing pressure. The attack was again repulsed and the enemy suffered heavy casualties. At 1100 hours the enemy brought a medium machine gun (MMG) within 40 yards of the left flank of the platoon and tried to isolate the section post. The MMG had to be silenced. Naib Subedar Udai Singh Rawat, the Platoon Commander, called for volunteers. An LMG group of Lance Naik Jaswant Singh,

Riflemen Trilok Singh and Gopal Singh offered themselves. They jumped out of their trench and in the face of intensive fire began to crawl towards the weapon-pit taking cover behind boulders, bushes and trees. When they got within ten yards of the gun-position Trilok Singh covered his men with his sten gun while they threw grenades into the gun-pit. As the grenade exploded Jaswant Singh and Trilok Singh rushed into the gun-position. They found two Chinese dead and another badly wounded but still holding the machine gun. They overpowered him, snatched the MMG from him and began to return to their position. While covering the return of the two riflemen, Trilok Singh was badly wounded by a burst of enemy fire but he continued to cover his comrades till he died. Jaswant Singh was also killed. Gopal Singh, though badly wounded, managed to get into a trench and was evacuated to the battalion headquarters later on. For this daring feat Jaswant Singh was awarded the MVC and Trilok Singh the VrC, both posthumous. Gopal Singh lived to receive his award, the VrC. Their Company Commander, 2nd Lieutenant Tandon and Naib Subedar Udai Singh Rawat, who personally engaged the enemy MMG with their LMGs, were given the VrC.

In the second attack the forward platoon fell short of ammunition. A message for more ammunition was sent to the battalion headquarters. The enemy fire was very intense. It was a problem to send ammunition to the threatened platoon. 2nd Lieutenant Goswami offered to carry the ammunition to Naib Subedar Udai Singh. Without caring for his life Goswami successfully carried the ammunition to the platoon. It is unfortunate that this officer did not live long after this. During the withdrawal on November 17 he was with the unit but nothing was heard about him afterwards.

After the third attack the invaders made two more attempts to overwhelm the Garhwalis but failed. The Garhwalis remained under fire the whole day; they were kept busy in meeting the enemy's intermittent attacks also. The Chinese also completed a new bridge, about 300 yards upstream from Bridge 4, and extended the mortar-able road to the south of the Tawang Chu.

The 4th Garhwal Rifles were regularly sending information to the 62nd Brigade Headquarters. It was apparent to the brigade

that the battalion without reinforcements could not hold back the Chinese for long. As the Chinese pressure was constantly increasing the battalion had to be withdrawn before it was badly mauled. At 1700 hours the battalion received the orders to withdraw to the Se La position. Its withdrawal was to be covered by the 1st Sikhs and the 4th SLI who were posted at the Se La pass. At 1900 hours in the evening of November 17 Brigade 3 area was vacated by the unit. At 2300 hours the same night it was concentrated at Nuranang. The unit was without the anti-tank platoon which was in the nullah valley guarding the right flank. At midnight the unit minus the anti-tank platoon and Major Rai's party assembled at the rendezvous in the vicinity of Nuranang and moved towards the Se La pass which was found to be unguarded. The unit crossed the pass. Its rear was fired upon by the enemy and was overwhelmed. Sub Bishan Singh and 20 jawans were taken prisoner.

### A SAD MOMENT

Sub Aswal told Rai that Chinese vehicles were running up and down the Se La-Jang road and there was no sign of their own battalion. He thought that probably the battalion supposed that the anti-tank platoon had heard about the withdrawal orders or being hard pressed by the Chinese had forgotten the platoon. Hence the combined party of Major Rai and Sub Aswal totalling more than 45 men had to fend for itself.

The two officers discussed the situation. A small patrol was sent to the 'open ground' to gain more information about the Chinese. After some time the patrol returned and informed them that Chinese guns and vehicles were moving towards the Se La pass. Now the question before the officers was whether to fight guerrilla actions against the Chinese or to withdraw to the rear to join their own troops at the Se La pass.

Guerrilla fighting was ruled out for various reasons. Firstly, they had no rations and their ammunition could not last them long. Secondly, the local population was not with them. Government's policy had not brought the Monpas closer to the Indians. Before the Chinese invasion the India-China conflict was an affair between two nations with which the Monpas were not at all concerned. Later



on some of them grew friendly with the Chinese because they were victorious. The Garhwalis were complete strangers to the people and the land. Hence they decided to join the brigade at the Se La pass. They believed that the 62nd Brigade must be offering a strong resistance to the Chinese there. Hence the party moved northward. The men were hungry and tired. Rai's men had only one blanket each to warm themselves, the anti-tank gunners did not have even that, their clothes and other personal effects having being left in the camp at the 'open ground'. In this condition the men climbed the cliff on the left of the nullah. They reached the top in the afternoon. After an eight-hour march they reached a hill near the Nuranang Chu stream. Rai halted the men and with two NCOs crept to the southern edge of the cliff to observe what the enemy was doing below.

At the bottom of the hill there were many men, women and children clad in blue. Some of them were brewing Tibetan tea. The remainder were unloading the military vehicles and carrying heavy stores up the hill to take them to the pass. There were a few Chinese soldiers guarding the party. Rai understood now why the Chinese were called 'the blue ants'. He actually saw the labourers working as ants. These blue ants were Chinese and Tibetans attached to army units for transporting military stores. The Chinese soldiers were clad in khaki coats and trousers padded with cotton. They were armed with semi-automatic rifles. Rai knew that he had neither porters nor rations nor any hope of receiving reinforcements. Also his men were hungry. The party had been out for more than 120 hours without a hot meal and 72 hours without any food at all. They were physically too weak to fight. But Rai hoped that the Indian troops must be resisting the Chinese at Bomdi La. Therefore, he decided to divide his party into small groups, so that they presented a small target to the enemy and asked them to head for Bomdi La where the Indians must be fighting the invader.

He explained to the men that it was useless to continue roaming in those mountains aimlessly without food. He assured them that the Indians were fighting the Chinese at Bomdi La. The soldiers listened to Major Rai, but Sub Aswal asked the time at which the patrol was to split into small parties. Eleven o'clock was fixed. The soldiers were divided into small groups according to their villages and pattis. When they were ready to move they went to the leader

one by one and bade him good-bye. It was a sad moment and even Rai was moved. In the end Aswal came and shook hands with Rai after which he turned about with a jerk. In a few minutes he disappeared in the mountains. Rai was left with two NCOs. After a pause this small party also set out on its way to the south. The three avoided the road. When they reached a point above Nuranang they hid themselves and waited for the night.

After the last light the party descended into the valley and at 2000 hours was on the Bomdi La-Tawang road. To their surprise a Chinese vehicle carrying troops came from the direction of Jang. It was going to the Se La pass. It was no use running away to avoid the Chinese, because if spotted they would be taken prisoner which they abhorred. They adopted a bold front and started marching smartly as if they were a Chinese party patrolling the road. The troops did not take any notice of them and the truck continued its journey. Rai and his companions heaved a sigh of relief.

Soon the party crossed the stream and started climbing the Se La ridge covered with fir trees and rhododendron bushes. It missed the Nuranang-Twin Lakes track and climbed to its east. Because of the bushes the going was hard as there was no track. The whole night passed but they could not see the sky-line. The forest was so thick that at times they could not see the stars even. But the party continued climbing. There was no level ground where they could rest. So they kept on moving. At last the sun rose and there was some light but there was no sign of the crest of the ridge. Rai and his men though disappointed continued to climb. At about 1500 hours the party reached the crest of the ridge. Major Rai while proceeding to *Merbia* had passed through this ground. He spotted the gompa from which he had directed his artillery fire on the Chinese in the first week of November. This was a boon to the party. The NCOs had lost all hopes of survival and now they were proceeding to a place where they expected to be welcomed. After October 8 an Indian outpost had been established in the gompa. When the men approached the gompa they found the doors open and some equipment lying in the verandah. Rai thought that the men had gone for some fatigue work. The party entered the building. There was none inside. Major Rai sat down on the floor and within a few seconds was fast asleep. It was after six days that he was under a roof. The NCOs

went outside to fetch some refreshments. To their horror they were surrounded by the Chinese working in the forest nearby ; these Chinese were the occupants of the gompa. As soon as they saw the Garhwalis they made a terrible noise. Rai woke up. He came outside. The noise increased. The result was that the three men were taken prisoner.

With the capture of Rai and his party the story of the 4th Garhwal Rifles comes to an end. Rai and the two NCOs survived the ordeal of a prisoners' camp in Tibet and returned to India. What happened to the rest? Almost half of the party died of exhaustion and hunger, a quarter was killed by the enemy, some were wounded or invalidated. The rest reached Assam to serve their tenure in the army. The battalion suffered heavy loss but it earned the gratitude of the nation. Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea was awarded the MVC. His citation sums up the exploits of the 4th Garhwal Rifles.

“Lt. Col. Battacharjea was commanding a battalion of the Garhwal Rifles which fought a withdrawal action from Tawang-Jang on 25th October, 1962. The morale of his troops had been shaken but they regained it under his inspiring leadership and soon dominated the area with aggressive patrolling. Lt. Col. Bhattacharjea himself accompanied the first few patrols, and his men recovered some arms and equipment left behind by the withdrawing forces. They also raided an enemy position and captured a prisoner.

“On 17th November, 1962, when the enemy started a major offensive against the Se La position, the brunt of the attack was borne by Lt. Col. Bhattacharjea's battalion. The enemy put in five successive attacks that day, but all of them were repulsed under his courageous leadership. At one time, when the enemy brought medium machine gun fire on his flank and rear, he immediately sent out a party of volunteers which destroyed the enemy position and captured the machine gun. On the night of 17th-18th November, 1962, the battalion carried out a successful withdrawal to Senge Dzong under orders from the Brigade Headquarters....”

**Comments :—**In the beginning of the Nuranang operations the morale of the Garhwalis was shaken, but soon they regained it after aggressive and intensive patrolling not only of the no man's land but also of the enemy-occupied area in the north of the Tawang Chu. It is because of this confidence in their ability to fight the enemy that the

attacks of 17th and 18th November were repulsed with minimum loss to themselves and maximum to the enemy.

No doubt the Garhwalis fought bravely and earned praise for the battalion from the IV Corps Commander, but the way the unit effected its withdrawal left much to be desired. Firstly, it was evident to Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea that confrontation with the enemy was imminent. It was not prudent to send a senior officer of the unit on patrol duty specially with a patrol of only platoon strength. The job could have been done equally well by a JCO. Had an officer of Rai's seniority been present in the unit at the time of the withdrawal the battalion headquarters would never have left the anti-tank platoon and the patrol party to their fate. Some arrangements would have been surely made to inform both the parties of the programme and the intention of the battalion. It is not creditable for a unit to forsake two of its officers and more than 40 other ranks and leave them at the mercy of the enemy. This shows that the command did not have a firm grip over the operation.

There are some who maintain that Rai should not have divided his party into small groups. Such critics may be right, because, as a large group it could have put up a better resistance against the Chinese and more Garhwali troops would have escaped disaster. But there is the other side also. A large party would have presented a big target to the enemy. Even if this large party had offered to surrender the Chinese would have never believed the Indians and would have fired upon them killing many. The Garhwalis had enough ammunition but no spirit and strength to fight. They were hungry and tired. Under the circumstances Rai's decision to disperse the patrol party into small groups was not wrong. "Under the circumstances Rai Sahib took a correct decision," said many of the NCOs and riflemen who were in Rai's party and suffered terribly in their trek back to Assam.

## CHAPTER VI

# A CONFLICT OF DECISIONS

“In my experience it is not so much asking men to fight or work with inadequate or obsolete equipment that lowers morale but the belief that those responsible are accepting such a state of affairs. If men realise that every one above them and behind them is flat out to get the things required for them, they will do wonders, as my men did, with the meagre resources they have instead of sitting down moaning for better.”<sup>1</sup>

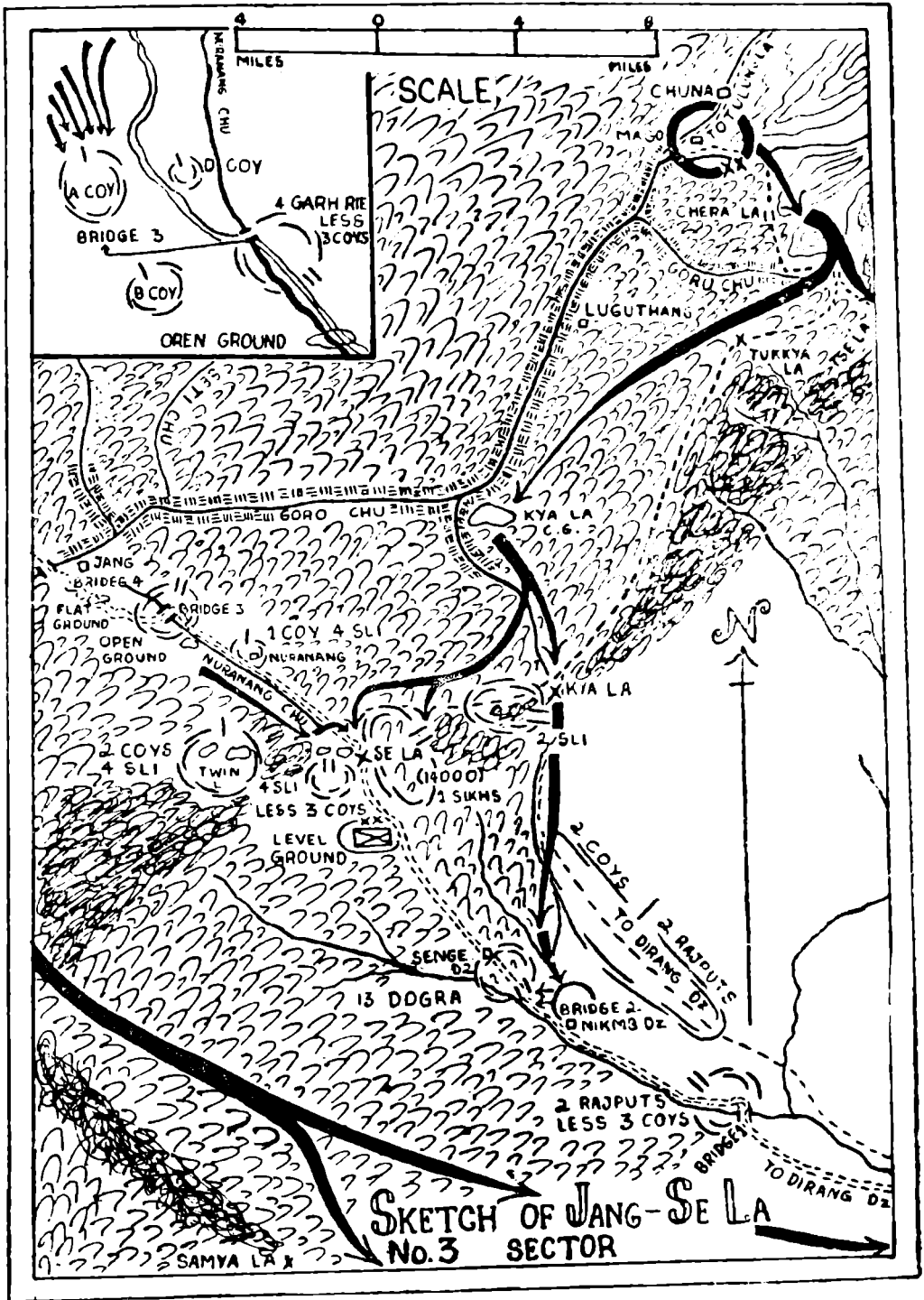
SLIM.

The Se La pass is the gateway to the Tawang-Jang sector. After the withdrawal of the 4th Garhwal Rifles and the 1st Sikhs from the Tawang area the Se La pass was the last place in the Nuranang valley where the 62nd Brigade could make a bold stand against the Chinese. Obviously from a defence point of view the area from ‘Twin Lakes’ to the Kya La is important. The Se La automatically becomes the Vital Ground of the formation responsible for the defence of the sector.

**Enemy Information** :—The Chinese regiment which crossed the Mukto Bridge climbed the Se La ridge. It proceeded to Dirang valley to cut the lines of communication of the 4th Division at various places. A second column comprising a battalion followed the Garhwalis and a third also comprising a battalion crossed the Se La ridge via the Kya La pass. The third column was followed by another battalion which attacked the Se La pass. Besides these four columns another force comprising two battalions appeared in the Poshing La area. The terrain on the right of the Se La area was rougher and more mountainous than that on the left. Therefore, the Chinese had greater difficulty in getting supplies on the right than on the left. Consequently the number of Chinese troops advancing from the left towards the Se La ridge was more than that from the right.

---

1. *Defeat into Victory* ... .. p. 168.



## THE 62nd BRIGADE

**Friendly Troops** :—Knowing that the Chinese were advancing from the south-west, north and the north-east and were likely to interfere with our maintenance line the brigade had to arrange for an all-round defence. With this purpose the troops of the 62nd Brigade were deployed as under :—

(a) The 4th Garhwal Rifles	area	Nuranang valley.
(b) The 1st Sikhs Battalion	„	south of the Se La pass
Headquarters	„	on the right of the road.
(i) A Company	„	high ground on the right
	„	of the pass.
(ii) B Company	„	south - east of A Com-
	„	pany's position.
(iii) C Company	„	south - east of B Com-
	„	pany's position.
(iv) D Company	„	high ground in the south-
	„	west of C Company's
	„	position.
(v) 3" mortars	„	west of D Company's
	„	position.
(c) The 2nd SLI	„	high ground in the north-
	„	east of A Company of
	„	the 1st Sikhs.
(d) The 4th SLI minus	„	high ground on the left
three companies	„	of the pass.
(i) A and C Companies	„	Twin Lakes.
(ii) D Company	„	Nuranang.

**In Support.**

(a) The 5th Field Artillery	„	between Senge Dzong
Regiment (24 guns)	„	and the Se La on a level
	„	piece of ground.
(b) One mountain battery	„	Se La, and
(i) 2 guns	„	Nuranang.
(ii) 2 guns	„	
Other army installations for	„	south of the Se La pass
servicing the troops	„	in the gap covered with
	„	thick vegetation on the
	„	right of the road.

**Tasks.**

- (a) The task of the 4th Garhwal Rifles was  
 (i) to prevent the enemy from entering the Nuranang valley, and

- (ii) in case of a full-fledged invasion to hold it for some time to enable the 62nd Brigade to get ready for facing the enemy.
- (b) The task of the 1st Sikhs was
  - (i) to prevent the enemy from entering the Dirang sector via the Se La pass, and
  - (ii) to contain the enemy in the north of the Se La ridge (in their area of responsibility).
- (c) The task of the 2nd SLI was
  - (i) to prevent the enemy from entering the southern part of the Se La ridge through the Kya La pass, and
  - (ii) to protect the right flank of the brigade.
- (d) The task of the 4th SLI was
  - (i) to prevent the enemy from entering the Dirang sector via the Se La pass, and
  - (ii) to protect the left flank of the brigade defences.
- (e) The 5th Artillery Regiment covered
  - (i) Defensive Tasks, Save our Soul, (DFs, SOS) and DFs in depth in front of the brigade units.
  - (ii) The two mountain guns covered the same tasks as the field artillery, and
  - (iii) The remaining two guns covered DFs, SOS and DFs in depth in front of the 4th Garhwal Rifles.

There was a platoon position of the Assam Rifles at Chuna. On 1st October the post was shifted to Mago. It was isolated from other units. The nearest habitation to the post in the area was Senge Dzong, about four days' march through difficult country. Evidently the post had to be supplied by air. Soon after the Chinese had established their administration in Tsona-Dong-Lhuntze Dzong tract (in Tibet) they improved land communications and built ration and other depots in the north of the Tulung La and the Pen La. In July and August 1962 they moved their troops into the border area (in Tibet). After 20th October the Chinese troops descended from the Tulung La and by the end of the month they had penetrated into Indian territory. The Assam Rifles platoon had already been withdrawn. Hence the invaders did not meet with any opposition. By this time the 62nd Brigade Headquarters had been established and a brigade commander arrived. The IV Corps and the 4th Division Commanders inspected the Se La defences on 7th November 1962. The temporary brigade commander was replaced by Brigadier Hoshiar Singh who was flown from Poona to assume command of the 62nd Brigade. Before the arrival of the new brigade commander the



Garhwalis had sent the information that the Chinese were carrying out road construction work at top speed. News had also arrived that the Chinese could use the Mukto Bridge to threaten the left flank of the brigade. Consequently arrangements were made to protect the left flank of the brigade. A day after the visit of the corps commander an extra battalion, the 2nd SLI, was given to the 62nd Brigade for protecting its right flank. The 4th SLI had already arrived in the sector. In short the deployment of troops on November 12 was as shown in the sketches 3 and 4A. Because of this new deployment of troops patrols could be sent to the north-east and north to obtain information about the Chinese infiltration.

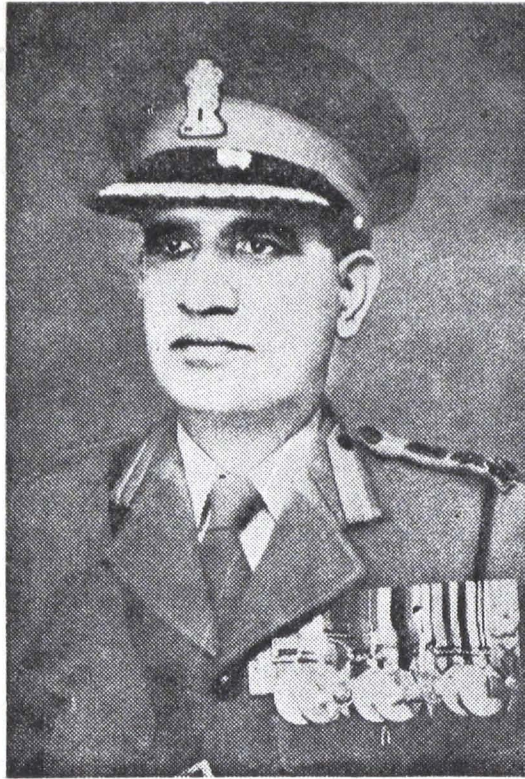
The 1st Sikhs had been the longest in the area and knew the ground. On 12th November the Sikhs were ordered to send a patrol to the Turkyā La area. Consequently on the morning of 13th November they sent a company patrol in that direction.

The Sikhs had no difficulty in reaching the 2nd SLI position. Having reached the water-head of the tributary of the Goro Chu the patrol turned to the left. The Sikhs travelled to the north and sometimes to the north-east crossing spur after spur by narrow and awkward passes. All the time the patrol kept to the head-waters of mountain streams to avoid long detours to by 7 pass the gorges in the locality. After marching for about 26 hours the patrol descended into a broad valley where the Goro Chu had cut a deep gorge. The patrol again turned to the left and climbed a ridge dominated by snowy heights. From there they saw some huts in the distance. This was Luguthang village. The patrol took care that the enemy did not spot its presence. The village was humming with activity; it had been transformed into a Chinese military camp. The patrol was tired and the three-day dry rations which it was carrying were just enough to enable it to return to its base. It could not take the initiative and attack the Chinese who were bound to retaliate and overwhelm it. Also being only a reconnaissance patrol its task was only to collect as much information about the enemy as possible. This the patrol had done. Hence it retraced its steps and by the first light of November 16 reached the 2nd SLI position and finally its base.

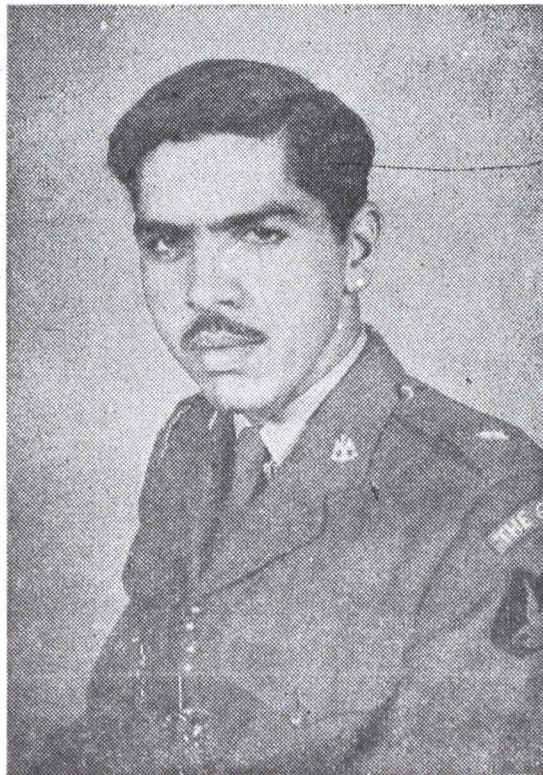
The brigade headquarters got the news of the Chinese concentration in the Luguthang area. Simultaneously it also learnt that the



Lieutenant-Col BN Avasthi,  
Commanding Officer of the 4th Rajputs.



**Brigadier Hoshiar Singh,  
Commander, 162nd Infantry Brigade.**



**Captain Amarjeet Singh, 5th Guards,  
Killed in Action.**



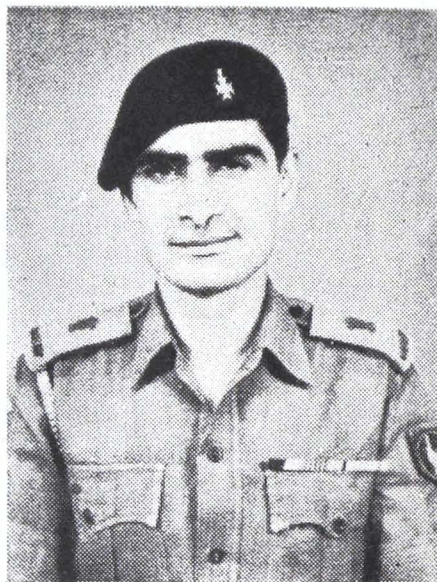
**Sub Jogindra Singh**  
**PVC (Posthumous),**  
**1st Sikhs**



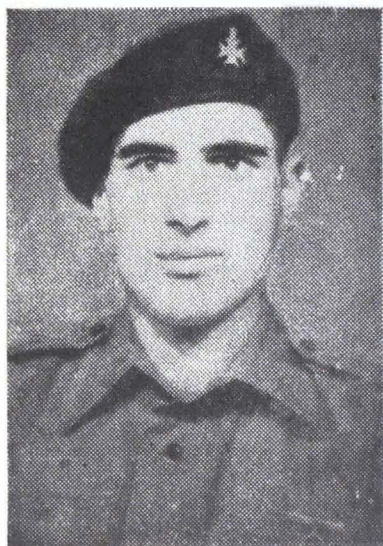
**Lieutenant IS Chaudhry,**  
**5th Guards, Killed in Action.**



Sepoy Kewal Singh  
MVC (Posthumous)  
4th Sikhs.



Lieutenant SN Tandon, VrC,  
4th Garhwals.



/NK Gopal Singh Gusain  
VrC,  
4th Garhwals.



Sub Udai Singh Rawat  
VrC,  
4th Garhwals.

Garhwalis could not secure a Chinese prisoner from across the Tawang Chu. In other words the brigade staff could not get dependable information regarding the plans of the Chinese. They were afraid that the Chinese might attack the Se La defences from the right. The brigade, therefore, decided to send a composite patrol of the 1st Sikhs, 4th and 2nd SLI into the Turkya La-Luguthang area. But before the patrol could start another patrol of the 4th SLI returned in the afternoon from the 'Twin Lakes' area after contacting the Assam Rifles post at *Merbia*. It brought the information that some Chinese were seen in the Mukto Bridge area. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh decided to hold a COs' conference on the morning of 16th November. He called the COs to his headquarters the same evening. In the meantime the HQ staff prepared operational orders for the composite patrol. This time the patrol had to bring more information and could fight to obtain it if necessary i. e. it was a fighting patrol. It was expected to return to the brigade in four days.

The patrol comprised a company of the 2nd SLI, two platoons of the 4th SLI and two of the 1st Sikhs, above 200 men including officers and JCOs, commanded by a major who was assisted by two lieutenants. The major and one of the lieutenants were from the 2nd SLI and the other from the 1st Sikhs. The patrol was to leave the unit lines at midnight. A powerful wireless set was provided to the patrol commander to keep in contact with the brigade headquarters.

\* \* \*

The CO of the 4th Garhwal Rifles reached the brigade headquarters at 1900 hours for the conference. He was asked to send a platoon patrol to the Mukto Bridge area the same night. Next morning the COs' conference took place as scheduled. A general discussion on infiltration tactics of the Chinese was held. But everybody was anxious to know the news from the Garhwali and composite patrols. Therefore, the COs after the conference stayed in the brigade mess.

In the morning of November 16 the composite patrol crossed the Luguthang-Kya La line and proceeded towards the north-east. It wanted to climb the highest ridge in the locality beyond which flows the Goro Chu. Its aim was to have a commanding view of the area

so that it could harass the line of communication of the enemy, if need arose. In the evening the patrol reached the foot of a ridge. The men were tired. They needed rest in the night. The patrol halted and hurriedly prepared its temporary defences.

The Chinese, after the episode of the Goswami patrol in the night of 14th November, had become cautious. On the 15th they had found signs that an Indian patrol had visited the area. Therefore, they were keeping an eye on aliens. Their patrol parties had seen the composite patrol during the day. They had followed it and had informed their headquarters about the movement of the Indians. The Chinese thus knew the position of the temporary base of the Indian party. In the day they did not interfere in the activities of the Indians, but as soon as it was dark they surrounded the patrol. When the Sikhs retired from the evening 'stand to' the Chinese opened fire on them. The Sikhs took up positions but they proved ineffective. Consequently the Indians suffered heavy casualties, one lieutenant was killed and 63 other ranks were killed, wounded or missing. The patrol commander lost control over his men. The patrol scattered in small parties and returned to their units in ones or twos. Some of them did not reach their unit lines till the fall of the Se La position. The remnants were so shaken that they rushed towards the 2nd SLI position without caring for the rear. When the patrol was fired upon its commander sent the news of the ambush to the brigade headquarters. The brigade knew about the mishap at 2100 hours on November 16. Hoshiar Singh on receiving the news ordered Bhattacharjea to despatch a patrol in the direction of the Kya La camping ground through the nullah which joins the Nuranang Chu at the 'open ground'. Bhattacharjea returned to his unit at midnight on the 16th and despatched the patrol under Major Rai.

Late in the evening of 16th November the news of the disaster was flashed to the 4th Division Headquarters. On 17th November at 10 o'clock, Major Kapoor, Commander of the 'Twin Lakes' area, informed that the Chinese were marching towards the Manda La pass in brigade strength. According to a later message these Chinese had been marching from 1000 hours to 1600 hours. Probably these were the same troops as had crossed the Mukto Bridge a day earlier.

The enemy also was moving fast. About a battalion of the Chinese followed the stragglers of the composite patrol. The raiders climbed the Se La ridge and by the evening of November 17 were swarming down its southern slopes. Probably their advance party had infiltrated into the valley earlier. Somehow the Indian patrols did not notice the Chinese who by the first light of 18th November occupied the hill feature just outside Nikma Dzong village. It appears that a Chinese party had reconnoitred the ground much earlier and had marked the emplacements of the infantry support-weapons to cover the Bomdi La-Jang road. The MMG fixed lines of fire were trained on the defile of Bridge 2; here there is a road-bend too which increases the disadvantage caused by the bottle neck to the traffic. At 0600 hours in the morning of November 18 the Chinese were all set to shower bullets and shells on the Indians using the road.

The above mentioned Chinese battalion had sent small parties to launch probing attacks on the Sikhs. These parties started a desultory fire on the camp of the C Company which was thinly held. Its two platoons which formed a part of the composite patrol had not yet rejoined the post. The D Company sent a patrol from the rear of the C Company to the Kya La to fight the raiders. But it was too late. By then the Chinese parties were on their way to the Nikma Dzong ridge.

In Dirang Dzong the 4th Division Headquarters was receiving news of operational reverses from almost every front. The crossing of the Mukto Bridge and the Chinese advance towards the Manda La, continued Chinese attacks on the Garhwalis at Nuranang, the destruction of the composite patrol and the Chinese infiltration into the Luguthang-Kya La area in large numbers must have shaken the divisional commander. The news of the fall of Thembang was the last to arrive. This news must have convinced the commander that the Chinese had launched a pincer movement and that in a couple of days his entire division would be encircled and annihilated.

In the 62nd Brigade Headquarters the appreciation of the tactical situation was not depressing. The Chinese infiltration on both the flanks had been reported and the composite patrol had met with disaster. The Chinese who had extended the Bum La road to Jang



were poised for advancing into the Nuranang valley. They had already pressed the Garhwalis very hard; the Garhwalis could not stand the attack any longer. There was every possibility that the brigade defended area would soon be attacked from three sides; there was also a possibility that the lines of communication of the brigade might be cut, isolating the formation from the 4th Division. In other words there was a great possibility of the Chinese surrounding the brigade on all sides.

The 62nd Brigade had four complete battalions which were 'fighting fit', the few casualties in the composite patrol were immaterial. There was no shortage of essential items. The brigade had completed its logistic build-up and it could stand the Chinese siege without any reinforcements at least for a week. The terrain of the sector was favourable for a sustained resistance. Comparing these tactical advantages with those of the enemy the Indian brigade was in a position to stand a siege longer than the enemy could persist in laying it because Chinese logistic bases were quite far from the front. The enemy could not go on without additional supplies for more than three or four days. If the Indians decided to fight the Chinese could have been compelled to abandon their plan. If they persisted to capture the Indian positions they were bound to be defeated.

If the Chinese contained the 62nd Brigade at the Se La position and proceeded to attack the 4th Division Headquarters and other positions on its maintenance line, what could be the reaction of the brigade? In that case the brigade could also threaten the lines of communication of the Chinese forward troops. Therefore, in every eventuality it was advantageous not only to the brigade but to the entire Indian force deployed in Kameng to hold the present position and fight the Chinese.

Therefore, Brigadier Hoshiar Singh is said to have decided that the brigade would stay in its present position and fight the Chinese. On November 16 in the COs' conference the decision was confirmed and the units were instructed to implement it. At 1700 hours on 17th November the three companies of the 4th SLI in the 'Twin Lakes' area were ordered to withdraw to the Se La pass to strengthen the battalion position which was being manned by the battalion headquarters' personnel and the B Company minus two platoons which

had gone with the composite patrol. The three companies were to cover the withdrawal of the 4th Garhwal Rifles from Nuranang.

In the divisional headquarters similar conferences of senior officers were held, but there the divisional commander decided to withdraw the 62nd Brigade to Dirang Dzong so that the 4th Division could make a concerted effort against the Chinese. The divisional commander tried to contact the corps commander but he was not available. On the Nuranang front the Garhwalis were hard pressed. They needed ammunition but it could not be sent because the Chinese guns had damaged the road. Moreover the enemy fire was so heavy that it was impossible to send ammunition by any kind of transport. Therefore, the division permitted Brigadier Hoshiar Singh to withdraw the Garhwalis to the brigade defended area. The Garhwalis received the withdrawal orders at 1700 hours on November 17. They started thinning out at 1900 hours. The three companies of the 4th SLI were also ordered to withdraw to the Se La position at 1700 hours.

Ultimately the divisional commander succeeded in contacting the corps commander at 1945 hours. He asked for permission to withdraw the 62nd Brigade from its present position to Dirang Dzong to strengthen the divisional headquarters' defences. The corps commander argued and "advocated to him (Pathania) the advantage of 62 Bde fighting it out from its present position". But the corps commander did not refuse the permission definitely. Hence Pathania thought that the corps commander would eventually agree to the withdrawal of the 62nd Brigade if the demand was pressed.

"He reiterated his request telephonically later that night, when Thapar, Sen and I were having dinner, to withdraw from Tse La\* as he thought the situation in this sector was deteriorating fast."

The corps commander again postponed the decision but assured the 4th Division Commander of his sympathy and help. Pathania repeated his request. Kaul yielded.

---

\*The Se La and the Tse La are two distinct passes on the same ridge. Kaul means the Se La and not Tse La and it should be taken as such wherever the latter appears in Kaul's quotations.

- (a) "You will hold on to your present position to the best of your ability.
- (b) When any position becomes untenable, I delegate the authority to you to withdraw to any alternative position you could hold.
- (c) .....
- (d) .....
- (e) .....
- (f) Your only course is to fight it out as best as you can.  
....."

Evidently the corps commander gave a conditional permission to Pathania to withdraw the 62nd Brigade to Dirang Dzong. Based on this Major-General Pathania is said to have contacted Brigadier Hoshiar Singh on the phone and told him of the danger of the 62nd Brigade being cut off at Senge Dzong from the divisional headquarters. Considering this possibility the divisional commander asked the brigade commander to withdraw his formation to Dirang Dzong. Probably the divisional commander had also contacted Hoshiar Singh earlier that day and had informed him of the possibility of the brigade withdrawing to Dirang Dzong. This talk of a withdrawal coupled with the mounting pressure of the Chinese forces against the Garhwalis and a threat to the 'Twin Lakes' area had made the atmosphere depressing. Besides, the composite patrol disaster increased the demoralisation of the troops. The brigade commander had already taken a firm decision that he would hold on to his present position and fight the Chinese. In spite of this he received orders, so is surmised, from the divisional commander to withdraw to Dirang Dzong.

"Hoshiar Singh therefore started withdrawing from Tse La against his better judgment as soon as he could."

The brigade staff prepared operational orders and communicated them to the units. According to these orders the 4th Garhwal Rifles which were at the time withdrawing to the Se La pass were to act as the advance-party for the 62nd Brigade in the withdrawal. The 2nd SLI was to follow the Garhwalis and the 4th SLI the former. The 1st Sikhs were to act as rear-guard. During the withdrawal the 13th Dogras and the 4th Rajputs were responsible for the safe crossing of Bridge 2 and Bridge 1 respectively by the brigade column.

It was night time and the country was mountainous and covered with thick forests; the units were spread out over a vast area and the withdrawal was to be carried out the same night ! Therefore, the operational orders were transmitted by wireless to the units. Whether the Garhwalis and the three companies of the 4th SLI received the orders is doubtful. As the orders were to be carried out immediately the time allotted to each unit was very tight. Under the circumstances it was an uphill task to organise the withdrawal and carry it out properly. Besides, the atmosphere in the brigade was surcharged with the talk of a possible withdrawal. Units were impatient and this impatience added to the difficulty of organising the operation.

**Before the Fall of the Se La Pass :—**The Se La pass was guarded by one company of the 1st Sikhs on the right and the 4th SLI less three companies and two platoons on the left. The Garhwalis were withdrawing to the Se La area to occupy positions allotted by the 62nd Brigade. The three companies of the 4th SLI were either following the Gharwalis or marching towards the pass along the left bank of the Nuranang Chu. They were to occupy their old positions which they had vacated on proceeding to the 'Twin Lakes' area. There was no sign of the two platoons which had gone to reinforce the composite patrol. In fact the 4th SLI battalion commander had no hope of the return of platoons.

**The Withdrawal :—**As soon as the orders for the withdrawal were received the units started moving. The farthest placed unit was the 2nd SLI. It was the first to arrive at the Se La position and report for the withdrawal, although the Garhwalis had not yet arrived. Probably the unit was allowed to cross the pass. The point is that the 2nd SLI crossed the pass before the Garhwalis whom it was supposed to have followed.

The withdrawing troops of the 2nd SLI were followed by the Chinese at their heels. The Se La pass was practically manned by one company of the 1st Sikhs and one platoon of the 4th SLI. These sub-units were also preparing to take their places in the forthcoming withdrawal. In this atmosphere the Chinese attacked the Indian position on the right of the pass. The Sikhs met the attack. Soon there was hand to hand fighting between the Sikhs and the Chinese. 2nd Lieutenant Dagur manned a light machine gun and told his men

to withdraw one by one under his covering fire. Despite the overwhelming number of the enemy he held the invaders at bay almost single-handed. Ultimately the Sikhs were obliged to withdraw. Thus their position was vacated. At 0400 hours the Chinese occupied the high ground on the right of the pass. After 0400 hours the invaders attacked the 4th SLI positions on the left of the pass. The 4th SLI suffered heavy casualties. Under these circumstances the battalion headquarters and the remnants withdrew. Later on the following officers of the 4th SLI were ambushed and killed between Senge Dzong and the pass during the withdrawal :—

- (i) Lieut.-Col RB Nanda,
- (ii) Major SR Tandon, the Second-in-Command,
- (iii) Captain KL Shekh,
- (iv) 2nd Lieutenant Gurdial Singh,
- (v) 2nd Lieutenant Railu, and
- (vi) the Regimental Medical Officer.

The three companies of the 4th SLI arrived on the wrong side of the Se La pass at 0400 hours. They had to let the Garhwalis pass first. After the Garhwalis had crossed the companies advanced. They came under heavy fire from the right and the left. A platoon led by Naib Subedar Budh Singh advanced towards the high ground on the left of the track. It suffered casualties and withdrew. Another platoon led by Subedar Banta Singh attacked the high ground on the right. This attack also failed. The companies suffered heavy casualties. These two reverses demoralised the SLI jawans. The B Company Havildar Major came down from the battalion headquarters to inform the companies of the latest position. After this the companies had no heart to fight. They disintegrated. The jawans of the 4th SLI climbed the Se La ridge in small parties. Their strength was not more than half the combined original strength of the three companies. These remnants crossed the Se La pass by the last light on November 18. Having crossed the Se La ridge they proceeded towards Nikma Dzong. Above Senge Dzong the party was ambushed by the enemy and suffered heavy casualties.

The 4th SLI suffered the heaviest casualties in the 62nd Brigade. The Garhwalis had also suffered quite a heavy loss but the Sikhs of the 4th SLI were the worst hit. This unit suffered 400 casualties most of whom were killed including 7 officers and 6 JCOs. Later on

Captain Rosario, the C Company Commander, who had been wounded in the fighting on the wrong side of the Se La pass died in a military hospital in Tezpur. Briefly, the entire 4th SLI Battalion was annihilated.

The Garhwalis reached the pass. It has already been pointed out that there was some administrative slackness in the 4th Garhwali Battalion ; the operational orders of the withdrawal had not reached the platoons. The men silently did what the others did in their front. Very few knew the aim, the destination and the timings of the withdrawal. The result was that Lieut.-Col Bhattacharjea who was with the advance column crossed the Se La pass without any mishap, while his D Company which was at the tail-end of the battalion was nowhere near the pass. At dawn it was still trailing behind. At 0400 hours it reached the glacial lakes. It was fired upon by the Chinese who had occupied the high ground vacated by the 1st Sikhs. The Garhwalis returned the fire but were soon overcome and a majority of them taken prisoner.

**The Confusion :—**During the withdrawal a column of the Garhwalis was ahead of the withdrawing mass. A few military transport vehicles loaded with troops had also penetrated into the column. This created confusion. There was no order, every one was trying to go ahead. In the morning the Garhwalis reached the road-bend in the north of Nikma Dzong. The Dogras who were supposed to be guarding Bridge 2 were not there. As soon as the Garhwalis turned to enter the defile in which Bridge 2 was located they came under the heavy fire of the Chinese. In spite of heavy casualties the column could not proceed further and came to a halt. The rear parties did not know what was happening in front; they continued advancing. Thus the column became denser and denser, and presented a big and compact target to the enemy. It tried to wipe out one or two Chinese posts of machine guns, but in vain. The enemy continued firing. In this desperate attempt to silence the Chinese fire Lieut.-Col Battacharjea was taken prisoner and Naib Subedar Jatan Singh Gusian won the VrC. This JCO had performed many acts of bravery on November 17 when the Chinese repeatedly attacked his unit on Bridge 3. Here we shall confine ourselves to his acts of bravery performed during the withdrawal. His citation dealing with this part is :—

“The next day, Jemadar Jatan Singh Gusian was detailed to destroy an enemy LMG firing from high ground near Nikma Gzong. After survey of the area, he found the LMG sited between some rocks. He asked his section to cover him and himself crawled behind the enemy and destroyed the LMG with a hand grenade. When the companies were regrouping and were about to resume the advance they were surrounded by the enemy in large numbers. Our troops were cut off in small pockets due to heavy shelling and were trapped in a large ambush after which the sub-units lost contact with each other. Jemadar Gusian, in utter disregard of his own safety, collected 41 men and successfully brought them out of the ambush.

“In these operations Jemadar Gusian displayed courage, devotion to duty and leadership of a high order.”

The bravery of a few individuals displayed in small groups did not help the Indian troops much. They were in the open and had to pass through the defile swept with fixed lines of automatic fire. There were some who did not hesitate to dash through the enemy fire. For instance the Regimental Medical Officer of the 1st Sikhs got through the fire alive in a jeep. The enemy fire inflicted heavy casualties on the forward portion of the moving human mass. After knowing what was happening ahead the men in the rear dispersed and the column disintegrated. Officers and men formed small parties. These parties marched in different directions. Their aim was to reach the plains of Assam. Briefly, the brigade had disintegrated into bits by 0800 hours and disappeared from the Nikma Dzong area.

Amidst this seemingly unruly human mass Brigadier Hoshier Singh is said to have run up and down to persuade the men to form organised columns and neutralise the Chinese fire. But nobody listened to him and his attempts failed. He, therefore, gave up the attempt and descended into the valley in the west of the Nikma Dzong ridge. There were many officers in his party. Among them were Lieut.-Col Mehta, Major Gurdip Singh, Captain Haripal Kaushik and 2nd Lieutenant Dagur all of the 1st Sikhs and Captain Abraham, the Brigade Intelligence Officer (BIO). At the very start Kaushik and Dagur were separated from the rest. They were joined by a JCO from their own unit. Every group of officers was accompanied by a few soldiers. Kaushik and Dagur crossed the stream flowing in the west of Nikma Dzong, climbed the ridge running along its right

bank and descended into the Dirang valley. On November 19 they were in front of Dirang Dzong where they saw military stores burning. In the evening of November 20 they reached a village, below Bomdi La, where Nepali labourers reside. By that time the Chinese had infiltrated into Rupa and the Rupa valley. According to local information the upper reaches of the Rup Chu river were free from the Chinese. Therefore, the stragglers headed for Phudong. On 22nd these officers joined a party which was led by the CO of the 4th Rajputs. This party was ambushed. Dagur who had performed acts of bravery at the Se La during the withdrawal was killed; Kaushik and the JCO escaped. They reached Kalaktang on November 26 and were rescued.

Brigadier Hoshiar Singh's party also disintegrated. Lieut.-Col Mehta was the first officer to be separated from the party. He joined an engineering group which was ambushed and he was killed. Like Mehta, Major Gurdip Singh was also separated from the main column. He happened to reach the Orka La and escaped into Assam via Bhutan. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh and Captain Abraham, his BIO, continued the journey for some days. Eventually Abraham was also separated and Brigadier Singh was left to lead some jawans and a couple of JCOs. He reached Phudong in the morning of November 27. Unfortunately he was ambushed and killed there. A Garhwali JCO, a Chinese POW, buried the body of Hoshiar Singh. Thus ended the story of the 62nd Brigade. With Brigadier Hoshiar Singh's death acts of bravery, treachery and cowardice of many army personnel went into oblivion. Stories of counter-attacks during the withdrawal were told later. Perhaps some were believed and the performers rewarded, but the truth was known only to Brigadier Hoshiar Singh. Many felt sad on hearing the news of the Brigadier's death but there were some who felt relieved also.

**Comments:**—"When Thapar and Sen decided (while I lay sick in Delhi) to abandon Tawang on 24 October as it was considered untenable and to hold Tse La instead, they did so because they were convinced that the latter position was impregnable. Brigadier K.K. Singh, my Brigadier General Staff, told Lt. Gen. Sen, in my absence, that we should make our next stand against the Chinese after Tawang at Bomdi La, not at Tse La, because we would have a shorter line of communications at Bomdi La than at Tse La and have some other strategic and tactical advantages. He was,



however, overruled by Sen," writes Lieut.-General Kaul, 4th Corps Commander.

From the above quotation it is evident that there were two opinions about holding the line of defence against the Chinese; the higher command wanted to hold the Se La ridge line while the Brigade General Staff, 4th Corps, preferred to defend the Bomdi La ridge. Without going into tactical and strategical merits and demerits of the two lines it can be seen that the military commanders were not unanimous in choosing the Se La ridge as the defence line against the Chinese; the higher command preferred to the Bomdi La line. It is obvious that there were some field commanders in Kameng who did not agree with the views of the higher command in holding the Se La line. They defended the Se La line under orders and not according to their own judgment. But on tactical and strategical grounds, they were convinced the decision of the higher command was unsound. When the time for defending the Se La sector came they wavered, and finally they regarded it as sheer madness. They knew that there were some who would support them for quitting the Se La position. Anyway they were not convinced that it was correct to hold the Se La defence line against the Chinese. This was the primary mistake in selecting a line of defence which was not favoured by the IV Corps Staff and the local commanders. Men who were of the view that the Se La line was not defensible ought to have been removed from the Kameng theatre. Failing that the Bomdi La line ought to have been defended after the loss of Tawang.

The second mistake was to employ the same troops in the defence of the Se La position which had been withdrawn from the Tawang sector. What happened at Dhola was very well known to them. In addition another withdrawal was forced on them. Although the withdrawal from the Tawang sector was ordered in time and there was no significant loss to our troops, yet it was a withdrawal which came immediately after the Dhola collapse. Consequently, the Tawang withdrawal further demoralised the troops. The 4th Garhwal Rifles and the 1st Sikhs were the units which were re-deployed in the south of the Tawang Chu. The former gradually built up the morale of its troops through aggressive and intensive patrolling, but the Sikhs do not seem to have done much patrolling. By the time the brigade commander woke up to the need of patrolling the right

flank the game was up; the Chinese had infiltrated into the area in the north and north-east of the Kya La pass in strength and it was not possible for the 62nd Brigade to push them out of Indian territory or keep them away from the Indian defences. Therefore, it cannot be believed that the Sikhs were very enthusiastic about defending the new positions which they must have regarded to be untenable. Had the Sikhs been enthusiastic and kept busy in aggressive and intensive patrolling their morale would have risen higher. Unfortunately reverse was the case at least after the mishaps of the two patrols in which the Sikhs had taken part. Whether the Sikhs blame the SLI or the latter throw the responsibility on the former for the composite platoon reverse, it is immaterial. Agreed that it was not wise to mix the Sikhs with the SLI jawans but perhaps under the existing circumstances it was unavoidable. Whatever might have been the reasons the composite patrol disaster further demoralised the Indian jawans.

We are not opposed to the selection of the Se La defence line but it should have been given due consideration and enough time for completion. The SLI had hardly been there for a week before it had to face the Chinese attack. The jawans did not know the country which was highly mountainous; they did not get the chance to acclimatise themselves to such heights. How could the troops keep their morale high in an unfamiliar country like that of Luguthang-Turkya area? Probably the 2nd SLI men had not gone on more than one patrol before the Chinese attacked them. In short the troops were not allowed sufficient time to prepare themselves for fighting in the Se La sector. This was the third mistake made in conducting operations in such a difficult and mountainous country.

The fourth mistake was related to this. Our security measures were inadequate. The Chinese knew our moves beforehand so that whenever we launched an offensive they were ready to meet it with disastrous results to our forces. The Garhwalis withdrew, so did the remnants of the composite patrol. Always the Chinese were at the heels of our withdrawing troops. The result was that the Chinese knew our withdrawal programme exactly. They launched a three-pronged attack on the Se La position when every unit and sub-unit was moving to the rear. On the other hand the Indians could never anticipate the Chinese moves to beat them at their own game. Apparently they did not get as much co-operation from the local people as

was necessary. The treatment of the local population was purely political. Considerations of defence never found a place in it. The Indian Army had nothing to do with it. In fact the mistakes which have been discussed so far were the outcome of political bungling.

The army authorities sent the 62nd Brigade to establish a strong base at the Se La pass, but its line of maintenance was neglected. In the rear its communication zone was not established. The 65th Brigade (in Dirang Dzong) was yet to be brought up to its normal strength and the 48th Brigade was in the process of being built up. Although Brigadier Michael Chatterjee along with his limited staff had appeared in Dirang Dzong, yet his 65th Infantry Brigade was yet to come to Kameng. This clearly shows that the lines of communication of the 62nd Brigade were not secure. In such conditions how could Brigadier Hoshiar Singh be firm in his resolve to hold on to his position when it was attacked by the Chinese.

“Experience has taught me, however, that before rushing into action it is advisable to get quite clearly fixed in mind what the object of it all is,” writes Slim.

What was the object of establishing a strong base around the Se La position? The Indian troops had met with two major reverses, one at Dhola and the other at Tawang. They needed a morale booster, a victory. This could come only through aggressive preparation which was not done. Further, according to principles of war a base for defence is established with a view to develop it as a jumping ground for an offensive. It appears that the 62nd Brigade was never meant to be used for an offensive. This deliberate or unwilling neglect was tactically bad enough but asking the 62nd Brigade to strengthen the 4th Division Headquarters was worse. The 62nd Brigade was given the job of defending the Se La area and it was familiarising itself with the local terrain to operate against the Chinese; suddenly it was snatched away from that zone to perform a different task on completely unfamiliar ground. This was quite wrong. Another brigade ought to have been sent to defend Dirang Dzong.

It is believed that Brigadier Hoshiar Singh had decided to hold on to his present position and that he had to withdraw under orders. This is a weak argument. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh was the man on the spot. If he was sure of himself he ought to have stuck to his

guns. It may be argued that like a true soldier he obeyed orders of his commander and withdrew. This again is not convincing. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh was more than a soldier, he was a senior commander. On him rested the fate of thousands of men. He ought to have acted like an intelligent and bold commander. If senior commanders commit blunders it is the duty of an officer who holds a virtually independent command at the front to correct the mistake. This is a crucial point. It cannot be grasped by those whose mental faculties have been dulled by rigid obedience to orders. In the highly complicated and mobile modern warfare it is sheer folly for a senior officer to be rigid in thinking and action specially when he is not transgressing seriously the limits of discipline. A formation commander has to be endowed with higher faculties than an ordinary unit commander. Even the latter is allowed certain tactical freedom according to rank and situation. At the worst Brigadier Hoshiar Singh might have faced a court of enquiry or court martial with some humiliation, but his troops would have escaped the sad fate which befell them in the withdrawal. Brigadier Singh is dead and it is not easy now to decide whether he was obliged to modify his own decision owing to an operational surprise and dilemma. Perhaps he knew the mood of his troops and his revised decision was based on his revaluation of the tactical situation.

The Indian troops had withdrawn from Dhola and they had evacuated Tawang due to Chinese pressure. The same thing was repeated on the Nuranang front; the Garhwalis and the three companies of the 4th SLI were also asked to withdraw. The 62nd Brigade did not possess the tactical means to launch an offensive against the Chinese. Under the circumstances it was but natural for the troops to think that they also would be soon withdrawing. In fact the atmosphere was so much surcharged with the talk of withdrawal that the troops had lost interest in fighting the enemy. They did not do vigorous patrolling even. When orders for the withdrawal came they felt relieved and moved away promptly. Under the circumstances it is hard to believe that Brigadier Hoshiar Singh retired only because he had been ordered to do so by his divisional commander. Either the brigadier ordered the withdrawal voluntarily or the brigade just went out of his control and disintegrated.

The completion of the withdrawal of a brigade in a jungle-covered

and mountainous terrain requires time even if it is planned and rehearsed properly. In the Se La withdrawal the brigade staff, like that of the 7th Brigade at Dhola, was not prepared for a forced and sudden move. If the brigade staff had the idea of a voluntary and organised withdrawal in mind it should not have withdrawn the Garhwalis and the three companies of the 4th SLI late in the evening. Under no circumstances the jawans ought to have been permitted to reach their destination in the dark. It is beyond comprehension as to how they could be deployed properly in the Se La area in the dark to meet an unexpected attack. The question of preparing new arrivals for the withdrawal at night was asking for trouble. Besides, it is not understood why the necessity of keeping some units firmly in their positions when the Garhwalis and the 4th SLI were retiring was not felt. When the Chinese attacked everybody was on the move. Naturally the troops had no desire to fight the invaders who were at their heels. Therefore, it is easy to see that the Se La position was abandoned without much fighting.

Further, in an orderly and planned withdrawal every care is taken not to let the morale of the troops sag. In the Se La sector the troops were already demoralised. Besides, they were ordered at midnight to withdraw in a few hours. The men were disgusted with the state of affairs. This demoralisation resulted in the complete collapse of the entire brigade. The 62nd Brigade Commander could not muster enough strength to neutralise the harassing fire of the Chinese and the entire formation suffered. Every one acted for himself and tried to escape. Only in escape there seemed to be safety. As the brigade could not provide protection to the men, they acted on their own. Brigadier Hoshiar Singh felt that he had virtually lost control over the formation which he had commanded only for a fortnight. He must have felt sorry for the state of affairs. He was a soldier. As such he could not have wished to live after such humiliation and ignominy. If he had wanted to live he could have hoisted a white flag and surrendered to the enemy, but he did not do so. He was a brave and true soldier and he wanted to live as such or die. With his death closed the chapter of the Se La reverses.

## CHAPTER VII

# ROUT OR FIGHT

“True an army without morale is nothing but a collection of unhappy, frightened men, but a nation without morale is just a collection of quarrelling, discontented sects and parties without unity and no real aim”.<sup>1</sup>

SLIM

The Indian defences were being rolled up from north to south in Kameng. The Dhola sector had ceased to exist. The Tawang sector also ceased to exist on the evening of 17th November. The storm passed through the Se La pass and now threatened the Dirang sector.

**The Dirang Sector:**—This area is the home of the Monpas. The Daflas, the Akas and the Mijis etcetera are not found here. It is triangular in shape bounded by the Se La, the Manda La and the Lagam ridges. The Se La separates the Tawang sector from the Dirang sector.

The Manda La ridge is a bifurcation of the Se La ridge. Its average height is 9,000 feet. It bifurcates from the Se La ridge in the vicinity of the Orka La and forms the watershed between the basins of the Dirang Chu and the Rupa Chu. It ends at the confluence of these two rivers. Its important passes are the Samya La, the Manda La and the Rib La (Bomdi La II in the sketch No. 4B). Bomdi La, the headquarters of the Kameng Frontier Division, is about 1,000 feet below the Rib La.

The Lagam ridge is a spur of the Se La ridge and bifurcates from it in the vicinity of the Tse La pass. It is breached by the Sangti Chu. It contains the Poshing La (11,950 feet) pass. From here, with the exception of the Kyala (12,500 feet), it loses height till it comes down to 5,000 feet near Thembang from where it runs in an easterly direction. It disappears at the junction of the Bhre'i

---

1. *Courage and Other Broadcasts* —Field Marshal Sir William Slim.

(Kameng) and the Dirang Chu rivers. The Lagam spur separates the Monpas in the west from the Daflas and the Akas in the east. At the Poshing La the spur has a minor gap.

“The Poshing La proved to be a barrier than a pass ; at least it was the barrier for the stream which had cut a deep valley for itself round the foot of the (Lagam) spur. Yet once upon a time the glacier from the Tse La had flowed from the Poshing La, and retreating slowly had left its mark in the form of a dry rocky stream-bed—at least, it was dry now—on the south side. As the glacier retreated up the valley, the stream found an easier exit by doing a little digging on its own account ; it went round the spur instead of over it.”<sup>2</sup>

The main river of the sector is the Dirang Chu which has its headwaters on the eastern and the northern slopes of the Se La ridge and the Manda La spur respectively. Dirang Dzong, a Monpa village, is situated about 500 feet above and on the right bank of the Dirang Chu. Its main tributaries are the Sangti Chu and the Rupa Chu.

The Sangti Chu drains the southern slopes of the upper Se La ridge. It joins the Dirang Chu at about two miles in the west of Dirang Dzong. The Monpas of the Dirang basin differ from the Tawang Monpas only in dress. The former use woollen clothes all the year round while the latter use cotton or silken clothes in summer.

Lagam, Thembang and Rahung are the last villages of the Monpas in the east. In fact a sprinkling of the tribal people is found in Namsu and Thembang. Rahung on the southern bank of the Dirang Chu is purely a Monpa village while Lagam has a Buddhist monastery surrounded by a few Monpa houses.

The sector does not experience snowfall except on the crests of ridges above 8,000 feet. Here snow is not a hinderance to travelling. One can go from Dirang Dzong to Tawang in the north and to the plains in the south throughout the year.

In spite of the barrier of the Manda La ridge the south-west monsoon penetrates into the sector through low passes and river

---

2. *Assam Adventure* by F. Kingdon Ward (London 1942).....P. 260

valleys. The mean annual rainfall of the sector is less than that of the Bomdi La sector. So far no meteorological station has been set up here but it is surmised that the mean annual rainfall of the Dirang valley is 50 inches. The climate of this region is moderate but it remains damp all the year round. In summer and the rainy season leeches and dim dams, as elsewhere in NEFA, are a nuisance to the visitors.

**Flora and Fauna** :—The plants and animals abounding in the region are tropical in valleys up to 6,000 feet, subtropical between 6,000 feet and 10,000 feet and temperate above this. Therefore, broad-leaved trees, some ever-green and others deciduous, of chestnut variety, magnolia and bamboo etcetera flourish in the valleys where roam sloth bears, panthers and wild pigs and wild hens break the silence of the dense forests with their cackle. Above 6,000 feet oaks and rhododendrons of many varieties (of much interest to a botanist) grow on the wooded hills. At places can be seen blue pine (*Pinus Excelsa*) and *Pinus Khasia*. Above 10,000 feet rhododendrons of a smaller variety, various species of spruce and abies cover the hills. Above 11,000 feet the silver fir also is found. Ultimately at 13,000 forests end though the tree line continues up to 16,000 feet. In this belt snow-leopard, wolf and barhal (*Ovis Nahura*) are found. Beyond the Tse La the local people hunt the musk-deer also.

**Routes** :—Dirang Dzong lies on the Indo-Tibetan trade route. The route enters the sector at the Manda La pass. After passing through the Dirang valley it turns to the north and climbs to the Nikma Dzong ridge. After passing through Nikma Dzong and Senge Dzong villages it reaches the Se La pass.

In 1959-1960 a motor road was constructed which joins Bomdi La, Dirang Dzong and Nikma Dzong with the Se La pass. The new road enters the sector through the Rib La. It descends to Rahung and reaches Dirang Dzong.

Between the Rib La and Rahung there is a bifurcation from the Bomdi La-Dirang track. It goes to the east of Rahung in the valley. Here a bridge over the Dirang Chu is crossed. Across the bridge is Thembang, standing on a spur, more than one thousand



feet above the level of the river. The track climbs to the Lagam spur. After running for 15 miles it reaches the Lagam monastery (9,200 feet). The journey from Thembang to Lagam takes about ten hours if one is travelling light. In the case of a soldier fully equipped and armed it may take 15 hours of constant marching ; if he has to fight his way through, it may take more than two days. In that case his first halt ought to be at Pangma village.

The track continues to run on the eastern side of the spur. It passes through Showri and Dongri (10,000 feet) pastures. After crossing the Kyala, the modern Chang La, it reaches the Poshing La. The track runs up and down the hills and there are two stairways in it. The difficulty on this track is that mountain streams cut across it making the journey very risky in the rainy season when the streams become swollen. Further, the dense forests add to the risks. Just before the Poshing La the track passes through a saddle flanked by deep gorges. After crossing the Poshing La, the route continues in a north-westerly direction and after passing through some level ground descends into the Sangti valley. Here it turns to the west and climbs to the Tse La pass. Across the pass lies the Goro valley where it joins the Se La-Mago track.

The Tse La route is a very difficult track used sparingly by the people of Luguthang or the Lamas of the monasteries in the south and north of the Tulung La-Pen La gap. From this track another bifurcation branches off from Dongri leading to Dirang Dzong village. But this footpath is even more difficult than the one that starts from Thembang and after passing through Namsu leads into Dirang Dzong village.

## DIRANG DZONG OPERATIONS

More than a division of nearly 10,000 Chinese troops operated to envelop the Dirang sector. One enemy regiment (equivalent to an Indian brigade of 3,000 troops) crossed the Tulung La. A part of the regiment (about 600 men) marched along the Tawang valley. It established its base at the Kya La camping ground. It was this column which sent its patrol to the Kya La and the vicinity of the Se La. The Sikhs tried to drive this patrol from the Kya La area unsuccessfully. Major Rai of the Garhwalis also pro-

ceeded to the Kya La C. G. to gain information about the enemy. It was this Chinese column which infiltrated into the valley in the east of the Nikma Dzong ridge and after taking up position on a dominating feature in the north of the village disintegrated the 62nd Brigade.

The main column of the Chinese regiment took the Mago-Chera La route and appeared at the Poshing La. The 5th Guards resisted its advance.

The second Chinese regiment entering the Tawang area from Loongla and the Bum La side crossed the Tawang Chu near Jang and attacked the Garhwalis. By 17th November the Chinese had completed the construction of Bridge 4 and had connected the Bum La with Jang with a motor road. By the morning of 19th November Chinese military vehicles carrying troops crossed the bridge and reached the Se La pass. The regiment had already crossed the Se La pass. Now it was maintained by military transport. It was this regiment which spread over the Se La ridge. Its forward elements later on joined the Chinese column which was sniping at the Indian troops from the Nikma Dzong ridge.

The third Chinese regiment crossed the Mukto Bridge over the Tawang Chu on November 16 and climbed the Se La ridge. Next day in the evening some of its men appeared in the south-west of the Se La pass. The remainder descended into the Dirang valley and sniped at the camps of the Indian division and brigade.

The Chinese appeared in the Dirang valley from the south and the west. They also threatened the sector from the Chang La-Poshing La area in the north. This region is quite tough. It was not reconnoitred by Indian troops. The prosperity of the Luguthang-Mago tract entirely depended on the Tibetans living across the Great Himalayan Range. Both the people, the Monpas of the south and the Tibetans of the north, maintained social and economic relations with each other even after the flight of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa. The Chinese took advantage of this freedom of movement to infiltrate into the Mago-Tse La area and dump rations and ammunition secretly to be used in an emergency. It is true that motor transport could not be used in the north of the Dirang sector

by the Chinese but local porters and ponies helped the raiders in moving their rations and equipment.

The armament used by the Chinese in this sector comprised personal weapons, mortars, RCL type guns and MMGs, all easily transportable.

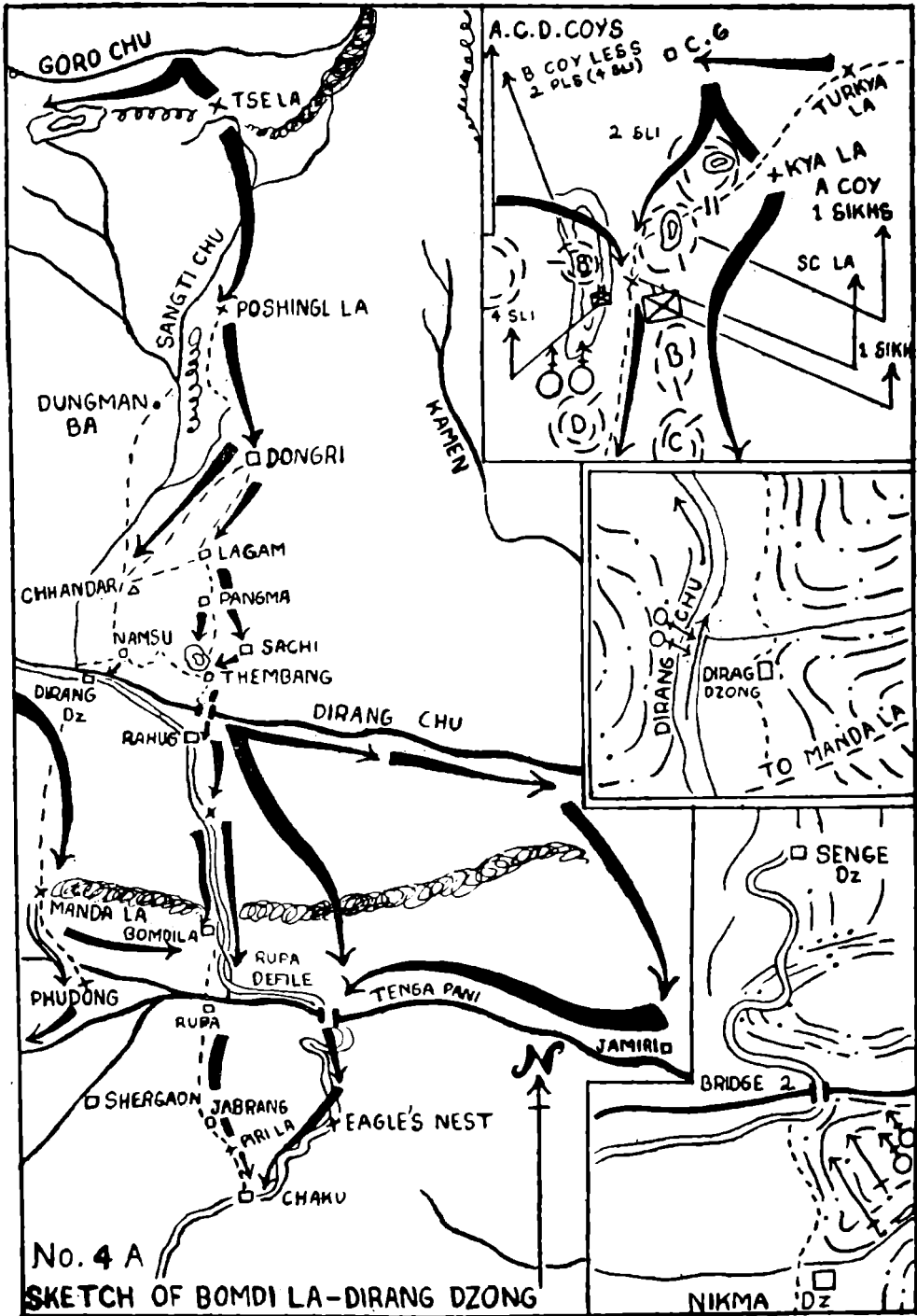
**The Indian Army:**—The first victim of the Dhola debacle was Major-General N Prasad, the 4th Division Commander. He was replaced by Major-General AS Pathania MVC, MC on November 4.

Nehru, so sure of his peaceful methods, was perturbed by the Chinese invasion. He temporarily put aside his cherished policy of non-alignment and sent an appeal to all friendly nations (perhaps including Pakistan)! The United States and the members of the British Commonwealth responded favourably.

“When Washington finally turned its attention to India, it honoured the ambassador’s pledge, loaded 60 U.S. planes with \$ 5,000,000 worth of automatic weapons, heavy mortars and land mines. Twelve huge C-130 Hercules transport, complete with U.S. crews and maintenance teams, took off from New Delhi to fly Indian troops and equipment to the battle zone. Britain weighed in with Bren and Sten guns, and airlifted 150 tons of arms to India. Canada prepared to ship six transport planes. Australia opened Indian credit for \$ 1,800,000 worth of munitions,” wrote *Time*, the Weekly News Magazine of 30th November 1962.

But before this urgently required equipment reached the military training centres and the foothills of NEFA the Chinese had declared the cease-fire. However, the American Hercules transport helped the Indian troops in Ladakh in transporting men and heavy equipment. On the eastern front men and materials flowed into the Dirang valley, though no attempt was made to use the Indian Air Force in battle. The 62nd, 65th and 48th Brigades were sent to Kameng ; the first two entered the Dirang valley ; the third remained in the rear of the 4th Division.

In the evening of 17th November the 62nd Brigade with its four battalions, the 5th Artillery Regiment (24 guns) and one mountain battery was on the Se La pass and in Nuranang valley. Its head-



quarters had been established on the 'level ground' midway between Senge Dzong and the Se La pass. In addition the 65th Brigade Headquarters was also moving to the Senge Dzong area. Efforts were being made to bring it up to its normal strength. Its units were the 13th Dogras, the 19th Marathas and the 4th Rajputs. Their deployment was as under :—

(a) the 13th Dogras less two companies	area	Nikma Dzong
two companies		Bridge 2,
(b) The 19th Marathas less three companies	„	Dirang Dzong.
three companies	„	Dirang Dzong,
(c) The 4th Rajputs less two companies and two platoons	„	Poshing La.
one company and two platoons	„	Bridge 1,
one company	„	east of Nikma Dzong, and Orka La pass

The 48th Infantry Brigade was slowly creeping into the Bomdi La sector. The 67th Brigade was yet to leave Foothill for joining the 4th Division. Its units had not arrived in the Dirang sector up to the time when the Dirang Dzong campaign came to an end.

The 4th Division Headquarters, in addition to its above mentioned brigades, had one squadron of the 7th Cavalry comprising ten tanks—six in Dirang Dzong and four in Bomdi La. Besides, the normal quota of engineers and other personnel of services with one hundred and odd vehicles was also stationed in the divisional headquarters' camp. In the 4th Division the 4th Rajputs and the 19th Marathas were the only units which played an important role in the Dirang Dzong operations.

**The 4th Rajputs :—**The 4th Rajputs had concentrated at Missamari. They were sent to Kameng. They reached Bomdi La on 24th October. The same day the battalion was directed to send a company to the Orka La (13,000 feet). On the map the distance between Bomdi La and the Orka La pass is about 35 miles. To a casual observer the track from Bomdi La to the pass appears to be running along the crest of the Manda La ridge. But actually it is not so. The Manda La ridge is covered with coniferous trees and cut here and there by mountain streams, thus making the journey difficult. Hence the trek takes more than three days. But the

Rajputs under the command of Major PL Kukreti completed the trek within 28 hours. The Orka La stands above Sakden Gompa and guards the entrance to Bhutan from Dirang Dzong. Obviously the task of the company was

- (a) to guard the approaches to Bhutan, and
- (b) to secure the left flank of the Se La defences.

The company constructed local defences and improved them. On 11th November it received two mountain ( $2 \times 3.7$  How) guns.

Late in the night of November 16 the Rajputs heard the sound of firing in the Jang area where the Garhwalis had been deployed. In the next night also they heard the sound of intermittent firing in the same area. They thought that the Garhwalis were resisting the Chinese advance. They became more alert. In the morning of 18th November at 0630 hours Major Kukreti received a call on the wireless from his CO, Lieut.-Col Avasthi, from the battalion headquarters.

After despatching Kukreti's company Lieut.-Col Avasthi with his troops proceeded to Dirang Dzong and then to the Senge Dzong area. The battalion less one company was thus deployed in the Bridge 1 area. On 11th November Avasthi was asked to send one company to the east of the Nikma Dzong ridge. Its task was to arrest the Chinese infiltration from the east of the ridge. The same day a company under Major Nair was despatched to guard the eastern approaches to the Nikma Dzong ridge.

On 15th November a report reached the brigade that the Chinese would attack its line of communication from the east. The Rajputs, consequently, were instructed to reinforce Nair's column for intensifying combing up operations in the area. Soon after Avasthi despatched two more platoons to Major Nair. The same evening one officer of Nair's column was reported missing, but the incident did not cause any anxiety. It was believed that the officer must have lost his bearings which was quite probable in the hilly country covered with thick jungles and that he would rejoin the unit soon. But he never rejoined the unit and was declared missing later on.

On 17th November at 2100 hours Avasthi received orders to cover the withdrawal of the 62nd Brigade to Dirang Dzong. At that time the Commanding Officer of the 4th Rajputs had his headquarters staff including the defence platoon and a company less two platoons to guard the Bridge 1 area and the battalion locality. At the moment his concern was to see that Bridge 1 was not damaged so that the 62nd Brigade could pass without any mishap to the 4th Division Headquarters. The time limit within which the withdrawal was to be completed was also laid down.

In the morning of November 18 he contacted Kukreti and ordered him to withdraw either to the present position and join the unit or proceed to the Manda La pass to meet the battalion there. Probably he intended to withdraw his battalion via the Manda La pass. He tried to contact Major Nair but by that time the Chinese had infiltrated and deployed on the ridge just outside the Nikma Dzong village in the north. Avasthi is said to have failed to get in touch with Nair. It will remain a mystery how almost 600 Chinese with their heavy mortars and MMGs could infiltrate through the Rajput mobile column and bring about the collapse of the 62nd Brigade which eventually resulted in the collapse of the entire 4th Division. It is even more surprising that Nair did not attack the maintenance line of the Chinese who had occupied the Nikma Dzong ridge. The Chinese needed supplies to maintain themselves. Nair could have harassed the Chinese just as they harassed us.

So Avasthi waited for the 62nd Brigade to cross Bridge 1 safely and his companies to return to the unit headquarters as he had planned to retire as a unit.

The 4th Division Headquarters moved into Dirang Dzong on November 4. Soon after, the 19th Marathas joined the division. At 1800 hours on 15th November information was received in the divisional headquarters that the Poshing La had been overrun by a column of the Chinese. It was bad news. The situation was made worse by the news that the combined patrol had suffered heavy casualties and the remnants pushed back to the Kya La-Se La line. The following movements of troops were immediately ordered :—

- (a) The strength of the Rajput company under Major Nair was to be increased.
- (b) The 5th Guards to move to Thembang with a view to recapturing the Poshing La.
- (c) The 19th Marathas to send two companies to help the Guards to regain the lost ground; in addition a third company was to be despatched with the column to function as a mobile reserve. Here it may be pointed out that the IV Corps had asked the 4th Division to protect the left flank of the 5th Guards; consequently the 4th Division Headquarters passed on the order to the 19th Marathas.
- (d) One company of the Madrasis to move to Dirang Dzong to reinforce the divisional troops.
- (e) Two companies of the 13th Dogras to report to the division for the defence of the Dirang Dzong village.

Three companies of the 19th Marathas left Dirang Dzong the same night. They were divided into two columns—one proceeding to Dungma Ba and the other consisting of two companies to Chhandar. On 17th morning these companies reached their destinations. Unfortunately the same day the fall of Thembang was announced at 1645 hours. Fifteen minutes after, the Marathas were ordered to withdraw.

It appears that the 4th Division was not prepared to take risks; otherwise the Marathas were occupying ideal positions for cutting the supply line of the Chinese. This was an ideal opportunity for the Indians to pay back the invaders in their own coin. The Marathas had ammunition and porters who could maintain them for a few more days. With a little effort they could surprise the enemy. If successful they would have had no difficulty in capturing the enemy's food supply and porters. But the 4th Division Commander did not have the will to take even a calculated risk. It cannot be argued that the Marathas lacked training because soldiers of this race are born guerrillas. Probably a fear-complex gripped the 4th Division Headquarters. As a result every unit was ordered to concentrate at Dirang Dzong.

The Marathas returned to Dirang Dzong. They rejoined their battalion at 0700 hours on 18th November. Due to some reason the divisional headquarters did not know about their arrival. The divisional staff was thinking that the Maratha companies would take



at least 24 hours to reach Dirang Dzong. It is strange that the progress of the return march was not ascertained by wireless. It seems that the divisional staff had left the companies to their fate.

One company of the 1st Madras left Bomdi La at 2130 hours on 16th November. It reached Dirang Dzong next morning. It was at once placed on the high ground adjacent to Dirang Dzong village in the south.

The two Dogra companies also arrived at Dirang Dzong in the morning on 17th November. Their task was the same as that of the Madrasis i. e. :—

- (a) to guard the lines of communication of the 4th Division, and
- (b) to stop the Chinese infiltrators coming from the Manda La ridge to the divisional defences.

The Dogras were ordered to join the Madrasis.

As stated earlier the divisional commander had decided to leave the valley before the Chinese could cut his lines of communication. He and his staff left Dirang Dzong at 0730 hours—rather late. It is said that if he had known about the return of the Maratha companies he would have postponed his decision. The events do not bear out this assumption. If he wanted to face the Chinese he could do so without the Marathas. He had about 3,000 men, combatants and non-combatants, more than enough for the job. But he left the valley probably thinking that this step was wiser than waiting for reinforcements. What instructions he left and with whom for the rest of the units, including the 62nd Brigade, was not known even to the IV Corps Commander.

“I do not know what orders Pathania gave to troops remaining behind before they abandoned the general area Dirang Dzong or the main road.”

However, Pathania took the Manda La route and reached Assam on 21st November 1967.

After the departure of the divisional commander there was a

rush among the troops for escaping to the plains of Assam. The self-preservation instinct was the driving force that impelled them to take recourse to flight. They imagined that there was safety only in running away from the Chinese hordes. No discipline was left; the fear of being seen by their officers or superiors vanished. When the divisional commander himself had gone how could they remain in the field to fight ?

The Marathas took the Manda La track and escaped to Assam. They did not have to fire a shot. Others also followed the same route of escape. The Chinese had not discovered by then that the Indian stragglers could use the Manda La-Kalaktang route. On 20th November the Chinese sealed this channel of escape also.

It is wrong to say that all Indian officers and troops in the Dirang valley followed the line of the least resistance. There were some who remained true to duty till the end. Among them the following did good work in the valley :—

- (a) Major D'zousa, Second-in-Command of the 7th Cavalry,
- (b) Captain Rawat, a staff officer of the divisional headquarters and a JCO.

The officers realised the gravity of the situation. There were more than a hundred soft vehicles standing on the road; their tanks were full and they were road-worthy. There were enough guns and heavy mortars. Besides, there were engineering and ordnance stores the capture of which by the enemy would have been disastrous to the Indians. Therefore, they decided to link up with the 48th Brigade ( of Bomdi La ) and get reinforcements to fight the enemy, and provide cover to the retreating divisional troops. The officers had their personal weapons with them at that time. They could use four tanks (two were non-starters) for fighting their way through to Bomdi La.

They proceeded to the road junction from where the Manda La track bifurcates. Here a crowd of soldiers had concentrated to start on their journey to the plains of Assam. The officers persuaded some and ordered others to desist from running away. Some of the men obeyed and followed them.

The party had two tanks and gun ammunition. About 40 men volunteered to accompany the party. The tank crew under the command of Major D'zousa started the engines. At 10 o'clock the advance commenced. The tanks led followed by the infantry. As soon as the tanks reached the corner after which there was a dry gap cut by a seasonal nullah the column was fired upon. The Chinese had taken up positions in this valley on the right of the track from where they opened fire on the Indian column. Simultaneously RCL and MMG fire came from the left bank of the Dirang river. The tanks were damaged and could not move. The crews of both the tanks left their vehicles and somehow escaped. Major D'zousa and Captain Rawat led their men into the nullah gap to clear it of the infiltrators. When they reached the valley they did not find any enemy there, the Chinese had run away. The party returned to the village. After this skirmish D'zousa with a small party of troops left for Assam by the Manda La track. The remaining party tried the two remaining tanks. The JCO with the help of some technicians started the tanks, but they were fired upon from the left. The tanks had to be left standing on the road. The party turned their attention to the right and saw the Madrasis and the Dogras climbing up. To them the route to Manda La was preferable. The party was disappointed but did not lose heart. Rawat and the JCO led their men back to the heavy equipment. They destroyed the petrol dumps, the tanks of every vehicle and whatever else they could.

In those days there was a rumour in the country that equipment worth twenty-six crores lent by the NATO powers had been left behind in the Dirang valley. This was baseless. The 4th Division lost a few artillery pieces, both field and mountain guns, about 110 soft vehicles and ten tanks—six in Dirang Dzong and four in Bomdi La. Nevertheless it was disgraceful and cowardly to withdraw without the enemy having fired a shot. Even today the number of the Chinese who later on cut the lines of communication of the 4th Division is not known to certainty. But it is beyond doubt that their number in Dirang Dzong was not more than that of the Indian troops.

Having destroyed the tanks, guns, ordnance stores and soft vehicles the party came to the Manda La track junction. Captain

Rawat and the party decided to quit the valley. It was 5 o'clock in the evening when they took the Manda La route. They had hardly covered a few furlongs when they ran into an enemy ambush. Although the strength of the enemy was not much yet they could do nothing; they were surprised. The party suffered some casualties. Those who survived escaped to the plains by the Manda La-Shergaon-Kalaktang route ; Captain Rawat and the JCO were among the survivors. When these events were taking place Lieut.-Col Avasthi was waiting for the 62nd Brigade to cross Bridge 1, and his three companies to join the unit.

Lieut.-Col Avasthi along with his staff and officers waited the whole day (18th October) for the 62nd Brigade to pass through. But there was no news of the brigade. It had disintegrated and its men, in small parties, had escaped towards the NEFA-Assam border. There was no superior authority to permit Avasthi to withdraw from the position, and wireless communication with the division had broken down. Even if there had been one Avasthi would not have left the position, as he wanted his companies to return and join the battalion. Avasthi fully realised that the chances of his survival were receding as time was passing, because the enemy was busy in plugging up all the openings to the Brahmaputra valley. Still his martial spirit and devotion to duty did not allow him to leave the 62nd Brigade and his companies in the lurch. In the morning he had heard an exchange of fire and he might have concluded that the Indians were giving a tough fight to the Chinese. He had faith in his men and he could not imagine that the brigade had disintegrated and its defences fallen to pieces. However, the sun set and darkness enveloped the surroundings still he waited for some good news. By this time he had lost all hopes of receiving any news of the brigade, but he still hoped that either his companies would return to him or would communicate with him. He passed the night in anxiety. Next morning he decided to withdraw to Dirang Dzong to find out what was happening there. Before leaving the place he contacted Kukreti twice, once at 0800 hours and again at 0930 hours. Probably he knew the location of Kukreti's company at the time. After 0930 hours his wireless set jammed and he completely lost touch with the others.

In the night of 19th November Avasthi and his men comprising

one company from Bridge 1, one platoon of the company which had gone to reinforce Nair's column and the rest of the battalion headquarters staff reached a village in the Dirang valley. He learnt about the fall of Dirang Dzong from local sources. He changed his mind and gave up the idea of proceeding to the 4th Division Headquarters which was no longer there. He took to the hills. The party marched day and night, when feasible, otherwise at night. The country through which Avasthi and men were marching was hilly and covered with forests which proved a hinderance in the movement of the column. The party gathered strength ; stragglers from other units also joined it. The column was led by a sincere soldier. There was order, discipline and hope even in those who had been left behind to look after themselves. They were lucky to get such a good leader.

In the night a man would grab the belt of the man in front so that none lost the way. Thus the whole lot moved in a solid single line and penetrated through country that none of them had either reconnoitred or traversed. In this way they crossed the Manda La ridge at a point which they could not recognise. They descended into the Rupa valley. On 22nd November they reached the river. They had not heard about the unilateral cease-fire which the Chinese had declared on 20th November. They were armed and cautious. In the night of 22nd the column crossed the Rupa Chu and climbed the hill which skirts Shergaon on the left. Next morning the column was marching in the north of the Lagyala Gompa, near Moshing Dumbo village. Avasthi is said to have assured his men that if they could safely march for a few more hours they would reach the plains of Assam. In fact if they had been able to cross the minor pass in front of them they would have reached a point from where the downward march begins (Kalaktang is a few miles from the Gompa). But that was not to be. A few hundred yards before the pass there is a thick copse in which the Chinese had laid an ambush. The party was caught unawares in the enemy trap. The Indians tried to extricate themselves and in this attempt they killed more than a hundred Chinese, but they also suffered heavy casualties. Only a few escaped alive.

Avasthi led attack after attack against the Chinese who were well entrenched, but failed to dislodge them. He was wounded,

still he continued fighting till in the afternoon at 1700 hours, after seven hours' fighting he was killed. Avasthi, his officers and men fought a heroic battle. It is a pity that for some reason (probably political) the Lagyala action was officially not recognised and these Rajput heroes were denied awards. The officers who had helped Avasthi to lead the party were also killed : "the worst thing about war is that it takes the best". Thus ended the gallant struggle of a brave soldier. His body was identified by Major Kukreti later on.

At 0630 hours on 18th November Kukreti spoke to his CO on the wireless. Avasthi wanted the company to join the battalion headquarters. The major assured his CO that he would reach him the same evening. Avasthi had his doubts. Although the track from the Orka La to Bridge 1 is along a downhill gradient yet the footpath goes down the valley of a stream flowing in the west of the Nikma Dzong ridge. This downward journey would have prevented the party from completing the trek in that time. Even if Kukreti and his soldiers who were mostly young could have accomplished the task the CO must have regarded it better to order the company to meet him in the way to the Brahmaputra valley. There was no alternative course for uniting the company with the unit. This would have given a chance to Lieut.-Col Avasthi to keep his battalion as an organised body at least from the point of rendezvous.

Major Kukreti's desire was to carry out the orders of his commanding officer. If he had wanted to escape to the plains he could have easily done so by marching down into Bhutan from the Orka La which he was himself guarding, but he turned his back on Bhutan and marched to the Manda La pass. His move was in accordance with his CO's verbal orders which he had received by wireless. Unfortunately circumstances intrigued and his move could not be synchronised with that of his CO and his company marched to the plains of Assam, without meeting the battalion.

Kukreti had once come from Bomdi La and he was sure of the way. He guided his company unerringly to the Manda La pass. He reached there on 20th night. Next day he was in Phudong. His party was safely proceeding to Shergaon when his rear platoon was ambushed. There was an exchange of fire between the Chinese

and the Rajputs. Both sides suffered casualties ; the Rajputs lost ten men. However, the party reached Tezpur via Kalaktang. Later Kukreti was given the task of finding out the whereabouts of Avasthi and his men.

Major Kukreti with two Rajputs reached Bhalukpung on 7th December. By this time some information had reached Tezpur which was encouraging. He knew where to go to find what had happened to Avasthi. On 9th December the party reached Kalaktang and on the 10th Lagyala Gompa. In the evening a Chinese patrol passed through the locality. The party remained hidden in a copse. The cease-fire had been declared. Therefore, the party had been instructed to open fire only in self-defence. Moreover, its primary aim was to complete the job in hand and hence to avoid fighting in any circumstances. On 11th December the party reached the place of the tragedy. It was about 800 yards in the north of the Lagyala Gompa at a height of 9,000 feet. In December it is uncomfortable at this height in NEFA, still the party started digging up and indentifying the dead bodies which were about 140. The party spent two nights in identification work. Kukreti succeeded in establishing the identity of 70 men including the following:—

- (i) Lieut.-Col BN Avasthi,
- (ii) Major Trilok Nath, Second-in-Command, the 4th Rajputs,
- (iii) Captain Y Tandon, the Battalion Adjutant,
- (iv) Captain Dayal Singh, Company Commander,
- (v) The Regimental Medical Officer,
- (vi) 2nd Lieutenant Chhattarpati Singh, s/o Col Girdhari Singh,
- (vii) Subedar Major Prithi Singh,
- (viii) Subedar Gopi Chand, Defence Platoon Commander, and
- (ix) battalion head clerk and his staff.

Behind each is hidden a story of the brave fight which he had put up against heavy odds before he met a gallant death.

A similar fate had overtaken Brigadier Hoshiar Singh and his party. Like Avasthi the 62nd Brigade Commander was ambushed near a thick copse in the Phudong area after the cease-fire. Avasthi was killed on 23rd November and Brigadier Hoshiar Singh on 27th.

The Chinese had no hesitation in shooting down officers and men of the Indian Army even after the cease-fire which they had voluntarily and unilaterally declared. It cannot be imagined that the Indian officers and jawans in the adverse circumstances in which they were would have taken offensive action. It was the Chinese who surprised and killed the Indians.

There are some who maintain that immediately after the declaration of the cease-fire the Indian troops ought to have thrown away their arms. How ridiculous is the argument? Firstly the Indians did not know that the Chinese had declared the cease-fire. How could they know it when their wireless set had gone out of order and they had no contacts with the local population for fear of being detected by the Chinese? Secondly in the extraordinary conditions how could the soldiers discard their personal weapons? As the Chinese took the initiative in declaring the cessation of hostilities they ought to have taken steps to negotiate a local truce with the Indian parties also. They could drop pamphlets from the air to proclaim their peaceful intentions and employ the local population to settle the differences but they laid ambushes instead and killed hundreds of Indian officers and men. Their aim was to destroy the Indian forces in Kameng and certainly they succeeded in it.

Now is left the story of Nair. Avasthi contacted Nair and ordered him also to retire. The Chinese had infiltrated between Nair and the 4th Rajputs, therefore, probably there was no better course for Nair to follow than to retire by the Namsu-Thembang route, the safest route. He and his troops reached Assam in December 1962.

**Comments:—**1. The defence policy of the Chinese in Tibet has been to establish strong bases for their frontier guards in villages all along the Indo-Tibetan boundary with the co-operation of the local population. By this they gained useful information about Indian troop movements and secured local labour for transporting war materials to their forward posts. In the Dirang sector the Chinese troops had obtained full knowledge about the Se La-Mago and Mago-Poshing La routes before they marched into India and with the volunteer local labour force to help them they did not suffer from shortage of essential items.



2. In an emergency Chinese regular troops are brought in vehicles from their bases to the forward concentration areas. They are provided with (dry) rations and ammunition for a week. The local porters help them in transporting heavy equipment. These troops deliver a hammer blow to the enemy and retire. Chinese troops are trained to carry out such short offensives specially on Indo-Tibetan borders. As soon as the blow has succeeded they find an excuse to retire. This method is sure to succeed because the Chinese know that Indian troops will never try to take the initiative from them by opening another front elsewhere. They try to make up through diplomacy what they possibly lose by this voluntary withdrawal.

3. In the Dirang sector the Chinese did not have to launch an attack against a single strongly held Indian post. Therefore, it is needless to talk about their mobile tactics in offensive operations. In that sector their main tactics were to weaken the fighting spirit of the Indian troops by attacking the soft spots of their formations or their lines of communication. Here the weak points in the Indian defence were the Poshing La axis, the Nikma Dzong ridge and the Manda La-Kalaktang route. The Chinese succeeded in smashing these axes without much difficulty.

What counter-measures could the 4th Division take to neutralise the effects of the Chinese manoeuvres?

Offsetting the advantage of the co-operation of the local population to the enemy on the frontier involves political considerations. The Indian Army had nothing to do with it. The Chinese strategy of delivering a hammer blow as outlined above cannot be discussed separately because it is automatically included in the discussion of the counter-measures for meeting the attack on our lines of communication.

The Chinese used the tactics of attacking the maintenance zone at many places :

- (a) The Chinese attacked the 62nd Brigade's line of communication at Nikma Dzong. This infiltration brought about the collapse of six infantry battalions.

- (b) They infiltrated between the 4th Division and the 48th Brigade Headquarters via the Poshing La-Thembang route causing the collapse of the Bomdi La defences.
- (c) They infiltrated on both sides of the Dirang Chu river in the vicinity of Dirang Dzong village. This was a minor infiltration.
- (d) On 20th November they blocked the Manda La route by which the bulk of the Indian troops tried to escape. This infiltration caused heavy casualties among the Indian troops.

The above-mentioned Chinese infiltrations in (a), (b) and (c) could have been successfully countered, if a really serious effort had been made by adopting the same tactics as those of the invaders. The Indians also should have attempted to cut the lines of communication of the Chinese. The Indians had many chances of harassing the enemy but they did not take risks and did not operate behind the Chinese lines of communication. The opportunities of harassing the Chinese are explained below :—

- (i) Major Nair's column could have been reinforced and asked to operate behind the Chinese column which had taken position on the hill feature outside Nikma Dzong village. The same could have been done by the Marathas on the Poshing La axis. If the Indians had succeeded in plugging up the Chinese lines of communication for a week the Chinese soldiers would have died like flies for want of food and ammunition.
- (ii) The Dirang Dzong infiltration could have been stopped had the Madrasis and the Dogras been aggressive and carried out intensive patrolling of the area of their responsibility before the intrusions started.
- (iii) Now remains the question of the Manda La infiltration. When an army formation is under a siege it should be the responsibility of higher commanders to keep the exit open for the besieged troops. It was the job of Lieut.-General Sen to foresee this possibility and to take suitable measures to help the Indian troops to extricate themselves. An Indian brigade could have been deployed long before November 19 on the Manda La track in the Phudong area. Unfortunately the authorities were planning to shift the IV Corps Headquarters deeper into the country. "The decision to move the Corps Headquarters from Tezpur to Gauhati was reached in mutual consultation between me, Lt. Gen.

Sen and Gen Thapar. This move was carried out on the 20th November, . . .”, writes Lieut.-General Kaul. Obviously the Army Commander and the Army Chief were more interested in the rearward move than in the front-line operations..

The Chinese succeeded in their manoeuvres because the Indian commanders did not have the will to defeat them. Fear of defeat and capture, even before a Chinese appeared on the scene and fired a shot, haunted our senior commanders.

The Divisional Commander, Major-General Pathania, was an old soldier who saw active service in World War II and in the Kashmir operations in which he won the MC and the MVC respectively. He was assisted by five able officers of brigadier rank. He had enough troops, more than the Chinese, and more reinforcements were arriving. The terrain of the sector was also such that it could not be of advantage to either side. Considering all these factors we cannot comment or uphold the judgment of Pathania either on sentimental grounds or on unsound arguments. We shall have to take recourse to logic based on military history to scrutinise the process of reasoning which might have influenced Major-General Pathania to retire from the field.

In World War II ‘The Battle of Nyakyedauk’ or popularly known as the ‘Battle of The Admin Box’ was a historic event fought in Arakan which turned the tables on the Japanese eventually compelling them to vacate Burma. In this battle only two Japanese forces, equivalent to two brigade groups of our army surrounded six brigades—114th, 89th, 33rd, 9th, 123rd and 161st Brigades—of the XV Corps. In fact the first four brigades had the most difficult time. The worst thing was that the Japanese overran the divisional headquarters. The divisional staff was ordered “to fight its way through the Japanese to the Administrative Box”. In this ‘Battle of The Admin Box’ the Japanese were driven back with tremendous loss. This victory was achieved through two main factors. Before the battle Field Marshal Viscount Slim had assured the corps commander that in case the XV Corps was surrounded by the enemy he would drop supplies by air and would provide troops from outside to look after the communication zone. The units of the encircled force remained free to counter-attack the Japanese.

“.....if any XV Corps troops were cut off they would stand fast. I promised that, when necessary, they would be supplied by air and that they would be relieved by our counter-attacking force, with whom they were to co-operate by taking the offensive themselves at the first opportunity.”<sup>3</sup>

Major-General Elliot holds the same opinion in similar circumstances.

“Above all, to ensure that we should not be deflected from our purpose by being manoeuvred out of our positions, it was everywhere understood that formations which might be surrounded were to stand fast, and that immediate and continuous supply by air would be arranged for them.”<sup>4</sup>

In Dirang Dzong a similar situation existed. Here neither the Army Commander, Lieut.-General Sen, nor the Chief, General Thapar, could supply the 4th Division by air or arrange, at short notice, for guarding the communication zone of the 4th Division, Protection of the communication zone was left to the 4th Division itself. Under the circumstances how could Pathania think of fighting the ‘Battle of The Admin Box’ ?

Further, Pathania knew that the rout at Dhola and the withdrawal from Tawang of the Indian troops had demoralised them. To raise their morale the jawans needed success. But success is not everything. “Even without success, confidence in their leaders will give soldiers morale.” There was neither any chance for the troops to gain success nor leadership which could push out the Chinese from Indian territory. Pathania must have realised these difficulties. If he had possessed determination he could have followed the example of Avasthi, Major D’Souza and Captain Rawat. He could have waited for some time. After all man lives on hope. When Avasthi could stay at his post for more than 24 hours, D’Souza fight the Chinese for three and Rawat for ten hours on 18th November Pathania, the pivot of the formation, also could have waited for a few hours and directed the battle. Some fools may argue that the result would have been the same as in the case of Major D’Souza and Captain Rawat which is silly. Supposing that according to the calculations of the divisional commander withdrawal was unavoid-

---

3. *Defeat into Victory* by Field Marshal Viscount Slim.....P. 201

4. *A Roll of Honour* by Major-General Elliot (London 1965).....P. 283.

able specially after the disintegration of the 62nd Brigade at 0630 hours still there cannot be an excuse for headlong flight. As things stand today, and they foreshadow the future also, the Indian Army for a long time\* to come would not be in a position to face the mobile tactics of the enemy (specially when the enemy is China or a communist country). This does not mean that Indian formation commanders should always ask for a withdrawal. Definitely the Indian public including those who are against violence and measures to strengthen the Indian Army would cry 'no'. Under the circumstances the Indian formation commanders will have to make the best of a bad bargain and fight the enemy. When defeat and capitulation seem inevitable it is not necessary to run away as a rabble without striking a blow. Some solution can always be found and military history provides many examples of such solutions.

---

\* When China is exploding the hydrogen bomb India is begging the western powers for the protection of an atomic umbrella. On her home front she is cooperating with the UAR in the production of combat jet aircraft. The UAR is producing the machinery while sophisticated Indian metallurgists and skilled workmen have been successful in constructing the frame of the aircraft—not very commendable after 20 years of independence.

## CHAPTER VIII

# THE FORLORN HOPE

“The Indian people, fiercely proud of their nationhood, have been deeply humiliated and shaken by the hated Chinese.”<sup>1</sup>

### TIME

Last from the Tawang side but first from the south is the Bomdi La sector. Its northern limit is the Manda La ridge and the southern the Piri range which terminates at the NEFA-Assam boundary. Its eastern limit is the Bhreli river and the western the Bhutan boundary.

In the entire NEFA the Bomdi La area is peculiar. In every other division of NEFA the heights of outer hills do not exceed 5,000 feet but here the altitude of the Piri range at places touches five figures. In fact the Piri ridge is a bifurcation of the Se La offshoot and separates from it near the Orka La pass. It runs parallel to the Manda La ridge in an arc. Its bulge is towards the plains of Assam extending a few miles to the south of Shergaon. It runs up to the great bend of the Bhreli river

Besides the Piri range there are many of its branches, each separating a pair of streams rising from the Piri range itself. These spurs have given a south-easterly direction to these streams and rivulets. In the rainy season these streams make it difficult to journey from the south to the north or vice versa.

The Piri range is usually crossed at the Pankhim La (9,000 feet). The former is the entrance of Shergaon and the latter for Rupa. The heights of the Pankhim La and the Piri La are above 9,000 feet, but there is a third opening in the south of the Jamiri village which is less than 5,000 feet high. During the 1962 operations some groups of Indian stragglers avoided the Shergaon route.

---

1. *Time*.....*The Weekly News Magazine* of 30 November 1962.

After crossing the Phudon pass (7,040 feet) they crossed another pass and reached Kalaktang.

The biggest river of the region is the Bhreli. It drains the waters of the south-eastern face of the Se La ridge and the southern slopes of the Kangto massif (23,260 feet). Its main tributary is the Rupa Chu which issues from the Orka La. Rupa village is situated on the bank of this stream. Shergaon is located on the banks of one of its southern tributaries emanating from the Pankhim La. Besides the Rupa Chu there are many other rivulets in the region. The Belsiri is notable in them. On its bank but inside the foothills is located Doimara, a winter camping ground of the Sherdukpens, the inhabitants of the Rupa Chu basin. Foothill, an outpost of the NEFA administration, is also located near its left bank.

In the south of the Piri range the entire area is covered with ever-green forests. Here the trees are tall and their trunks are covered with many varieties of creepers. As one crosses the foothills deciduous trees make their appearance. Above 7,000 feet oak and tall rhododendron forests are found. In the spring season the region is worth visiting, the entire hillside is ablaze with a variety of bright colours. As a rule in the vicinity of the crest of the Piri range blue pines should be found but strangely there are none from Chaku to the Piri La. Probably this absence of pine trees may be due to the excessive moisture in the atmosphere. The Piri range is separated from the Manda La ridge by the Rupa Chu. On the Manda La ridge there are thick forests of coniferous trees, rhododendrons and silver firs. Spruce also grows here.

The climate of the region is also peculiar. In the south of the Piri range torrential rains evenly distributed throughout the year have made the climate of the foothills very damp and unpleasant. Dim dams and leeches abound here. In winter it is cool but after sunset doors have to be shut to keep out the moisture. Near the crest of the Piri range summer is warm and damp but during winter a blazing fire is needed to keep warm. The mean annual rainfall of the region is more than 200 inches. The Piri range stops the major portion of the monsoon from entering the sector. Therefore, the mean annual rainfall of the Rupa basin is about 60

inches. Obviously less rain and height have given the basin a milder climate, warm and damp in summer, cool and moist in winter. Because of pleasanter climatic conditions the Rupa basin has become the home of Sherdukpens whose origin is traceable to the Monpas of the north. This is proved by the fact that the Sherdukpens migrate to Doimara with their cattle in winter and return to their homes in summer. This migratory habit has existed in the community for generations.

In the east of Rupa village the valley loses height. The lesser is the height the warmer is the climate. Therefore, here live the Khawas and the Akas, the so-called tribal people of Kameng.

The eastern part of Kameng Frontier Division is the home of tribal people. No Monpas live here. The area gets more than 200 inches of mean annual rainfall. The Chinese did not operate in this region. It is the dark corner of Kameng; the eastern portion of the lower Bhreli river is the darkest. In its forests the Assam bison roams freely without the fear of being hunted by man.

The foothill forests of Kameng are full of animal life of which the elephant is the most conspicuous. As soon as the Government withdraws its protection the elephant will be hunted down to extinction by the local people.

**Routes :—**Previously the main trade route started from Udalgiri. It crossed the Pankhim La and entered Shergaon (6,750 feet). It continued in the north-easterly direction and crossing a minor watershed descended into the Rupa valley. Here is located Dumko village on a pine-clad hill. After the village it passed through forests of blue pines and oaks and reached Phudong village (7,040 feet). It continued ascending till it crossed the Manda La ridge covered with rhododendrons and silver firs. This route was open for traffic during the dry season only. During the monsoon season its foothill rivers were so flooded that to reach the Pankhim La from the south used to be a formidable task and therefore the eastern track was used.

The eastern track starts from Bhalukpunj and after running along the Bhreli valley for a few miles climbs up to the diminish-



ing height of the Piri range. After reaching its crest it descends to Jamiri village in the Rupa valley.

A footpath leaves the main track from Jamiri village. It climbs the eastern extremity of the jungle-covered Manda La ridge. Having crossed the crest it descends into the Dirang valley. After twists and turns it reaches Thembang. The route from Bhalukpunj to Thembang is very tedious, but most of the Indian stragglers who used it in their retreat in 1962 reached Tezpur safely. Even the Chinese avoided this forest-covered region.

The main track turns to the west from Jamiri and reaches Rupa and Phudong to join the Pankhim La route. Kingdon Ward once used it in the rainy season and returned to India from Shergaon.

When the NEFA administration was established in Kameng a new route was opened and improved. The older routes are now used by local people only.

This new route starts from Foothill. It runs into the Belsiri valley and passing through Doimara it starts climbing up. It passes through Keylong at the 17th mile and then a steep climb begins. After about ten miles the track reaches the crest of the Piri range. Chaku (7,890 feet) is another six miles from there. In 1959 this was the road-head. From here the path climbs up to the Piri La pass (9,280 feet) and then after passing through Jabrang descends to Rupa village in the Rupa valley. From here the bridle path crosses the beds of many rivulets till it reaches the bottom of the Manda La ridge. A stiff climb follows and then Bomdi La (8,500 feet) is reached. Another upward climb and the visitor is at the Rib La (named the Bomdi La II).

On 1st April 1959 the Foothill-Bomdi La road was completed; it was jeepable. Up to Chaku its alignment was the same as that of the footpath, but from Chaku the present road goes round a hill and after running for about 14 miles on a slow gradient crosses the highest point—Eagle's Nest (9,120 feet). From here it descends into the Rupa or the Tenga Pani valley. At the 52nd mile, about one and a half miles in the east of Rupa village, a nullah joins the

Rupa Chu. This nullah springs from the Manda La ridge a little to the east of the Rib La (9,640 feet). The road turns into the valley of this nullah. Here there is a deep gorge and a defile called the 'Rupa Defile'. The road crosses the nullah and then recrosses it. The road runs along the left bank of the stream. It skirts Bomdi La on the left and then climbs to the Rib La to descend into the Dirang valley. At the sixth mile a track bifurcates from it. This leads to Thembang. After this the road continues through Rahung village and reaches Dirang village, the centre of the Dirang Dzong sector.

## BOMDI LA OPERATIONS

**The enemy Build-up** :—The strength of the Chinese column which crossed the Tulung La on or after October 20 increased within three weeks to six battalions, of about 600 men each mostly composed of riflemen. The battalions seemed to be fairly independent in their operational roles. One-third of the Chinese column was sent towards the Kya La and the rest to the Tse La-Poshing La-Lagam axis. Here the activities of the latter will be dealt with.

By the first week of November about four battalions were assembled in the Turky La-Tse La area. Because of the supply difficulties the enemy took some time in completing this build-up. The footpath was unfit for animal transport. Therefore, he could bring only infantry weapons into India. Further, there seemed to be no necessity of a central or formation authority to control or synchronise operations. If Chinese formation headquarters functioned in the Bomdi La sector at all either its role must have been very minor or it functioned after the evacuation of Bomdi La by the Indian forces. From all accounts it is evident that the Chinese troops operated in units of battalion strength independently. In conformity with their role their area of operation extended quite deep into Indian territory. The Chinese would have established formation headquarters earlier had the Indian troops resisted their advance with some strength. It appears that the object of the Chinese forces after the collapse of the 4th Division Headquarters was to rout the Indian forces during the withdrawal. For this purpose about four battalions of the Chinese infiltrated into the Tse La sector. Their job was to cut the line of communication of the 4th Division and to capture

**Bomdi La.** This force appeared in the area after November 10. Later on it was reinforced by a couple of battalions. The last reinforcement proceeded to 'Rupa Defile' direct from Thembang.

The force comprising two batallions which was advancing towards the Se La descended into the Dirang valley. After capturing the divisional headquarters, vacated by the Indians already, the Chinese column proceeded towards Bomdi La on a wide front covering the Bomdi La-Dirang road and the northern foothills of the Manda La ridge. It was this column which intercepted the Indian forces in their withdrawal at Phudong and Shergaon after November 20. Up to that time this column did not appear to have taken part in the Bomdi La operations.

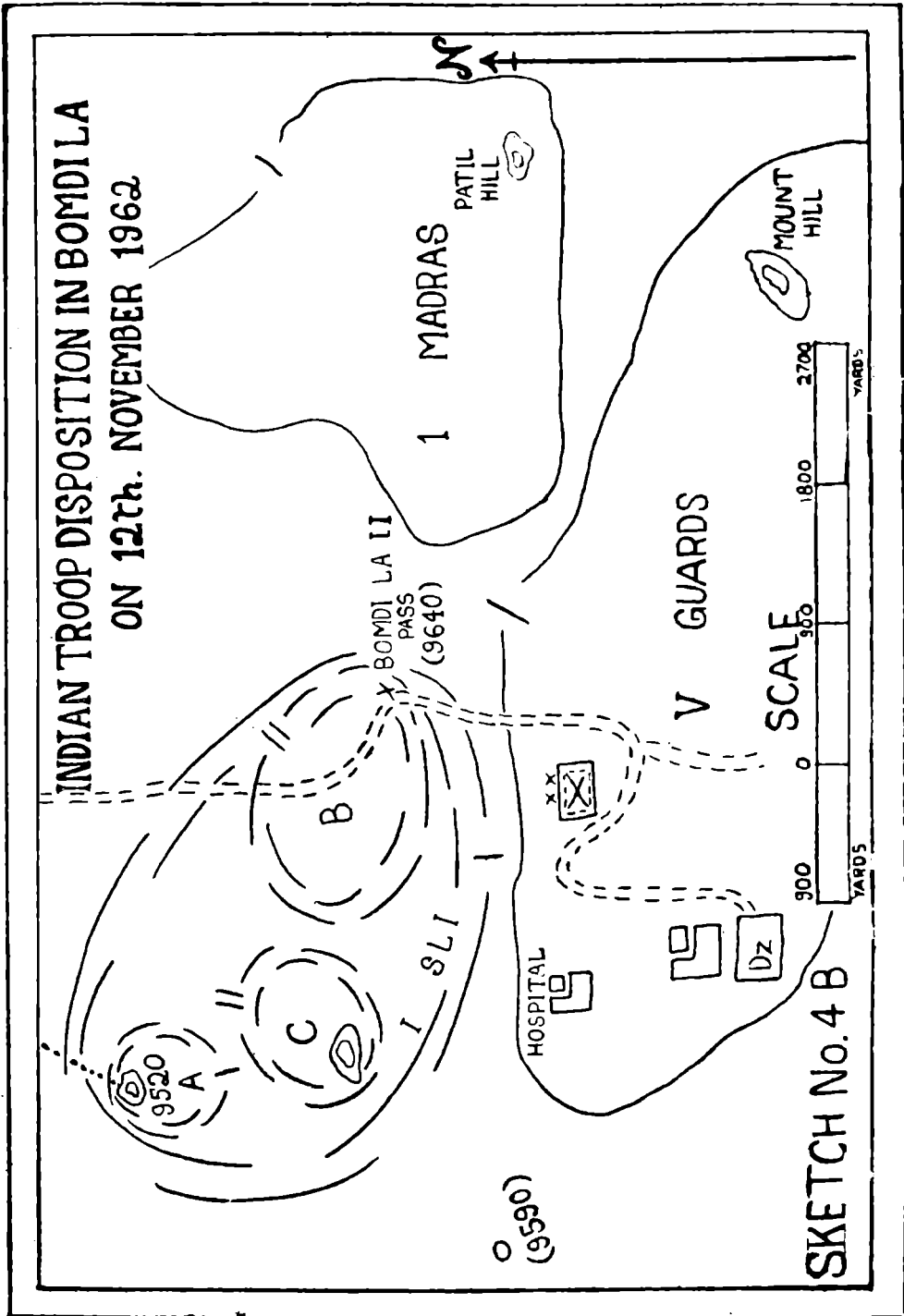
The third Chinese column crossed the Mukto Bridge. This force was also divided into two columns, one to cover the Dirang-Manda La track and the other to attack Bomdi La from the west. This column started operating on 17th November night. Thus the immediate danger to Bomdi La was from the east as well as the west.

**The Indian troops :—**Till the last week of October 1962 there were no regular troops in the Bomdi La sector. A company of the Central Reserve Police was performing station duties. Here was also located the headquarters of the 3rd wing of the Assam Rifles battalion responsible for the internal security of Kameng Frontier Division. Its distribution was as follows :—

- ( i ) two platoons posted at Sepla,
- ( ii ) two platoons at Bameng headquarters, and
- ( iii ) two platoons at the Chang La—about two miles in the south of the Poshing La.

After the first week of November, the 48th Brigade was to be sent to the sector. On October 20 this brigade was at Ambala. Its units were.

- ( i ) the 5th Guards,
- ( ii ) the 1st SLI (Sikh Light Infantry),
- ( iii ) the 4th SLI,
- ( iv ) a heavy mortar battery,
- ( v ) the 377th Field Company Engineers,



- (vi) a company of Mahars (MMG), and
- (vii) Advance Dressing Station, the 29th Field Ambulance,

The brigade's advance party comprising representatives of units under the command of the brigade left Ambala on October 22. The party reached Missamari on October 25 followed by the 48th Brigade Headquarters less the 4th SLI which was assembled next day. The 4th SLI was despatched from the Rangya railway station to the Se La area to be incorporated in the 62nd Brigade.

On October 27 the reconnaissance party of the 48th Brigade reached Bomdi La. Brigadier Gurbax Singh, the Brigade Commander, proceeded straight to Senge Dzong. The divisional commander had not arrived in the theatre. The IV Corps Headquarters in addition to its own commitments was looking after the work of the division also. The corps decided that the 48th Brigade should be deployed at Bomdi La. Its task was the guarding of the lines of communication of the 4th Division which was soon to arrive at Dirang Dzong.

Brigadier Gurbax Singh returned to Bomdi La and reconnoitred the area where he was to build brigade defences. He decided to have the brigade administrative headquarters at Rupa and tactical headquarters at Bomdi La. He confirmed his operational orders in writing. According to the plan of operations Bomdi La was to be defended by two battalions in the forward area and one battalion in the rear. The latter was to look after the dropping zone also. Having done that the brigade commander waited for his units to arrive.

On November 3 the 4th Division Commander, Major-General Pathania, arrived at Bomdi La on his way to Dirang Dzong. He approved the planning of the brigade commander. On 4th November divisional headquarters started functioning at Dirang Dzong.

On November 2 the men of the Assam Rifles at the Chang La pass suspected Chinese infiltration in their area. They sent this information to the IV Corps Headquarters. Consequently the 48th Brigade Commander received orders from the corps headquarters to despatch a platoon to the Poshing La-Chang La axis. On Novem-

ber 3 a platoon of the 5th Guards was sent from Missamari. It reached Dirang Dzong on November 4. The same day it marched towards the Poshing La. Captain Amarjeet Singh, the Company Commander, accompanied the platoon. He was given porters to carry the company stores. After a three-day march the party reached the vicinity of Dongri. Here the labourers ran away. It took more than a day to arrange for the transportation of the stores and another two days to reach the Poshing La position. In the evening of 12th November the platoon was in position at the pass. In the meantime on November 10 a local Monpa who was returning from Mago village had informed the Assam Rifles post at the Chang La that about 500 Chinese had crossed the Tse La and were heading towards the Poshing La with a view to advancing towards Thembang and capturing Bomdi La.

The news that the civil porters with the Guards' party had deserted and that the Chinese had infiltrated into the Tse La area was discouraging. It was flashed immediately to the 48th Brigade. The brigade at once sent a JCO with two sections to the Poshing La as a precautionary measure. The JCO reached the Poshing La on 13th November. Captain Amarjeet Singh had left for the Tse La to reconnoitre the area and to report about the suspected infiltration by the Chinese.

On November 11 the brigade headquarters received orders to raise the strength of the Poshing La post to a company. The reinforcements were to be despatched by the 13th and the compliance report to reach the 4th Division Headquarters by the 14th. The reinforcement was despatched in two parts as under :—

- (a) One platoon on November 12, and
- (b) the company headquarters plus the remaining platoon on November 13.

Geographically the Poshing La spur is a part of the Dirang sector, but tactically it was included in the Bomdi La sector. The distance between the Poshing La and Bomdi La is about 50 miles, and it is a strenuous march of three days in a very difficult terrain. Making allowance for transporting men and materials in vehicles up to the sixth mile from Bomdi La the distance comes to about

45 miles which is still too long. Despite the impediments the 5th Guards submitted the completion report on November 14. By that time only the JCO and two sections sent by the brigade had reached the destination ; others were in the way.

**The Brigade Build-up** :—On November 5 Brigadier Gurbax Singh was still waiting for the arrival of his units at Bomdi La. He received orders to send one infantry company to Phudong to guard the western approach to Bomdi La. Consequently on November 6 a company of the 1st SLI was despatched to Phudong (1st SLI less one company was still at Missamari). On the next day the 5th Guards less one platoon (platoon at the Poshing La) arrived at Bomdi La. On the same day the 1st Madrasis were attached to the 48th Brigade.

At 1000 hours in the morning of November 8 the brigade commander issued orders for the defence of Bomdi La. He received a battery of the 88th Field Regiment on November 14. Two days later a troop of heavy mortars also arrived. Thus the troops in Bomdi La were adequately supplied with supporting weapons. The 1st SLI Battalion was yet to arrive from Missamari.

On November 11 the 1st SLI less one company (company at Phudong) also reached Bomdi La. Immediately after its arrival it occupied its position and started digging trenches, bunkers and weapon pits. By 14th November its defences were ready. It means that the defences of the 48th Brigade were ready on November 14. On that evening the deployment of troops was as under :—

The 48th Brigade Tactical Headquarters	area	Bomdi La, on the high ground near the local circuit house.
(a) The 5th Guards less one platoon	„	hospital-dropping zone-Mount Hill,
one platoon	„	Poshing La.
(b) The 1st SLI Battalion Headquarters	„	Equidistant from Pts 9590 and 9520 and Bomdi La II.
(i) A Company	„	Pt 9520,
(ii) C „	„	battalion headquarters locality,
(iii) B „	„	Bomdi La II, and
(iv) D „	„	Phudong.

- (c) The 1st Madras area Right flank, high ground with Palit Hill being the dominating ground.

**Battle of Thembang** :—On November 14 about 100 Chinese were seen in the Tse La area. Their movement was reported to higher formation headquarters. The same evening Captain Amarjeet Singh was still somewhere between the Tse La and the Poshing La. His rear party comprising a platoon (including the JCO and two sections sent by the brigade) was at the Poshing La position. One company less one platoon of the Guards was still on its way to the Poshing La. There was no operational activity in the night of November 14.

In the morning of November 15 Captain Amarjeet Singh moved forward to find out the truth of the news regarding the enemy activity. At 1000 hours the officer was ambushed by more than 100 Chinese. He and his men fought valiantly but to no avail. He and most of his men were killed. The very fact that the officer along with the majority of his men was killed indicates that he preferred death to surrender or flight. Despite his daring leadership and devotion to duty the officer was not given any award. However, those who escaped joined their platoon at the Poshing La. Soon after this 300 Chinese attacked the post and took it. The JCO and his two sections returned to Bomdi La and gave the news of the tragedy. The remaining men of the Guards joined their company which was on its way to the Poshing La position. The depleted Guards company retired to Lagam and on November 16 occupied a hill feature in the north-west of Thembang.

The formation headquarters received the news of the fall of the Poshing La post and the death of Captain Amarjeet Singh at 1730 hours on November 15. After half an hour the 4th Division ordered the 48th Brigade to send one more company of the Guards with some fire-support to the Thembang area. The task of this company was to re-establish a firm base at the Poshing La pass with the help of the troops which were already there. Simultaneously the 19th Marathas were ordered to send three companies to protect the left flank of the 5th Guards.



The third step the division took was to strengthen its own defences. As discussed in the previous chapter a company of the Madras and two of the Dogras reported for duty at the divisional headquarters. The additional Guards company along with a section of 3" mortars was despatched at 0800 hours on the morning of 16th November. During this time the Chinese had reached Dongri. From here they despatched about three hundred troops to Dirang Dzong via Namsu village. These troops attacked the contingent escaping from Dirang Dzong on the morning of 18th November. The main body advanced to Lagam and occupied it. Having consolidated the position the column was sub-divided into two, the main column proceeded towards Sachi via Pangma and the other headed for Thembang. The 4th Division on receiving the news of the Chinese advance took immediate action. It ordered the 48th Brigade to send the rest of the Guards to Thembang with some additional fire-support. The order was conveyed to the brigade at 1030 hours, only two and a half hours after the despatch of the second company to the same area! The task of the 5th Guards was

- (a) to establish a firm base at Thembang by the last light on November 16, and
- (b) to recapture and re-establish the Poshing La post.

The 5th Guards less two companies ( the two companies were already deployed in the Thembang area ) and one section of mountain guns moved out of Bomdi La at 1600 hours on November 16. The battalion reached Thembang at 0630 hours on the next morning. By that time about one thousand Chinese had concentrated at Sachi and more were on their way to Thembang.

The CO of the Guards assessed the tactical situation. There were more than three battalions of the Chinese poised to attack the Guards from the Sachi and Pangma sides. If his battalion kept a pocket at the hill feature in the north-west of Thembang his strength would become divided. The Chinese would capture the hill feature and then attack the Thembang position. On the other hand if the Guards company was withdrawn to Thembang the Chinese would occupy the feature and dominate the Thembang area. Lieut.-Col Ajmer Singh, the CO, decided to withdraw the company to Thembang and face the Chinese as a compact battalion. In his view this

plan was expected to produce better results. The difficulty was that porters were not available to bring back the ammunition from the hill feature to Thembang. At 1200 hours the Guards company joined the battalion-defended locality with its personal arms; the company left the reserve ammunition on the hill feature. This proved to be a serious disadvantage to the battalion later on.

As soon as the Guards company vacated the hill the Chinese, as was expected, occupied it and thus secured a commanding position over the Thembang theatre.

Thembang is about 1,000 feet above the Dirang Chu. It lies on a plateau in the immediate east of which there is a small nullah which joins the Dirang Chu. Sachi is situated in the valley of this nullah. At about 1300 hours the Chinese mortars started bombarding the Indian position heavily, At 1400 hours the first enemy attack came. The Guards repulsed it with heavy loss to the enemy. The Chinese tried to storm the Guards' position but failed. Indian mortars and mountain guns inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy. Later on it was confirmed by the local Monpas that more than 400 Chinese had been killed on the Thembang field.

The firing at Thembang was so heavy that the battalion commander felt that ammunition would run out soon. He asked the brigade for more, but could not be supplied as the Chinese had cut the supply line to Thembang.

While the enemy kept up the pressure on the Thembang plateau a force of more than a thousand was seen surrounding the position on three sides in the valley. Their plan was to attack the Indian position from three sides; the fourth i.e. the Bomdi La side was already hard pressed by them. Ajmer Singh seeing the danger of being surrounded asked permission to withdraw. He is said to have told the 48th Brigade that it was not possible for him to hold Thembang for long. He was ordered to retire to Bomdi La.

Fighting had started at 1400 hours and was continuing at 1600 hours. At 1645 hours on November 17 the fighting ended and Thembang was captured by the enemy.

The route to Bomdi La had already been cut by the Chinese. The Guards could see it from their position. Therefore, there was no question of the Guards going to Bomdi La; they gave up the idea of returning to the brigade headquarters. The CO dispersed the battalion into companies and asked them to proceed to the plains of Assam as best as they could. The unit appears to have taken the Jamiri route. Some of its jawans went to Char Duar but most of them reached Foothill. The collapse of the 5th Guards was rather early. Till then the Chinese had not infiltrated into the Chaku-Rupa area. Thus most of the Guards reached the plains safely. The losses suffered by the unit were 3 officers, 2 JCOs and 85 other ranks in killed and one officer, one JCO and 45 other ranks in wounded. The loss clearly shows that the unit gave a stubborn fight to the enemy. After this the battalion did not meet with any further losses.

**Battle of Bomdi La :—**After capturing Thembang the Chinese crossed the river and climbed the Manda La ridge. At 2100 hours they reached the road-track junction which is six miles in the north of Bomdi La, and cut the line of communication of the 4th Division. The 48th Brigade was cut off from the divisional headquarters. The news was conveyed to the IV Corps Headquarters. At 2215 hours the corps commander ordered the 48th Brigade to despatch a mobile column of two companies with two tanks ( the other two being off the road ) and a section of MMGs to Dirang Dzong. The task of the mobile column was

- (a) to remove the Chinese road-block at the road-track junction in the north of Bomdi La, and
- (b) to link up with the 4th Division Headquarters.

At that time the deployment of brigade troops in Bomdi La was :

- ( i ) The 1st Madras less one company, the company was at Dirang Dzong.
- ( ii ) The 1st SLI less one company, the company was at Phudong.
- ( iii ) One troop of B Squadron of the 7th Cavalry (only two tanks were on road).
- ( iv ) One section of the 7th Bengal Mountain Battery.
- ( v ) The 88th Field Battery less one troop, the troop was with the Guards.
- ( vi ) One troop of heavy mortar battery.

- (vii) One section of the 7th Mahars (MMGs),  
the other section of the platoon with the Guards.

It means that there were only six infantry companies at Bomdi La to defend it. The defence plan was based on sixteen companies—twelve actually on the ground with their areas of responsibility allotted to them and the remaining four to serve as the brigade mobile reserve for being rushed to the spot where required. Evidently at that time there was a clear shortage of a battalion, ignoring the mobile reserve. In spite of this the IV Corps Commander wanted to send two companies of the 1st SLI as a mobile column to link up with the divisional headquarters. The brigade protested against the execution of the order immediately; it was not safe to remove troops specially at night from important ground which they were holding. Already the dropping zone, 300 × 300 square yards, was unguarded. If the troops were removed from the forward positions at night the Chinese were to occupy them unnoticed. In that case it would not be possible to expel the intruders afterwards. In other words Bomdi La would fall due to our own fault. The corps commander assured the brigade that two battalions, the 6/8th Gorkha Rifles and the 3rd Jammu and Kashmir Rifles (3rd J & K Rif), under the command of the 67th Brigade would be despatched to reach Bomdi La by 9 o'clock the next morning. The brigade commander thought that this would fully make up the already existing deficiency in the Bomdi La defences as well as that caused by the despatch of two companies of the 1st SLI and, therefore, agreed to send the mobile column as soon as the two battalions arrived. Thus the collapse of Bomdi La was averted.

The Bomdi La garrison remained alert the whole night. It expected a dawn attack but it did not come.

During this interval the Chinese column from the road-track junction which had reached Bomdi La heights remained hidden. The ground in Bomdi La is hilly and covered with thick forests. Therefore, it was not difficult for the Chinese to escape detection. Their second column was advancing from the west along the Manda La ridge towards Bomdi La. This column also had reached the outskirts of the town. Consequently Bomdi La was in danger of being attacked from the east as well as the west.

In the north of Bomdi La Thembang received more Chinese reinforcements from Dirang Dzong and Lagam. These troops formed a combined column which began to advance towards the Rupa Defile and Tenga Pani. Thus the lines of communication of Bomdi La were also going to be threatened soon.

The night of 17th November was uneventful. In the morning information was received that the 62nd Brigade had left its position to join the 4th Division Headquarters at Dirang Dzong. At 0800 hours on 18th November a message was received that the divisional commander and his staff had left for the plains at 0730 hours. Up to 0900 hours there was no news from the 62nd Brigade and of course the divisional headquarters had closed down one and a half hours earlier. Therefore, it was futile to send the mobile column to link up with the divisional headquarters which did not exist at all. The 6/8th Gorkhas and 3rd J & K Rif had also not reached Bomdi La. In their absence who was to man the bunkers of the two companies of the 1st SLI ? Still the IV Corps Commander insisted on the mobile column moving towards Dirang Dzong as soon as possible. The order was conveyed to the units concerned.

The B and C Companies of the 1st SLI left their bunkers and collected on the road below Bomdi La II. The two tanks and the section of mountain guns joined them. It was 1115 hours when the column was ready to move. Suddenly some Chinese were seen emerging from their hiding places. Some of them were seen advancing towards the bunkers just vacated by the 1st SLI. By 1200 hours the Chinese had occupied all the bunkers around Bomdi La II and on its west. Within an hour the Manda La column of the Chinese also arrived and joined the road-track junction party. Within a few minutes of the assembly of the mobile column the Chinese opened fire. The mobile column moved towards the north. As soon as it neared the Bomdi La pass the Chinese who had occupied it earlier fired upon it. It was impossible for the column to cross the pass. Consequently the column was withdrawn and dispersed. The jawans of the 1st SLI tried to reoccupy their bunkers but failed. They were sent to the rear for the protection of the dropping zone. They occupied the bunkers which had been lying vacant since the departure of the Guards, The intensity of the Chinese fire increased. The Indians replied with gun and mor-

tar fire from close range. The 48th Brigade had received artillery and mortar ammunition a day before in military trucks. Those vehicles would have returned to Foothill empty. They were employed to evacuate the civilian population comprising the government staff and their families to the rear. The Indian gunners used the ammunition with good effect against the enemy. It was this artillery fire that prevented the Chinese from overwhelming the Bomdi La defences. In fact, many hours after the evacuation of Bomdi La the brigade major with Lieut.-Col Gurdial Singh (of the 3rd J and K Rif) recovered important documents from the brigade office though it was dominated by a Chinese post located in the circuit house adjacent to it.

By 1400 hours on November 18 the Chinese occupied all the vacant bunkers in the forward as well as the rear areas of Bomdi La. After this the Chinese were seen advancing towards our right flank also, hence the position of the 1st Madras was also threatened. At 1600 hours the position became confused and the 48th Brigade lost control over the situation. Under the circumstances it issued orders (by wireless) at 1600 hours to units to withdraw to Rupa. It is doubtful whether battalion or company commanders were informed of the orders by their signallers. The signal section of the 1st Madras was informed of the orders at 1600 hours; the CO and the adjutant are said to have been away at the time. It is surmised that the signaller passed on the message to the commanding officer of the 1st Madras. It appears that there was confusion in the brigade and operational orders were conveyed to units only orally and in a hurry. Who was the advance-guard and who to cover the withdrawal? Moreover, the two battalions which had been expected to arrive at 0900 hours on November 18 were nowhere in sight. Therefore, the brigade commander probably in the knowledge of the corps headquarters decided to leave Bomdi La. In the opinion of some the brigade commander could have mustered strength and made a counter-attack at that time to relieve the situation. The commander thought otherwise. He issued instructions for withdrawal. The withdrawal was not regular and properly organised.

The 1st Madras started thinning out at 1700 hours and by 2100 hours the position was abandoned. The unit instead of going to the Rupa Defile proceeded slightly to the east to avoid the road. The

next morning the battalion less one company (company at Dirang Dzong) reached the lower reaches of the Tenga Pani or Rupa Chu and crossed it. The Chinese column from Thembang had reached there earlier. The majority of officers and men of the 1st Madras surrendered to the enemy without fighting.

The 1st SLI less one company (the company at Phudong) withdrew to the Tenga Pani and next morning it was in the south of the river on high ground.

The brigade commander left Bomdi La at 1600 hours for the administrative headquarters in Rupa. An hour later the brigade major also left for the Tenga Pani to contact the IV Corps and bring the 6/8th Gorkhas to the brigade headquarters.

When the brigade staff was on its way to the Tenga valley at 1700 hours, the brigade major met Lieut.-Col Gurdial Singh, the CO of the 3rd J and K Rif and his reconnaissance party. Their battalion was far behind following them to Bomdi La. It appears that no orders for the withdrawal were given to the new comers. Gurdial Singh and his party proceeded towards Bomdi La and the brigade party to Bomdi La.

At 1830 hours the 3rd J and K Rif reached Bomdi La and its jawans along with some stragglers were given the task of guarding the dropping zone. The Chinese continued firing towards the buildings and huts in the occupation of the Indian troops but they did not dare to assault the positions; the Indian guns were intermittently firing at them. The stragglers from the Guards and from positions around Bomdi La were arriving to take shelter in the local defences. At 2000 hours the number of such men was more than 200, excluding the 3rd J and K Rif jawans. Though hungry and without adequate ammunition the stragglers were prepared to fight their way out. These soldiers did not have a commander who could lead them. Without a good leader they were just a rabble.

Brigadier Gurbax Singh reached Rupa. Now he had to defend the Tenga valley. A little after his arrival he was informed that there were still about 200 troops left behind in Bomdi La. He thought of retrieving the position. The same evening he retur-

ned to Bomdi La. It was at 2100 hours that his staff decided to salvage the documents from the brigade office. As narrated earlier under the very noses of the Chinese the brigade major and Lieut.-Col Gurdial Singh proceeded to the office and removed the official records.

The same night a conference was held. Some were in favour of counter-attacking and recapturing the lost positions. There were others who agreed that there were enough troops and success was within reach, but they thought that by the time they recaptured the lost positions the Chinese would succeed in cutting the line of communication at the Tenga Pani. If that happened the Bomdi La garrison would be isolated from the rest of the brigade (in Rupa) and would be annihilated. Therefore, the opinion that the troops must withdraw from Bomdi La prevailed. The order for the withdrawal was given at 0300 hours on November 19. After retiring the troops were to rendezvous at Rupa. The brigade commander and his staff left Bomdi La immediately after issuing orders; the rest followed him later on. By 0600 hours Bomdi La was completely abandoned. In other words, the complete fall of Bomdi La took place fourteen hours after the official announcement.

The withdrawing troops reached Tenga Pani at 0630 hours. The 3rd J & K Rif also reached the Tenga valley without loss.

**Defence of Rupa:**—The task of the 48th Brigade was to hold Rupa. At the time the units in the Tenga valley were :—

- (a) The 6/8th Gorkha Rifles,
- (b) the 3rd J & K Rif, and
- (c) the 1st SLI.

(a) The Gorkha battalion under the command of Lieut.-Col Kale was to reach Bomdi La on the morning of November 18 by 9 o'clock and join the 67th Brigade. When about fifty members of the 67th Brigade staff reached Bomdi La at 1000 hours the Gorkha battalion was still at Chaku. Due to transport difficulties or some other administrative confusion the battalion reached Rupa instead of Bomdi La at 1400 hours on the same day. There was hardly any time left for the battalion to go to Bomdi La. Hence it stayed at Rupa.



On November 19 the brigade commander issued orders for the defence of Rupa. The 6/8th Gorkhas were to protect the approaches to Rupa from the north. By 0830 hours the unit took up its position on the high ground in the north of the town. The 5th Division was on its way to reinforce the Bomdi La and Dirang Dzong defences.

(b) The 3rd J & K Rif received orders to defend the nullah junction in the Tenga valley. The unit was to be deployed on the ridge running along the left bank of the nullah coming from the east of Bomdi La.

The CO, the adjutant and the reconnaissance party took a jeep and proceeded towards Bomdi La to reconnoitre the lower valley of the nullah. The jeep was accompanied by a truck carrying an escort party. As soon as the vehicles reached the Rupa Defile they were fired upon. All the occupants jumped out of the vehicle and took cover. Some were killed and some escaped, but the CO and the adjutant remained hidden. At 1500 hours the light of the sun fell upon them and exposed them. The Chinese surrounded them and made them prisoner.

(c) The 1st SLI was seen in the Tenga valley but after 11 a.m. it moved to Foothill. It is not known why the 1st SLI battalion withdrew to Foothill. It appears that the unit withdrew in the confusion prevailing on 18th November at Bomdi La. Although the withdrawal was afterwards regularised yet the temper of the SLI troops persisted and the unit withdrew to the plains of Assam as a routine operation.

The brigade commander seeing that there were only two battalions left with him decided to withdraw to Chaku. At 1100 hours the order for the withdrawal was communicated to the unit commanders concerned. This time the Gorkhas were to cover the withdrawal. The next position to be defended was Chaku.

The Gorkhas kept contact with the enemy throughout the withdrawal and enabled the brigade to withdraw to Chaku with ease. They performed the task of a rear-guard creditably. Their failure to reach Bomdi La on November 18 in time was compensated by their

action on November 19. In fact their performance in the withdrawal proved that they would have reached Bomdi La at the appointed time on November 18 but for some administrative error at the higher level.

At 5 o'clock in the evening of November 19 the 3rd J & K Rif and the 6/8th Gorkhas reached Chaku. A column of the Chinese moving along the road had already reached this place and taken cover. Another enemy column was following at the heels of the Indian troops which withdrew from Rupa. The second group also took cover in the vicinity of Chaku.

Brigadier Gurbax Singh ordered the units to hold the Chaku position. He sent for ammunition, digging tools and rations from the corps. The stores started arriving. Soon afterwards it grew dark. The Chinese took advantage of this. They advanced, surrounded the Indian defences and opened fire from all the sides. The Indians held their ground. The stores kept on arriving. Unfortunately at 0315 hours on November 20 a military vehicle carrying ammunition overturned on the road and blocked the passage. Frantic efforts were made to remove the obstruction. But due to darkness and under active field conditions it could not be done. The Indians could not hold on without ammunition in unprepared positions. They were fighting a losing battle. On November 20 they withdrew to Foothill. The Chinese did not pursue the Indians and changed the direction of their advance.

The Chinese aim of crushing the Indian formations in Kameng was partially accomplished. On November 20 no organised units or formations of Indian troops were left in the territory claimed by China. The only troops in Kameng were the stragglers who could not offer any resistance. Further, the Indian leaders' past and present declarations ruled out every possibility of Indian retaliation. The Indians had been virtually observing the cease-fire from the day the 4th Division Commander along with his staff left for the plains. Lastly in the tactical situation as it existed the Chinese could achieve their aim completely only after the cease-fire, they could carry out the mass slaughter of the Indians with ease. Being assured of achieving their aim they declared the cease-fire unilaterally on the midnight of November 20. Afterwards they ruth-

lessly indulged in the slaughter of Indians. It is worth noting that the number of Indian casualties after the cease-fire was more than before it. On the other hand the number of POWs was greater before the cease-fire than after it. Thus the Chinese accomplished their aim. They crushed Indian resistance in NEFA. Now their immediate aim was something else. It had far-reaching political implications.

The immediate aim of the Chinese was to reconnoitre the area in the vicinity of the trijunction of the Assam, Kameng and Bhutan boundaries so that if in future the People's Republic of China was required to describe the details of the trijunction it could do so without difficulty. Here it may be pointed out that after the Chinese government pushed the Outer-Inner Tibetan boundary from the north of Rima to the north of Tawang it started claiming NEFA as a part of China. The main objection of the world powers against this claim was that as no Chinese had put his foot on the territory China could not claim it as her own. Chinese patrols, therefore, rushed towards the trijunction in the vicinity of Kalaktang and must have studied the ground in great detail. It is because of this activity of the Chinese in this part that hundreds of Indian troops were ambushed and killed on the ridge in the north of Kalaktang. Chinese patrols were seen in this area even up to 15th December 1962. Now no nation can raise the objection that the Chinese do not know the territory they claim as their own; the Chinese can give a vivid description of the trijunction of the Assam, Kameng and Bhutan boundaries,

Thus ended the story of Kameng which will be remembered by the Indians with shame for decades to come.

## COMMENTS

The Thag La, the Bum La and the Tulung La are the three gateways to Kameng Frontier Division from the north. The episode of the first ended on October 20 and of the second four days later. The administration of the third had been neglected by the North-East Frontier Agency from the very beginning. The Chinese, during the inactivity of the Government of India in this direction, remained active and vigilant; they planned the invasion of Kameng

through the Tulung La also. For them the importance of the pass was greater than the other two. If a brigade group of Chinese troops crossed the Bum La to attack the Dhola sector, the same strength passed through the Thag La to overrun the Tawang sector. The Tulung La also had the concentration of an equal number of troops. The importance of the pass lay in the fact that it provided the attacking forces a chance of surprising the defenders of Kameng. Secondly, the Chinese troops which passed through the Tulung La-Tse La-Poshing La axis could push down to the communication zone of the 4th Division and cut at the very roots of the Indian contingents located in the Dirang valley. The third advantage to the troops infiltrating through the Tulung La-Poshing La axis was that their advance could be synchronised with that of the two other columns from the Thag La and the Bum La. The Chinese intention was to deliver a hammer blow with the three columns simultaneously. In fact this actually took place at Bomdi La. The column from the Poshing La attacked Bomdi La from the north and the east, while the columns from the other two passes attacked Bomdi La from the west bringing the collapse of the Indian forces in Kameng.

On the other hand the Indian Army's attitude towards the Poshing La-Lagam sector was just the reverse. The higher the Tulung La was listed in the Chinese strategy and tactics the lower was the priority in the 4th Division list of supply and maintenance so much so that up to November 12 there were no regular Indian troops on the Poshing La-Lagam axis. Only two platoons of the Assam Rifles were performing police duties at Chang La, in the south of the Poshing La. Even on November 12 a solitary company of the 5th Guards was sent piecemeal to the Poshing La area with its base 50 miles behind in a mountainous and jungle-covered terrain. The consequences of such negligence can be well imagined.

The Indian brigade at Dhola had been defeated and later on Tawang was evacuated without much fighting. When the Indian forces were facing reverse after reverse on the front Bomdi La was without any regular troops. This was a tragic state of affairs. No modern nation would establish a defence line without depth and a secure communication zone, but the Indian Army did it. When

they moved troops to Bomdi La they seemed to have learnt nothing from the fall of Dhola.

Before the 1st SLI moved into the Bomdi La sector one of its companies was detached from it and sent to Phudong. Could another battalion not be detailed to look after the Shergaon-Phudong area ? Afterwards, when the SLI moved to Bomdi La, it was not kept together as a unit. On November 11 it reached Bomdi La. It completed its defences on the 14th and on the night of 16th November it was asked to part with its two companies. In fact on the morning of November 17 two of its companies, though for a couple of hours only, were taken away from the battalion commander. The same thing had happened with other units as well.

The 5th Guards arrived in Bomdi La on November 7, but on November 2 they had despatched one of their platoons to the Poshing La area. On November 10 the battalion completed its defences and after two days it started sending a company in bits to the Poshing La-Lagam axis. At 1000 hours on November 16 the 5th Guards received orders to move to Thembang. At that time they had been divided into many parts, each separated from the other by quite a good distance. Could not the 4th Division realise earlier that at least one battalion was required on the Poshing La-Lagam axis to check the enemy from approaching Bomdi La to regain the initiative from the Chinese by recapturing the lost position ?

The 1st Madras was more lucky. It was split up into two parts only, one company at Dirang Dzong and the other at Bomdi La. It was the least troubled battalion but it also bothered least about fighting the enemy ; the main body surrendered to the Chinese without fighting.

This practice of 'buggering the troops' had been followed at Dhola, Se La and Dirang Dzong. The same mistake was repeated at Bomdi La also. This repetition of the mistake created a sense of disappointment in unit commanders, junior officers and hence among troops with the result that the juniors lost confidence in their seniors. The senior officers could not make up their mind for action. Today they wanted a platoon for an operation, tomorrow

a company and a day after a battalion. The local formation commanders in Kameng and the IV Corps Headquarters were living from day to day. If the Government of India was living and behaving in a day to day style the Indian Army in NEFA was not doing better either.

The second drawback of the army authorities in Kameng was that they were quite ignorant about the Phudong-Manda La-Thembang-Dongri-Poshing La-Tse La-Turkya La-Chera La route. Kingdon Ward and Bailey had traversed this route in the first quarter of this century and they have described the route in detail in the books written by them, still many Indian Army officers maintain that the route along the eastern slope of the Tse La spur was not known to the local commanders. The very fact that a senior officer in his book does not make any distinction between the Tse La and the Se La passes, although one is at a distance of 50 miles from the other, proves the contention. It was this ignorance which gave rise to confused thinking in the formation headquarters.

The 4th Division ordered a platoon of the Guards to proceed to the Poshing La and then a company and then a battalion. This building up of defences in a dark and distant corner of NEFA indicates that not only the urgency of the operation was not realised but also shows that there was a complete misunderstanding of the tactical problem. Had the formation commanders familiarised themselves with the terrain of the Poshing La-Lagam axis beforehand probably their action would have been different. But this familiarity required for its acquisition plenty of time. Unfortunately time did not favour those who had to defend the Bomdi La and Dirang sectors.

It is true that to justify a mistake one commits another and so on. That is what happened at Bomdi La. Sending a battalion from Bomdi La to Thembang was bad enough but to organise a mobile column out of the already committed troops for the defence of the base was worse. Further, for what purpose the column organised? To link up with 4th Division Headquarters which did not exist at all! The order for the despatch of the column was given at 2100 hours on November 16. For good reasons it was not carried out that night. It made ready to proceed on its allotted task

after more than fourteen hours. During this interval there had been a material change in the tactical situation at Bomdi La. This was not at all taken into consideration and the column was asked to form up on the road to move towards Dirang Dzong. As soon as it moved to the north it came under heavy enemy fire. It could not cross the Bomdi La II ; it had to be dispersed. This idea of linking up with the division was laudable but firstly it required troops from outside the Bomdi La garrison and secondly its time passed the moment the 4th Division Commander had left Dirang Dzong. No comments are needed if the idea was to bring the stragglers from the Se La and Dirang Dzong to Bomdi La.

By the withdrawal of the 1st SLI companies from their built-up positions to concentrate on the road the 48th Brigade provided a golden opportunity to the Chinese to come and occupy the bunkers left by the Indian jawans and dominate the sector by manning the local features. Thus the enemy won well-prepared defensive positions without firing a shot.

The mobile column, dispersed and the jawans tried to take defensive positions in their previously built bunkers. They could not do so. Afterwards they were shunted here and there. Obviously they got fed up and had no respect left for the organisation which directed the operations. In the end there was confusion and in that confusion units started withdrawing. The Madrasis went out of the control of the brigade in the afternoon of November 18. When they retired they withdrew not to the Tenga valley but to somewhere else to fall into the enemy trap. This disregard for orders from the brigade was noticeable on November 19 when the 1st SLI managed to reach Chaku from the Tenga valley on its own. In junior formations we may blame the unit commanders for this light-hearted attitude about the orders from the brigade but the fact remains that it was due to the wavering policy of the higher commanders which caused this confusion in the units.

When the 48th Brigade Commander had issued orders for the withdrawal there was no need for him to deviate from his directive. Why was the 3rd J & K Rif allowed to proceed to Bomdi La and guard the dropping zone in an area which officially had been vacated and the vacation announced ? Further, the presence of the

3rd J & K Rif in Bomdi La was in the full knowledge of the brigade staff officers who had issued the verbal orders for the withdrawal earlier. It means that either the brigade did not issue any orders and the units acted on their own initiative and withdrew to the places of their choice or if it did issue the orders the issuing authority was not sure of their compliance by units. Consequently Brigadier Gurbax Singh returned to Bomdi La and tried to mend his mistake by issuing a second order for the final withdrawal. This order saved the situation a little but it could not raise the morale of the troops.

A military officer is a soldier as well as an officer. As a soldier Lieut.-Col Gurdial Singh did not falter. He exhibited his keenness to retrieve the situation but as an officer he acted carelessly when without gathering enough information about the enemy he proceeded in a jeep in the direction from which the enemy was supposed to be coming. There was a general complaint that the units did not secure adequate information about the enemy through vigorous and extensive patrolling before planning an operation. Gurdial also suffered from this shortcoming. In fact he had more reason to be cautious, because he had entered the area only a day before and knew very little about it.

There was already some confusion in the brigade but the departure of the 1st SLI to Foothill must have upset the brigade commander. It is immaterial whether the 48th Brigade defended Chaku or not, because, under the circumstances it was very difficult for a formation which had carried out one withdrawal after another to defend Chaku. The confusion generated after the dispersal of the mobile column at Bomdi La persisted in the formation till its end came at Chaku. Formally there might have been no negligence on the part of the 48th Brigade Commander but history cannot absolve him of slackness in grasping the tactical situation and in acting indecisively to save his brigade from disintegration and collapse.

In the end it is to be recorded that Indian generals and brigadiers in Kameng overburdened themselves with responsibilities. In their anxiety to overdo things they demobilised practically every battalion commander of the 4th Division and disintegrated not only



units but companies also. This made it easy for the Chinese to defeat the Indian forces one by one.

The cause of the debacle is easily traceable to weak and spineless leadership in the Indian High Command. General officers failed to take timely and decisive measures and let the matters drift uncontrolled.

## CHAPTER IX

# THE STORM IN THE NORTH-EAST

“Many countries are devoted to peace. But I imagine that no country is more passionately devoted to peace and peaceful methods than India. To us war is hateful”<sup>1</sup>.

JWAHAR LAL

In the Chinese invasion of 1962 Walong, a collection of small villages, in the north-east corner of India became famous. It attained the same importance as Tawang and like the Tawang sector the Walong sector also attracted the attention of the reading public.

**The Walong Sector** :—In the north-east corner of India is situated the Diphu La (16,850 feet).

“The international frontier between Burma and Tibet is considerably north of the Diphu La, and a little above the junction of the Dichu with the Lohit”<sup>2</sup>.

“...the trijunction of India, Burma and China is five miles north of the Diphu L’ka Pass, and not at the Diphu L’ka Pass itself. The co-ordinates of the trijunction are approximately longitude 97°23’ east and latitude 28°13’ north”<sup>3</sup>.

The Chinese claim that the Diphu La is the trijunction itself. It makes a difference in the territorial extent claimed by India and China. If the Chinese claim is accepted the crest of the spur ( Ndap range ) branching from the Diphu La becomes a disputed feature. The spur separates the waters of the Di Chu and the Sat Ti Chu. The Chinese aim has always been to claim the crest of the last highest range from the Tibetan side as the Indo-Tibetan boundary and by including the Diphu La in Greater China the Ndap range provides the opportunity for raising a controversy where none exists. The Ndap range extends to Walong. In that case this village becomes Chinese territory and India loses more

---

1. *White Paper No. VIII* Govt. of India ( Delhi 1963 ).....P. 50.

2. *Salween* by Ronald Kaulback (Hadder and Stouton, London).....P. 46

3. *White Paper No. V* Govt. of India .....P. 20.

than 285 square miles of land to China. The controversy apart the sector is bounded by the Himalayan Range in the north and east. The range is the watershed between the Lat Ti Chu ( in Tibet ) and Di Chu ( in India ). From the Diphu La extends to the south-west and then south-east a mountain wall which separates Lohit Frontier Division from Burma. It is called the Patkoi Range. In the west of the sector there is another mountain range which separates the Miju Mishmis from the Idu Mishmis residing in its east and west respectively. In the south also unidentified mountain ranges border the sector. Thus the Walong sector is a bowl-like tract surrounded by hills. Besides, many spurs or ridges, each separating a pair of streams cut the bowl laterally. These ridges slope from east to west on the eastern bank and from west to east on the western bank of the Lohit river. They are tactically important. If sufficient time has been spent on the logistic build-up of troops of a force retiring from the McMahon Line and adequate reinforcements are available to sustain their effort, they can put up lateral defences across the bowl to offer a stiff resistance to the invader from the north. But to bring supplies and reinforcements into the sector is difficult for any nation let alone India which is economically and industrially an undeveloped country. Even if supplies are air-dropped a large portion of them is sure to be lost in the forests.

**Rivers** :—The prominent rivers of the area are the Lohit, Di Chu, Sat Ti Chu and the The Chu. The Lohit ( the Tsayul Chu of Tibet ) enters India at 4,500 feet. In its downward course many tributaries join it from the east and the west. At every river junction the rivers have cut deep gorges and footpaths along the river banks have to make wide diversions to avoid them. On account of geological difficulties in the region bridge construction has been difficult. The Mishmis have constructed rope bridges ( called *Tune* in Kumaoni ) across rivers. There is one at Walong and another in the east of Kibithoo near the McMahon Line.

The main tributary of the Lohit is the Di Chu. It rises from a point four miles in the north of the Diphu La. It flows between two mountain ranges and after running for about fifty miles joins the Lohit river. In the middle of its course are the Hot Springs, a suitable camping ground for troops on patrol. Five miles upstream from the springs is a dropping zone.

In the south of the Di Chu is the Sat Ti Chu. The two are separated by Ndap range having an average height of 11,000 feet. The Sat Ti Chu rises from the mountain range forming the Indo-Burmese boundary and joins the Lohit below Dong village.

The third river of note is the The Chu which emerges from a mountain range along the crest of which runs the Indo-Tibetan boundary. It joins the Lohit below Kibithoo. Besides the three tributaries mentioned above there are other streams which have their own tactical importance.

**Flora** :—The area is covered with thick forests. On the lower heights there are dense bamboo forests. Where the bamboo is less prominent there are *broad-leaved* ever-green and tall trees the trunks of which are thickly covered with creepers. Above 5,000 feet oaks, rhododendrons and *pinus excelsa* also form a part of the forest wealth. Above 11,000 feet the vegetation is temperate. Coniferous trees of spruce and juniper variety intermixed with silver firs grow here. It is clear that the 1962 operations in the Walong sector were conducted in jungle-covered mountains and valleys.

**Fauna** :—Like the terrain and vegetation the fauna also varies. Wild boars, bears and panthers roam in the forests while pythons, karait, cobras and vipers creep on the ground. Except the lizards which hibernate up to 8,000 feet other animals are found in forests much higher. Above 9,000 feet is found the *takin* along the Di Chu river. There is such abundance of game here that the porters of early travellers lived mostly on the meat of local fauna.

**Geological Aspect** :—On account of the geological defects of the land much trade never passed through Lohit Frontier Division. Captain Cooper in 1860s and 1870s tried to open a trade route to China along the Lohit valley, but failed. Individual trekking has always been the rule and it will remain so till the Himalayas have been stabilised in this region. It is a well-known geological hypothesis that the northern land-mass comprising China and Tibet is pressing against the Gondwana Land, the southern land-mass comprising India minus the Himalayas. In the Walong sector the southern mass consists of hard and old rocks. These are resisting the pressure of the northern mass. Because of this, and some other

geological reasons, here the hard and old rocks of the southern mass have protruded into the northern mass. This pressure from the north meeting resistance from the south has strained the earth's crust. As the struggle between the two forces is continuous, the geological instability of the land in the Walong region is also continuous. Therefore, for a long time to come the Walong sector will remain a geologically disturbed region.

In 1910 a Chinese general forced the local population to construct a road to India through the Lohit valley. After hard labour the Mishmis constructed a road up to Manikaran. Ultimately the general gave up the attempt and withdrew to Rima and then to Szechuan.

**Routes :—**The Rima track runs along the right bank of the Lohit river. It connects Hayuliang with Manikaran and Walong. There are many stairways which have to be negotiated before the McMahon Line is reached. Beyond Walong the track passes through small villages and reaches Kibithoo, a frontier village. The distance from Walong to Kibithoo is about 17 miles. The McMahon Line is reached after another three miles. Beyond the McMahon Line the track enters Tibet and passes through Sama and Tattoo villages to reach Rima, a Tibetan administrative base.

Another track parallel to the above mentioned route runs along the left bank of the Lohit river. In its lower portion its gradient is steep. It passes through the densest forests of Lohit Frontier Division. In the Walong sector it passes through Tinai (a small village opposite to Walong), Dong and Kahoo. The last is in the Di Chu valley. The track meets the western track at Rima. This track on account of its forested and highly undulating terrain is seldom used by outsiders. Like the western track it is unsuitable for animal transport. The former can be used for carrying heavy loads with some difficulty but the latter is absolutely unfit for such traffic.

There is a third track which enters Lohit Frontier Division from Tazung Dam. After crossing the Diphu La it descends to a lake. Having skirted it the track drops to a height of 12,000 feet and enters the Di Chu valley. The Hot Springs are reached after another two days' journey and Kahoo two days afterwards. The

distance between the Hot Springs and Kahoo is 25 miles. There is a steel-rope bridge across the Lohit river near the Di Chu-Lohit junction ( called Sangam ). This track joins the western track at Kibithoo. A bifurcation of the track joins Kahoo with Rima.

Besides the above-noted tracks there are other footpaths which are used by the local Mishmis and Bhotias only. The area is sparsely populated. Often there is not a single house or hut to be seen for miles around. This may be the reason that the Han in spite of his greed for grabbing others' territory did not expand his empire to the Lohit Frontier Division.

**Journey** :—The distance from Lohitpur ( Dening ), the road-head, 9 miles from Tezu, to Walong is 108 miles. European travellers with all the paraphernalia of an expedition used to cover the distance in fifteen days, while Indian troops in small parties usually take ten days. Naturally such a time and energy consuming mode of travel could not be relied upon for a rapid movement of troops and supplies in an emergency. Therefore, in the 1962 operations war equipment and men were flown to Walong. In fact Walong garrison lived almost on air-drops or *Otter* landings. At Walong there is a landing-ground on which small aircraft like *Otter* could land. Now-a-days the landing-strip is being widened to take a Dakota. In the north lies Kibithoo which entirely depends on air-drops. It has been provided with a dropping zone in its south.

**Landmarks** :—The most prominent and dominating feature in the Walong sector is the height 14,470 feet. It is about ten miles in the north-west of Walong. Another feature which has a bloody history is the Trijunction ( 13,250 feet ); it is in the south-east of the 14,470 feet height. In the east of the Trijunction are situated the Yellow Pimple and Green Pimple. The three features form a triangle, the Yellow Pimple being the northern apex. On the right ( facing north ) of the Green Pimple are the Patrol Base, the Lachhman Ridge, the Maha Plateau, the Mithune and the Ladders. The last lies on the Kibithoo track. In the south of the Mithune-Ladders is a small 'stream'. These landmarks are on the right bank of the Lohit river. On the east bank are the High Plateau, Dong Hill, Dong Peak and Dakota Hill. Proceeding in a clockwise direction comes the East Ridge and across the river the Yepak plateau

on the west bank is reached. Around Walong are the Avalanche Hill, Mor Post, Firm Base, West Ridge and the landing-strip. In the north of the Maha Plateau at a distance of one and a half miles is Ashi Hill in the south of which flows the Namti river.

On the frontier the westernmost landmark is the Gleil La (12,820 feet). There is point 10,000 feet in the north-west of Kibithoo and just in its south is a lower height of 9,000 feet. In the north of the boundary is Sama village (in Tibet) and in the south is Kibithoo (in India) both being about three miles from the frontier. About half a mile to the south of Kibithoo is the dropping zone. On the east bank of the Lohit is 'Sangam' (river junction) in the north-east of Kibithoo. The dominating feature of 'Sangam' is Hump. To the east of Sangam is the Dichu Ridge. It is on the right bank of the Di Chu river. The dominating point of the Dichu Ridge is Top. About half a mile in the north of the Dichu Ridge is the McMahon Ridge the dominating feature of which is Dome. Twenty miles from Kahoo up the Di Chu valley are the Hot Springs and seven miles further up is the Jachap post.

## THE BATTLES OF THE WALONG SECTOR

**The Chinese Intrusions** :—The first intrusion of the Chinese into the Walong sector was noticed in October 1957 when a small party of Chinese troops penetrated into Lohit up to Walong. On being challenged the party returned to Tibet. In the same year Chinese survey parties entered the division several times. On 28th September 1958 another Chinese armed party of an officer and fifty soldiers intruded into the Di Chu valley. The party reached a point approximately  $28^{\circ}15'$  north and  $97^{\circ}15'$  east, while the co-ordinates of the trijunction of India, Burma and Tibet are  $28^{\circ}13'$  north and  $97^{\circ}23'$  east. Evidently, the Chinese advanced into the Di Chu valley up to Jachap. Afterwards they offered some excuse or other for these intrusions. According to an official note of 3rd April 1960 the Government of the People's Republic of China stated that,

“Monyul, the area of Lower Tsayul including Walong not only was inhabited by Tibetans, but was always under the jurisdiction of Tibet. British troops unlawfully invaded and occupied Walong in 1944; and it was only after the local Tibet government

sent a representative of the Dzong pon of Sangacho Dzong to make representations that the troops withdrew”.

On the contrary the history of China leads us to a different conclusion. The Chinese through these intrusions familiarised themselves with the terrain of the Di Chu and Lohit valleys. The knowledge so gained could be used in future military operations. It means the Chinese intrusions were made with the purpose of reconnoitring the ground on which they were planning to operate against India.

**The Chinese Appreciation and Plan :—**From the nature of the ground the Chinese must have concluded that infiltration through the Di Chu valley would give them a chance to swoop down from a higher to a lower height and to attack the right flank of the Indian defences with good prospects of success. But they must have also seen that the maintenance of the column advancing along the Di Chu valley would be difficult and the valley would not provide a broad front for their troops to manoeuvre. Further the Sino-Burmese frontier had not been finally settled between Burma and China. It was pending till India and China concluded a frontier treaty delimiting the Indo-Tibetan boundary in this part. At present the territory between the Diphu La and the boundary trijunction of India, Burma and Tibet as shown in survey maps of India is disputed by the Chinese. The Chinese did not like to enter the disputed territory unnecessarily. Even if the Chinese consider the Diphu La to be the trijunction the problem for their troops entering from the Diphu La is not solved. In that case the Chinese troops would have to pass through Burmese territory. Probably the Government of the People's Republic of China did not like to offend the Government of Burma. Therefore, the Chinese ruled out the possibility of attacking the Walong sector from the east. On account of limited space for manoeuvring troops and difficulties of maintenance the Chinese also discarded the idea of attacking Walong from the west.

The favourite tactics of the Chinese to attack enemy defences are to engage the enemy in front and to manoeuvre the troops so that reinforcements cannot be received from the bases in the rear. The Walong sector is bounded in the east and the west by mountain ranges which run north-south. Further, the sector is traversed



by rivers and mountain ranges sloping towards the Lohit river. These two physical features make the manoeuvring of troops to the rear of the defenders of the Walong sector a very cumbersome business. Therefore, sending pincers from Tibet to meet behind Walong was not possible. The Chinese, therefore, gave up the idea of enveloping the sector by two wide pincers. They could, if so desired, proceed to Hayuliang direct from the McMahon Line, but to accomplish this they had to cross the mountain ridge forming the western boundary of the sector. If they had done so without overcoming the Walong garrison their lines of communication would have become exposed to Indian counter-attacks. The Indians could have interfered with the Chinese maintenance line whenever they liked. Therefore, the only alternative for the Chinese was to attack the Walong defences frontally. In this case the Indians were faced with the same disadvantages as the Chinese, they also could not manoeuvre their troops to harass the rear of the Chinese if the latter advanced far into Indian territory ( there was no chance for the Indian troops to go into Tibet ). Therefore, the Indians could offer a stiff resistance to the Chinese advance with a limited number of troops on a limited front. Consequently, the Chinese frontal attacks, in spite of fewer opportunities for manoeuvring troops on the McMahon Line, had good chances of success provided they could maintain continued superiority in men and fire-power over the defenders. Because of these tactical limitations, the Chinese knew that they could concentrate only a limited number of troops in the area. They were fully aware that the Indians would not try to move into Tibet and therefore the outcome of their invasion would be, after some time, to compel the Indian troops to fall back further south from the McMahon Line leaving space for the Chinese troops to move in. In other words the build-up of the Chinese troops depended upon how soon the Indians retired from their forward posts. In the beginning the Chinese assembled a battalion at Rima. By the time the hostilities ceased Rima was the base of a brigade and the Ashi Hill area of the remaining brigades of a Chinese infantry divisional group ( more than a division ). The Chinese also moved their field artillery to their forward areas. Thus they became much superior in number and fire-power to the Indians in every aspect.

**The Defence of Walong :—**Immediately after coming of the 4th

Infantry Division to NEFA an Indian Army brigade was sent to Walong. Its task was to support the Assam Rifles, if need arose. The policing of Lohit, as of the other NEFA divisions, was the responsibility of a battalion of the Assam Rifles. Its three wings were distributed as under :

- (a) One wing in western Lohit Frontier Division for the Dibong valley,
- (b) one at Hayuliang, and
- (c) one at Walong.

The Walong wing manned only the Kibithoo frontier outpost. This post guarded the Di Chu valley and sent patrols up to the Diphu La.

On account of the intransigence of the Chinese all along the Indo-Tibetan border, the Government of India, under the Onkar Operation, increased the number of frontier outposts in the Walong sector by three platoon positions. These were the The Chu (ten miles in the west of Kibithoo), the Hot Springs and the Jachap. The The Chu post guarded the entrance to the The Chu valley from the west, while the remaining two were in the Di Chu valley. The The Chu was provided with its own dropping zone while the other two shared a common dropping zone which was between them. On the creation of these outposts Kibithoo became the headquarters of one wing of the Assam Rifles. Walong accommodated another wing, thus there were two wings of the Assam Rifles functioning in the Walong sector.

After the launching of the Onkar Operation, the 2nd Rajputs were kept as a reserve battalion to support the wings of the Assam Rifles. At that time the 5th Infantry Brigade was responsible for the defence of the Walong sector. The maintenance of the troops in the Walong sector was done by *Otters* and air-drops.

**The Battle of McMahon Ridge** :—The 2nd Rajputs were relieved by the 6th Kumaonis in April 1962. In July the 5th Brigade Headquarters ordered the Assam Rifles to establish a platoon post on the McMahon Ridge. After a few days the OP on the McMahon Ridge reported a heavy build-up of the enemy at Sama and Rima. The 5th Brigade at once posted a company of the 6th

Kumaonis on the Dichu Ridge. Thus the disposition of troops of the 5th Brigade on October 18 was as under :—

(a) The 6th Kumaon Battalion		
Tactical Headquarters	area	Kibithoo.
Administrative Headquarters	,,	Walong,
(i) A Company	,,	Dichu,
(ii) B Company	,,	East Ridge, moved to Kibithoo dropping zone on October 22,
(iii) C Company	,,	Kibithoo, and
(iv) D Company	,,	Ladders, moved to Kabithoo dropping zone on October 20.
(b) One company of the 1st Sikhs	,,	Lachhman Ridge, Maha Plateau, Mithune and Ladders.
The other company of the 1st Sikhs	,,	Dong Plateau, Dong Hill and reverse slope of Dakota Hill.

On October 18 a Kumaoni patrol noticed that a Chinese patrol of 2 officers and 50 other ranks accompanied by a lama as guide had occupied point 10,000 feet. The Kumaonis at once ordered the Assam Rifles platoon, under command, to occupy height 9,000 feet opposite the Chinese post. This bold action of the Chinese alerted the Kumaonis. On October 19 the Kumaoni commander sent a platoon of the A Company to reinforce the McMahon Ridge post. Simultaneously the commander asked for reinforcements. In response to his request the D Company from the Ladders joined the Kibithoo defences on October 20 and the B Company set out for the Kibithoo dropping zone to assume defence duties. It reached there on October 22. Thus the whole battalion of the Kumaonis was about to concentrate at Kibithoo very soon.

At 1900 hours on October 21 a few Very Lights were fired in the Sama area (in Tibet). The same night Major Gomathinaygam, the Company Commander, moved with a platoon less a section to the McMahon Ridge. Thus the McMahon Ridge was held by a

platoon of the Assam Rifles and a company less a platoon and a section of the Kumaonis.

At 2330 hours on October 21 the Chinese opened fire on the McMahan Ridge. For about half an hour the Indians were subjected to heavy enemy small-arms fire and shelling. As soon as the fire lifted about 300 Chinese attacked the McMahan Ridge and another hundred attacked the Top in the Di Chu valley. Naik Bahadur Singh of the Kumaonis guided mortar fire on the enemy with good effect. The enemy was met with rifle and mortar fire and suffered heavy losses. Consequently the enemy's first attack was dispersed but soon the second came. This time about 500 Chinese attacked the McMahan Ridge and Top and another 200 assaulted the Hump. The fighting on all the three positions of A Company—Dichu Ridge, Sangam and McMahan Ridge—continued for four hours. The Chinese overwhelmed the Indian posts. Major Naygam was wounded but he successfully withdrew his men to Sangam. In this action about 100 Chinese were killed while the Kumaonis suffered only 9 casualties i.e. one officer, Major Naygam, and five other ranks were wounded and three other ranks killed.

During the McMahan Ridge operation Naik Bahadur Singh not only guided the mortar fire with terrible effect on the enemy but also fought the Chinese with bravery. He took over an LMG from the two gunners of his section who had been wounded and kept on firing till the last moment when he was fatally hit in the chest by a burst from an enemy machine-gun. He died on the spot. For this act of bravery Naik Bahadur Singh was awarded the VrC.

At 0700 hours on October 22 the entire A Company and the platoon of the Assam Rifles withdrew to Sangam and crossed over to Kibithoo. On October 18 the outposts at the Hot Springs and Jachap had been ordered to move to Kibithoo at the earliest. They also crossed over to Kibithoo the same morning. The withdrawing troops destroyed the steel-rope bridge. Therefore, the Chinese could not cross the river to attack Kibithoo from the east. For the time being the right flank of the Kibithoo garrison was safe.

**Kibithoo Abandoned** :—Simultaneously with the launching of the onslaught on the McMahan Ridge about 100 Chinese attacked the

post. The Assam Rifles platoon did not have the means to withstand the assault. The enemy overran the post. Those who escaped proceeded to the south under the leadership of Naib Subedar Ao, an Assam Rifles JCO. The party crossed a mountain range and after marching for nearly a month reached Hayuliang via Minuatang. Naib Subedar Ao died of exposure and fatigue on the way.

After the fall of the The Chu post the left flank of Kibithoo became exposed. On the right flank also the Chinese sooner or later would be able to cross the river and threaten Kibithoo. In front, the Chinese had already entrenched themselves at point 10,000 feet. Their OP at this place was accurately guiding the Chinese artillery fire. Chinese continued to bombard the Indian positions on October 22. It was clear that the enemy would launch a massive attack at night. At Kibithoo the maintenance of troops by air-drops was not possible. The 5th Brigade, therefore, decided to withdraw the Kumaonis to Walong. The battalion received the orders for the withdrawal at 1600 hours on October 22. At that time the B Company was on the point of entering Kibithoo. It turned back and with the rest of the battalion having assumed the duties of the advance-guard withdrew to Walong. The D Company was stationed at the Kibithoo dropping zone. It was ordered to act as the rear-guard of the battalion. At the end of the withdrawal the D Company was to halt at Ashi Hill and establish a screen position there.

The Kumaonis carried out the withdrawal successfully. The D Company under Lieutenant Vikram Singh established the screen at Ashi Hill by the evening of October 23. On the same day the rest of the Sikh battalion reached Walong. Besides the arrival of the reinforcements there were other changes in the command. Lieut.-General BM Kaul was lying sick in Delhi. On October 23 Lieut.-General Harbax Singh was appointed the Officiating Corps Commander. At the same time the 5th Brigade was to be replaced by another infantry brigade. The former was entrusted with the defence of the middle sector (in Assam). On October 23 the 2/8th Gorkha Rifles, one of the units of the new brigade, arrived at Walong. More units were yet to come. The new brigade commander was also expected to visit the sector soon to gain a first-hand knowledge of the local conditions.

**The Kumaonis at Ashi Hill :—**At 0300 hours on October 25 the Chinese bumped into the Kumaoni screen. The defenders, due to the restricted field of fire and with the intention of inflicting the maximum casualties allowed the enemy to come within rifle range. In front of Ashi Hill there is a small stream across which there was a suspension bridge. The bridge had been damaged by the Kumaonis. The Chinese did not know this fact. The forward elements of the advancing column stepped on to the broken bridge. A Chinese walking at the head of the column fell into the river. His shouts attracted the attention of his companions. They flashed their torches to locate him thus exposing their own position to the Indians. Lieutenant Vikram Singh fired a Very light. The Chinese were caught on a narrow fording point unawares. The D Company supported by MMGs and mortars inflicted heavy damage on the enemy. About 70 Chinese were killed or wounded, while the casualties among the Kumaonis were three men killed, one wounded and one missing. At 0400 hours the Kumaonis were ordered to retire to Walong.

**Comments :—**Kibithoo is 17 miles from Walong. It is a two-day march. Therefore, the Kumaonis could not do much there except to fight it out with the Chinese as best as they could. Probably their main objective was to delay the advance of the Chinese so that in the meantime the Walong defences could be strengthened. This purpose was achieved because on the 23rd October infantry units started arriving in Walong. If the Kumaonis had withstood the Chinese onslaught longer, they would not have gained much. Without reinforcements they could not fight. If they had remained longer, they would have been mauled so badly as to be useless for future operations. The Kumaonis, therefore, had to withdraw to Walong. Even after the Ashi Hill action their morale was not high.

**The 4th Sikhs :—**On September 12 the 4th Sikhs were at Ramgarh near Ranchi in Bihar. The unit received orders to move to an unknown destination. On 22nd September they reached Jorhat. On 27th September their A and B Companies arrived at Walong and formed the advance-party of the battalion. These companies waited for the rest of the unit to arrive which it did on 23rd October. Probably the withdrawal of the Kumaonis from Kibithoo hastened its coming. The Sikh battalion was not yet

ready to be thrown into the battle that was being fought about two days' march away. Therefore, the decision to withdraw the Kumaonis to Walong was timely and correct.

## THE BATTLES OF WALONG

**The Indian Troop Build-up :-** After the withdrawal of the Kumaonis from Kibithoo a new brigade was to arrive at Walong. On 27th October Lieut.-General Harbax Singh, the Officiating Corps Commander, visited Walong. He was accompanied by Brigadier JC Hartley MC. Lieut.-General Harbax Singh is the Colonel Commandant of the Sikh Regiment, besides being a Sikh officer himself. Brigadier Hartley also happened to be an old officer of the Sikhs; he had commanded the 16th Sikhs in Italy in World War II. The 4th Sikhs were happy and their morale rose high. They presented two Chinese automatic rifles to their colonel. They had captured these weapons on a patrol. It is a pity that Brigadier Hartley did not like the sector to display his soldierly qualities which had enabled him to win the Military Cross in World War II. Hartley left the sector on October 31 for good. Brigadier Naween Rolley with the 11th Brigade came to the Walong sector. Thus on October 27 the Indian troop disposition in the Walong sector was as under :-

(a)	The 4th Sikhs Battalion	area	West Ridge,
	Headquarters		
	(i) A Company	„	Dakota Hill
	(ii) C Company	„	High Plateau,
	(iii) B Company less one	„	Maha Plateau,
	platoon		
	one platoon	„	Mithune,
	(iv) D Company	„	Lachhman Ridge,
			and
	(v) battalion mortars	„	on the reverse slope
			of Dakota Hill.
(b)	(i) One company less one	„	Ladders,
	platoon of the 2/8th G.R.		
	one platoon	„	Maha Plateau,
	(ii) the CO along with his		
	reconnaissance group		on the east bank.
(c)	The 6th Kumaonis	„	Walong.
(d)	Two wings of the	„	station duties and
	Assam Rifles		patrolling the flanks
			of the sector.

- (e) The advance-party of the 3/3rd G. R. had also reached Hayuliang.

After seeing the ground the officiating corps commander is said to have opined that Walong could be transformed into an impenetrable defence box which could be successfully defended by the 4th Sikhs, 6th Kumaonis and two wings of the Assam Rifles. Consequently, the 2/8th G. R. troops were considered to be surplus; they were ordered to return to their unit. At the same time the 3/3rd G. R. was also ordered to return to Hayuliang and wait there for further orders.

On October 29 Lieut.-General BM Kaul returned from Delhi and resumed the command of the IV Corps. Within a few days of his arrival the 2nd Infantry Division under the command of Major-General MS Pathania was formed. The defence of the Walong sector was entrusted to the 11th Brigade under Brigadier Rolley. This brigade was a part of the 2nd Division. Brigadier Rolley asked for more units. The 3/3rd G. R. returned to Walong.

In the first week of October the 3/3rd G. R. were fighting the Pak intruders on the Feni river in Cachar. They had inflicted heavy casualties on the intruders and driven them out of Indian territory. After this success they were expecting to be given rest and leave. To their surprise their advance-party was suddenly ordered to move to Chhabua (Indian airfield near Jorhat) and after that to Hayuliang. On October 27 the CO of the 3/3rd G. R. and his reconnaissance party reached Walong. He at once proceeded to the east bank of the Lohit river for reconnaissance. Soon he was recalled and ordered to return to Hayuliang with his party. He was now to wait for further orders. During this time a change in the command necessitated a change in the disposition of troops in the Walong sector. The 3/3rd Gorkhas were absorbed in the new set-up. Consequently the unit was flown back to Walong.

With the recall of the 3/3rd G. R. the 4th Dogras the 1st Assam and the 1/5th Gorkhas were also ordered to concentrate at Hayuliang or Walong. The Dogras arrived at Walong on 15th November and the other two units reached Hayuliang at the same time. They were to wait for orders. In fact the 1/5th Gorkhas received



orders to move to Walong but by that time the fight was over. A company of the Dogras proceeded on 16th November to take part in the battle. Two of its platoons broke through the enemy lines and reached their destination. They withdrew with the Kumaonis to whom they were temporarily attached.

Ultimately on the evening of November 15 the deployment of troops in the Walong sector was as under :--

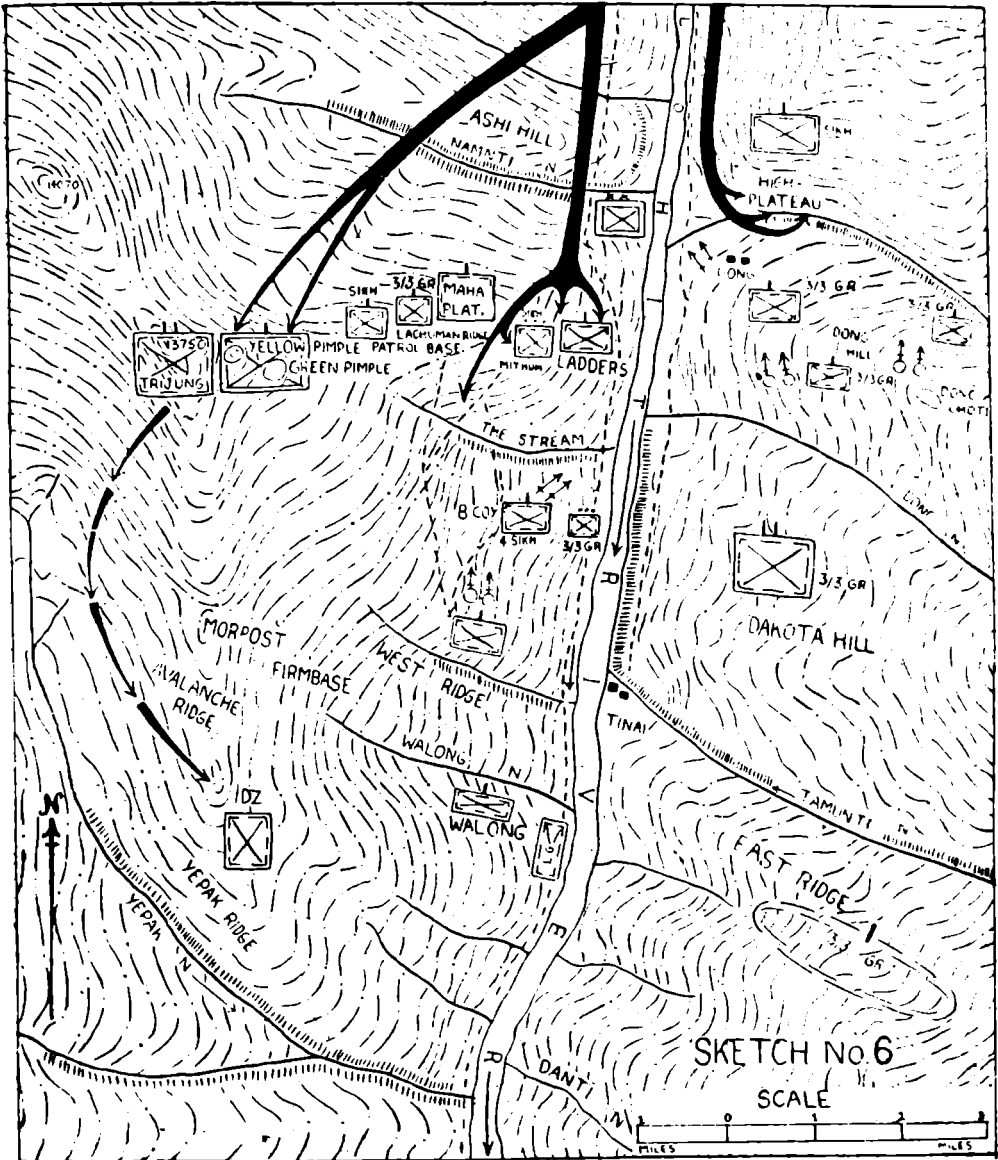
The 11th Brigade		
Tactical Headquarters	area	southern slopes of Trijunction,
Administrative Headquarters	,,	Walong.
(a) The 6th Kumaonis less one company	,,	Trijunction,
(i) one company	,,	West Ridge,
(ii) 3" mortars	,,	Mor Post,
(iii) battalion rear headquarters	,,	Firm Base.
(b) The 4th Sikhs Battalion Headquarters	,,	Forward slope of West Ridge,
(i) A Company	,,	Patrol Base established on November 7.
(ii) C Company	,,	Maha Plateau,
(iii) D Company	,,	High Plateau under the command of the 3/3rd G. R., and
(iv) 3" mortars	,,	battalion locality.
(c) The 3/3rd G. R. Battalion Headquarters	,,	Dakota Hill,
(i) B Company	,,	Lachhman under the command of the 4th Sikhs,
(ii) D Company less two platoons	,,	the 'Stream',
two platoons	,,	Ladders under the command of the 4th Sikhs,
(iii) A Company	,,	Dong Hill,
(iv) C Company	,,	Dong Peak, and
(v) 3" mortars	,,	reverse slope of Dakota Hill.
(d) Six platoons of the Assam Rifles	,,	Patrolling and other station duties.

**In Support**

- (i) One battery of heavy area mortars as shown in the sketch,
- (ii) one battery of mountain guns ,, ,, ,, ,, ,, and
- (iii) one battery of field guns ,, ,, ,, ,, ,,

**The Enemy :—**

- (a) One division less one brigade ,, Ashi Hill, and
- one brigade ,, north of Ashi Hill.



**Note :—**The Chinese were provided with rubber boats to cross the river for operating on the east bank. The brigade in the north of Ashi Hill was to cross the river to operate on the east bank.

**First Contact With The Enemy** :—The distance between the Ladders and the Ashi Hill posts is about a mile. The D Company of the Kumaonis withdrew to the friendly position at 0600 hours on October 24. The Chinese seemed to have followed at the heels of the Kumaonis, because, at 0730 hours on the same day about 700 Chinese attacked the Ladders along the Walong-Kibithoo track. This was the first time when the Chinese made contact with the Sikhs. The Ladders position was well covered by heavy mortars and MMGs placed on the back slope of Dakota Hill on the east bank. These weapons fired accurately and incessantly. They scored considerable success, about 40 Chinese were killed. The attack was beaten back and the Chinese retired to the Ashi Hill area to regroup and reorganise. Soon after a company of the 2/8th Gorkhas less one platoon arrived and relieved the Sikhs at the Ladders. The remaining platoon joined the Sikhs at the Mithune. Thus the Ladders was defended by a company less a platoon and the Mithune by two platoons. On the same night the Chinese in larger numbers attacked the Mithune-Ladders positions. Again they were repulsed with heavy loss. They could not recover their dead, hence they set fire to the forest in front of the Mithune-Ladders positions so that the Indians might not find any dead bodies of the Chinese (the Chinese attach much importance to their dead soldiers in the field and try to recover them at any cost). The enemy incessantly fired incendiary bombs to burn up the forest. The fire raged for days. The whole atmosphere was filled with the stench of the burning dead bodies. This stench told the true story of the huge loss which the Chinese had suffered on October 24. The Chinese again attacked the Mithune and Ladders positions consecutively on October 25 and 26. The enemy apparently wanted to penetrate through these positions to Walong but failed. In these clashes Sepoy Kewal Singh of the Sikhs won the MVC on the night of October 26. This was the first MVC awarded in the Walong sector.

It became a daily routine of the Chinese to attack the Mithune and Ladders positions. It was also a daily affair for the Indians to repel these attacks forcefully. As soon as darkness fell the Chinese attacked and the Sikhs and the Gorkhas fought them back inflicting heavy losses. For the Chinese the Mithune-Ladders positions became the 'Tiger's Mouth'. This exchange of fire was so regular that Indian troops from other posts used to visit the

Mithune-Ladders area daily to see the fighting. It was like an amusement for them. The firing taxed the Chinese heavily. On November 2 the local Chinese commander sent a message to the rear for permission to withdraw but it was refused. The Chinese never like to lose face. Probably Indians did not realise it.

**Patrol Activities :—**The Chinese firing on the Mithune and Ladders positions was a ruse to cover their operational activities somewhere else. Behind the screen of this firing the Chinese constructed a track from Ashi Hill to the Green Pimple post and started their build-up unchecked. Soon our left flank was in danger.

On November 3 the 2/8th Gorkhas were relieved by a company of the 3/3rd Gorkha Rifles. Now the 3/3rd Gorkha company less a platoon manned the Ladders position. This platoon was placed on the high ground in the south of the 'Stream'. Another company of the same unit relieved the Sikhs at the Lachhman picket. The Sikhs after being relieved started aggressive and intensive patrolling.

On November 4 a Sikh patrol noticed a movement in the Green-Yellow Pimple area. In fact immediately after completing the Ashi Hill-Green Pimple track the Chinese occupied the two hill features, consolidated their positions and laid a telephone line to interconnect them with Ashi Hill. The same evening the Sikhs laid an ambush on the Green Pimple track. About one hundred Chinese passed that way. They sensed the presence of the Indians and attacked them. The Chinese suffered heavy casualties, while the Sikhs had one other rank killed and seven wounded. The patrol recovered the casualties and brought them back safely to its position.

After the occupation of the two pimples the Chinese dominated the Walong area. They were guiding their artillery fire on Indian positions accurately. If allowed to stay for some time more they could launch a major offensive from that direction. Anticipating the danger the brigade commander decided to dislodge the Chinese from the Green Pimple.

At that time the A and B Companies of the Sikhs had been in their posts for long. Hot meals and a bath had become luxuries for them; they could not clean their hair throughout this period. On

the other hand the Kumaonis had recovered from the after-effects of the withdrawal forced on them by the circumstances at the time. They were considered to be fit for an offensive.

**The Green Pimple :—**Although the Kumaonis had been doing patrolling and exchanging fire with the Chinese yet this was their first offensive action against the enemy well entrenched on a dominating feature at a height of more than 12,000 feet. The task of dislodging the enemy from the Green Pimple was allotted to the A Company under the command of Captain Mathur. Its objective was the top of the pimple.

The company was to get fire-support from heavy mortars, but for unavoidable reasons this could not be given. In spite of that the company launched the attack at 0850 hours on November 6. The hill-men captured the forward bunkers of the enemy. The Chinese counter-attacked. The Kumaonis were subjected to a heavy fire which was accurate and intense. They fought for an hour but could not capture the objective. It was an uphill task for a single company to dislodge the enemy who was entrenched in more than a company strength on a dominating feature well supported by automatic fire. The company without superiority in numbers and fire-power could hardly be expected to capture a high feature in a jungle-covered mountainous terrain. Captain Mathur realised that soon their ammunition would be exhausted and he would not be able to extricate his men from the jaws of death. He judiciously decided to pull back his troops. Even if he had captured the Green Pimple he could not have held it against Chinese counter-attacks which were sure to come. Mathur withdrew the company to the battalion position on the West Ridge. In this operation 23 Kumaonis were killed and wounded. Captain Mathur was awarded the VrC afterwards.

**The Kumaonis Occupy the Trijunction :—**After the above-noted reverse the Indian troops in the Walong sector intensified their patrol activity. On November 11 a platoon of the Kumaonis was detailed to proceed on patrol to the Mor Post. The patrol cautiously reached the objective and found it vacant. At once a message to this effect was sent to the battalion headquarters. Lieut.-Col Madiah, the Battalion Commander, ordered the patrol commander, a young

lieutenant, to proceed to Trijunction and report the situation there. The patrol proceeded to Trijunction along the spur jutting out from the objective itself. To its surprise the patrol found that Trijunction had not yet been occupied by the enemy. On receipt of the situation report the CO directed the patrol to stay on the objective. Soon after the battalion tactical headquarters with a company moved to Trijunction and consolidated the position during the night.

Brigadier Rolley had already come to the conclusion that the Chinese must be dislodged from the Green Pimple. The 6th Kumaonis had tried once on November 6 and had failed. Since that day both sides had been attempting to strengthen their tactical positions. On November 7 a Sikh patrol had a clash with the Chinese, as a consequence of which the Sikhs decided to establish a strong base for sending out patrols. This they did the same evening. This step limited the field of manoeuvring troops for the Chinese. Hence it restricted the chances of the enemy to attack the Walong defences from the left flank. The brigade commander was still convinced that the Chinese would not take the occupation of Trijunction lying down; they would counter-attack to dislodge the Kumaonis from Trijunction at the earliest opportunity. For this offensive they would use the Green Pimple as the firm base. Therefore, Rolley resolved to dislodge the Chinese from the Green Pimple before they were further strengthened.

**The Yellow Pimple** :—This time the Indian commander planned to capture the objective from the rear. He considered the capture of the Green Pimple as secondary. He planned to synchronise the capture of the Yellow Pimple with the cutting of the maintenance line of the Green Pimple. With this double stroke he hoped to isolate the Green Pimple and then take it in the second phase. Therefore, he asked the Sikhs to hold up the enemy at the Green Pimple and attack his communications and maintenance while the 6th Kumaonis stormed the Yellow Pimple. In compliance with this order Naib Subedar Gurnam Singh of the 4th Sikhs led forward a patrol. His task was to disrupt the maintenance line of the enemy leading to the Green Pimple. He discovered a telephone line running to the Green Pimple and cut it. He laid an ambush also. A small Chinese detachment accompanied by a large protection party came to mend the line. The enemy being greatly superior in numbers had no diffi-

culty in discovering the ambush. The Chinese encircled the Indians and attacked them. Two Sikhs were killed and eight including Naib Subedar Gurnam Singh wounded. The JCO bled profusely and grew very weak. In spite of his own poor condition and the small number of men left Gurnam Singh decided that he could save his small party only by smashing through the enemy ring. He himself picked up an LMG from a dead gunner and firing from the hip led a wild charge against the encircling enemy. With his Bren gun blazing away and he himself leading the charge, his men reached the enemy ring. The enemy's concentrated automatic fire was directed at point blank range. Gurnam Singh was hit in the chest by a burst. He was wounded fatally. The wild charge with the war-cry of '*Sat Sri Akal*' rent the air and unnerved the enemy, who broke. Thus the dash and courage of Naib Subedar Gurnam Singh saved his men from certain destruction by the enemy. Afterwards the Sikhs recovered the casualties.

“I saw these casualties coming back on stretchers. Men had been hit by small-arms fire and were in great pain. Before they could be taken back to a hospital, first-aid was rendered to them at the Regimental Aid Post (RAP). They had been carried for four hours over uneven rocky terrain”, writes the IV Corps Commander.

There were no helicopters to evacuate the casualties. If the patients were lucky they could catch an *Otter* (carrying about ten passengers). Otherwise they had to face another ten-day trek down to Tezu probably in inclement weather.

Unfortunately, the two companies of the Kumaonis could not reach the assembly area in time because the battalion had been split up into many operational parties. One of the companies had to come from the east bank after crossing the river by a rope bridge. Further, the companies were to trek up from a height of 6,000 feet to 13,000 feet. This took time and the companies reached Trijunction after the intercepting parties of the Sikhs had withdrawn to the Patrol Base. Consequently the attack was postponed for another day.

**The Yellow Pimple Again** :—The Kumaonis were again given the task of attacking the Yellow Pimple and dislodging the Chinese. The deployment of troops at 0900 hours on October 14 was as under :—

The enemy about 100 men	area	Yellow Pimple.
<b>In Support</b>		
Heavy mortars and mountain guns	,,	Ashi Hill.
<b>The Indian Forces</b>		
(a) The 6th Kumaonis less	area	Trijunction,
two companies		
one company	,,	West Ridge and Firm Base,
one company		split up into small duty
		parties, and
3" mortars	area	Mor Post.
<b>In Support</b>		
One battery of mountain guns	,,	Mor Post.

The attack was made at 1000 hours on November 14. Two companies of the Kumaonis took part in the operation. One company advanced from the left and the other from the right.

The company from the left advanced down the hill along a spur. It reached a point in the north of the top of the Yellow Pimple, the objective. It had to climb about 50 yards to reach the objective. It tried hard to reach the top but the enemy guns prevented it. Indian guns were not accurate ; their fire was spasmodic and ineffective.

The approach for the company on the right was along a shallow valley. After coming down, it had to climb up from the south to reach the right half of the top of the Yellow Pimple. In the course of its advance the company destroyed eleven enemy bunkers. The approach was narrow, therefore, more than a platoon could not advance freely for the attack. Besides comparatively the Kumaonis had a very limited artillery support. But the battalion mortars, on this flank, did a good job. The advance continued. As soon as the company started climbing up the hill it met a terrific enemy fire. It had to climb about 200 yards to reach the top. Briefly at 1400 hours the company on the right had to climb 200 yards and that on the left 50 yards to reach the top of the Yellow Pimple. By this time 20 of their men including an officer had been killed or wounded. The company on the right was the greater sufferer ; its strength had been depleted and it called for reinforcements. The only reserves with the battalion were two platoons. Lieut.-Col Madiah decided to throw them into the attack. Thus the battalion headquarters at Trijunction was left with only one platoon. The platoons advan-



ced to join the company on the right. One of the platoon commanders, Subedar Govind Singh, dashed forward with an LMG to attack an enemy bunker which had been holding up the advance. Before he could silence the bunker he was fired upon from another bunker which he had not noticed earlier. He was wounded. He charged the second bunker like a wounded tiger and silenced it by lobing a grenade. The JCO had grown so weak that he could hardly move, still he charged the first bunker and silenced it too. Soon after he fell down and breathed his last (unsung). After the silencing the bunkers the company's advance continued. It also reached within 50 yards of the objective. Here the attack was finally halted. The fighting had been going on for more than six hours. Due to sheer exhaustion the parties stopped the firing for some time. During this interval the brigade commander ordered the Kumaonis to consolidate the ground that they had captured. The enemy counter-attack came at 2330 hours (on November 14). The Kumaonis held their ground till hand-to-hand fighting ensued.

The Chinese pressure was continually increasing. The Kumaonis without ammunition and reinforcements could not hold the ground longer. At the first light on November 15 final counter-attack of the Chinese came. The Indians fell back. The company on the left flank withdrew to Trijunction. The company on the right dispersed. Some of its men trickled back to Trijunction, some reached the Mor Post and a few the Firm Base. Thus ended the battle of the Yellow Pimple. About 200 men took part in the operation, only 90 returned to the base. Thus Trijunction had only a company including the medical platoon to defend it.

Although the Kumaonis broke contact with the enemy at the Yellow Pimple the Chinese followed close at their heels and attacked them at Trijunction.

**Comments:**—In spite of the reverse at Kibithoo the Kumaonis were given the task of dislodging the enemy from the Green Pimple. Had they succeeded the Green Pimple would have been free from the Chinese and the Walong area would have become safer; the enemy OP in that case could not have directed the artillery fire on our positions in the sector. Further, this would have removed the threat to the Walong defences from the left flank. The Kumaonis fought

bravely but failed. Their strength comprised only a company and they had to operate without any artillery support. By this time the Indians ought to have learnt that the Chinese did not hold important features like the Yellow or the Green Pimple with anything less than a company, and that they always made up the shortage in man-power by artillery fire-support. Under the circumstances to send only a company without adequate fire-support to dislodge from a hill feature an equally strong force well dug-in and heavily supported by artillery was unwise. The attack was initiated by the brigade and not thrust on it by unavoidable circumstances. Therefore, there could hardly be any excuse for such poor planning. In these circumstances the failure of the Kumaonis was a foregone conclusion. It was due to the company commander's pluck that the column escaped annihilation and returned to the base.

After this failure the Kumaonis on November 12 were given the task of clearing the Chinese from the Yellow Pimple. While the Kumaonis were to launch the attack the Sikhs were to cut the line of communication of the Green Pimple thus isolating the Chinese post from its rear and denying it further reinforcements. The plan was bold, but its execution poor, the troops were either insufficient or not available at the proper time and place. Lastly, it was not proper to employ the same troops again and again in spite of reverses at each stage. Could not the Kumaonis change place with the Sikhs ?

Only one platoon of the Sikhs was employed to ambush a Chinese repair party which was expected to come for mending the line which had been cut by them. This number was insufficient for the job. Even a protection party was too strong for those who lay in ambush. Secondly, it was quite wrong that the Sikhs, who by virtue of their physical built require more space than the Indian hillmen for taking cover, were given the task of ambushing the Chinese, while the Kumaonis, who are nimble in hills and forests, were given an offensive role. The argument that the Sikhs had had no respite while the Kumaonis had rested is not correct. Further, the Sikhs with their moustaches, beard and hair on the head *are moving landmarks*. They were bound to be spotted by the Chinese easily. The result was that the hunters became the hunted ! The redeeming feature was that the enemy was taken aback by the Sikhs

who were under cover. The patrol escaped complete destruction by the enemy because the Sikhs fought with exceptional bravery.

The Kumaoni battalion had been split up into company and platoon positions. They were not concentrated at any place in two companies. One of their companies was posted on the East Ridge and it took at least three hours to cross the river by the rope bridge. Another company was also posted in similar circumstances. Obviously the two companies needed time to concentrate and then to advance to the forward assembly area to launch an attack on the Green Pimple. In fairness to the Kumaonis they could not have reached the operational ground in time.

Another chance was given to the Kumaonis. Their two companies again attacked the Yellow Pimple on November 14 without adequate artillery support. It was wrong to ask the troops who had taken part in aggressive operations on the 6th and 12th November to launch another offensive on 14th November. The troops should have been rested before being thrown into battle again. The attack on the right flank was delivered on a narrow front. Even a section of the Chinese supported by artillery could have held up the attack of an Indian battalion. And actually this is what that happened. The Kumaonis could have succeeded only if they had been provided with much superior artillery support. But they were not. In men their only reserves were two platoons. The battalion commander rushed these platoons into the fight as reinforcements. He could do no more. In spite of these handicaps the Kumaonis fought bravely in keeping with their regimental traditions, but traditions alone are not enough; more troops and fire-support were required. Unfortunately they were not there. The attack of the Kumaonis failed when they were only 50 yards short of the objective. They failed because there was shortage of troops and insufficient fire-support at the required time and place.

## THE MAIN ATTACK

On November 15 the Chinese launched their main attack on a front stretching from Trijunction to the High Plateau. Although the 11th Brigade was coordinating and controlling the Walong defences and three commanding officers—Lieut.-Cols Madiab, Bahl

and Yadav—were responsible for the three distinct areas of responsibility in the sector, yet none of the positions were mutually supporting. Each of them had to fight for itself. Therefore, it would be confusing to deal with the entire front as a whole. Each post fought an independent battle having no connection with its neighbour. Therefore, each of the battles fought from Trijunction in the east to the High Plateau in the west will be dealt with separately,

**Battle of Trijunction :—**The Chinese followed the retreating Kumaonis at their heels. They made contact with Trijunction at 0400 hours on November 15. At that time the defenders were not more than a company in strength including the medical platoon and the battalion headquarters personnel. The first Chinese attack came at 0430 hours. There was a heavy exchange of fire between the attackers and the defenders. The Chinese suffered many casualties and at 0600 hours the attack dispersed. The Kumaonis' casualties were two other ranks killed and Captain Bhatia, 2nd Lieutenant Khatri and one other rank wounded.

The next Chinese attack came at 0730 hours on the same day. Again there were some casualties on both sides and the attack dispersed. Afterwards throughout the day the Chinese continued intermittently to bombard Trijunction; the Kumaonis stuck to their position. Shortly afterwards reinforcements started arriving. The strength of the garrison increased. From one hundred it went up to four hundred, including the medical platoon, the wounded detained in the battalion RAP and the battalion headquarters' personnel. The Chinese had cut the route from the Mor Post to Trijunction. Still in the evening Subedar Ganga Singh, Officiating Subedar Major, carried to the battalion position a supply of *puris* for the evening meal of the jawans. Two *puris* per jawan were immediately distributed. Probably that was the last cooked meal which the Kumaonis had in the Walong sector. Ganga Singh stayed at Trijunction.

Soon after the last light the Chinese artillery started firing. The enemy had established an observation post at a distance of about 200 yards from the main position of the Kumaonis. Three Chinese were noticed in the observation post. They were the artillery OPs

who were guiding their guns to bombard the Kumaonis. Luckily Hav Pushkar Singh spotted these Chinese and killed all the three one by one. After this there was a lull in the enemy firing. But soon a fierce Chinese attack came. The defenders opened fire on the advancing column and the attackers were again dispersed. Another column came up to take the place of the first. This was also repulsed. Many Chinese were killed but a large number remained who had taken cover behind the dead bodies of their comrades. This was something new in the experience of the Kumaonis. After a couple of hours another attack came. The wave of the attackers passed through the remnants of the previous attacks. The Kumaonis opened fire at a closer range this time. Again many Chinese were killed but those who survived stayed where they were. This was repeated five times that night. After every attack the distance between the attackers and the defenders grew less and less. The Kumaonis found that they had fired so heavily that there was a shortage of ammunition. Lieut.-Col Madiah was forced to order that MMGs would be handled by Havs and hand grenades thrown by JCOs only. In spite of this slowing down of firing by the Indians the Chinese dead were piling up. The casualty figures of the Kumaonis were also rising at a rapid rate. There was no sign of any reinforcements. Besides, the problem of the evacuation of the wounded was worrying Madiah. The routes to the Mor Post and Firm Base had been cut. There seemed to be no way of either receiving reinforcements or evacuating casualties. At last early in the morning of November 16 some reinforcements arrived. It was only a company less a platoon of the 4th Dogras which had managed to break through the enemy encirclement. This reinforcement was not enough even to replace the casualties which the Kumaonis had suffered. However, the Dogras took up positions and were fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Kumaonis within half-an-hour of their arrival.

The last Chinese attack supported by 120 mm mortars came at 0730 hours on November 16. The attack like the previous ones was beaten back, but the Chinese mortars were inflicting heavy casualties on the Kumaonis. This was a crucial time for Madiah to take a decision. He faced two problems, either to call for reinforcements and wait or to take a risk and evacuate his wounded to Walong. He had no hope of getting the reinforcements, because

by that time the Chinese had infiltrated into Walong and cut the lines of communication of the Indian units fighting in the forward areas. As far as the evacuation of the wounded was concerned Madiah ordered Captain Chopra, the Regimental Medical Officer, to move back to Walong with about thirty wounded whom the doctor had been tending in the RAP throughout the night. It is surmised that the Kumaonis received the orders to withdraw soon afterwards.

There is a controversy regarding the time of the receipt of the withdrawal orders. The IV Corps Commander allowed the 11th Brigade Commander to withdraw his troops at 1000 hours. The orders must have reached the unit commanders by 1230 hours through the usual channels. The operational orders possibly were not communicated to the unit commanders before 1300 hours. Evidently they could not have reached section and platoon or even company commanders. Further, they must have been very general to allow ample freedom of action to unit commanders. It is very doubtful whether Lieut.-Col Madiah ever received these orders. Even if he had stayed on at Trijunction he could not have done much. He needed ammunition to check the Chinese who were coming on wave after wave. In absence of ammunition the only alternative for him was to disperse his battalion in small parties in order to escape enemy patrols and head for Hayuliang or the plains of Assam. Consequently, Madiah ordered his troops to break contact with the enemy and make their way to safety.

**The West Ridge** :—The A Company of the 6th Kumaonis under the command of Lieutenant Vikram Singh was posted on the West Ridge. By 0800 hours the Chinese had reached the vicinity of Walong. They had brought with them their field artillery and heavy mortars also. They shelled the West Ridge. The Kumaonis withstood the bombardment. At 0830 hours the enemy attacked. The defenders fought for about an hour but the Chinese overwhelmed them. The Kumaoni casualties were 25 killed, wounded or missing.

**The Patrol Base** :—Similar attacks were launched by the Chinese against positions held by the 1st Sikhs. On the morning of November 15 they opened fire on the Patrol Base. This post was an eyesore to the enemy because its main object was to threaten the rear of

the Green Pimple. To accomplish this, patrols of the A Company used to have daily encounters with the Chinese. Some of these encounters proved very costly to the enemy who waited for a chance to get even with the Sikhs. The enemy on November 15 intermittently subjected the post to a devastating fire. But this did not interfere with the patrolling programme of the A Company Commander. He sent a patrol to harass the rear of the enemy as usual but apparently without any success. The Chinese continued shelling the Patrol Base. At 1830 hours the D Company Commander of the Sikhs on the east bank observed about a dozen torch-lights moving from the north to Ashi Hill. He sent a message to all the companies deployed on the west bank informing them of this fact. After two hours the Chinese attacked the Patrol Base. The Sikhs repelled it. It was followed by bombardment. Another attack came at 2330 hours. During the fighting Major Samvatsar was wounded. Samvatsar continued to direct the operation. The Sikhs put up a stubborn resistance. The company suffered heavy casualties. The Chinese were still pressing hard. The company commander asked permission for withdrawing to the Maha Plateau. The permission was granted. The company hesitated before its commander who was wounded was evacuated to the rear.

By chance a couple of men had escaped to the battalion headquarters. They described the plight of the company and the critical condition of Major Samvatsar. Captain Kumar, the unit Quarter Master, collected some of his men and rushed to the Patrol Base.

Another difficult problem which faced the company was of covering its withdrawal to the Maha Plateau. Volunteers were called for the suicidal job. Lance Naik Santok Singh, Sepoy Tehar Singh and Mela Singh offered themselves. The three brave soldiers, disregarding the danger to their lives, covered the withdrawal of the company. Captain Kumar was accompanying Major Sumvatsar. Unfortunately a shell hit the major. This time he was fatally wounded and died on the spot. Captain Kumar was taken prisoner. The company subedar was also killed. The battered company somehow reached the Maha Plateau post. In the battle of the Patrol Base one officer, one JCO and 20 other ranks were killed while two JCOs and 40 other ranks were wounded. Among the dead were four international Olympic sportsmen.

The casualties suffered by the A Company are a good indication of the bravery of the Sikhs. It is a pity that the Chinese did not pay the respect to the heroes who fell in the fighting. After the cease-fire when a recovering party went to the Patrol Base it found that the hands and feet of every corpse had been tied with a cable and their turbans were riddled with bullets. This shows that every Sikh fought bravely to the last.

**Lachhman Ridge** :—Side by side with the Patrol Base the Lachhman picket also came under enemy fire. The invaders continued to bombard spasmodically throughout the day and night on November 15. At 0430 hours on November 16 the Chinese started bombarding the picket as a preliminary to attacking it which they did at 0500 hours. The Gorkhas stood the onslaught well. Wave after wave of the Chinese infantry advanced to the attack and was repulsed by the Gorkhas. The second Chinese attack in force came at 0730 hours. The company commander asked for reinforcements but there were none to spare. Every Indian post was under attack. By this time the enemy had swarmed into the periphery of Walong and was attacking Indian positions from the rear also. The Gorkhas fought hard but they were surrounded. By 0800 hours the picket was overrun and the company commander taken prisoner. Only a few Gorkhas escaped, the rest being killed or taken prisoner.

**Maha Plateau** :—Like the other posts on the left flank the Maha Plateau was also subjected to intermittent enemy bombardment throughout the day and night of November 15. Immediately after first light on November 16 the intensity of Chinese artillery fire increased. As usual the first Chinese attack came at 0500 hours. The Sikhs fought furiously. The Chinese suffered many casualties but the Sikhs also did not escape unscathed. The C Company Commander of the Sikhs asked for help from the B Company. The Chinese had entered the gap between the Maha Plateau and the Mithune at 2130 hours on November 15 and by this time were threatening the B Company position also. In spite of this the B Company Commander sent a section to the Maha Plateau. By the time this reinforcement reached the plateau the remnants of the A Company also arrived thus increasing the strength of the post. The second attack of the enemy was made at 0700 hours. In spite of



the brave struggle the Sikhs made the Maha Plateau position fell. The company commander was taken prisoner. Those who escaped joined the B Company. In the Maha Plateau operation one JCO and twenty-two other ranks were killed and one JCO and fifteen other ranks wounded; more than half the company was wiped out.

**The Mithune :—**A direct track from Ashi Hill leads to the Mithune feature. The Chinese started softening up the position with artillery fire in the morning of November 15. At 1100 hours the Chinese used 55 mm guns for blasting the Indian bunkers. The Sikhs withstood the attack. In the night news arrived that the Chinese had come in their rear through the gap on the left flank. The post commander asked the company for help. His company commander sent a section to reinforce the Mithune. The picket remained vigilant throughout the night. Early in the morning of November 16 the first Chinese attack was delivered. It was repulsed. The second attack was made at 0730 hours from all sides. The position was virtually surrounded. The attackers suffered heavy casualties; the Sikhs were also hard hit. One JCO and twelve other ranks were killed and nine other ranks wounded. In other words three-fourth of the Sikh platoon was wiped out. Luckily the Chinese also retired for regrouping and reorganising. The Sikhs took advantage of the opportunity. They could not be reinforced further and did not have the strength to meet another attack. Therefore, the remnants carrying their wounded retired to the company headquarters. The company somehow managed to remain in its position till midday on November 16. Soon after the B Company Commander withdrew the troops safely from the forward line to Hayuliang.

**The Ladders :—**The Gorkhas at the Ladders had to fight the fiercest battle.

This position was defended by two platoons. The main position of the company was about one mile away in the rear. The position had been prepared on the Walong-Kibithoo track. Here the track runs along the west bank of the Lohit river for some distance, though more than one thousand feet above the level of the river, after which it climbs the plateau and goes beyond. It is visible from the east bank. The Gorkhas were deployed on both sides of the track.

One of their platoons had dug defences on the forward end of the track entering the plateau and the other where it climbed the steep cliff. The latter defences were like caves cut in a vertical rock. Artillery shells fired from the enemy positions on the west bank could not hit the stairway defences, though they would be blasted by RCL guns placed on the east bank. As long as the Sikhs and the Gorkhas held the defences on the east bank the Chinese could not harm the Ladders position on the stairway.

The forward platoon's defences at the Ladders had been placed at the top-end of the stairway. Naturally, this platoon had the advantage of a good field of fire in front of it. The enemy would have to pay a heavy price if he attacked it frontally. Besides, the defences had been cut into the hard rock which could only be blasted with RCL guns. Thus the Ladders defences were almost impenetrable.

It would have been costly to attack the Ladders without softening up the Gorkhas. This could be done only by intensive fire from the east bank. The Chinese, therefore, could not think of breaking through the Ladders defences without driving out the Gorkhas and the Sikhs from the east bank and establishing their own weapon posts there. Luckily Major Chand, the Company Commander, had returned to the Ladders from his rear headquarters on 14th November. When the main Chinese attack began he was at the stairway defences.

On the morning of November 15 the Chinese subjected the forward platoon of the Gorkhas to 55 mm gun-fire. As soon as the guns stopped firing the Chinese attacked the platoon in large numbers. As soon as the enemy fire was lifted the Gorkhas were ready in the firing trenches with their rifles and LMGs to shoot down the enemy advancing in waves. The Ladders position was supported by field guns, heavy mortars and MMGs which had been placed on the east bank. These weapons played havoc in the Chinese ranks.

The attacks were proving very costly to the Chinese. After 0900 hours they stopped attacking the Ladders and resorted to blasting the forward platoon's bunkers. They partially succeeded in their attempt. The occupants of the damaged bunkers had to

vacate them. Unluckily the LMG of a section was buried under the debris. The gunners escorted by Bir Bahadur, the Company Hav-Major, approached the company commander and informed him of the loss. They were ordered to return and salvage the LMG ! They returned to their previous positions under intensive enemy fire and salvaged the weapon. The remnants of the forward platoon continued to face the fire. By 1300 hours the Gorkhas had very little ammunition left. Naib Subedar Dil Bahadur, the Company JCO, brought some ammunition to the Ladders picket. At 2100 hours another Chinese attack came. The Gorkhas repulsed it; but now they were short of men and ammunition. At 2200 hours they sent a message to the commanding officer of the Sikhs for reinforcements. The CO of the Sikhs expressed his inability to send any reinforcements to the Gorkhas as his own position was hard pressed. Luckily, by this time the Chinese pressure had shifted to the Mithune post and the Ladders position escaped capture for another night.

On the morning of 16th November Major Chand woke to find the Chinese attacking the High Plateau from the north and the west. He saw swarms of enemy troops crossing over to the east bank in rubber boats and climbing the steep cliff to attack the Indian position. At 0800 hours the place was taken and the attack over. Now the Chinese placed their supporting weapons on the east bank and their cross-fire was directed at the Ladders. At 0830 hours the bombardment started. The Gorkhas were blinded by the dust raised by the bullets and shells hitting the rocks but they could do nothing about it. One by one their bunkers were destroyed. At 1000 hours Naik Gurung came from the rear platoon to obtain fresh orders from the company commander. The company wireless set had gone out of order in the previous night. The NCO had heard that the Chinese had reached the outskirts of Walong and the Indian troops would soon be withdrawing. Therefore, Naib Subedar Dil Bahadur wanted fresh orders from the company commander for which he sent Naik Gurung to the Ladders.

Gurung informed Chand of what had happened. The D Company Commander wanted confirmation from the company JCO ! The NCO returned and reported the conversation to Naib Subedar Dil Bahadur. The JCO proceeded towards Walong. There was no sign of the 11th Brigade Headquarters and the Indian troops seemed

to have disappeared ; there were Chinese all round. He returned to his company commander and reported what he had seen. The enemy's constant and prolonged firing had shattered Major Chand's nerves. He listened to the JCO but did not believe him. Chand thought that it was impossible for the Chinese to break through the Indian line. He again ordered the JCO to go to Walong and get in touch with the 11th Brigade Headquarters in order to obtain detailed and latest information. The JCO went to Walong but could not return to his company commander. It was 1700 hours and there was no use for the JCO to stay in the enemy infested area. He and the men of his company headed for the plains.

At the Ladders the command post was also destroyed. The company commander had no bunker to take shelter in. On the morning of 17th November he left the Ladders. He had not allowed the Chinese to break through his position; he did not know when the Indian troops retired to Walong or to Hayuliang. He had seen the Sikhs' position on the east bank being overrun. Besides this he knew nothing else. He did not know how he was left alone. In fact he was almost unconscious of his surroundings. Somehow he reached the bank of the Lohit river. He fell into the river while having a wash. After floating for some distance he was thrown on dry land by a wave. He set off to the south. Soon he was picked up by the Chinese. After a couple of days he found himself in the Chinese camp somewhere in the Tsayul valley about 70 miles from Rima.

Thus ended the heroic struggle of the Gorkhas of the Ladders. They did not allow the Chinese to break through their position. This was surprising for some people. Those who escaped from the Ladders ordeal faced a searching cross-examination for days before a military court of enquiry. This was very irritating. If the soldier yields to the enemy he is blamed for his half-hearted attempt to face the enemy and if he succeeds in holding back the enemy he is subjected to unending cross-examination not only before a military court but by every one who meets him. That is why a soldier prefers either a victory under the most trying conditions or a quiet death. He hates to be taken prisoner. This is the life of a soldier on a battle-field. The Subedar major ( SM ) of the 3/3rd G.R. had a sharp talk with an Indian general.

“How is it that you were taken prisoner ?” queried the general.

“I do not understand what you mean,” replied the SM.

“Why did you not escape like others ?”

“We were ordered to fight, which we did. We had either to be killed or taken prisoner. We did not have any other order. We were not ordered to quit the battle-field”, replied the SM.

**The High Plateau :—**The High Plateau was at the right extremity of the Walong front. It was held by the D Company of the 4th Sikhs commanded by Lieutenant Yog Raj Palta. The post was under the operational command of the 3/3rd Gorkhas.

At 1830 hours on November 15 Palta noticed a dozen torch-lights moving from Ashi Hill in the direction of the Patrol Base. He alerted his colleagues on the west bank. He also noticed that the Chinese were crossing to the east bank in rubber boats. He warned his men that the Chinese would attack them the same night. After the last light the Chinese started bombarding the High Plateau. The fire was coming from the Ashi Hill area. The Chinese were trying to pound the High Plateau position out of existence. The Sikhs withstood the bombardment.

The first Chinese attack came in the dark at 2330 hours. The attackers advanced from the north and the west in waves. The Sikhs met the advancing enemy with a concentrated fire. The invaders suffered heavy casualties and the attack was beaten back. But a column of the Chinese moved to the rear of the post and succeeded in cutting the track leading to the Gorkha positions.

The second attack was made at 0130 hours on November 16. Palta asked for help from the CO of the Gorkhas. But the reinforcements could not reach him because the track was occupied by the enemy. The Sikhs continued to fight bravely. Palta was handling his stengun with one hand and throwing grenades with the other ; he was pulling out the safety pin of the grenades with his teeth. He was moving from trench to trench to inspire his men. He exhorted them : ‘Crush the Chinese bugs and do not leave your positions’. The men did as they were told ; they did not leave their positions and continued destroying the Chinese who were continuously advancing. During the fighting young Palta was fatally wounded,

still he continued exhorting his men : 'Fry the Chinese, hold on to your positions'. He was hit a second time and died. His subedar was also killed, still there was no slackening of effort in the company. At last the Chinese attack stopped. The invaders had nowhere to go. Those Chinese who survived remained where they were and waited for the dawn.

After the death of Palta and the company JCO, Hav Gurmukh Singh took over the command. At that time only 18 men had been left alive. Gurmukh Singh encouraged them with grim and brave words : "Take heart, we will fight to the last".

At 0445 hours on November 16 the third Chinese attack came. This was a massive attack. The Chinese remnants of the first and second attacks joined in it and the combined force attacked the High Plateau from the north, west and south. The Chinese were mowed down by the Sikhs' fire like flies still the enemy continued climbing up to the plateau and attacking the Indian position. *There was not a single Sikh sepoy who faltered, and there was not a single Sikh NCO who died before he was wounded at least twice.* Thus every man on the post fought and died. Hav Gurmukh Singh and his 18 men fought in the best traditions of the regiment.

There were some non-combatant Sikh soldiers still left alive in the company position. They continued firing. At 0800 hours the artillery OP came. He assumed the command of the position as well as directed his artillery fire with great loss to the enemy. For some time it seemed that he might retrieve the position and drive out the Chinese from the east bank. But the Chinese were endlessly creeping up the steep bank to the top of the plateau like swarms of ants. Soon the OP was killed. The Chinese captured the position, but they found only empty bunkers. Thus the battle of the High Plateau was really won by those who died to a man and not by those who occupied the grave-yard of the 25 heroes.

After the cease-fire senior military officers of the Sikh Regiment visited the High Plateau. What the officers saw was very revealing. Every Sikh who had died had his weapon gripped in his hand and he was lying in his bunker with his head to the north and feet to

the south. It means that it never occurred to them that they should run away to fight another day, as one Sikh soldier said :

“In war we know only two things—either get killed or kill the enemy. When this is the case why not kill as many enemy as possible before getting killed. A third alternative does not cross our mind at all.”

The Sikhs settled scores with the Chinese then and there. Lieut.-General Harbax Singh, the Colonel Commandant of the Sikh Regiment has said :

“It is coming to light now after it has been seen that the dead of the 4 Sikh at Walong were lying in their bunkers where they had fought it out to the last, that the Bn's performance was more than in keeping with the highest tradition of the Regiment. In one or two instances, complete platoon was wiped out without a single survivor. In this connection two names come to my mind and they are Jem Gurnam Singh and Hav Gurmukh Singh the performances of whose platoons were in no way short of Saragarhi epic” (At Saragarhi 21 Sikh soldiers who were defending the fortress were killed in action in 1897. Queen Victoria awarded each hero the IOM Class I, considered equivalent to the Victoria Cross in those days.)

## THE WITHDRAWAL

The Sikhs had been given the task of preventing the enemy from entering Walong from the east bank. They built their defences on the Plateau on the Dong-Kahoo track. They, specially the platoon of Hav Gurmukh Singh, fought to the last man, a heroic deed. In the absence of an Indian offensive, at every stage the result was as expected ; the Chinese eventually broke through the Indian line of defence. On the west bank the main task of the Sikhs was patrolling. On November 7 they had established the Patrol Base. Their other posts helped the Patrol Base in the execution of the task. Not a day passed when the Sikhs did not have a clash with the Chinese.

After the withdrawal from Kibithoo the Kumaonis were a bit shaken. Soon they regained their spirit. They were given an offensive role. They attacked the Pimples twice ; unfortunately both their attacks failed.

The Gorkhas were allotted a defensive role on both the banks. On the west bank they were put under the operational control of the Sikhs. On the east bank they were in the second line of defence. By the time their turn came to prove their mettle the Indian defences had cracked. However, the outcome of the Gorkha defence would have been the same as that of the Sikhs in the front. In the end they also had to withdraw. The only question to be considered under the circumstances is the manner of the withdrawal.

“I overheard several telephone conversations ( as I was at this time at headquarters 11 Brigade ) between Commander, 11 Brigade to the Brigade Major on the one hand and Commanding Officers of Companies and Battalions holding our forward positions on the other, which gave me the impression that some of our Commanders, despite the resolute attitude of their Brigade Commander, could have displayed greater determination at the time. Soon after 4 Sikh and 3/3 Gorkhas began withdrawing from their positions under pressure. I heard Major Handoo telling several officers in various battalions over the telephone in no uncertain terms that they should give fighting. Some of them did. Others did not”, writes the IV Corps Commander.

This was not a good augury for the withdrawal. It is a fact that the Gorkhas at the Ladders had not been informed of the withdrawal. It means that the withdrawal orders were not issued at all or if issued they did not reach every unit and sub-unit ; only the battalion commanders knew them. In spite of the confusion the execution of the withdrawal was not so bad as depicted by critics. On November 16 there were only three batalions at Walong. The 4th Dogras reached Walong in the same morning. It was easy for them to retire because they were already concentrated near the Yepak Plateau, the brigade rendezvous for the troops withdrawing from the front.

It is of little importance as to who functioned as the advance-guard or the rear-guard in the withdrawal. It cannot be denied that there was some confusion among the units at the start of the operation. It is logical to believe that it persisted till the end. The brigade failed to control the operation. Hence naming the advance-guard or the rear-guard is superfluous. The success of the withdrawal ( of units which did not disintegrate ) lay in the fact that the Indian troops were not routed by the victorious Chinese and that they maintained discipline and decorum to the extent possible under the circumstances.



**The 6th Kumaonis :—**At about 1200 hours on November 16 the withdrawal began. Nearest to the Yepak Plateau were the Kumaonis on the West Ridge and the Mor Post. By this time the Chinese had swarmed all over the Walong sector. It was very difficult for the detachments at the West Ridge and the Mor Post to withdraw as an organised body, therefore, the post commanders split up their contingents into small parties. Some of these parties reached the brigade rendezvous, others did not ; some were wiped out by the enemy and some escaped to Hayuliang or Tezu after many days. One party under Naib Subedar Bhairab Singh with nine other ranks joined the battalion at Tezu after eight days. The party had trekked on the snow-covered mountains with practically nothing to eat except some wild herbs and a mountain goat. Another party consisting of one Dogra officer, three JCOs and eighteen other ranks reached the Yepak Plateau after the Chinese had cut the route to Hayuliang. The party made a diversion and crossed the watershed separating the Yepak and the She Ti rivers. It was ambushed at the latter. The stragglers fought the Chinese and after losing one JCO and one other rank escaped from the ambush. Again the party marched across the country and reached Hayuliang.

At the Trijunction position, Lieut.-Col Madiah split up the battalion into companies and platoons and told his commanders to proceed to the Yepak Plateau as best as they could on their own. He himself with thirty other ranks descended into the Yepak valley. There was no regular foot-path along the banks of the river. The party crossed hills and small nullahs and in the evening of November 18 reached the Yepak Plateau. The invaders had occupied the plateau in the afternoon of November 16. They fired at the Kumaoni party. Every member of this unfortunate party was killed except Lieut.-Col Madiah who had jumped into a lake. The Chinese spotted him and took him prisoner. Similarly there was another small party of two young NCOs and Sub Ganga Singh. This party also reached the Yepak-Lohit river junction on November 18. Seeing some Chinese cooking their meal the men retraced their steps up the Yepak valley. The JCO could not keep pace with the young NCOs. He asked them to leave him and save themselves. The NCOs first hesitated but at last left the JCO and marched towards Hayuliang. Sub Ganga Singh proceeded towards Walong in the hope that he might find some members of the brigade staff there ; he hoped

that Walong might still be in Indian hands ! While on the road he was ambushed. In the scuffle he emptied his revolver which was loaded and killed two Chinese. The Chinese took him prisoner and subjected him to a very humiliating treatment. Ganga Singh survived the ordeal. The Chinese took him to Walong where he met Captain Chopra, his Regimental Medical Officer. In the end he was sent to the Chinese POW camp where other officer and JCO prisoners had already been lodged. Thus ended the story of the 6th Kumaonis on 4th December 1962 when the last stragglers of the unit reached Tezu.

**The 4th Sikhs :—**The Sikhs on the west bank fought as hard as they could. In the struggle many were killed and wounded. Those who survived were successfully organised into proper withdrawal columns. The columns marched back to Hayuliang. Here is given the statement of another Sikh sepoy :—

“We fight. We kill or get killed. We do not like hanky-panky orders. If that is the case it is better if we are left on our own. We will manage ourselves. When there is no fighting and we are ordered to withdraw we do so. Our officers see that we are safely retired to the rear. Our NCOs and senior soldiers are acceptable to us as our leaders.”

It is surprising that whether it was Kameng or Walong the Sikhs were the only group of soldiers who were first in the fighting and first in the withdrawal. The credit of the Walong withdrawal goes to their B Company Commander. This is the story of the Sikhs on the west bank. Those Sikhs who were on the east bank were not so fortunate. The majority of them perished on the battlefield. Those few who survived withdrew by the eastern bank route. Their tall stature, prominent beards and moustaches and long hair (*kese*) marked them out distinctly ; they were neither ambushed nor tortured by the Chinese. Most of the stragglers reached Tezu safely, though they took some time in finding their way to the plains. Naik Kuldeep Singh from the High Plateau reached Tezu on 22nd December 1962.

**The Gorkhas :—**The Lachhman post was overrun by the Chinese on the morning of November 16. The Gorkhas manning the post were either killed or taken prisoner ; their company commander

was taken prisoner. Later on he is said to have died in the POW camp. Major Chand of the Ladders missed the withdrawal order, if there was any, and he was also eventually taken prisoner. On the east bank Lieut.-Col Yadav, the CO of the 3/3rd G. R., was himself the sector commander. After overrunning the D Company (of the 4th Sikhs) position the invaders took some time in re-grouping their troops. They attacked the Gorkha positions after 1100 hours. At that time the unit was expecting the withdrawal orders to arrive any moment. Therefore, there was no question of the Gorkhas fighting to the bitter end. They did fight for some time. They were killed or taken prisoner. Those who escaped took the eastern bank route to Tezu. The trekking was difficult but the Gorkhas did it. In fact the Gorkhas suffered more casualties on the way than in the fighting in the Walong sector. It is during their trekking that most of these were taken prisoner including their CO and most of their company commanders.

On the east bank most of the supporting arms had been placed on the reverse slope of Dakota Hill. All these were captured by the Chinese intact. After the cease-fire these were returned to the Indian representatives by the Chinese.

The story of the brave fight which the Indian gunners put up in Kameng and Walong will never be told. One who gets a chance to read the regimental history of artillery units will find that the deeds performed by the gunners were in no way less patriotic, bold and soldierly as those performed by the infantry. Because the gunners fire from behind their own troops they remain unnoticed by the public. Now and then one hears about the inhuman and bestial treatment meted out to gunner OPs who after the withdrawal of their forces are sometimes left behind in the battle-field to be killed or taken prisoner by the victorious enemy. But what about those who continue firing their guns till the last minute at the advancing enemy without any hesitation knowing fully well that soon they would be overpowered and killed or taken prisoner? None hears their story. They die unsung. In the Chinese invasion of 1962 the number of such gunners runs into hundreds.

Brigadier Rolley and his staff withdrew to Hayuliang safely. The 1/5th G. R. had received orders to move to Walong to rein-

force or cover the withdrawal of the 11th Brigade. Now there was no need for them to go to Walong.

The defences of Hayuliang were strengthened but the Chinese advanced only up to the post situated on the high ground in the north of the town. They had no intention of advancing far to the south. Their main purpose after crushing the resistance of the Indian troops of Walong was to obtain factual information about the ground near the trijunction where the boundaries of Assam, Lohit and Tirup Frontier Divisions meet. It has already been mentioned that the Chinese had advanced their claim over the entire territory embracing Lohit, Siang, Subansiri and Kameng Frontier Divisions. They wanted to familiarise themselves with this trijunction which is near Namsai in Lohit. Chinese detachments were seen in this area in the second week of December 1962.

At this stage we are in a position to say that around both the trijunctions, one in the west and the other in Lohit, the Indian casualties were quite heavy. Had the Indians known that the Chinese would obviously rush towards the trijunctions probably they would have avoided these points and lessened their casualties. Here the Indians had to pay heavily for their lack of interest in reading the enemy's mind and foreseeing the obvious.

However, with the possession of the description of the Lohit-Tirap-Assam boundary trijunction the Chinese are fully equipped to attend any international conference where they might be required to describe the ground which they claim as their own. It is worth noting that this trijunction often appears in the news whenever there is a controversy between Assam and Nagaland or a mention of Naga rebels proceeding to China via Tirap.

**Comments :—**During the British regime China had claimed the Indian territory up to Manikaran, and it was well known to the Indian Government that the Chinese had not agreed about the correct location of the boundary trijunction of India, Burma and Tibet. Thus the position of Walong had attained the same importance as that of Tawang and Longju in Kameng and Subansiri respectively. If Tawang could be the Divisional Vital Ground, what prevented Walong from attaining the same status in Lohit ? When an infan-

try brigade could be deployed to defend Tawang there were more valid reasons for stationing a brigade group in Walong. But nothing was done to that effect. It was unwise for the Government to have neglected the defence of this sensitive area. The terrain of the Walong sector is advantageous for defence. Had the defences of the sector been completed in time and an adequate number of troops posted to man them with a suitable logistic build-up to maintain the supplies, the Chinese would have found it difficult to capture the Walong area. The delay in building up the local brigade was glaringly noticeable.

Before September 26 the only regular troops in the area were the Kumaonis. The 4th Sikhs were the second battalion to arrive. Their two companies arrived in Walong on September 26 and the rest on October 23, a day before the evacuation of Kibithoo. Probably the fall of Kibithoo expedited the matters ! Besides, the army authorities could not make up their mind whether to defend the area with two battalions or more. The 2/8th Gorkha Rifles were sent to the sector on October 24 and were flown out on October 31. The other unit was the 3/3rd G. R. It was Brigadier Rolley who asked for the return of the battalion from Hayuliang otherwise its fate was going to be the same as that of the 2/8th G. R. The same trend of indecision was apparent in allotting a particular brigade to defend the Walong sector.

After the fall of Kibithoo the 5th Infantry Brigade was transferred to Jorhat to perform peace-time duties. Another brigade, either 181 or 192, was posted in Walong. It was to be commanded by Brigadier Hartley. The inclusion of this brigade in the sector remained on paper only. For about a week there was no brigade at all in Walong. Probably the 2nd Infantry Division, a newly raised formation, was looking after the defences of the sector. Brigadier Hartley stayed in the sector for about a week and completely disappeared from there afterwards.

Brigadier Hartley's disappearance from the battle-field caused misgivings amongst the troops. The Kumaonis had withdrawn from Kibithoo and the sector was new for the Indian troops ; its unfamiliarity struck awe in their heart. In this atmosphere of uncertainty and unfamiliarity the arrival and departure of a brigadier produced

doubts in the troops, specially when a new brigade was about to come. In the absence of authentic information and due to the fact of units coming to and flowing out of Walong rumours spread. These rumours were definitely not healthy for the morale of troops.

Ultimately Brigadier Rolley arrived at Walong. He reconnoitred the area and started planning its defence. His plan was ambitious. Consider the length of the area of responsibility of the Sikhs ! It extended up to a distance of 6,000 yards. Was it proper for a battalion to be deployed in a jungle-covered and mountainous terrain on such a wide front ? Further, no attempts were made to integrate the troops deployed on both the banks of the Lohit river. The rope bridge above Tinai proved to be a bottle-neck and the Indian Army engineers failed to improvise means to bring the two wings of the Walong sector closer. The troops on the east bank for all practical purposes remained a separate entity from those on the west bank. Firstly, the troops were brought in Walong piecemeal not allowing them to develop the spirit of oneness with the brigade; secondly, the feeling of strangeness to each other was further widened by keeping the two wings of the front separate. These two shortcomings were against all the tenets of concentrated effort in a war. On the other hand the Chinese put adequate troops at the right time and place. They also introduced rubber boats by which their troops could cross and recross the river. This necessary administrative innovation succeeded in integrating their efforts. It had a demoralising effect on the Indian troops, they wondered why their engineers could not do what the Chinese engineers had done. The invaders operated on both the banks in unison bringing about the collapse of the 11th Brigade bit by bit.

There was no serious defect in the plan of defence of the Walong sector. But surely if the defence of the sector could be strengthened by two more battalions, one acting as the brigade mobile reserve and the other to guard the Yepak plateau, the Indian troops would have definitely given a better account of themselves. As far as it is known the 1/5th G. R. and the 1st Assam Battalions were ready to move to Walong for this purpose but they reached Hayuliang when the fighting was over. Some more promptness in the Walong operations would have improved the situation much.

Further, it is not understood why the two companies of the Gorkhas were placed under the command of the Sikhs and a company of the latter under the former. Surely this mixing up of troops and operational responsibility can never be healthy for defensive battles which strain the nerves even of seasoned troops, and we are sure that this must have been in the knowledge of those who controlled the Walong operations. These occasions arise when units ask for reinforcements from those who operationally control them. For instance the Gorkha company commanders at the Lachhman and at the Ladders positions required help from the Sikhs. Probably the Sikhs were right in not giving the help because at the Maha and the Mithune pickets they themselves were threatened. The B Company Commander sent reinforcements to the Sikhs and not to the Gorkhas. Similarly Palta, the Sikh Company Commander on the High Plateau asked the Gorkhas for reinforcements. The CO of the 3/3rd G. R. could do nothing because the track to the Sikh position had been cut by the Chinese. Still, in the heat of battle when the defenders' nerves are highly strung, even a genuine refusal of help can be misinterpreted causing irreparable damage. In an attack many of the administrative or other shortcomings in the conduct of the campaign are liable to be overlooked but in defence such acts cannot be ignored. If the Gorkhas were not considered suitable for an offensive action, surely they ought not to have been sent to the war theatre right from the beginning. If they were allowed to participate in the Walong operations they ought to have been allotted an independent area of responsibility. The fact that it was not done leads one to the conclusion that either there was confused thinking or the local commander had no faith in his troops and he introduced checks and counter-checks so as to undermine the independence of the Sikhs and the Gorkhas.

The Kumaonis were defeated at Kibithoo. They were shaken. It is to the credit of the Kumaonis that they faced one defeat after another but did not lose heart till the end and fought every action bravely. None of their defeats was due to their faults. Therefore, it can be said that the Kumaonis acquitted themselves well in the battles of Walong. But it can also be said that there was still scope for better performance.

There is some criticism of the manner of the Sikhs' withdrawal.

The criticism is baseless. After all which were the units to withdraw from Walong ? The 4th Dogras were just being flown to the Walong theatre. That process must have been stopped on the morning of November 16, when the Dogras failed to break through the enemy's encirclement to reach Trijunction. They must have been turned back to withdraw to Hayuliang. The second unit were the Gorkhas. Two of their companies under the operational control of the Sikhs did not receive the withdrawal orders. Whose fault was it ? It is difficult to answer this question, but the over-all responsibility of this neglect rests on the brigade staff. The remaining part of the battalion on the east bank could not withdraw with the brigade column, it ought to have been written off from the very beginning. The Kumaonis had disintegrated long before the orders for withdrawal were issued. Thus the 4th Sikhs were the only unit affected by the withdrawal; they withdrew as an organised body and suffered less casualties. Whether they were ahead of or behind the brigade nucleus is immaterial. If the 4th Sikhs did not act according to the operational orders it means there was some looseness of command in the 11th Brigade.

The Sikhs are impressive soldiers in Asia. Their name carries weight and a Sikh soldier creates a fear complex in his opponents, at least in the Pak and the Chinese troops. He has drive and initiative. This sometimes goes against his own interests. He has started swaggering and in this attitude of belittling the soldierly qualities of others earns their ill will. This was proved in Kameng and in Walong, He has got to co-operate on equal terms with other Indian troops and respect the enemy's military prowess. It will be in India's interest if the Sikh officers do not underrate their enemy and thus avoid the collapse or disintegration of their units. The time is not far when other troops strengthened with fire-power will equal the Sikhs on a battle-field. It will be a sad day for India if her troops lose the reputation which they have earned by their deeds.

Briefly the Indian units in Walong fought the enemy with determination and valour, though there was much scope for improvement in the efficiency and boldness of the brigade command. It is suggested that to remove these shortcomings and give more war experience to our commanders they should be given opportunities of *participating and observing actual battles in other parts of the world* such as Vietnam etcetera.



## CHAPTER X

# THE REST OF NEFA

“Strict adherence to the co-ordinates shown on the McMahon Line maps would result in advancing the Indian boundary in both the areas of Migyitung and Tulung La further north thereby including both these places inside Indian territory. In the area east of Tsari Sarpa, strict adherence to the co-ordinates of Lola in the McMahon Line maps would result in advancing the boundary of India into this area by at least 7 miles to the north”.

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Although the Chinese have claimed the entire territory of NEFA, except Tirap Frontier Division, they confined their invasion of 1962 to two areas only, one over which they have advanced their claim and the other into which large numbers of people of Tibetan origin have recently immigrated and permanently settled. The northern portion of western Lohit, western Subansiri and eastern Kameng are not included in these areas hence they are free from Chinese intrusions.

## SIANG FRONTIER DIVISION

Siang Frontier Division is the biggest unit of the NEFA administration. The Siang river flows through it. It is bounded in the north by the Great Himalayan Range, and by two mountainous barriers in the east and west. The southern part is a plain. It is forested so thickly that it is almost isolated from Assam. It is here that the Chinese entered the northern part of Siang and forced the population to move to the south.

The important towns and villages of the sector are Machuka, Manigong, Tadadege, Tuting and Gelling. The Great Himalayan Range separates the area from Tibet. The Dom La, Tunga La, Shoka La, Lamdo La and the Lusha La are its well-known passes.

**Terrain** :—The northern part of Siang is very mountainous, its altitude ranges from 12,000 feet to 18,000 feet. Here the level of

even the river valleys is high. The area is crossed by more than a dozen mountain spurs jutting out of the Himalayan Range from the north-west to the south-east. Each spur separates the waters of two rivers flowing parallel to it ; further, these rivers are joined by tributaries flowing from the south-west to the north-east and the north-east to the south-west. This criss-crossing of the watersheds has made travelling from one valley to another impracticable. It is because of this that the posts of the Assam Rifles on the Indo-Tibetan frontier are practically independent of one another. Here the snowline runs at a height of 15,000 feet, hence the crests of practically all local watersheds remain covered with perennial snow.

**Flora** :—Like the Se La tract the entire region is forested. Here grow the spruce, the abies and the silver fir. In patches the birch is also found. Near the perennial snows the stunted rhododendron is also seen.

**Fauna** :—Ibex, mountain goats and sheep are found in herds. The snow-leopard and bear roam here and there. Besides, the wild boar has also migrated to the region. The main game for the shikaris is the musk deer.

**Rivers** :—The main rivers of the region are the Brahmaputra and Syom. The main tributaries of the former are the Tingong, Moyang and Sira Peten Sigong. The tributary of the Syom is the Sika which joins it at Yiyu.

**Climate** :—There is no mountain barrier in the south high enough to stop the monsoon from entering the tract. The monsoon in its passage from the plains of Assam to this region precipitates much of its moisture in the lower parts of the Siang and Syom valleys, Still it has sufficient moisture to provide about 30" mean annual rainfall to the area. It is evenly distributed throughout the year. In winter the region receives about 15" rainfall equivalent to 13 feet of snowfall, Consequently, in summer the region is cool and damp and in winter damp and cold. In spite of a heavy snowfall trekking throughout the region is practicable.

**Routes** :— Civilised man has neglected this area from the

beginning. It is in the present times that attempts have been made to bring the local people (the Tagins and Boris) nearer to the Assamese. Previously the Indo-Tibetan route ran through Siang Division. The Assamese pilgrims annually used to go by this route to Mt. Tsari for worshipping their gods. Now-a-days the Border Roads are constructing and extending metalled roads to frontier outposts. In spite of this, tracks and foot-paths are still the chief means of communication in the area. They are unfit for animal transport. The outposts of the Assam Rifles get their supplies by air-drops. Therefore, every post has been provided with a dropping zone.

**The Pilgrim Route :—**The track starts from Pasighat, the gateway of Siang and goes to the Syom-Siang river junction where it enters the Syom valley. After passing through Along it reaches Yiyu. The alignment of the new motorable road which has been extended to 30 miles in the north of Along coincides with this track. Here a branch of the track enters the Syom valley and after crossing a watershed leads to the Tunga La, the other enters the Sika valley and finally leads to the same pass. From the pass the track descends into the Brahmaputra valley (in Tibet). Many foot-paths lead to Mt. Tsari from this place. After the coming of the British rule in Assam in the late eighteen thirtys the Assamese pilgrims stopped visiting the Tsari shrine. The Buddhist pilgrims of the region continued using the track for their pilgrimage.

Another important track bifurcates from Yiyu and after passing through Tuting and Gelling enters Tibet. This route is of local importance only.

Although Machuka is the headquarters of a sub-division of Siang yet its approach from the divisional side is very difficult. Visitors if willing to trek through the terrain between Machuka and Daporijo, start the journey from Daporijo. Normally government officials fly to Machuka from Lime King or Daporijo.

The difficulties of the terrain make it clear that it will take a long time for motor transport to reach the Tunga La. To connect the frontier outposts even by a jeepable road is a task which the democratic government of the country will probably never under-

take. Therefore, the northern track of Siang is accessible only by helicopter or *Otter*.

**Characteristics of the Region :—**A peculiarity of this region is that it is a vast land enclosed within the bend of the Brahmaputra lying both in India and Tibet. It is a well-known historical fact that the Brahmaputra valley in the north of Siang was inhabited by the Abors ( the modern Adis ). Thus the Abors and the Boris inhabited the Brahmaputra valley in Tibet and the valleys of its tributaries in Siang Frontier Division. Even today the valleys in the Machuka sub-division are inhabited by the Boris. But the region near the Great Himalayan Rang was not populated. This is also known that such regions attract the people of Tibetan extraction for occupying them. The Tibetans could not colonise the mountainous tract unless they pushed out the Abors from the Brahmaputra valley ( in Tibet ). Eventually in some way the Tibetans pushed the Abors to the south of the Himalayan wall and occupied the Brahmaputra valley. Afterwards they trickled into the northern sector as Monbas and Khambas ( they are the descendants of the Monpas and the Khampas but for political reasons they have substituted b for p ). It is because of this that the Chinese are tempted to extend their claim to this region. On the excuse of Tibetan culture and emigration the Chinese wish to liberate the local people from the domination of the Indians ! It is on this excuse that the Chinese invaded this region in 1962.

The Khambas and the Monbas are not the indigenous people of the region, they are recent intruders into Siang. The Abors, a freedom loving people, were hostile to these foreign settlers. They did not let the new comers enter the plains of Assam. Thus the Monbas and the Khambas remained isolated from the Assamese. After the establishment of the NEFA administration tracks have been improved and the Abors are for the first time tolerating outsiders in their country. Thus a few Khambas and Monbas are found trekking down to the frontier towns of Assam, otherwise their general mode of travel to the south is still by air.

The Government of India has opened schools in the tract in which the Tibetan language in the Tibetan script is taught. It is also the medium of instruction in the Buddhist schools. In spite of the

development of the area to make the life of the Khambas and Monbas comfortable there is no integration between the Buddhists and the Abor animists ; the former are isolated from both the Abors and the Tibetians. The Abors have not forgotten history and they always regard the Monbas and the Khambas as usurpers of their land. The Buddhists also have their sympathies for the country of their origin. Because of these extra-territorial loyalties in the Buddhists and the feeling of pride for their nationality in the Abors, the Monbas and the Khambas do not feel very much attached to Siang and hence to India. Under these circumstances the presence of the Chinese across the frontier is a source of trouble to our country.

**Defence of Northern Siang :—**In similar circumstances as existed in the frontier areas of NEFA China had attacked the integrity and sovereignty of her other neighbours. From experience India knew that Chinese troops might intervene in disputes between the Buddhists and the Abors of Siang. She established posts of the Assam Rifles to maintain law and order in the sector.

Up to the end of 1961 Along was the headquarters of one wing of the Assam Rifles. A platoon of this wing was posted at Machuka. Occasionally patrols of the Assam Rifles were sent from Along to the upper Syom and the Siang valleys. In February 1962 under the Onkar Operation eight outposts of the Assam Rifles were increased in Siang. They were manned by a platoon each. These posts were : the Karbo, Tuting, Gelling, Lusha La, Lumdo La, Shoka La, Tunga La and Dom La. In winter the forward posts withdrew to a lower height. This downward move normally began on October 1. Thus the Gelling post used to withdraw to Tuting, the Lusha La and the Lumbdo La to Lamang, Shoka La to Henkar, Tunga La to Tadadege and Dom La to Manigong. Machuka and Yiyu became wing headquarters. This facilitated the co-ordination of defence duties of the units of the Assam Rifles. Simultaneously the 2nd Madras was posted in Along to fill up the vacuum caused by the transfer of a wing of the Assam Rifles. The battalion was commanded by Lieut.-Col Peter Alley. In May-June of the same year it was moved to Tuting.

After the fall of Kibithoo, Siang attracted the attention of Indian military authorities. The newly raised 2nd Division was made responsible for the defence of the northern border areas of Suban-

siri and Siang also. The 192nd Infantry Brigade was brought into this sector to form a part of this division. The brigade established its headquarters at Along. Soon its tactical headquarters moved to Machuka ; the administrative headquarters remained at Along, Thus Along became the administrative base which maintained the troops in the forward areas. After October 1962 units of the 192nd Brigade started arriving.

The advance-party of the 2/8th Gorkhas was air-lifted from Hayuliang to Along. By 8th November the entire battalion had arrived at Along.

The right flank of the 192nd Brigade was guarded by the 2nd Madras posted at Tuting. The left was protected by 2nd J & K Rif stationed at Lime King ( Subansiri ). The 2/8th Gorkhas were allotted the Machuka sector. Consequently the commanding officer of the Gorkhas with his adjutant and the battalion reconnaissance party were flown to Machuka. At 1700 hours on November 16 a company of the 2/8th also landed there. The rest of the battalion was to follow soon.

**Chinese attacks :—**On November 12 some Khampha rebels from Tibet crossed the Indo-Tibetan boundary and entered Gelling. They were armed. They had been fighting the Chinese in Tibet. When they were surrounded by the Chinese they escaped to India. The Assam Rifles picket disarmed them and sent them to Tuting. On 16th November the Chinese entered Siang. Soon they took Gelling. Next day they attacked Tuting. After some fighting the Madrasis withdrew to Along. Thus on November 16 it became clear to the 192nd Brigade that its right flank was exposed and there was every possibility of the Chinese attacking the middle sector also. The 2/8th G. R. party was ordered to withdraw no sooner than its company had arrived there. There was no time for flying them back to Along, therefore, the company started marching back to Along. Lieut.-Col DA Taylor, the CO of the 2/8th G. R., also decided to march back. Probably he and his adjutant, Major Ghosh, strayed from the right route. Soon he was lost in forests of the mountains which lie between Machuka and Along. It was the month of November. The crests of ridges were covered with snow. Taylor seems to have been caught in a snow-storm or in a cravasse. He,

Major Ghosh and few other ranks were buried under the snow. Four men were able to escape to Along. They told the story of Taylor's death. When the snow thawed a rescue party went to the place of the tragedy and recovered the bodies. Later it came to light that Major Sarin, the Signal Officer at Machuka, committed suicide. More details are not available. It is also difficult to say why the Gorkhas were suddenly ordered to withdraw from Machuka. It is not known if they fought any action or just withdrew in compliance of the orders. Thus the northern part of Siang was vacated and the Chinese occupied it.

“Over the period from 20th October to 21st November 1962 in the Siang Division the Indian Defence posts at Lamang, Hinkar, Tadadege, Manigong, Machuka and Tuting had to be withdrawn in the face of massive Chinese attacks,” ( Government of India note ).

## SUBANSIRI FRONTIER DIVISION

Like Siang, Subansiri Frontier Division is named after the river which drains its eastern and northern parts. In the east and the west the Great Himalayan Range separates it from Siang and Kameng. In the south there is no range ; a narrow belt of Tarai merges into the northern plains of Assam. The northern portion of Subansiri is lined by the Great Himalayan Range. In the north-east this range recedes into Tibet.

“The McMahon Line however departs from well recognised geographical features at a few places. For example, the international boundary departs from the watershed near Tsari in order to include in Tibet the pilgrimage route of Tsari Nyingpa which is used every year by a large number of Tibetans. Similarly, the village of Migyitung was included in Tibet in view of the fact that the Tibetans attached considerable importance to this village”.

The frontier area adjacent to Mt. Tsari is called Longju. The prominent villages of the Longju sector are Migyitung ( in Tibet ), Tamadan, Longju, Roi and Maja. On account of its nearness to the international boundary no landing-ground has been built in the area, though Maja village has a dropping zone. The nearest landing-ground is at Lime King, a small town on the right bank of the Subansiri river.

The other area of importance is the Subansiri valley. The villages in this valley are Lung (in Tibet), Asafia, Taksing, Lengbeng and Lime King. The administrative base of the Indian forces stationed in Longju and Subansiri is at Lime King.

**The Longju Sector** :—The Tsari Chu flows through it. It is not bounded by the Great Himalayan Range in the north ; geographically it is a part of the Mt. Tsari region. It is bounded by two ridges in the east and south separating it from a small stream and the Subansiri river. It is mostly hilly. Its average height is 5,000 feet. It has a subtropical climate. Monsoon winds penetrate into the region through the Subansiri valley giving it about 40 inches of mean annual rainfall. There are dense forests in which the boar, bear and panther are found. There are also lizards, leeches and snakes.

In summer the region is very unhealthy. The Tagins, a branch of the Dafla stock, live here in small villages. Before 1959 they sold their forest products to the Tibetans of the Mt. Tsari region. A few decades ago Tibetan pilgrims were sometimes plundered by the Tagins. Therefore, the Tibetan government provided armed guards to them. Now the Tagins are afraid of the Tibetans. On account of bad climatic conditions the region never attracted outsiders. The area is not only unhealthy but also lacks good tracks.

Longju is in the centre of the region. It can be reached from Lime King, Daporijo and Machuka by foot-paths passing through dense forests. At places there are ladder climbs and indigenous suspension bridges making the journey hazardous and exhausting. The Tibetans did not like to migrate to this region on account of its numerous drawbacks. The trekking from Lime King to Longju takes three days and nearly the same from Machuka but more than a week from Daporijo to Longju.

**The Subansiri Valley** :—The Subansiri has formed a narrow and deep valley between two mountains. The northern mountain separates it from the Tsari Chu and the southern from the Kamla valley. The Subansiri rises in Tibet and enters India at an altitude of 9,000 feet. Like the Longju region this tract also lacks good communications. The tracks are risky and inconvenient as those of the Tsari Chu tract ; they are used by the native people only.



The sparse population of the small villages comprises the handsome Hill Miris. Like the Tagins they also live on forest produce. In some places a little cultivation is also done.

**The Longju Operations :—** The falseness of China's peaceful motives was exposed after the flight of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa in March 1959. At that time a platoon of the Assam Rifles was stationed at Longju. In July 1959, the officer-in-charge of the Indian check-post at Longju fell ill. The Government of India informed the government of China on 24th July that they proposed to air-drop a doctor.

On 25th August 1959 a Chinese detachment crossed into Indian territory and attacked an Indian picket. As a result a rifleman was killed and another wounded, the remainder were taken prisoner. A few men who were away on duty escaped. They informed the commander of the Longju picket about the incident. The next morning the Chinese attacked the Longju picket in overwhelming numbers. Captain Adhikari of the Assam Rifles withdrew his men to Daporijo after some fighting. The Chinese maintain that it was the Indians who first attacked them and then withdrew from Longju. But the statement given below belies this.

“Although the Chinese troops did not cross for a single step into Longju during the incident of August 25 and 26, it must, however be pointed out that Longju is indisputably part of Chinese territory”.

On 5th September the Government of India received a further account of the incidents and wrote to China :

“...the Chinese deliberately fired on our forward picket killing one person on the spot and seriously wounding another. Later the Chinese detachment opened fire on the main outpost at Longju at 0300 hours on 26th August and overran the surrounding area. Our personnel had to fire in self-defence. The Government of India protests.....”.

China rejected the protest of the Government of India and at the same time claimed Tamadan. The Government of India tried to solve the border problem with patience. They wrote back :

“Pending examination of the position at Tamadan force should not be used on the Indian post there. As far as Longju is concerned

the Government of India would be prepared not to send their personnel back to the area provided the Chinese would also withdraw their forces. This would mean that neither side would have their personnel at Longju”.

Chou En-lai accepted the proposal.

“Pending the above mentioned agreement, the Chinese Government, in a conciliatory spirit and out of the desire to move towards the withdrawal of armed forces along the entire border, is prepared to agree first to reach a partial solution by applying the proposal you have made in your letter for the non-stationing of the armed forces of both sides at Longju to the other disputed places on the border as well”.

After this note the Chinese troops were supposed to have been withdrawn from Longju and Nehru announced it in the Lok Sabha. In fact the Chinese had not withdrawn from Longju, as evident from the Chinese note of 8th December 1962.

“Longju is a village in the Migyitung area, and India itself has admitted that Migyitung is situated to the north of the illegal McMahon Line. This village was invaded and occupied by Indian troops in June 1959, but was recovered by China after the armed conflict instigated by Indian troops in August 1959. Following that, China not only restored its administrative control over Longju, but also maintained a post there for a period of time. The Indian memorandum alleges that both sides agreed that neither Chinese nor Indian personnel should occupy the village. *This is pure fabrication.* It is appropriate to ask : When and in what manner did the two Governments agree to refrain from ‘occupying’ Longju ? It is impossible for the Indian Government to produce any definite evidence on the question”.

This settles the case of Longju. China still occupies it.

China also wanted the high ground in its south. In January 1962 Chinese forces occupied Roi village. India Protested. China rejected the protest claiming that Roi village was actually in Chinese territory.

The Government of India took steps to establish a new post in the south of Longju. A platoon of the Assam Rifles under Captain Mitra established a post at Maja, three miles in the south of Longju.

On 16th November 1962 this post was abandoned. No regular troops were ever sent to this area.

**The Subansiri Valley Operations** :—There was an Indian post at Taksing on the Subansiri river near the Indo-Tibetan boundary. In February 1962 the Government of India increased its strength by a platoon. In June a dozen tribesmen from Lengbeng under Chinese persuasion stole some arms from Taksing post. While escaping they were intercepted. There was an exchange of fire between them and the Indians in which a tribesman was killed. The others escaped to Lung a village on the Tibetan side of the border. Thus trouble started here also. The Indians became vigilant and posted some troops in Asafia village.

In November 1962 the Chinese used force and the Indian pickets withdrew. A battalion of the J & K Rifles was at Lime King to support the frontier outposts. On learning that Asafia and Taksing had fallen Lime King also was vacated on November 16.

“Over the period from 20th October to 21st November 1962 the towns of Asafia, Taksing and Lime King in the Subansiri Division were overrun by the Chinese forces”.

**Comments** :—Without the support of the local population Indian forces could not fight in the far flung frontier areas. NEFA is vast and is sparsely populated. Its area is 32,000 square miles and population only 325,000. To integrate the people of NEFA with other Indians plainsmen's blood should be mixed with the hillmen's. This is the only way to save NEFA from the clutches of China. The problem of defending the area still remains. The Chinese used NEFA as a bargaining counter to get Aksai Chin in Ladakh. India has to beat China at her own game. This is the job of the politicians. In other words the defence of NEFA is more political than military.

## CHAPTER XI

# THE SOLILOQUY

“War is produced by, and receives its form from the ideas, feelings and relations obtaining at the moment it breaks out”<sup>1</sup>.

CLAUSEWITZ

China succeeded in making Longju, Khinzemane and the Diphu La a subject of discussion with India, before 1957. Later on her troops intruded into India several times. India resisted the intrusions. China used force against India. This was a blunder on her part. The Chinese invasion of 1962 was an eye-opener to the nations of the world. Even Russia became suspicious.

Circumstances forced India to drift apart from her neighbours i. e. the Tibetans making it obligatory on their part to develop contacts with the Han. The Indian hillmen followed the Tibetans. It is a historical fact that China became the pilgrim centre of Buddhists of the Himalayan region. India did not learn anything from history and she failed to bridge the gulf which had been created during the Mohammedan period between her and the Tibetans. China exploited the situation—she planned to invade the Indian Himalayan border areas. India remained inactive. When the Chinese invasion of 1962 came Indian troops suffered defeat after defeat. For political reasons Indian leaders’ attention was attracted towards Kameng. There a major portion of war effort was concentrated. Consequently the Kameng collapse attained notoriety in proportion to the effort.

The Kameng reverse was the consequence of the incompetence of the Indian leaders who invited the untimely Chinese attack and kept the nation unprepared (since 1947) under the false sense of security of Panchsheel. The cadre of military officers on whom rests the efficiency of the army could not escape its dulling effect. Under the circumstances the Indian Army’s reverses were a foregone conclusion. There are two aspects of the Kameng campaign, the long term and the short term. The former is connected with the short-

---

1. *Principles of War* by Marshal Foch, Translated by Hilaire Belloc (London 1918).....P. 22.

age of men and war equipment and lack of training of the personnel, the latter with the performance of senior officers in action.

It was for the Chief of Army Staff and the Army Commander to oppose the proposal of meeting the Chinese challenge. A field commander, however senior in rank, could not do so as it would have amounted to defiance of an operational order. As the Chief and the Army Commander, whether for reasons of expediency or under political pressure, sent the ill-equipped and ill-trained army to the Kameng front in a hurry, they must shoulder the overall responsibility for the NEFA collapse.

Now the question arises whether the IV Corps Commander could have made a better use of the men and materials available to him. The chief duty of a commander is to see that every individual under his command, whether a civilian or a soldier, gives of his best in an emergency. It is immaterial whether the commander sits in the firing line or miles away from it, but he must inspire his men and win the confidence of his subordinate commanders. From all accounts the IV Corps Commander (reasons apart) failed in this.

Not only the corps commander but nearly all his formation commanders failed to make use of men and materials placed under their command. They did not use to advantage their youth, initiative and ambition.

The responsibility of the defeat of 1962 does not fall on army officers alone. In a democracy the army carries out the policy of its government. It is the duty of the government to keep the army well supplied with men and materials so that it remains fighting fit at all times ; it is for the government to decide whether a task is within the capacity of its army. Nehru failed to realise the gravity of the situation created by the Chinese intransigence and hence cannot be absolved from the responsibility of the NEFA reverses. From a broader point it will be readily seen that the entire nation which voted Nehru to power is to blame for the NEFA disaster. It got what it deserved. The people remained steeped in the creed of *ahimsa* for more than half a century and lost their power of sensing danger and meeting it. This has to be remedied effectively if the future has to be safeguarded.

# INDEX

- Abors 17, 18, 247, 248  
Ahimsa 3, 256  
Ahoms 23, 24  
Aim (Chinese) 30, 45, 60, 72, 74-76, 163, 173, 189, 190, 197  
Aim (Indian) 55-57, 78, 90, 129, 137, 138, 162  
Akas 18, 145, 146, 171  
Ambala 174, 176  
Apa Tanis 18, 24, 30  
Appreciation 55, 61, 72, 73, 84, 130, 203-204  
Arakan 5, 86, 166  
Ashi Hill 202, 208, 209, 213-215, 219, 226, 228, 232  
Ashoka 23  
Asia 28, 243  
Asiatic Research 22
- Bailey FM 24, 33, 90, 193  
Bakhtyar Khilji 23  
Bara Hoti 44  
Barnet Correlli 27  
Battle of  
    Admin Box 166, 167  
    Ashi Hill 209  
    Bomdi La 182-187  
    Green Pimple 216, 222  
    High Plateau 232-234  
    IB Ridge 205-207  
    Lachhman picket 227  
    Ladders 228-232  
    Longju 252 ..  
    Maha Plateau 223-228  
    McMahon Ridge 205-207  
    Mithune 228  
    Namka Chu 77  
    Patrol Base 225-227  
    Thembang 179-182  
    Tongpeng La 103-105  
    Trijunction 223-225  
    Tsangdhar 82  
    Tsangle 80  
    Tseng-jong 62, 65, 68, 79, 80  
    West Ridge 225  
    Yellow Pimple 207  
Birth of Buddhism 22-23  
Bisheshwar Prasad 89  
Border  
    Indo-Tibetan 43, 72, 164, 205  
    NEFA-Assam 159, 169  
    Roads 31, 92, 105, 106, 109, 246
- Boundary  
    Indo-Burmese 24, 199  
    Indo-Pak 30, 52, 53  
    Indo-Tibetan 27-29, 31-33, 35-36, 43, 49, 53, 59, 163, 197, 199, 202, 203, 244, 249, 250, 254  
    Outer-Inner Tibetan 27, 28, 190  
    Treaty 24  
    trijunction 33, 52, 71, 190, 197, 202, 203, 239  
Bridge 1 134, 152, 154, 159, 160, 161  
Bridge 2 131, 134, 137, 152, 161  
Bridge 3 92, 108, 109, 115, 119, 137  
Bridge 4 42, 91, 93, 94, 105, 106 114, 118, 149  
Brigadier  
    Gurbux Singh 176, 178, 186, 189, 195  
    Hartley 210, 240  
    Hoshiar Singh 127, 129, 130, 132-134, 138, 139, 142-144, 162  
    John Dalvi 47, 55, 56, 82, 84  
    Rolley 210, 211, 217, 238, 240, 241  
Buggering of troops 192
- Captain  
    Amarjeet Singh 177, 179  
    Chopra 225, 237  
    Cooper 24, 199  
    Kumar 226  
    Mathur 216  
    Rawat 157-159, 167  
Chaku 41, 42, 170, 172, 187-189, 195  
Chiang Kai-shek 29  
Chinese VIP 44, 79  
Chou En-lai 5, 253  
Chuna 44, 45, 90, 93, 98, 127  
Clausewitz 255  
Climate 20, 37, 92, 147, 170-171, 245, 251  
Comments 84-88, 122-123, 139, 163-168, 209, 220-222, 239-243  
Congress 4, 89  
Cuban affairs 64
- Daflas 17, 18, 24, 145, 146, 251  
Dalai Lama 25, 26, 30, 39, 40, 149, 252  
Dongri 148, 177, 180  
Dungma Ba 155
- Elwyn Varrier 15  
Eagle's Nest 172
- Fall of  
    Bomdi La 15, 173, 183, 185, 187

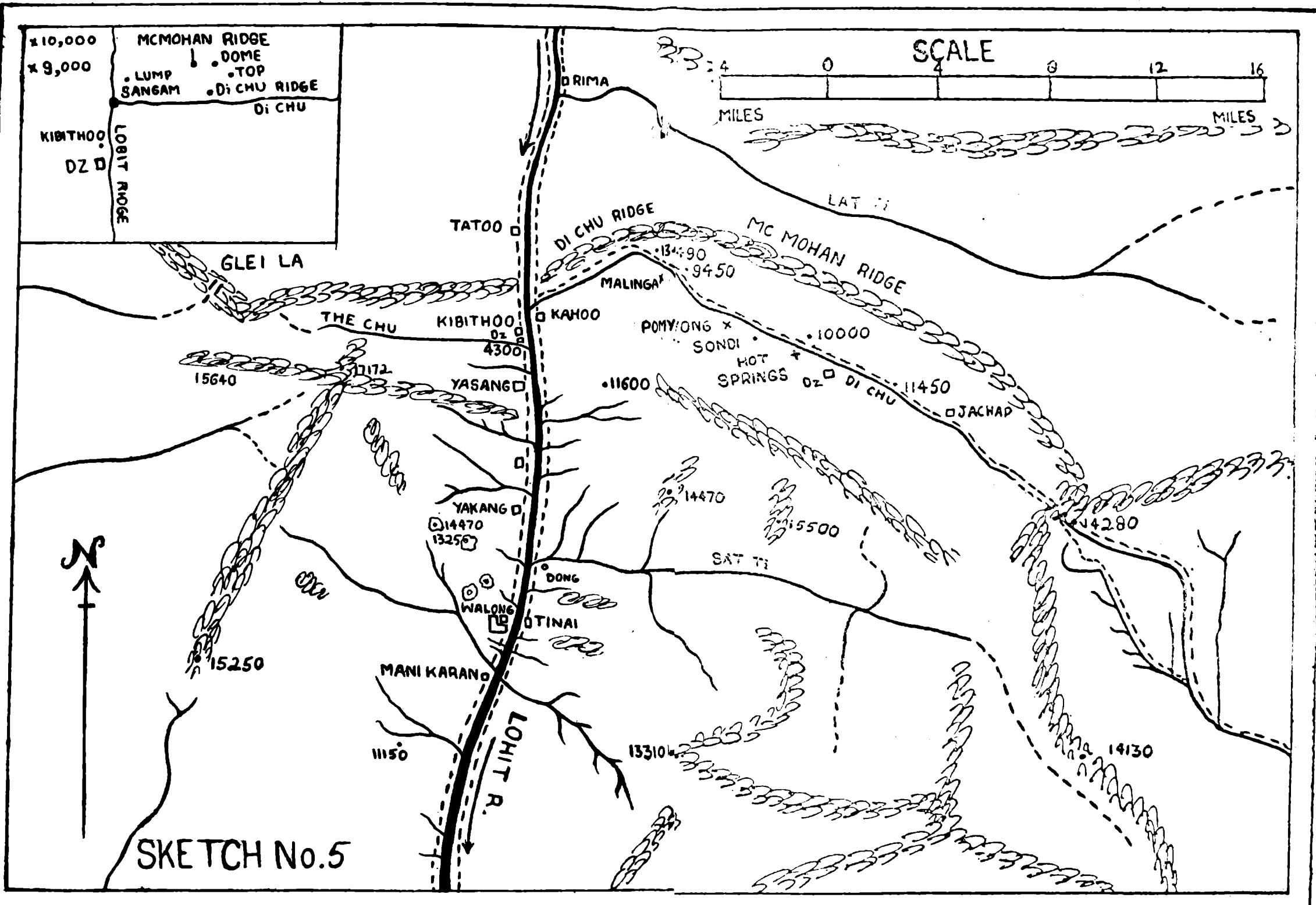
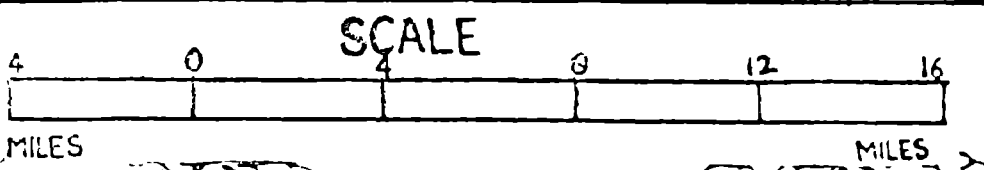
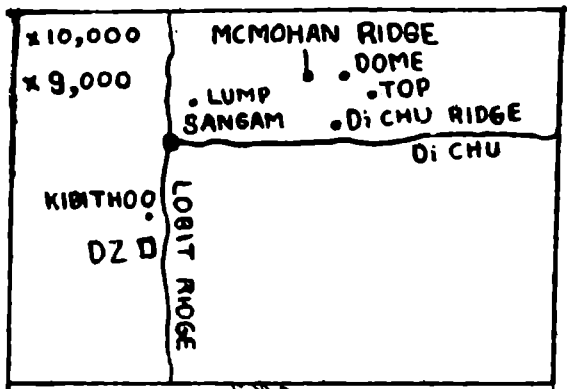
- Dhola 167, 192  
 Kibithoo 209, 220, 240, 248  
 Poshing La 179  
 Se La 129  
 Tawang 89, 90, 108, 139, 191  
 Thembang 131, 155, 181  
 Tsangle 73  
 Tseng-jong 68, 70, 71, 98  
 Fauna and Flora 37-39, 92, 147, 170, 171, 199, 243  
 Field Marshal Slim 124, 141, 145, 166, 167  
 Flat ground 92, 105, 106, 108, 109  
 Foothill 16, 32, 152, 170, 172, 182, 185, 188, 189, 195  
 Frontier Indo-Tibetan 245  
 Frontier Sino-Burmese 203
- Gandhi M 3  
 General  
   Cariappa 6, 12  
   Rommel 68, 109  
   Thapar 133, 139, 166, 167  
   Thimayya 4, 5  
 Geological aspect 22, 92, 198-200  
 Goa 51, 67  
 Guerrilla actions 68, 119
- Hart Liddel 68  
 Havildar  
   Gurnam Singh 233, 234  
   Pushkar Singh 224  
   Sucha Singh 101, 102  
 Hayuliang 200, 204, 205, 208, 211, 225, 228, 231, 236, 237-240, 241, 243, 249  
 Himalayan Range 24, 33, 37, 42, 72, 91, 94, 149, 198, 244, 245, 247, 250, 251  
 Hot Springs 198, 200-202, 205, 207  
 Huin Tsiang 20-22
- India-China political relations 32, 49
- JASB 20  
 Jang 25, 42, 90, 92, 99, 100, 102, 104-106, 108-110, 116, 121, 130, 149  
 Jorhat 20, 209, 211, 240
- Kalaktang 139, 160, 162, 170, 190  
 Kalika Puran 21  
 Kangto massive 90-92, 170  
 Kashmir operations 5, 166  
 Kaulback Ronald 24, 197  
 Khampas 19, 247, 249  
 Khinzemane 36, 39-43, 45, 62, 70, 73, 74, 76-80, 100, 255  
 Kya La CG 91, 129, 148, 149
- Lagyala Gompa 160-162  
 Lake Chaime 21  
 Lake Mansarovar 21  
 Lake Sechiang 36, 77  
 Lamb Alstair 27  
 Lance Naik Yeshwant 117, 118  
 Land routes 16, 39-41, 92-95, 117-118, 171-173, 200-201  
 Landa village 94, 98, 110, 111  
 Landmarks 201-202, 221  
 Level ground 126, 152  
 Lieutenant  
   Dagar 135, 136, 139  
   Goswami 112, 113, 118  
   Kaushik 102, 105, 138, 139  
   Palta 232, 233, 242  
   Roy 78, 80  
   Tandon 100, 118  
   Vikram Singh 208, 209, 225  
 Lieutenant-Colonel  
   Ahluwalia 82  
   Ajmer Singh 180, 181  
   Avasthi 139, 153, 154, 159-163, 167  
   Bhattacharjya 108, 113-115, 117, 122, 123, 130, 137  
   Gurdial Singh 185-187, 195  
   Kale 187  
   Madiah 216, 219, 222, 224, 225, 236  
   Mehta 138, 139  
   Ratan Singh 78-80  
   Rikh 81  
   Taylor 6, 249, 250  
 Lieutenant-General  
   Harbux Singh 71, 100, 109, 208, 210, 234  
   Kaul 6, 7, 14, 50, 52-54, 56, 57, 68, 69, 71, 109, 133, 139, 140, 166, 208, 211.  
   Sen 5, 53, 55, 100, 133, 139, 140, 165-167  
   Thorat 5, 6, 7, 13  
   Umrao Singh 51-53, 55, 65  
 Log bridge 36, 51, 62  
 Lok Sabha 31, 253  
 Longju 23, 31, 239, 250, 251-253, 255  
 Luguthang 42, 90, 94, 128, 148  
 Lumpu 40, 41, 45-49, 52, 54, 62-64, 71, 75, 76, 82, 83, 87, 88, 100, 148  
 Lung village 251, 254
- Machuka 244, 246-251  
 Mago 90, 93, 94, 127, 173  
 Major  
   Chand 229-231, 238  
   Chaudhry 60, 61  
   D'Souza 157, 158, 167  
   Gurdial Singh 81  
   Gurdip Singh 138, 139  
   Kukreti 153, 154, 159, 161, 162  
   Nair 153-155, 160, 163, 165  
   Naygam 206-207  
   Nijjar 82

- Rai 106, 107, 110, 111, 113-117, 119-123, 139, 148  
 Sumvatsar 226  
 Major-General  
 Elliot 167  
 Niranjan Prasad 51, 150  
 Pathania AS 131, 133, 134, 150, 156, 166, 176, 177  
 Maltese Cross 16  
 Manikaran 21, 200, 239  
 Mao Tse-tung 5, 30  
 Marshal Foch 255  
 Martin Montgomery 21, 22  
 McMahon Line 25, 27-29, 31, 32, 42, 45, 48, 49, 51, 66, 89, 94, 97, 101, 198, 200, 204, 244, 250, 253  
 Merbia 111, 113, 121, 129  
 Migyitung 24, 244, 250, 253  
 Ministry of Defence 30  
 Ministry of External Affairs 43, 56  
 Mishmis 17, 18, 19, 24, 31, 198, 200, 201  
 Missamari 32, 152, 176-178  
 Moupas 18, 37-39, 50, 100, 119, 145, 146, 149, 171, 177, 181, 247  
 Mt. Tsari 23, 24, 244, 246, 250, 251  
 Mukto Bridge 83, 95, 110, 111, 113, 114, 117, 124, 128, 130, 131, 149, 174  
 NATO power 158  
 Naga ebullience 30, 52  
 Nagas 17, 31, 239  
 Naib Subedar  
 Ao 208  
 Bhairab Singh 136, 236  
 Budh Singh 136  
 Gurnam Singh 217, 218  
 Jatan Singh 137, 138  
 Udai Singh 114, 117, 118  
 Naik Bahadur Singh 207  
 Naik Kuldip Singh 237  
 Ndap range 197, 199  
 Nehru Jawahar Lal 31, 41, 45, 50, 53, 69, 150, 197, 253, 256  
 Nepali-Bhotia 113-114  
 Nuranang 26, 92, 95, 107, 119, 126, 131, 133  
 Occupation of  
 Karpo La 58, 61  
 Tawang 89  
 Thagla ridge 45  
 Trijunction 216-217  
 Tsangle 52, 58  
 Tseng-jong 55-62, 64, 65  
 Walong 202  
 Onkar Operation 31-33, 55, 202, 248  
 Open ground 92, 109, 115, 119, 120, 130  
 Paitsai 35, 57, 58, 62, 66, 73, 150  
 Pak infiltrators 51, 211, 243  
 Pakistan 30, 32, 150  
 Panchsheel 45, 255  
 Parasram 21, 22  
 Pass  
 Bum La 33, 42, 44, 45, 72, 74, 75, 91, 94, 95, 97, 101, 149, 190, 191  
 Chang La 145, 148, 174, 176, 177, 191  
 Chera La 93  
 Diphu La 31, 197, 198, 200, 203, 205, 255  
 Dum Dum La 33, 57, 62  
 Hatung La 35, 36, 41, 44, 46, 54, 71, 74-76, 81, 82  
 Kya La 91, 93, 94, 116, 124, 127, 130, 131, 141, 148, 173  
 Manda La 30, 131, 145, 147, 154, 161  
 Orka La 16, 91, 139, 145, 152, 153, 161, 169, 170  
 Pankhim La 169-171  
 Pen La 90, 92, 93, 127  
 Piri La 169, 170, 172  
 Poshing La 124, 145, 146, 148, 149, 152, 174, 177-179, 191, 193  
 Se La 91-93, 95, 100, 105-107, 119-121, 124, 126, 127, 132-137, 139, 142, 145, 147-140, 152, 174, 192-194  
 Thag La 33, 41, 42, 46, 57, 62, 190, 191  
 Tse La 91, 132-134, 139, 145-148, 177, 179, 193  
 Tulung La 90, 92, 93, 127, 148, 170, 190, 191, 244  
 Tunga La 244, 246  
 Turkya La 93, 128  
 Yumtso La 33, 36, 41, 46, 62, 79  
 Patkoi Range 24, 198  
 Peking 76, 77  
 Phudong 139, 161, 162, 170-172, 174, 178, 182, 186, 192  
 President of India 14, 89  
 Puranic knowledge 21-22  
 Queen Victoria 234  
 Raiders' Ridge 94, 101, 103  
 Rima 20, 28, 31, 190, 200, 201, 204, 205, 231  
 Rivers  
 Bhreli 91, 145, 146, 169-171  
 Brahmaputra 16, 18, 21, 22, 28, 40, 53, 103, 244, 245, 247  
 Di Chu 31, 197, 199, 202  
 Dirang Chu 91, 145-147, 158, 165, 181  
 Goro Chu 90, 91, 93, 128, 129



- Lohit 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25, 197-202,  
 204, 208, 211, 222, 228, 231  
 Namka Chu 35, 36, 45-55, 57, 58,  
 60, 61, 66, 71, 73, 74, 77, 84  
 Nyamjang Chu 17, 33, 35, 36, 39,  
 40, 58, 78, 90  
 Rupa Chu 138, 145, 146, 170, 173,  
 184, 186, 187  
 Sangti Chu 145, 146  
 Sat Ti Chu 197-199  
 Seti Chu 90  
 Subansiri 23, 250, 251, 254  
 Syom 245  
 Tashiyangti 33, 36, 41  
 Tawang Chu 35, 37, 40, 42, 83, 90,  
 91, 93, 94, 106-112, 118, 122, 129,  
 140, 149  
 The Chu 198, 199, 205  
 Yepak 236  
 Rupa Defile 173, 174, 184, 185, 188  
  
 Senge Dzong 25, 31, 94, 122, 126, 127,  
 134, 136, 147, 152, 176  
 Simla Convention 27-30, 43, 47  
 Stand to 80, 107, 130  
 Subedar  
   Aswal 115, 119-121  
   Banta Singh 135  
   Bishen Singh 119  
   Ganga Singh 223, 236, 237  
   Govind Singh 220  
   Jogindra Singh 1101-103  
   Pratap Singh 110  
 Survey parties 24, 25, 43, 202  
 Szechuan 20, 200  
  
 Tagins 19, 23, 24, 30, 246, 252  
 Tashigong 33, 40, 41  
 Tezu 15, 16, 22, 201, 218, 236-238  
 Thembang 145-148, 155, 172-174, 177,  
 179-182, 184, 186, 192, 193  
 Tiger mouth 214, 226  
  
*Time magazine* 150, 169  
 Trijunction 201, 212, 216-220, 222, 223,  
 225, 236, 243  
 Tsetang 40, 64, 72, 103  
 Twin Lakes 94, 95, 124, 126, 291, 130,  
 132, 135  
 Twin Peaks 94, 95, 97, 98, 101-103,  
 111, 129, 131, 133  
  
 UAR 168  
 Unit Darbar 54  
 Uri 17  
  
 Valley  
   Brahmaputra 23, 24, 70, 159, 161,  
   246-248  
   Di Chu 200, 203, 205, 207  
   Dirang 113, 139, 147, 150, 156-160,  
   172-174, 191  
   Goro Chu 95, 148  
   Lohit 23, 24, 31, 203  
   Namka Chu 91-93, 108, 121, 123, 124,  
   126, 132, 150  
   Nyamjang Chu 16, 37, 44, 83  
   Rupa Chu 139, 160, 171, 172, 188, 194  
   Sangti Chu 148  
   Subansiri 24, 30, 251  
   Syom 245, 246, 248  
   Tawang Chu 90, 95, 148  
   Yepak 236  
 Vital Ground 43, 45, 46, 59, 90, 95, 124,  
 239  
  
 Ward Kingdom 24, 90, 146, 172, 193  
 Waters Thomas 24, 90, 146, 172, 193  
 Western Desert 68  
 World War II 86, 166, 186, 210  
  
 Yiyu 245, 246, 248  
 Zirkhim 41, 54, 82





SKETCH No.5