

Hyder Jung Harsey—"Hyder"

AN INTREPID ADVENTURER

BY GOPAL BHARDWAJ

The family of Harsey is of undoubted antiquity. In the year 1745 Theophilus Harsey, a Cumberland squire, took up arms for Prince Charles Edward Stewart (bonnie Prince Charlie) and led his family, tenants and retainers into the field. He and his son were present at the battle of Culloden.

A grandson of Theophilus took service with the East India Company, and was posted to the army in India where he met and married an Indian girl of a well-to-do family. It must be remembered that this was the practice towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

When it was rare for British girls to come out to India. The offsprings of such unions eventually occupied some of the highest positions in the land, one rose to the post of Lt-Governor of a province, others became Colonels of regiments and still others, such as the Harseys, Skinners, and Gardeners, were dashing soldiers-of-fortune, each with a private army of his own.

Hyder Jung Harsey—"Hyder", after Hyder Ali of Mysore, one of the stoutest opponents of the British in India, and "Jung", a warlike appellation, was born in 1782. The "Jung" was later changed to "Young". As befitted a member of a race of intrepid warriors, Hyder was educated at Woolwich. At the age of 16 years he returned to India and was appointed Aide-de-Camp to Saadut Ali Khan, the last Nawab Wazir of Oudh and father of Ghazi-ud-din, the first King of Oudh.

Life in the Oudh court being insufficiently stirring for the young aide-de-camp, he resigned his post and took service with the Maharathas. As he could speak French he was given the same duties by General Perron, the French Commander-in-chief of the Maharatha forces. For his gallantry during the capture of Agra by Perron he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant and Deputy Commandant of the Agra Fort. He was then only 17 years old, an age at which most boys are still in school!

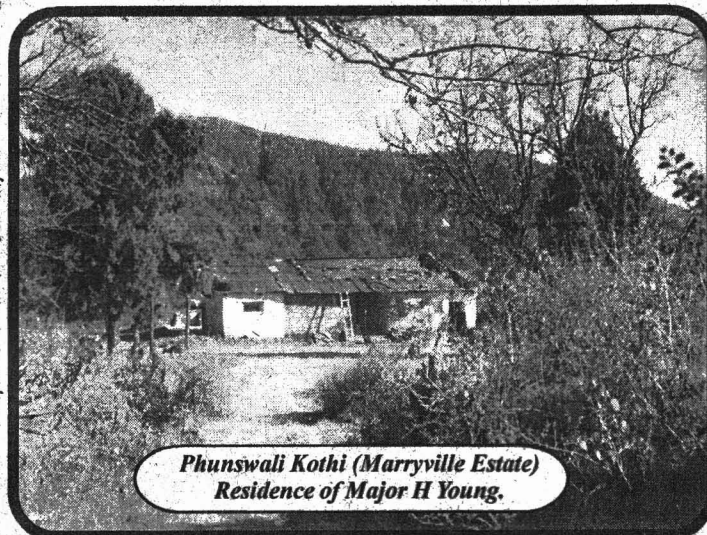
When Perron conceived the idea of converting India into a dependency of France, Hyder, who was intensely loyal to his sovereign, left his service and joined that of George Thomas, an Irish soldier of fortune, who had carved out a kingdom for himself in what was then known as the district of Harijana in the Punjab. (now in Haryana State) Thomas too, had the ambition of adding the Punjab, west of river Sutlej, to the dominions of his sovereign. This led to a clash between Perron and Thomas in which the latter, mainly due to the fact that he became dead drunk at a crucial period in the battle of Georgegarh, was defeated. Harsey, who had rendered yeoman service during the engagement, now decided to take a leaf out of the book of these two adventurers. He collected a force and conquered Mewat, then part of district of Mathura and Gurguan. He was then barely out of his teens.

Lord Wellesley, the then Governor-General, in 1803, decided to break the power of Perron. He called on all British and Anglo-Indian officers serving with the Maharatta army or holding territories of their own, to join the British army under Lord Lake. Hyder, bringing his own troops with him, answered the call and rendered distinguished services during the Maharatta war.

On the conclusion of the war, he and Colonel William Linnaeus Gardener married two sisters, Princesses of Cambay, who had been adopted as his daughters by the Moghul Emperor Akbar II. In consequence of their marriages Gardener and Harsey acquired considerable estates under firmans from the Emperor. Gardener settling down at Kasgange, in the Etah district, and Harsey at Kareli, in the Bareilly district of the then United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, now in the state

of Uttar Pradesh. Harsey's brother-in-law, the princes of Cambay, threw in their lot with him. Hyder had now risen to the rank of Captain.

During the years 1807-08 the British Government sent out various expeditions to execute surveys of their newly acquired territories and among others, a party, consisting of Captains Hyder Harsey and F. V. Raper and Lieutenant W.S. Webb, was dispatched to survey the upper waters of the river Ganges. It was, at this time, uncertain where the river rose, some affirming correctly that it had its source at Gangotri in Garhwal, while others believed that the apparent source at Gangotri was the mouth of a tunnel which pierced the Himalayas and conducted the waters of the Ganges from the holy lake of Mansarovar in Tibet. The three men set out from Bareilly in April 1808 and made an accurate survey of the Ganges and of the mountain region through which it flowed and



Phunswali Kothi (Marryville Estate)
Residence of Major H Young.

definitely settled the fact that the main source of the river was at Gangotri. The travelers made their way through Garhwal, which had been conquered five years previously by the Gurkhas, without much trouble. They were invited to a big game hunt by the Gurkha Governor, Hasti Dal Chautariya. During the hunt a bear attacked the Governor and would have killed him but Hyder promptly rushed up and slew the animal with a spear. He then cured Hasti Dal's wounds, which services were remembered by the Governor some years later, when he, in turn, was instrumental in saving the life of Harsey.

In 1809 the Gurkhas advanced still further and invaded many tracts of the country which were either under British protection or belonged to them. Among other regions occupied by the Nepalese was a portion of the Terai bordering on Oudh. Hyder was commissioned by the British Government to raise a force and clear the country of the invaders—a tribute to the Anglo-Indian's bravery and leadership, which service he performed with complete success fighting three actions with the Gurkhas at Barrum Deo. The territory cleared by Harsey was sold to the King of Oudh by the British for a million pounds and the small province of Handia.

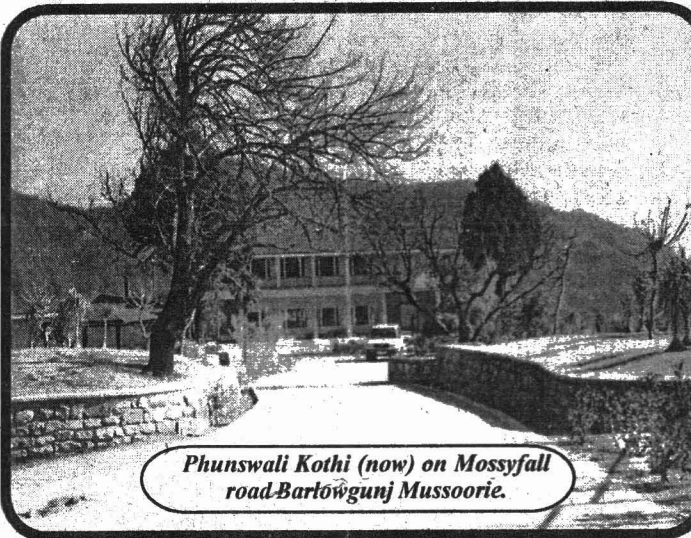
Two years later Hyder gained acquaintance at Bareilly with Sudarshan Sah, the exiled Raja of Garhwal, who for the sum of Rs. 3005 sold him the valley of the Doon and pergunna Chandee in Bijnor district.

Early in 1812 Hyder made another bold expedition through the lower Himalayas from which the Gurkhas had expelled the legitimate owners. He accompanied William Moorcroft in a journey through Kumaon and Garhwal to western Tibet, with the special objective of visiting Lake Mansarovar. The travellers entered Kumaon on May 9, 1812, disguised as Gosains (Hindu pilgrims). Harsey undertook the survey of the entire route traversed. He, later, received nothing but the ingratitude of the survey department, as the latter considered that he, not being a trained surveyor, had no business to encroach on their preserve!

Harsey and his companion arrived at Niti on June 4th

1812, where they were held up and it was solely due to their tact, patience and courage that they were able to complete the journey to Lake Mansarovar, where they verified that it gave origin neither to the Ganges nor to any other river reputed to flow from it. They reached Mansarovar on 5th—the first foreign travellers from India to traverse the Himalaya mountains into western Tibet and visit the sacred Lake. On their return journey, which was begun on August 8th, they were arrested by the Gurkhas on October 15th. After various communications with Bam Sah, the Gurkha Governor of Almora, and Amar Singh Thapa, the Commander-in-chief of the Gurkha army in these parts, they were released on November 1st and got back safely to Bareilly.

In 1814 the Marquis of Hastings declared war against the Gurkhas, who had committed a series of aggressions on British territory. The Governor-General planned to



Phunswali Kothi (now) on Mossyfall
road Bartowgunj Mussoorie.

attack the Nepalese from four directions and, in addition, to create a diversion by invading the Gurkha-held province of Kumaon which was to be attacked by two small bodies of irregulars commanded by Captain Harsey and his brother-in-law Lt-Col. William Gardener. Both were placed under the political control of Gardener's cousin, Edward Gardner, an Indian civilian, who was now appointed Commissioner of Kumaon. This rash, indeed desperate, enterprise was suggested by Harsey and Gardener themselves, both fearless men. Gardener, at this time, commanded a body of mounted frontier Police, later known as Gardener's Horse. He was directed to raise 3000 men at Kashipur and Harsey 1500 Rohillas at Bareilly and Pilibhit, in which region he had much property and influence. The plan of campaign was for Gardener to advance into Kumaon up to the Kosi valley and Harsey up the Kali river and to eventually cut off Amar Singh Thapa, who was fighting Ochterlony near Sutlej, from his only line of retreat. The time allotted for preparing the small force was all too short, a month to raise and a month to train. In its third month of existence Harsey's contingent was actively engaged with the Gurkhas. In the middle of February 1815 Hyder advanced from Pilibhit, entered Kumaon from the east and, on February 18th, he captured two forts which blocked his road to Timla Pass. He continued his advance successfully and, on the last day of the month, he occupied Champawat, the ancient capital of Kali Kumaon, and drove the Gurkhas across the river Kali. He next planned to advance on Almora to join hands with his brother-in-law, Gardener. But his force was quite inadequate to this. He had no guns and no more ammunition for his infantry than his men had been able to carry in addition to seven days' ration and their baggage. Worst of all, he was compelled to divide his small force, for it was necessary for him to guard his flank by holding the line of the Kali river.

Harsey detached 500 men under Lieutenant Martindell; his only British officer, to surround the fort of Kutulgarh; which was held by 400 Gurkhas; with 300 men he formed

a chain of small posts to guard his line of supplies from Pilibhit; 300 men held the line of the Kali river and, deducting sick and wounded, there only remained about 300 effective men with him at Champawat, at which place he was forming a depot of supplies for further advance. So passed the month of March.

Gardener advanced by way of Ranikhet, where he was reinforced by 850 men on March 22nd, and took up a position facing Almora. Hyder was all anxiety to link up with Gardener, but, on March 31st, he received intelligence that 500 Gurkhas had forced the Kali at a point some 14 miles from Champawat. He promptly made a night march, with only 270 men, and attacked the Gurkhas in the early morning of April 1st. The battle went well with Harsey for a time. To clinch the issue he sent word to Martindell to come to his assistance. Before Martindell could join him, at about 3 o'clock in

the afternoon, 1500 more Gurkhas, under Hasti Dal Chautariya, crossed the river and attacked Harsey. Early in the fight Hyder was wounded in the thigh, one of the Cambay Princes was killed and Gholam Hyder Khan, his old follower from Mewat, was also wounded. The Rohillas, seeing their officers fall and fearing annihilation broke and fled. The Gurkhas, according to their custom, started to behead the dead and wounded. When they were about to kill Hyder Harsey, he was, fortunately, recognized by Hasti Dal, who saved his life and took him as a prisoner to Almora and there treated him like a brother, in gratitude for Harsey having rescued him from a bear seven years previously. The second Cambay prince escaped by sitting on his shield and sliding down a precipitous slope. Gholam Hyder Khan, who was wounded by an arrow through both thighs, also got away. Captain Harsey remained a prisoner in Almora until April 27, 1815, when that fortress surren-

dered to Colonel Nicolls, who had brought a considerable force and taken over command from Gardener. Hyder was employed by Hasti Dal as a negotiator and did useful service. On his release he returned to his home in Kareli. His wound was very severe and, owing to unskillful treatment during his captivity at Almora, he never fully recovered from its effects.

As related earlier, Hyder sold the pergunna of Chandee to East India Company in 1815 for an annuity to himself and his heirs and successors of Rs 1200. In the deed was a stipulation, that when the Doon came into the possession of the Company, he would sell them the valley as well. The British army, within a few months of the execution of this sale deed, conquered the Doon from Gurkhas. Despite the past heroic services of Harsey, his help in the defeat of the Maharathas, his two surveys, on behalf of the Government, of the Himalayas up to Lake Manasarovar, his defeat of the Gurkhas who had occupied the Terai, tract of which was sold by the Government to the King of Oudh for a million pounds and the province of Handia and his gallant effort in the Nepal war, the East India Company basely refused to honour the agreement to purchase the Doon from him. In all probability he would have parted with it for a mere song. The Rohillas rose in rebellion in 1816 and The East India Company shamelessly sought the help of Harsey in suppressing the rebellion. This he did very effectively. The Government presented him with a Sword of Honour and promoted him to the rank of a Major. Four years later, while at Hardwar, Hyder witnessed a terrible tragedy at the Kumbh Mela, when about 370 pilgrims were crushed to death in a sudden rush to bathe at the propitious moment. On his report the Marquis of Hastings, the then Governor-General of India, had a broad and safe bathing place made.

The sieze of Bhartpur, in 1825-26, was the gallant Anglo-Indian warrior's last campaign. On the capture of the fort, which, up to then, had been considered impregnable. Hyder returned to his home in Kareli where he lived in great state and happiness till his death in 1840.



Capt Hyder Young Hearsay