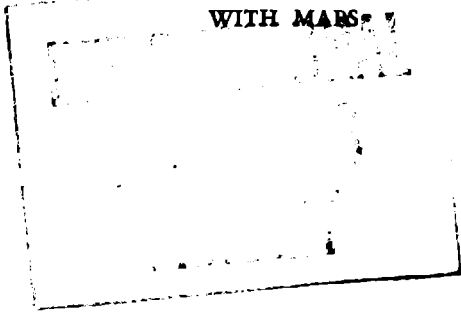


DUNCAN FORBES

JOHNNY
GURKHA

Foreword by
Brigadier the Rt. Hon.
SIR JOHN SMYTH,
Bt., V.C., M.C., M.P.

ILLUSTRATED AND
WITH MAPS



ROBERT HALE . LONDON

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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	9
<i>Introduction</i>	13
1 The Homeland in the Hills	15
2 The Gurkha Conquest	31
3 War with the British	39
4 In the Plains of India	57
5 The Queen's Peace	74
6 France and Turkey	91
7 El Alamein to Hiroshima	102
8 Year of Decision	117
9 Jungle-Bashers	128
10 War in the Himalayas	138
11 At Home in Malaysia	149
12 China Patrol	165
13 Borneo Adventure	171
14 Kaski and Lamjung, Tidworth and London	181
15 Gurkha Families	187
<i>Index</i>	201

Illustrations

	<i>facing page</i>
1 The little town of Gorkha	32
2 In the Kot at Katmandu—the ancient standards of Nepal	32
3 First World War—3rd/3rd Gurkhas in the Palestine trenches	33
4 The Adjutant of the 44th Gurkhas with his V.C.O.s, 1896	33
5 Third Afghan War—2nd/1st Gurkhas on the North West Frontier	48
6 Second World War—4th/10th Gurkhas in Prome, Burma	49
7 C.O. of the 1st/10th Gurkhas, Lt.-Col. O. N. Smyth, takes the surrender of the Japanese 28th Army in Burma	49
8 Gurkhas marching through Kure, Japan	96
9 Gurkhas in Italy—men of the 2nd/3rd crossing the Ronco	96
10 Testing the blade of the Gurkha <i>Kukri</i>	97
11 2nd Gurkha V.C.s visit Singapore—Captain Lalbahadur Thapa and Havildar Bhanbhagta Gurung	97
12 British Gurkha Coronation Contingent in Katmandu, led by Major D. H. Houston M.C., 6th Gurkha Rifles	112
13 Getting airborne with the R.A.F.	112
14 7th Gurkhas fly off to Borneo	113
15 Chasing rebels in a Brunei waterway	113
16 Pipers and drummers welcome a troopship from Hong Kong	160
17 A family of the 1st/7th Gurkhas disembarks from the <i>Nevasa</i>	161

18	1st/6th Gurkhas fitting out for Tidworth	161
19	Gurkha nurses fly off to England for training as Q.A.R.A.N.C. sisters	176
20	Krishna and his consorts—children of the 1st/2nd Gurkhas	176
21	Gurkha boys at the training depot master the intricacies of Meccano	177
22	Gurkha radio announcer, Lina Devaraj, interviews a Nepalese general	177

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MAPS

	<i>page</i>
1 The Homeland in Nepal	18-19
2 India—The Western Marches	42-43
3 India—The Eastern Marches	44-45
4 The Gurkha World	93

Foreword

by Brigadier the Rt. Hon.

SIR JOHN SMYTH, Bt., V.C., M.C., M.P.

I am very honoured to have been asked to write the Foreword to Major Forbes' thrilling book *Johnny Gurkha*. A great deal has been written over the years about the Gurkha soldier but, in view of the great contribution which the British Gurkha Brigade has been making to the maintenance of world peace over the past few years, this new book is very opportune. And it could not have found a better author than Major Forbes. He approaches the subject with an intimate knowledge, which comes from his head, and, perhaps more important, from a love and understanding of the Gurkha soldier—which can only come from the heart.

My own acquaintance with "Johnny Gurkha" started early in my military career and in the right place—Nepal. In 1913, as the last-joined subaltern in the 15th Ludhiana Sikhs, I was invited, by the Maharajah himself to spend no less than two whole months in Nepal. Now, in those days only V.I.P.s (and the lucky few like myself) were invited to do that. I owed my invitation to the fact that I and the eldest son of the Residency surgeon in Nepal were close friends. My journey to Nepal could hardly have been more difficult. The 15th Sikhs were stationed in Loralai in Baluchistan on the far North-West Frontier of India. I had to travel across the whole breadth of India in the middle of the hot weather. Then from the railhead at Gorakhpur I was carried through the deadly malarial belt of the Nepal Terai and began my three days' climb up to Katmandu.

During my interesting stay I met and made friends with the Prime Minister and Supreme Commander-in-Chief of Nepal, General Sir Shumshere Jung. And the lovely *kukri* he gave me hangs on the wall of my study today. I saw something of Nepal and its people—and particularly the tough hill tribes from whom our Gurkha soldiers are recruited.

In the First World War, as the author describes in Chapter 6 of his book, the Gurkhas made a great contribution—and also a great sacrifice. During those four grim years the Gurkhas left their dead in France, Mesopotamia and Gallipoli. And in France, in the critical early days when the fate of the free world hung in the balance, they fought at La Bassée, Festubert, Givency and Neuve Chapelle. On several occasions my own 15th Sikhs were close beside them on all these battlefields.

Just after the First World War, in 1919–20, there occurred the toughest operation that had ever taken place on the North-West Frontier of India. It was the campaign against the redoubtable Mahsuds. I was Brigade Major of the 43rd Brigade, one of the two brigades of the striking force. By the end of December, 1919, we had got such a battering that the whole outcome of the campaign was in the melting pot. The fierce tribesmen, at the top of their form, armed with modern weapons, and operating in their own tangled mass of mountains, were proving more than a handful for some of the Indian Army battalions in the Derajat Column who had not been trained in Mountain Warfare. General Skeen flew to A.H.Q. Delhi to emphasize the seriousness of the situation. As a result four battalions of Gurkhas were sent to join the column. They were the 2/5th, the 2/9th, the 4/3rd and the 3/11th. Their arrival turned the scale though not without some desperately hard fighting and many casualties.

Twenty-one years later, when I raised the 19th (Dagger) Division in Secunderabad, the 48th Gurkha Brigade was one of my three brigades. Early in 1942, when the Japanese invaded Burma, I was flown out to that country to command the 17th Division from which I had already had to detach two brigades to reinforce General Percival in Malaya. I at once asked for the 48th Brigade—and what a welcome reinforcement they were! The Brigade was composed of the 1/3rd, the 1/4th and 2/5th Gurkhas. They had of course been “milked” several times to help raise new battalions but the old standards and the old traditions were there and, in a rapidly deteriorating situation—particularly after Singapore fell—they and their British officers acquitted themselves magnificently.

In recent years I have been privileged as a Member of Parliament to take up the cause of the maintenance of the Gurkha Brigade within the British Army at its full establishment. And,

indeed, I have pressed that its numbers should be considerably increased.

In recent times, in Malaya and Borneo and other theatres, these Gurkha battalions have proved quite invaluable and have played an important part in the maintenance of peace.

Johnny Gurkha has no more wholehearted an admirer than me.

House of Commons

February, 1964.

Introduction

The seed of this account of the Gurkhas of Nepal was first sown in 1955, when I was writing the stories of the Gurkha Regiments and Corps in the British Army for publication in serial form in the Gurkha newspaper *Parbate*. For these stories I had to draw much of my material from the Regimental Histories. Some say that such books are dull. I found, on the contrary, that they revealed a field of human endeavour that covered the world. They ranged from Western Europe to Japan, from Tibet and Turkestan to Indonesia. Place-names like Imphal on the Indo-Burmese border and Arakan on the coast of Bengal, that seemed to come new to the British public in the Second World War, had already been enshrined in the memories of half-forgotten campaigns.

The hero of the story is the Gurkha soldier, and his eleven regiments provide the setting. Today, 150 years after his ancestors first enlisted in the British Indian Army, he is to be found spread as far and wide as ever. He can be seen training in the hills of Wales and on the German plain. He flies from the damp cold of Tidworth to the torrid heat of Aden. He faces a continental enemy in the bitter ice and snow of the Himalayas and a hit-and-run terrorist in the dripping hot jungles of Borneo. He patrols two frontiers of China in Ladakh and Hong Kong, 2,500 miles apart.

All this he does cheerfully as part of the day's work, for he is the last and most tenacious of a dying breed, the professional soldier—the mercenary. In the words of A. E. Housman:

“What God abandoned, these defended,
And saved the sum of things for pay.”

He comes from a narrow strip of country in the mid-levels of the Himalayas, one section only of a country whose total population is less than that of Holland, yet he came a quarter of a million strong to take part in both the world wars of our century.

For the account of this country, which is woven into the narrative, the basis was already laid in the History of Nepal and the

Geography of Nepal, which I wrote for the children in the Gurkha schools in 1956. It is changing rapidly, even in areas that twenty years ago those who ought to know were saying would not alter in a century. But the sturdy, hardy character of the Gurkha will not change, so long as he retains his love of his homeland in the hills.

Where possible I have tried to let the Gurkha speak for himself, and I wish to thank the Chief Education Officer of the Far East Land Forces and the Editor of *Parbate* for permission to publish my translations of extracts from the memoirs of the late Major Rakamsing Rai and of Lance Corporal Bhadrasing Gurung, and of the accounts of adventures in Borneo.

I would also like to thank the Ministry of Defence and the C.E.O., F.A.R.E.L.F., for permission to publish an English version of parts of the *Roman Gurkhali Reader Book 5* and the Editor of *Kukri* for allowing me to reproduce the poem with which the book ends.

I am also indebted to the pages of *Gorkha* for information concerning the exploits of Gurkhas in the Indian Army since the Second World War.

Last but not least I wish to thank Miss Joyce Cariss, who has many years' experience of the Gurkha families, for her invaluable help in preparing the book for publication and Major Ted Townsend for his assistance in sorting out matters in London that would have been difficult for me to deal with from Malaya.

D.F.

Seremban, Malaya, 1964.

I

The Homeland in the Hills

GORKHA lies four days' march west of Katmandu, or three now that the first stage can be covered by road. It was April 22nd when I set out, the hottest time of the year, but as I was intending to realize a long-cherished ambition, the temperature and the discomfort of walking in the sticky heat did not seem to be too important a deterrent.

I had arrived in Katmandu by plane from the area of flattened paddy fields at Bhairewa, near the birthplace of the Buddha, which serves as an airstrip. It is in the flat Terai land only three miles north of the Indian frontier and close to the small recruiting centre, which brings in the Gurkhas of the British Army who come from the western hills of Nepal, and deals with leave parties, discharges and payment of pensions.

The men come up the narrow-gauge railway from Gorakhpur, hard by the main Indian Army recruiting depot at Kunraghat, and sit for three and a half hours whilst the train potters along across the plains, stopping at stations named after the great indigo planters of the last century—Peppegunj and Campiergunj, with Bridgemangunj on the branch line to the west by the old depot at Lehra. Then at last, after travelling for two days and nights from Calcutta, they get out at the railhead at Nautanwa and cross the border into Nepal.

Most of the men are bound for their villages in the distant hills of the Great Himalayas, anything up to a hundred and fifty miles on the trail, but for many of them the first hundred miles to Pokhara are now simplified by the daily service of the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation.

It is a homely, casual airline. Ticket offices and passenger reception halls are mostly huts made of bamboo poles and matting, and one never quite knows what time the plane is leaving, or even where it is going until the last moment. Nevertheless, even if it

means waiting for a while, it is far simpler to spend twenty-five minutes in the plane with the red double triangle of the Nepalese flag on its tail than to trek for a week or more, especially if one has one's family with one. Considering the cost of porters and food and lodging on the way, it is probably cheaper too.

And so my twenty-eight companions on the plane were mostly soldiers going home with their families. The men were used to aeroplanes and took it very calmly. The women were more nervous and the children more excited. As we came up to the first forested rampart of the Himalayas, which is called the Churia hills, they tried to pick out the lie of the land route and the features of the landscape. We crossed a wide valley of the Bhitri Madesh and skimmed between two peaks of the higher Mahabharat Lekh, but from then on the deep gorges far below and the passes close beneath us alternated in such confusion that it was impossible to follow the route any more.

On the steep slopes of these gorges lay villages of oval houses, with reddish mud plaster walls and thatched roofs, which are typical of those the Gurkhas live in. Above and below the villages the fields on their narrow terraces lay empty and bare, waiting for the rains.

Sliding down over the last pass, with the white wall of the Himalayas straight ahead, we dropped into the broad lakeland vale of Pokhara. Here we landed on grass, and as we taxied back from the end of the airstrip, the most conspicuous thing to be seen was a large peepul tree with a circular stone terrace built up around it. It was far more prominent than the airport buildings, and in its shade a large crowd had gathered.

We stepped out. A ragged minstrel *gaine* struck up a song welcoming us back to the homeland, and accompanied himself on his primitive fiddle. A band of sturdy, stocky girls rushed forward. They were Tibetan-type Bhotias from up north in Thak, offering their services as porters. With difficulty they were held at bay whilst the men sorted out their steel trunks and the new umbrellas and sunshades they had brought from Singapore, Hong Kong or Calcutta, and gathered together their bouncing children and their wives, who were loaded with gold bangles, ear-rings and nose-rings, which represented a profitable investment of savings.

As we took to the air again after a twenty-minute halt, the first man away had already reached the far side of the airstrip,

heading towards Pokhara town. He was striding ahead in a pair of blue shorts and a white open-necked shirt, with his wife behind him and two female porters carrying his trunks on their backs, supported against their foreheads by the bands of their harnesses.

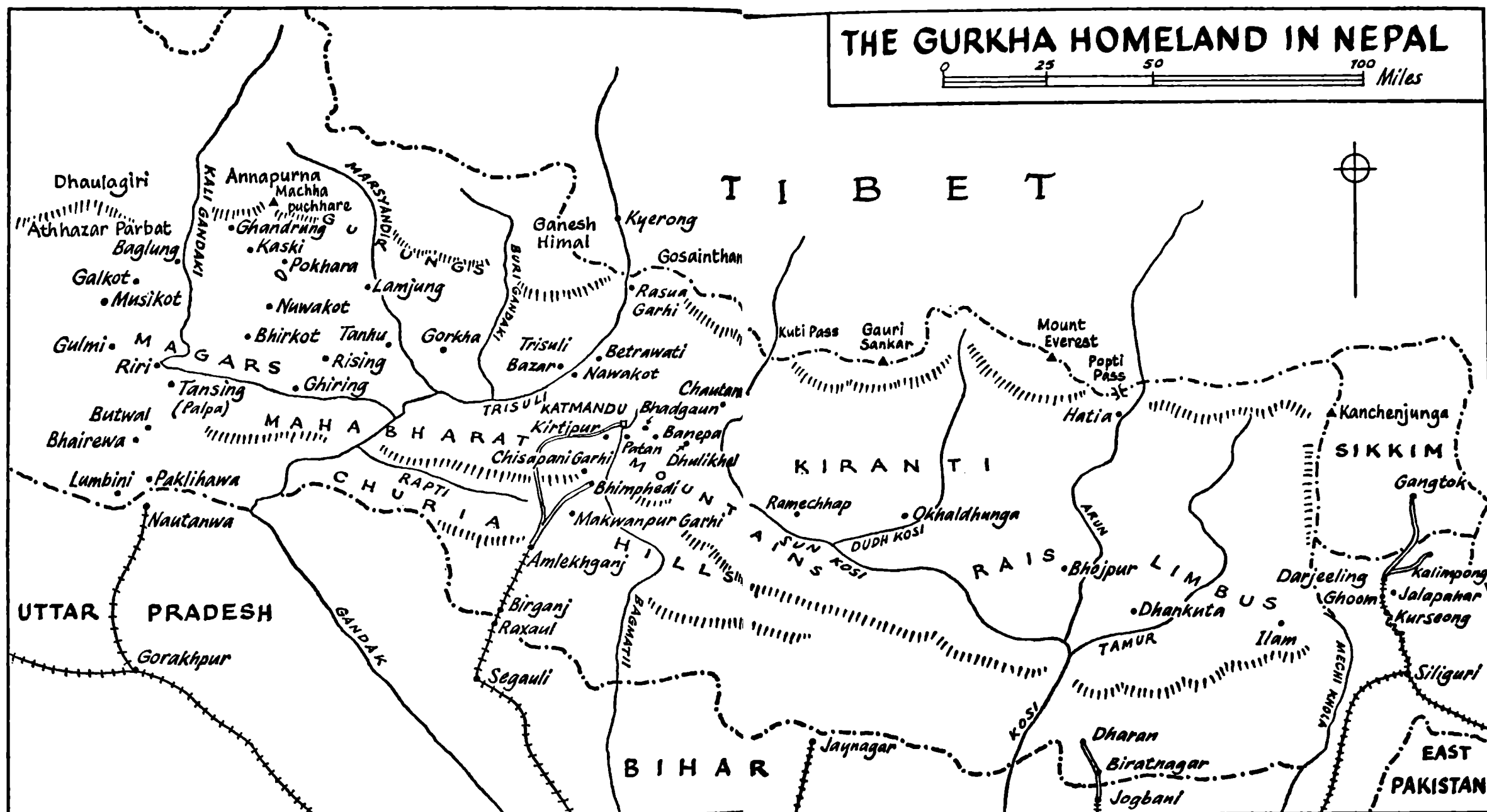
It was another half hour to Katmandu over the hills and valleys that it takes seven days to negotiate on foot. We crossed three of Nepal's main rivers—the Marsyandi, the Buri Gandaki and the Trisuli—and we slid along the valley of the Darondi with the citadel of Gorkha within rifle-shot above us to the south, but we did not make the scheduled stop at the airfield beside the river at Phaluntar. It was left to me to visit the citadel on foot four days later.

When eventually I set out from Katmandu with a porter named Manbahadur Tamang, it was pouring with rain, and we crouched rather miserably in the shelter of a teahouse on the edge of the city where the trail to the western hills begins. It was a gloomy start to a journey. The drivers of the three battered jeeps parked on the earth verge of the road wanted 150 rupees to do the forty-six miles to Trisuli, and in any case seemed reluctant to go at all.

In such circumstances it is not a bad policy to be patient and wait, Micawber-like, for something to turn up. After nearly two hours, when the jeep men were just beginning to look as though they were prepared to bargain, a road maintenance man appeared in a much superior jeep and offered us a ride to the top of the pass for five rupees each.

The road to Trisuli has been built by Indian engineers to connect the capital with the hydro-electric works under construction there as part of Indian aid to Nepal, and the maintenance man whose offer I eagerly accepted was an Indian from far-off Jaipur on the other side of Delhi.

We splashed our way past Balajiu, where a new light industries estate is being grafted incongruously on to the village of Narayan-in-the-water, and climbed up into the clouds on the rim of the Nepal Valley in long traverses up the hillside. Rani Powah at the top of the pass, close to the British Embassy's bungalow at Kakani, was enveloped in mist. I went and sat in another teashop, just like the one at the beginning of the journey, bought a packet of Nepalese cigarettes called Paltan, meaning "regiment", and



costing twopence halfpenny for ten, and smoked my way through them waiting for something else to turn up.

Soon the maintenance man came back from his road business and told me he would take me downhill as well, as far as the end of his territory. This he did, depositing me at the thirty-fourth mile. There were still twelve miles to go, but the road does a long sweep to the west, and I was able to cut the distance to eight by taking a short cut on foot and fording the Tadi river instead of going round to the bridge.

So the two of us set out, sliding down the slippery mud in the last showers of rain. The level of the river was half-way up my thighs, and I took my trousers off to cross it, but one has to get used to doing that sort of thing in the hills of Nepal, and in the afternoon we were happily walking over the flat tableland of Batar Bazaar between the Tadi and the Trisuli, with Nawakot, the old capital of Number One West, which I had visited eight years before, in view on the hill above.

Rejoining the road I went on up the valley to Trisuli, passing

the whitewashed lines of the Devidatta Battalion of the Nepalese Army, which maintains a pole across the road as a checkpoint. It was getting dark when I arrived at the new red cantilever bridge across the river, for my porter was slow and I had kept on waiting for him. A police corporal called me into his office, handed me an exercise-book and told me to write down in it the date and my name, destination and rank. Neither here nor anywhere else was I asked for the supposedly indispensable trekking permit, authorizing my route through the hills, which I had obtained from the Nepalese Foreign Office.

We had come down from a height of 6,000 feet at Rani Powah to only 2,100 in the valley. So it was hot, and I was glad the farce of checking the man with the white face was soon over. Close by there were a number of Indian Army Gurkhas, wearing their uniforms complete in various degrees, who were either going on leave or rejoining their units. They were settled in lodgings in the main street of the bazaar. I carried on up the road, which skirted round the village to the Indian Aid Garden Estate named Khinchit above. Here there was a comfortable guest house, where I spent the night as the only guest.

Next morning I set out at 6.30, and half a mile further on I came to the end of the road. The track continued up the bed of the Samri Khola and later alongside it. It was crowded with people, mostly bowed under their loads, which might include a baby in a basket, or chickens and ducks tied together like bunches of vegetables, as well as household goods. The people of the villages on this part of the route were mostly Newars and Chhettris, but the tribal division seemed to be very much by altitude, for the folk in the hills behind were said to be Tamangs and Gurungs.

The first traveller I talked to, however, was a foreigner like myself. I had been following a group of Chhettri youths and girls laden with branches of green leaves for thatch and for fodder for their water buffaloes, when an elderly Indian stopped to ask me if he would be able to get a vehicle from Trisuli to Birganj, which is on the railway down in the plains. He had been with his son on a pilgrimage to the temple of Gorakhnath at Gorkha to take part in the festival of Chaite Dasein.

These two were the first of many I was to encounter returning from this temple to Katmandu. They were mostly women,

dressed in the red costume of the pilgrim, and travelling in groups either under the leadership of a pandar or in family units, having been sent to take part in the bloody sacrifices.

Chaite Dasein takes its name from the month of Chait, which straddles March and April, and is to the spring harvest what the better known Dasein or Dasahra is to the autumn harvest. It is therefore of most significance to those parts of the country which yield two crops a year—that is the Valley of Nepal itself and other places where there is enough water for a winter corn crop. Yet in Katmandu it is more or less confined to a military occasion. The ceremony takes place in the courtyard of the royal guard in old Katmandu, called the Kot, and is attended by the generals of the army dressed in national costume and wearing white tennis shoes to avoid contaminating the hallowed ground with leather.

Wearing my own felt slippers I witnessed the procedure. The ancient standards of the thirty-nine regiments of the Gurkhas were standing unfurled in six groups, each with a sacrificial post in front of it. Buffaloes and goats were decapitated by the executioners and dragged along to leave a circle of blood round the consecrated area as the senior officers arrived. As each general entered, the band played the national anthem, and the rest of the officers paraded with drawn swords to give the salute.

The senior general then played his part, visiting each of the *maula* posts in turn. At each one a bel fruit was sliced open, a kid was killed with the *kukri*, and a buffalo was sacrificed with the bigger *khanra*. Then the general, with the red *sindur* powder on his fingers symbolizing the blood of the animals, took each standard between his palms and blessed it. His young son, expecting to go up to Oxford shortly, slaughtered a dozen goats with his own hands.

At Gorkha, however, the attendance at Chaite Dasein is much more widespread, and the slaughter is heavier, for this is the home of Lord Gorakhnath, the yogi who became the chief magician of the tantric religion in Nepal. According to a popular legend he once visited the Valley of Nepal, but the people did not pay any attention to him. He made off angrily and found himself a cave five days distant. This is the cave beneath the Kalika Darbar at Gorkha. There he cast his magic spells, getting into his power the snake deities which control the rainfall. He thus brought on a drought, which lasted for a whole year.

At last the Brahmins put into operation a plan which proved successful. They got another magician to go to the east and catch the Lord Protector of the Fishes, Machhendranath, in a copper pot and bring him to Nepal. In Patan they cast an image and poured the spirit of Macchendranath into a golden vase inside it. Gorakhnath left his cave and returned to the Valley to do homage to the deity. His anger was appeased and rain fell.

If anyone thinks the old tantric legends no longer have any significance in Nepal, he should go to Gorkha at the time just before the rains begin. In Katmandu and Patan the images of Buddhist Machhendranath are dragged through the streets in chariots with high bamboo steeples on them covered with the branches of fir trees, and rain is made bloodlessly, but in out-of-the-way Gorkha the blood still flows long and deep.

I had to tell the elderly pilgrim and his son that he would have to go to Katmandu before he could motor to Birganj, and then I went on up the Samri valley. Children saluted and called out the *namaste* greeting as I walked past. Like the boys from the Tribhubana High School at Trisuli, who had invited me to attend their concert, they all wanted to try out their few words of English. I was usually at first assumed to be an American, which is scarcely surprising, as with over a hundred young men of the U.S. Peace Corps travelling up and down the country, together with the numerous executives of the U.S. Aid Mission, the British are a relatively rare minority.

There were numerous soldiers coming and going, wearing the insignia of their Indian Army regiments. They talked of duty high up in the mountains in the North-east Frontier Agency and in the North-western Himalayas a long way above the familiar military cantonments of the hill-stations. Others, wearing civilian clothes, turned out to be Calcutta policemen, or factory or railway guards. The soldiers carried nothing on their backs and strode along in shorts, with swagger canes in their hands. I sometimes felt that they looked askance at even my lightly filled rucksack, for in the hills a gentleman does not carry his own load.

A stone staircase led to the red-coloured village of Samri Bhanjyang at the top of the pass. Beside the last step there was a *chautara* resting platform with a stone on it saying thirteen kosh to Katmandu, or about twenty-six miles. Nearby stood one of the many *powahs*, or rest-houses, on this route, which have been

allowed to tumble down in ruins. But there was no food to be had, so we started down the other side and stopped at the first village. Here we got a meal for two of rice, curried potatoes and spinach for the equivalent of one and sixpence, but I refused the leaves which are supposed to be chewed as a dessert. As we sat eating on the floor of our hostess's house, a large party went past. Four men were carrying another reclining in a big basket, and behind them followed a servant and three porters carrying the gear.

The track continued to descend. In the streams tumbling into the main valley the water-mills were at work grinding the grain from the spring harvest. The biggest of these streams, at Barang Burung, was spanned by a steel suspension bridge, but at this time of year one could go across on stepping-stones and save a detour. Beyond it we climbed again, and there were stone steps up to Tharpu in a gully that otherwise would have been impossibly slippery in wet weather. A crowd of Gurungs clambered up past me, the first one letting out a short whistle to show that he had got to the top, and in the other direction went a sick man, curled up in a basket on another man's back.

In upper Tharpu I rested in a pine grove on a knoll high above the Thaple Khola after talking to a pensioner from the Singapore Police Force. Then we spent two hours in the late afternoon going along the ridge trail as far as Katunje. The village before Katunje, at an altitude of over 4,000 feet, was inhabited by Gurungs with their grazing cattle. A girl sitting at a *chautara* offered me a basket of *tarbola*, a fruit like a raspberry with a stone instead of pips. But in Katunje itself they were of all tribes. The young policeman there went through the motions of checking my passport and made a great show of stopping some laden men who were about to pass. He was looking for *ganje*, the hashish-like hemp they smoke in the hills, he said.

We found lodgings in a house on the main trail much to the disgust, it seemed, of the householder's wife, whom we could hear loudly complaining on the floor above. The unseen nagger complained even more loudly when he agreed to sell us rice and a young pullet as well, saying that they themselves were going to starve in consequence. There was, in fact, some sense in this as food was scarce after a disastrously dry winter following destructive hailstorms. But Manbahadur carried on stoically with the

cooking, blowing into the wood fire with a bamboo tube to keep it going, and we went to bed with full stomachs. In other houses the grain they had managed to gather in was being ground by large pestles on the end of wooden levers, which were worked up and down on a fulcrum by the foot.

Next day, coming down the end of the ridge, I met the local schoolmaster, a Newar from the district centre of Dhading further south. He was paid 45 rupees a month, or £2 5s. at the current rate of exchange, for teaching ten small boys from seven to eleven in the morning in a byre with a leaky roof and with no equipment in a language that was not his own. Fortunately later on I was to see many better schools, and I found the same enthusiasm for education everywhere, so much so that to have a school had become a veritable status symbol for a rural community.

From the end of the ridge the trail plunged down steeply with the white peaks of the Ganesh Himal as a backdrop. Although it was still before seven o'clock, the Dasein pilgrims were already well up on the trail from the valley below. The red-clad women had gilt medallions stuck to their foreheads, and in one important family cavalcade the children were still asleep in baskets on the porters' backs.

Half-way down the 3,000-foot drop I stopped at a carved waterspout for my morning ablutions. It was a setting of grandeur, with the high Himalayas on the right and the long valley of the Ankhu Khola down below, and between them on the great hillsides village after village in their carefully contoured fields.

We crossed the Ankhu, which is deep and swift, on a sixty-year-old suspension bridge built by a Scottish engineer, and carried on five miles further down the level land of the valley. Here there were many bright birds—jays and orioles in particular—and at places there were strings of woven straws across the trail, with leaves hanging down from them. The heat made the many resting-places under the big peepul trees doubly welcome.

Manbahadur was so slow that I began to think he might have taken another turning, but eventually he caught up with me and confessed that the whole of the previous month he had been down with fever and unable to work. Together we climbed out of the hot valley on to the triangle of land between the Ankhu and the Buri Gandaki and stopped at the village of Salliantar at the top to have our morning meal.

Whilst the rice was heating up I talked to the other occupant of the teahouse, a Brahmin *bahun*, wearing the Sivaite necklace of dried oak-apples, who was smoking a pipe of *ganje*. He was joined by a fifteen-year-old boy on holiday from the Sanskrit school at Dhading and another enrolled in the local high school. These three precious representatives of the priestly caste told the good woman of the *patti* to charge me more because I was a foreigner. This brought about an argument, and we left in bad odour. But such is the awe in which the Brahmins are still held in the land that it is still quite usual for a commoner to bend down and kiss a Brahmin's foot before venturing to speak to him. If the Brahmin wishes to be especially condescending he will lift his foot up on to a convenient ledge so that the supplicant need not bow right down to the ground.

As we came down the steep wooded hillside the Buri Gandaki was in full view. Some three miles further up it we came to the bridge at Arughat. This was the biggest place I had seen since leaving Katmandu. It had a long main street with substantial houses on either side containing shops selling cloth, clothing, foodstuffs and household utensils. It also had a seat perilously close to the cliffside above the river with an ornate lamp-post beside it, and a red pillar box exactly like an English one, with "Next clearance at . . ." written on it in English, but no time had been inserted in the slot.

Although Arughat is an important junction of routes, there was nevertheless a shock in store for us round the next bend. The narrow gorge of the west-east tributary of the main river, which our track was to follow, was spanned by so crazy and dilapidated a bridge that I found Manbahadur, who was ahead of me for once, standing facing it like a horse refusing a jump. It was built of baulks of timber anchored with rocks at one end. Each level of timbers overlapped the course on which it rested and stretched out further towards the middle. The gap in the middle was spanned by more planks. The whole thing had slipped at one end and was twisted and leaning at such an angle that it looked as though it might collapse at any moment. The flimsy wooden handrail was so loose that to hang on to it would have been fatal.

I looked below into the river bed. There, at the bottom of the death drop, people were unconcernedly washing themselves and

their clothes. I looked across the gimcrack structure at the cliff on the other side, and balancing precariously I crept across. Manbahadur fatalistically followed. Half-way up the cliff I met a policeman coming down from Gorkha and remarked on the dangerous condition of the bridge. He agreed whole-heartedly. He told me that the previous month a teacher had fallen off it and been killed. He had reported the situation to the office, but nothing had been done. He had formerly served in the British Army, so he knew what things ought to be like.

The track continued tediously up the winding bed of this book. We made slow progress, and all hopes of reaching the read of the valley by nightfall faded. So we had to look about for food and shelter. There were neither. One place suggested, called Tin Chautara, turned out to be occupied by lepers. It grew dark, and the best we could do was to follow the pointing fingers of some cowherds up to one of the thatched, open-sided shelters they use to keep the sun off during the day as they sit amongst the terraces of maize.

We ate chocolate and biscuits and drank Nepalese aristocrat brandy, and then we turned in straight away, prepared to leave at dawn. At five o'clock next morning we packed up and left. There was another three quarters of an hour of the stifling valley before we started to climb again and began to feel the wind on the pass at the corners of the trail. On this stretch I met a Gurkha who had served in the 2nd Goorkhas in Italy and elsewhere during the Second World War and had completed six years altogether. After that he had been a doorkeeper in Calcutta for two years, and then he had joined the Nepalese police and was now stationed at Gorkha.

It came on to rain again, so we sheltered in the next village, called Koyapani, and drank tea and ate biscuits in the village shop. As elsewhere they asked me if I was going to Ampipal. This place is on a hill ten miles across the Darondi valley north from Gorkha, where the United Mission to Nepal has set up a settlement, which includes a medical centre, schools, an agricultural station and quite comfortable stone houses for the missionaries. Its fame has spread throughout the hills of Central Nepal, and people travel long distances to get aid there for their ailments.

As soon as the rain stopped I pressed on to Khanchowk at the top of the pass, and started climbing up on to the ridge above

without stopping. This is the point where the path to Gorkha branches off from the main east-west route, for Gorkha stands high above the valley that the route follows, watching over and standing guard over it, but to one side.

It was a killing ascent up to 5,000 feet, then undulating. I stopped to eat at a place called Taple, and after much explanation, with curious villagers crowded round, I managed to get the man in the teashop to heat up a packet of soup for me, the first he had ever seen. At another point the framework and axles of two swings stood like gaunt gallows against the skyline. But the swingers are not children, they are grown men and women, and they only swing once a year at the Dola Jatra festival. Then they put the swings away till the same time next year.

As we approached Gorkha the mountainside became more wooded. There were monkeys in the undergrowth, and well-fashioned square stone-flagged washing-places became quite frequent. These were signs that reminded me of the civilization of Katmandu, and my expectations ran high as I caught my first glimpse of the big buildings of Gorkha on a knoll framed in the branches of the trees.

The approach was up a long flight of broad, carefully made steps, which led to a small platform between the wooded mountainside and the knoll. The other end of the platform the trail descended again, but to the right there was a doorway in a brick wall leading to more ascending steps. The first thing I saw on this platform was a fearsome stone statue, coloured pink and white, that was guarding the approach. Facing it stood the plain stone tablets that recount the genealogy and the exploits of the kings of Gorkha. I went through the carved doorway in the wall and climbed the next flight of steps into the citadel.

By European standards it was small, and there were no fortifications, its defence consisted of the precipitous mountainside and the masonry of the platform on which the three buildings of the citadel stood. It looked more like the stronghold of a petty baron than the castle of a king. And this is what it must have been—the stronghold and treasury of an eagle who could descend from his eyrie and control the routes through the central hills, levying taxes on travellers and merchandise.

As I climbed the steps alongside the wall of the lowest of the buildings I sensed the suffocating and oppressive atmosphere one

always feels in castles with long and blood-stained histories. This seemed strange because the Gorkha citadel can hardly date back to much before the eighteenth century, and there is no record of any particularly violent events taking place there. Its style is similar to that of the big Newar houses of the Nepal Valley, with walls of red brick, tiled roofs and blackened, elaborately carved woodwork between storeys, under the eaves, and forming window casements and door-frames.

The first building was empty. The central one was the temple and abode of the Brahmins, and on its veranda I found the gimlet-eyed *pujari*, ready to pounce on any impropriety.

A small flight of steps leads from the temple and the main platform of the citadel down to the famous cave of Gorakh, but the general approach for the devotees from below is up a steep terrace of stone masonry, which covers the hillside to a height of over a hundred feet and, in the past, may well have been used as an assembly amphitheatre for the Gurkha archers and spearsmen.

The cave contains innumerable tridents, large and small, bunched together in groups. They are the weapons of Siva. There are ex-voto pictures and photographs of generous benefactors, and in the furthest recess flower blossoms keep sweet a small image of Kali, who is Siva's warlike consort.

Above the cave stands the Kalika Darbar, the palace of the Gorkha rajas before Prithwi Narayan conquered Katmandu and moved into his much larger domain. It is in the form of three sides of a hollow square, with the fourth side of the courtyard in the middle open against the parapet on the edge of the cliff.

The *pujari* led the way from the temple, and the suffocating sense of oppression became more and more overpowering. As we turned the corner the reason immediately became apparent. The courtyard was still swimming in the blood of the animals sacrificed six days before. The whole place reeked of the slaughter-house. Yet this is the same place that Balchandra Sharma, Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy, in a publication financed by the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization, calls "the very cradle of present-day Nepal."

I stayed only long enough to notice the two tall red and white standards, and the photographs of important visitors and benefactors ranged round the roof beams of the courtyard cloisters, and then I escaped back into the clean air. Gorkha lay below, with

the hollow square of the present-day administrative buildings prominent on the far side of the town. All the way down there were flights of excellent stone steps, probably more than a thousand of them, as the drop down from the pinnacle of the Darbar to the swelling breast of the mountain on which the town stands is well over a thousand feet.

The town is strung out along the main track that comes up from the Trisuli river to the south, and in fact it looks no different from any of the smaller towns in the Nepal Valley. Inside the built-up area the track is paved with large uneven flagstones and becomes the main street. The houses are built on plinths abutting directly on to it, and the people take their ease on the ground floor in full view of the passers-by. For any privacy they must go upstairs.

I arrived on Saturday, the Nepalese sabbath, so the idlers were more numerous than they would have been on a normal weekday. Yet it was only the children who showed any interest whatever in my presence, and their motives seemed to be a curious combination of beggary, curiosity and mockery.

Most of the houses had partly rotting thatched roofs, and there was neither drainage nor piped water, nor a single latrine in the whole town, except for one dug to the general amusement of the populace by the two young men of the American Peace Corps behind their house at the further end of the street. Nor was there any hotel or lodging-house of any kind. For a tent the best site would undoubtedly have been beside the pleasant green army parade-ground, which is also used as a sports field, but I had none, and I was therefore constrained to impose myself on the Peace Corps house beside the weed-filled square pond with the dilapidated temple of the Maharajah in the middle of it.

Lying exhausted on my camp bed that night I concluded that, whatever it may have been in the past, Gorkha is now no more than a backwater, with scarcely a man of those we know as Gurkhas living in it. It grew to strength as the capital of the twenty-four kingdoms, whose little keeps can still be seen perched on the hilltops in the neighbourhood, but as soon as Gorkha had conquered Katmandu, all the leaders and men of note must have followed their raja's example in moving to the new wealthy conquests.

I had half expected to catch a plane from the airstrip below, but

none had been in for a week, and Phaluntar was said to have eighty people, mostly returning pilgrims, waiting for an airlift. So I walked on to Pokhara, about the same distance again as I had come from Katmandu, but very much easier going, with only two low passes to cross at Kunchha and Deorali. At the former I met a subedar pensioner of the 1st Gurkha Rifles, a holder of the Military Cross, who had served in Burma, Saigon and Celebes during the Second World War, and had been an instructor at the Military Academy in Dehra Doon before retiring in 1950. It was encouraging to learn that he was an active member of the Lamjung Panchayat, for it is in the newly developing panchayat system of basic democracy that the Gurkha ex-servicemen can most easily make the weight of their judgement felt in Nepal. A slogan was written on the wall of the house just above the recently installed village water tap: "Working for the country is working for everyone. Work for the progress of the country benefits everyone equally."

At the next village I came across a sprightly old havildar on leave from his unusual duty of guarding the Dalai Lama.

2

The Gurkha Conquest

THIS, then, is Gorkha, a small town in the Himalayan hills, and not even a town by the standards of most countries. It is more the size of a large village with about five thousand inhabitants, and would not merit being called a town if it were not for its citadel and the fact that it is the seat of government of a province. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century few outside the hills had even heard of it, but within half a century the renown of the Gorkhali, the men of Gorkha, had spread to both Calcutta and Peking, and ultimately they became famous throughout the world.

The story starts in the sixteenth century when Drabya Shah fell upon Gorkha and won himself a crown. He thus established the line of the kings of Gorkha and then of Nepal, whose dynasty has continued right down to the present day.

The story of the Shahs before this event is legend rather than history, but the element of importance in the legend is that the family claims descent from the Rajput nobility. When the Moslems fell upon India through the passes of the North-west, it was the Rajputs who put up the fiercest resistance to the storm. This resistance culminated in the desperate last stand in the fortress of Chitor. The women were burnt to death on a huge funeral pyre to save them from capture and rape, and the men of Chitor, led by the Rajput chivalry, determined to fight to the last. Chitor fell in 1303.

Inevitably there were some who survived, however, and according to the legend it was a group of these survivors who trekked northwards to the comparative safety of the hills to live again and preserve the Rajput race.

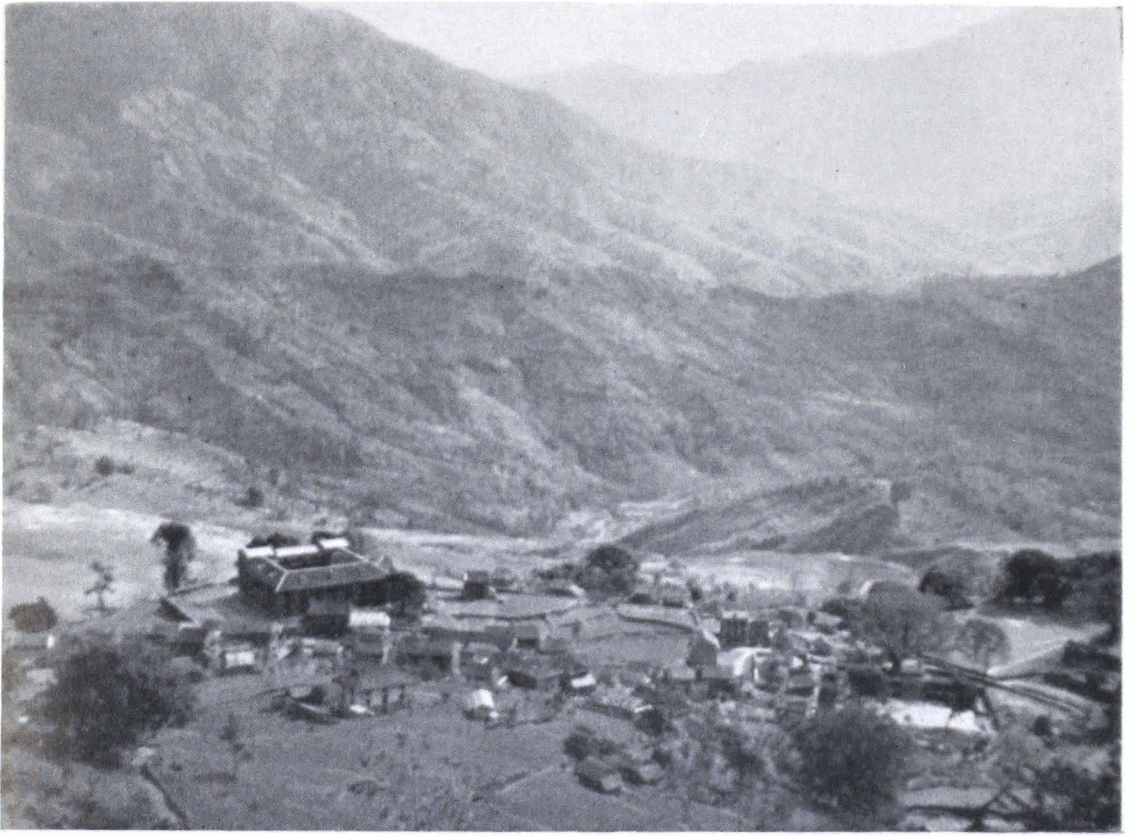
Amongst the mountain ranges they found the Magar tribes cultivating the lower slopes with rice and maize and the Gurung with their herds of cattle and goats higher up the mountainsides, migrating in summer to the high pastures called the *lekh*. These

were the raw material of the Gurkhas. They were simple hardy people, living in thatched adobe huts, usually circular in shape with a hole in the roof to let out the smoke of the cooking fire. They dressed in homespun cloth woven from goat's or yak's hair. They spoke their own tribal dialects of Magar *kura* and Gurung *kura*, simple languages of the Tibeto-Burman group, and if they had any religion apart from their animistic rites, it was a form of Buddhism spreading from the religious centres in the Valley of Nepal to the East. They were people of the Mongolian type, whom one might easily mistake for Chinese or Japanese peasants.

The newcomers from the plains were of the *Kshatriya*, or warrior caste, the second highest of the four traditional caste divisions of mankind in the Hindu world. They brought with them their *Brahmins*, the men of religion and the highest caste. Together the two groups, with their superior civilization and knowledge, moulded the highland clans to their advantage and gained ascendancy over them. They spread the Hindu religion and admitted those chieftains and leaders of the country people who were amenable to them into their own hierarchy. Many of them, both priest and warrior, married the hill girls, producing that mixture of Aryan and Mongolian stock which can be seen in all its gradations in Nepal today.

Thus in the biggest tribe of the Gurkhas, the Magars, who live in the shadow of Annapurna and of Machhapuchhare, the "fish-tail" mountain in the provinces west of Katmandu, the clans include the Rana—originally a Rajput title—as well as the Ale and the Pun of the native language.

In this way for four centuries a gradual process of encroachment of Indian Hindu culture into the hills took place, which would hardly have occurred without the impetus of the Moslem invasion and the consolidation of the Mogul Empire in the plains below. In time the language of these refugees from Islam, a type of Hindi, became the lingua franca of the hills, though the tribes continued to use their own dialects as they still do to this day. It was called *Khaskura*, the language of the Khas people, who included the clans that had grown out of the unions of the leading Hindu families with the families of the local chiefs. It is interesting to note that the Moslems themselves never attempted to penetrate the hills and disturb the Hindu principalities established there.



The little town of Gorkha



In the Kot at Katmandu—the ancient standards of Nepal



First World War—3rd/
3rd Gurkhas in the
Palestine trenches

The Adjutant of the
44th Gurkhas with his
V.C.O.s, 1896



The legend of the exodus from Rajputana is continued with the story of Khancha and Mincha. They were the sons of a Rajput prince of the Ranas, who came to the hills from Ujjain. Khancha inherited lands in the Magar country in the neighbourhood of Bhirkot, and Mincha's property was at Nawakot, further north on the edge of the Gurung country. Khancha's kingdom spread across the Gandaki river to include Gulmi and Ghandrung, Mincha extended his realm and lorded it over Kaski and Lamjung.

The generations pass. The next thing we hear, two hundred years later, is that the lord of Lamjung is of the Thakurs, another Rajput family. He has two sons. The elder succeeds his father. The younger, Drabya Shah, seizes the little town of Gorkha ten miles to the east and becomes a raja himself. The town is small, but from it he controls the land around and the main east-west route in the hills. So the Thakurs and Ranas, the families of the Kings and Maharajahs of Nepal, are both accounted for.

Another two hundred years of highland life pass without a Walter Scott to weave the story of clan and family loyalties and feuds. Then Drabya Shah's descendant, Narabhupal Shah, comes to the throne. He comes at a time when there is strife and dissension in the Valley of Nepal.

At that time each city and town of the Valley was a state unto itself, and there was no overall central government. In Katmandu Jaya Prakash Malla reigned. In Patan, no more than a mile away, his brother ruled, and in Bhadgaun, eight miles to the east, Ranjit Malla was raja.

These Malla kings were also from India, like the kings of Gorkha, but from the nearer region of Tirhut in North Bihar. They had ruled for four hundred years, but although they had brought with them their Brahmins and Hindu ritual, they had allowed the original Newar inhabitants of the Valley—a people of Mongoloid stock like the hillmen around them—to continue to flourish in their curious brand of the Buddhist faith.

In spite of periodic trouble and strife it had been mainly a time of peace. The three cities had used the brilliant talents of their Newar craftsmen to the full and rivalled each other in enhancing the splendour of their palaces, temples and monastic retreats, and even in the decoration of the private houses, the remains of which can still be seen today.

Narabhupal Shah saw that the rivalry in the Valley had turned

to open enmity and seized Nawakot, which is perched on a high hill eighteen miles west of Katmandu, but separated from the capital by the 7,000-foot range of mountains which encircles the Valley. He was driven back. He died in 1742 and was succeeded by his son, Prithwi Narayan Shah. The latter's first name means "the world" and he was destined to be a conqueror.

By the time Prithwi Narayan came of age the situation in the Valley had gone from bad to worse. In the year of his father's death the men of Gorkha were in Nawakot again. They were not there in strength and were driven out, but the King of Katmandu accused Kasiram Thapa, a nobleman of Nawakot, of treason and had him put to death. Thus the loyalty of Nawakot was undermined.

King Jaya Prakash had good reason to fear his subjects. Already he had been driven out of his palace by the court officials of the Katmandu Darbar. His queen had been won over from him and his infant son proclaimed king in his place. But counter intrigue got him back from his refuge in the country, and the offending queen was put to death.

In Patan, where his brother ruled, there was no less trouble. Six Newar men of substance of the Pradhan family formed a conspiracy to put out the eyes of the ruler. Jaya Prakash, getting wind of the plot, had them and their wives come to Katmandu, where he arrested them. But instead of putting them to death he did worse. He made a public mockery of them, having them driven round the city with their wives dressed up as witches.

Jaya Prakash was also at odds with Ranjit in Bhadgaun. Ranjit had some visitors from Katmandu arrested on the grounds that they were offending the sumptuary laws of dress and behaving in too proud and arrogant a manner. Jaya Prakash retaliated by throwing some Bhadgaunis into jail who had come to worship at Pashupatinath, the famous place of Hindu pilgrimage on the banks of the Bagmati.

Prithwi Narayan was apprised of all these happenings in the rich and fertile vale. At one stage the mortally offended Pradhans, who had by now deposed their Malla king, actually invited him to take the throne. At another stage Ranjit proposed to settle his squabbles with Jaya Prakash by inviting him to attack Katmandu.

The ground would thus seem to have been well prepared for the Gurkha conquest. Prithwi Narayan seized Nawakot, and this

time the men of Katmandu were unable to get it back. The lofty darbar building there became his forward base for his attacks on the Valley. It may appear that he now had a very easy task and that all that he had to do was to divide the three quarrelling cities and rule. But he was still poor and each one of the cities was much richer than he was. He started his operations with an attack on a fourth—the town and citadel of Kirtipur.

Kirtipur lies three miles south-west of Katmandu. Like Nawakot it is perched on top of a hill in a position of natural strength. The outer ring of houses faces inwards, presenting high blank walls at the top of the steep hillside. The gaps between the houses are protected by gateways. Prithwi Narayan no doubt saw this Newar town as his advance base for winning control over the two cities of Katmandu and Patan, which it overlooks. He came down from the mountains to the west and rushed into the attack.

But the inhabitants, though of a race which has frequently been despised, like the Jews, for being unmartial, mercantile and servile, proved that, given the circumstances, like the Jews they could fight as stubbornly as any. They held him off. Jaya Prakash, using Indian mercenaries, forced him to retreat.

Danuvanta, Lord of Kirtipur, who had been let down by his own overlords in Patan, then went to Katmandu to transfer his allegiance to the king who had assisted him. The latter, who by now seemed bent on turning everyone against himself, confirmed the allegiance by making Danuvanta and his retinue parade through the streets dressed up as women.

Prithwi Narayan knew about these things and started a different strategy. His men were but lightly armed. One of them is portrayed on the right-hand side of the royal coat of arms of the King of Nepal. He wears a knee-length coarse tunic. Arms, legs and feet are bare. A broad cloth, called the *patuka*, is wound round his waist. In it he folds his bag of rice just as the Scottish clansman carries his poke of oatmeal, and through it is stuck his *kukri*, the curved knife with its two little skinning knives, its tinder and flint. In one hand he carries a bow and in the other an arrow. On his head he wears at a rakish angle the upturned flower-pot hat squashed down on one side now called the Bhadgauni *topi*.

Thus lightly equipped the Gurkha archers and spearsmen could not tackle Katmandu, which was divided into sections called

toles. Each *tole* was responsible for guarding one of the gates. If the Gurkhas did get in, they ran the risk of getting lost in the maze of streets and of being tackled piecemeal or sniped at from the upper storeys of houses.

Instead, they ringed the Valley and tried to cut it off from the outside world. Manning the tops of the seven passes which give access to the Valley, they prevented goods of any kind from going in or out. Anybody who through intention or ignorance defied these grisly customs posts, was summarily hanged, women and children not excepted. By this means they could not hope to starve the Valley into subjection, since it was self-sufficient in food, but they could prevent the importation of essential salt, and of cotton, tea and other desirable commodities. They could be a running sore in the side of Jaya Prakash and show his subjects he was unable to provide for them the protection to which they were entitled.

The brutal blockade continued for several years, during which Prithwi Narayan intrigued with the discontented parties in the three cities. Then he struck at Kirtipur again. The name means "Town of Fame", but neither Katmandu nor Patan came to its aid in its time of need. After a siege lasting several months Prithwi Narayan demanded its surrender. He received a rude reply attached to the feathers of an arrow. Angered by this defiance, he ordered a general assault. For the second time he was driven back.

Father Giuseppe, the Capuchin friar who was there at the time, relates a story, which in view of what happened later, contains a bitter irony. Prithwi Narayan's brother was badly wounded in the attack and fell at the mercy of a Newar peasant, who raised his weapon to despatch him. But his companion held his arm saying, "He is a king, and kings we may not kill." Prithwi Narayan's brother was nursed back to health by another of the friars.

In 1767, after excursions to cement his sway over Lamjung to the west and Makwanpur to the south, the furious Prithwi returned to attack stubborn Kirtipur. This time it fell. The Gurkhas, led by that same brother of Prithwi Narayan who had been spared by the Newar *jyapu* and restored to health by the Italian friar, laid siege to the town.

Jaya Prakash, discredited by his own people, having gained the enmity of the Brahmins by rifling their temples to pay his troops, desperately digging for the treasure reputed to be buried under-

ground in order to buy allegiance, was in no position to help. His own lords went over to the other side and joined forces with the Gurkhas when Patan and Bhadgaun combined at last to try to come to the rescue of Kirtipur.

It was too late. Danuvanta, himself, whose original resistance had only brought him public mockery, showed the Gurkhas the way into the town. Even then the citadel continued to resist. According to Father Giuseppe the last ditch defenders, who must have been few for the citadel is very small, were offered an amnesty, which they accepted.

Prithwi Narayan, who had remained at Nawakot rather than risk another personal defeat, would hear nothing of amnesty. He ordered the lords of Kirtipur to be put to death and the noses and lips of every citizen, man, woman and child, to be cut off, except for those of the musicians who would thus be prevented from playing their wind instruments. His brother, once spared by a Newar, once restored to health by a priest like the one who now came on his errand of mercy to intercede for the inhabitants, carried out the orders with the utmost exactitude and recorded the weight of the noses and lips for his master.

Even now the kings of the Valley could have combined and thrown off the invader from the hills, but in all the sorry tale Kirtipur was the only place that showed any resolution or spirit. Amongst the rest there was no cohesion or unity, no loyalty or sense of purpose. After four hundred years of immunity from outside threats they were riddled through with intrigues and jealousies and personal feuds, which could not be resolved. Jaya Prakash sought the East India Company's help. It came too little and too late. Captain Kinloch's detachment, struck down by malaria in the forests of the Terai, ignorant of the country, unprepared for the distance to be covered and the difficulty of the terrain, did not even reach the Valley.

Prithwi Narayan, welcomed by the Pradhans, marched into Patan without opposition. Then he executed them as traitors to their own king. He walked into Katmandu on the day of the Indra Jatra festival, when large numbers of the citizens were drunk. Bhadgaun was the last to fall, and there the three Malla kings went down. Jaya Prakash, betrayed on all sides, decided that his Tibetan mercenaries were going to betray him too, and had them burnt alive in their barracks. Ranjit's own children

betrayed him. After their usefulness to him was past, Prithwi Narayan had them executed like the Pradhans.

At the end the victorious men of Gorkha mocked the crazy kings in their defeat, but Jaya Prakash Malla, dying of his wounds, summoned up a last spark of nobility to rebuke them. He was allowed to die at the royal burning ghat at Pashupatinath. Ranjit Malla was allowed to go into exile to holy Benares. The third king died in prison.

3

War with the British

THE sordid tale of intrigue, treachery and brutality which describes the Gurkha conquest of the rich heart and centre of Nepal accords ill with all that we have heard of the courage, honesty, frankness and generosity of the Gurkha soldier. But here we are dealing with two different things. Under the leadership of Hitler and his Nazi clique, who by all the dictates of humanity, were as abominable a set of men as Nature could produce, the German soldier was the finest fighting man in Europe.

Prithwi Narayan built his palace in Katmandu higher than any other building and called its topmost storey Kailas, the pinnacle of heaven. With the whole of the Nepal Valley now in his hands he set about organizing it as a base for his martial rule. Public appointments were given out to his trusted lieutenants. Thakurs, Thapas, Pandes and Ranas took over the administration from Mallas and Pradhans. His men were appointed as Subhas, or provincial governors. He was a dictator and he could not rest.

He sent one general north to cover the country right up to the Tibetan passes, whilst he himself marched east with another general to extend his sway over the Kiranti people. The latter were hillmen like his own Gurkhas and put up a stiff resistance. But Prithwi Narayan now had the resources of the Valley behind him, and after six months they broke. They were honoured in defeat and their chiefs were left in their domains in return for their allegiance.

Prithwi Narayan then marched westwards to subdue the twenty-four principalities to the west of Gorkha. He died in the 1770's, and at his death he was in command of all the Himalayan hill country for three hundred miles from the Rapti river in the west to the Kosi in the east. More important, he had founded the nation of Nepal and was its first king.

After Prithwi Narayan's death the hillmen of Nepal under

their Gurkha leaders went still further west and east. Recruits to the Gurkha armies from the villages in the hills were never in short supply, and now there was money to pay them and provide them with equipment. Bodies of armed men on a scale never seen before marched along the mountain trails. The account of inter-cine rivalry at the top is reminiscent of the situation in the last days of the Mallas, but now there is a strong army under a single government, and it is used.

The Gurkhas extended their military operations through the Kiranti country into the neighbouring mountain state of Sikkim and as far as Darjeeling. They went west into Kumaun and Garhwal, extending the length of the mountain kingdom from three hundred to seven hundred miles. In all this they had to make use of the most difficult mountain tracks, with the most frugal supplies obtainable *en route*, often against the grain of the country where it runs from north to south following the spurs and valleys coming down from the high Himalayas.

They even went through the passes into Tibet on the pretext of a grievance that the Tibetans were debasing the currency of Nepal with their own coinage. Going up the Kuti pass between the two giant mountains, Gosainthan and Gauri Sankar, they penetrated as far as Shekar Dzong a third of the way to Lhasa. The Tibetans promised an annual payment in cash and the Gurkhas withdrew. But they made only one payment, which simply served to whet the appetite of the invaders. Next year the attack was resumed with a force of no less than 18,000 men. The year was 1791 and the Gurkhas had been promised part of the dead Tashi Lama's treasure in Lhasa by a younger brother who had been defrauded of his share.

This time they got beyond Shekar Dzong and reached Shigatse, two-thirds of the way to the capital. There they plundered the monastery of Tashi Llumpo and found the loot so good that they did not bother about going any further. When they set out to return to Nepal with their spoils, they went another way home in order to avoid the king's customs officials on the Kuti pass, who would have robbed them of a good proportion of their treasure in order to replenish the royal coffers. The pass they chose was the precipitous and dangerous Popti La, which breaks through the Himalayas high above the gorge of the Arun river in the shadow of Mount Everest. And there they were overtaken by winter.

The pass itself crosses the snows at a height of 14,500 feet above sea-level and then descends 7,000 feet to the village of Hatia in the space of about ten miles. But after the high mountains there are the towering cliffs of the river gorge to negotiate. In places the trail literally hangs above the river, being made of logs and branches supported on timbers wedged into the rock face. Here a false step or a rotten bough means a plunge to death below. After this there are a great number of ridges to be crossed and rivers and streams to be negotiated before getting back to Katmandu. Two thousand men died in the blizzards and from exhaustion on the march. There was so little food that they were reduced to eating yak's meat, which is normally forbidden to Hindus, being considered to be beef.

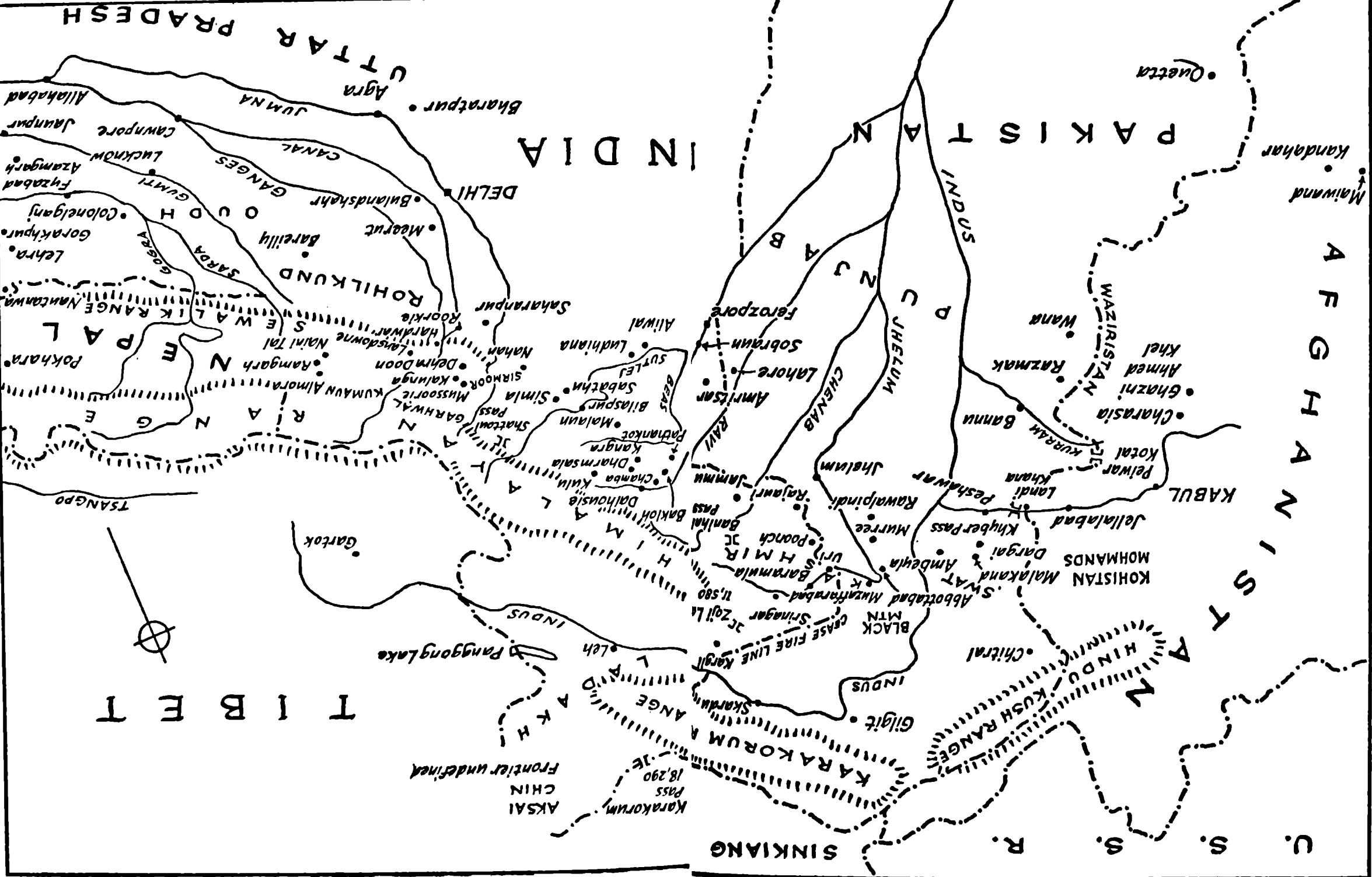
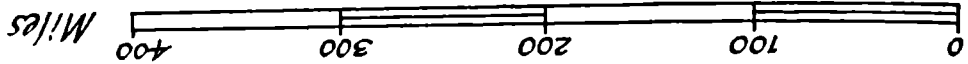
No sooner had the exhausted army returned than it was required to fight again. The second incursion into Tibet had been the latest in a series of incidents, beginning with the annexation of Sikkim, whose Raja had called upon his Tibetan cousins for help, that incurred the increasing wrath of the Chinese Emperor. China at that time considered both Tibet and Sikkim to be her vassals. In 1792, the year after the plundering of the monastery, the Chinese General Fu Kang marched. By August his forces had reached Betrawati at the ford and suspension bridge across the Phalangu river only twenty-five miles or so from Katmandu.

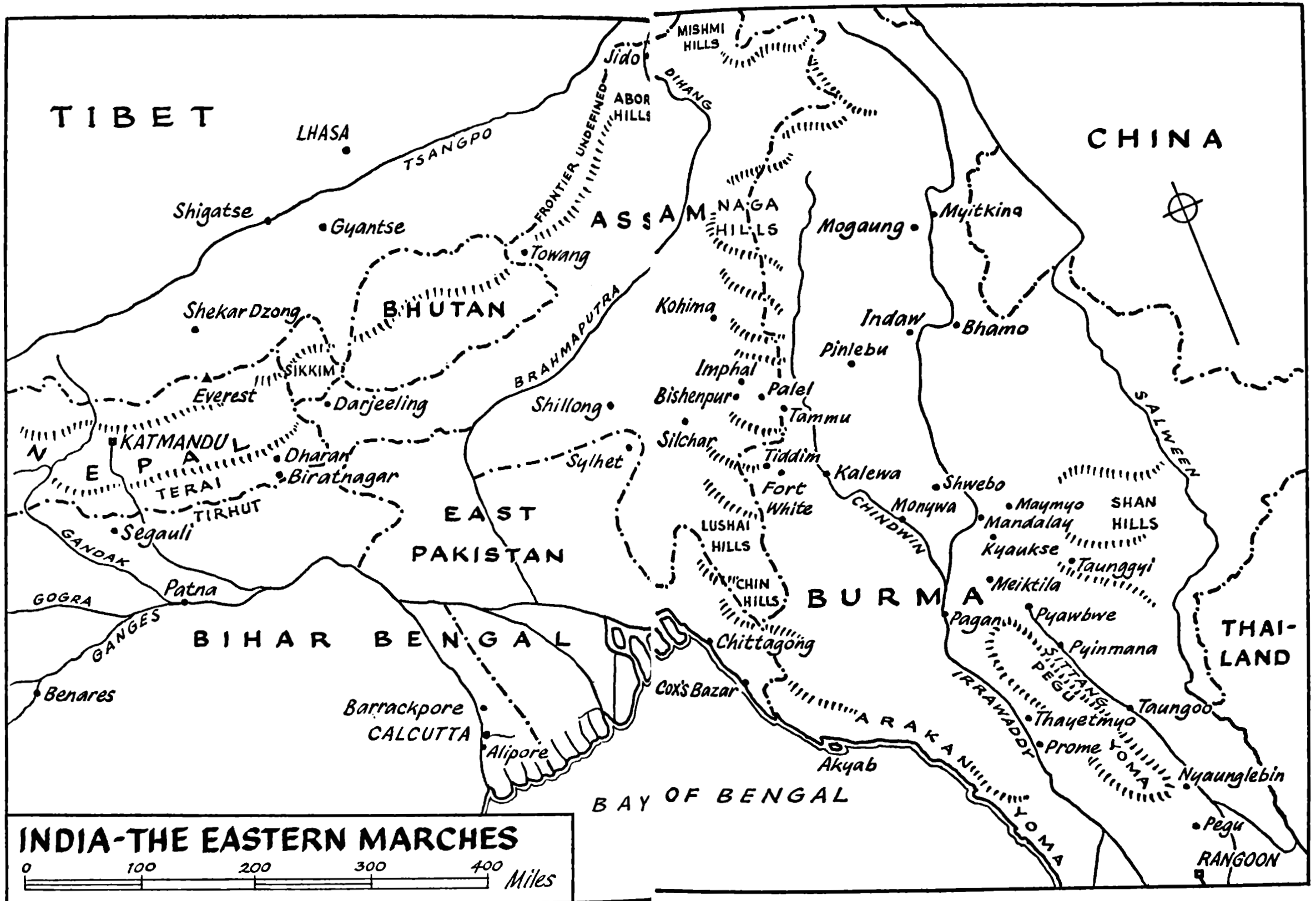
Both sides were exhausted, the Chinese by their extended line of communication and the difficulties of marching through a hostile country, the Gurkhas by their previous privations and their first taste of fighting an experienced and well-disciplined foe. King Bahadur Shah sued for peace, and it was agreed that every ten years Katmandu would send tribute to Peking. The Chinese considered that the Gurkhas had been sufficiently chastened and the Emperor promoted Fu Kang to a dukedom for his success in a most difficult campaign.

It did, indeed, appear that the Gurkhas had been chastened, for under their General Amarsing Thapa they now went west again instead of north. They went into the Kangra valley, there to assault the fortress of the Raja. But Kangra had a common frontier with the domains of Ranjit Sing, called the Lion of the Punjab, and Ranjit came to the rescue. Although Amarsing's men were now armed with muskets, they were driven off.

Meanwhile the irrepressible Gurkhas were infiltrating south-

INDIA - THE WESTERN MARCHES





wards into the soft plains. They thus came into conflict with a third considerable power apart from the Chinese and the Sikhs. The third power was the British East India Company.

The Company's sphere of control had been steadily extending in the face of grave doubts and apprehension on the part of the government in London. The seat of the Company's Indian headquarters was Calcutta, and there was a Governor-General just as there might have been if the Indian territories had been a British colony. But they were not a British colony. They were the fruit of private enterprise, and since the Battle of Plassey in 1757 the Company had become a *de facto* government as well as a house of merchant traders. One of the most important sources of revenue came from the export of opium to China.

In 1801 the Nawab of Oudh ceded the Gorakhpur territory of what is now Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, the former United Provinces, to the Company. It was a curious transaction. The forces of Oudh, Delhi and the Company had combined against the Rohillas. In the course of the fighting the Rohillas got into Delhi, put out the eyes of the Sultan, the descendant of the great Mogul emperors, and massacred many of his children and relations. Eventually the Rohillas were defeated, and the Company received the territory of Rohilkund below the Kumaun and Garhwal hills from the Nawab, Asof-ud-Daulah, in return for its assistance, together with the district of Gorakhpur.

The new land was used extensively for growing indigo. It also brought the British for the first time into direct contact with the Gurkhas, having a common frontier in the plains below the foothills of the Himalayas.

The provocation to the Company was a gradual process. Bands of Gurkhas descended from the hills and took over villages in the plains. Love of land and the taxes and rent that go with it was the motive, for in 1793 a most important event had taken place. The land settlement of Lord Cornwallis, originally designated for ten years only, had been declared perpetual. Under it the *zamindars*, who had been merely the tax-collectors of the Mogul government, were confirmed in the ownership of the land. They paid their taxes as landowners and not as revenue agents. The peasants were disinherited. The root cause of the war between the Company and Nepal was the desire of the barons of Nepal to extend their sway over the *zamindars* of the plains and tap this convenient

source of income, for whatever the pipers might tell of glory in the field, it was the shareholders in London and the court in Katmandu that called the tune.

At the court in Katmandu the Prime Minister was Bhimsen Thapa of the same clan as the Commander-in-Chief, the Kaji Amarsing Thapa. When the Company protested at the depredations of the Gurkhas, he was for standing firm. The General counselled caution. Bhimsen, who profited personally from the Nepalese colonies in the Terai, would not listen. He must have seen how the Company's servants went to war in those days—the officers with five or six servants, tents as big as a room in a house, and an immense amount of baggage; sepoy who would not eat on the march, but had to take off their uniforms and perform ceremonial ablutions before taking their food, and would not be ready to fight for hours afterwards. Mundy, in his "Pen and Pencil Sketches in India" has described his camp equipment as a single Captain "travelling on the most economical principles". It consisted of one double-poled tent, one "routee" or small tent, a "pal" or servants' tent, two elephants, six camels, four horses, a pony, a buggy and twenty-four servants plus mahouts, camel-drivers and tent-pitchers. Bhimsen must have thought that they were easy meat to men who had campaigned continuously in the most difficult country in the world.

The King of Nepal at that time was a minor. Addressing the boy Raja in front of the whole court, Bhimsen had this to say:

"Through the influence of your good fortune and that of your ancestors no-one has yet been able to cope with the State of Nepal. The Chinese once made war on us, but were reduced to seek peace. How then will the English be able to penetrate our hills? The small fort of Bhurtpore was the work of man, yet the English being worsted before it, desisted from the attempt to conquer it. Our hills and fastnesses are formed by the hand of God, and are impregnable."

So the Gurkhas refused to withdraw from the territory of the District Magistrate of Gorakhpur, and in 1814 the Governor-General, Lord Moira, who had come personally to Lucknow, declared war. Preparations had already been put in hand to attack the Gurkhas from four points widely separated from one another.

General Amarsing was in the far west in Garhwal, more than a month's march from Katmandu. The first column, commanded by General Gillespie, was to occupy the valley of Dehra Doon and force him back on to the arduous hill tracks for his communications. The second column, led by General Ochterlony, was to advance from Ludhiana further west in the Punjab, where he was already serving as Political Agent, and attack the Gurkha *kaji* in the Simla hills. The third, led by Wood, was to advance from Gorakhpur on Palpa over the foothills, and the fourth, under Marley, was to go straight for Katmandu, whilst the capital was deprived by the other columns of reinforcements from the west.

At first the war went well for the Gurkhas. The Indian Army of the Company had had no previous experience of mountain warfare. They were used to and expected set-piece battles in the eighteenth-century manner, and were not prepared for the fortified stockade, the sudden surprise attack and the highly mobile enemy.

Marley and Wood did not even reach the outer ramparts of Nepal. They have been severely criticized, but the approach march alone through the deadly malarial forests of the Terai was difficult enough. The artillery they were encumbered with must have made it more difficult still. It was all unknown country to them. Very few Englishmen had ever been to the Nepal Valley, before, probably only three—Kirkpatrick, Knox and Hamilton—and no one knew quite what to expect.

The Gurkhas destroyed two of the outposts that Marley had established at the gates of the Churia hills, and the latter ignominiously retreated. Wood withdrew before reaching Butwal, which lies below Palpa, when faced with a force much smaller than his own.

In the west, however, the Indian sepoy were better led and had more success. Gillespie, always in the forefront of the battle, led his column through the Sewalik hills and into the vale of the Doons. From the Doons he climbed to the stockade of Kalunga not far from the modern hill station of Mussoorie. He had four thousand men and twenty guns to tackle the six hundred Gurkha defenders.

Nevertheless they made no real impression on the stone and wood fort until the siege train arrived from far-off Delhi nearly a month after the beginning of the attack. The General led two



Third Afghan War—2nd/1st Gurkhas on the North West Frontier



Second World War—
4th/10th Gurkhas in
Prome, Burma



Commanding Officer
of the 1st/10th Gurkhas,
Lt.-Col. O. N. Smyth,
takes the surrender of
the Japanese 28th Army
in Burma

assaults in person. In the third he was shot down and killed. Then at last bombardments breached the walls. When all was clearly lost Balbahadur, the Gurkha commander, escaped at night with all the men that remained. They were less than a hundred, and rather than return in disgrace to their native land they went off to serve the Sikh king in Lahore, becoming the first *lahures*. It is said that they died to a man in battle with the Afghans.

At Kalunga there are now two obelisks. One is a memorial to Gillespie and the British and Indian dead. The other commemorates "their gallant adversaries". The fort itself was taken to pieces by the pioneers and hardly a stone remains.

Gillespie's successor was no more vigorous than Marley and Wood and retreated to Dehra Doon. Then, under orders from the Supreme Commander, Lord Moira, now the Marquess of Hastings, he marched westward along the Doon into the Sirmoor country to co-operate with Ochterlony's force.

Ochterlony faced the clever, experienced and redoubtable Gurkha General Amarsing Thapa himself, and he proved to be more than his match. He had an eye for mountain country and an appreciation of mountain strategy that was outstanding in the army of the day and aroused the admiration of his adversary.

Amarsing's fortress was at Malaun in the hills above the Kangra valley. Ochterlony advanced through Bilaspur on the Sutlej river, cutting off his supply route and occupying the heights between Malaun and the lesser fort at the south-eastern end of the ridge. He thus managed to isolate Amarsing and about two thousand of his men. The Gurkha General sent his chief lieutenant, the Sirdar Bhagte Thapa, to dislodge Ochterlony from the heights. A furious but unsuccessful attack on the Company's defences ensued, in which a quarter of the two thousand, including Bhagte, were lost. Then came the news that another British officer, Colonel Gardner, had captured the hill fort of Almora in Kumaun, thus cutting the route by which reinforcements might reach the Gurkhas at Malaun. Amarsing was deserted by his chiefs. Left with two hundred faithful henchmen, he sued for peace.

Ochterlony's peace terms set the boundaries of modern Nepal from the Maha Kali in the west to the Mechi Khola in the east. Simla, Garhwal and Kumaun were to be surrendered to the British, Sikkim was to be returned to its Raja, and the strip of lowland south of the hills called the Terai, in part of which the

conflict first started, was to be handed over to the Company's administration. The seven-hundred-mile stretch of mountains and valleys was thus reduced to five hundred. Furthermore the British were to be free to recruit soldiers in Nepal and to appoint a Resident in Katmandu. Amarsing, whose courage, skill and loyalty to his country had aroused Ochterlony's admiration, was allowed to march out of Malaun with his arms, colours and equipment.

So ended the battles of Kalunga and Malaun and the first phase of the Anglo-Nepalese war. Bhimsen Thapa, Prime Minister in Katmandu, refused to ratify the terms accepted by his general in the far west. As far as he was concerned things nearer home had gone very well with the discomfiture of Marley and Wood. Furthermore it seemed that other active spirits were beginning to emulate the Gurkhas in harrassing the Company. The Sikh king, Ranjit Sing, was commencing the aggressive policy which led up to the Sikh wars of the 1840's. Mahrattas and Afghans were bestirring themselves.

Negotiations finally foundered on the question of the Terai, the only flat lands of any extent in the whole kingdom. Bhimsen Thapa could not be made to give in. He and his Gurkha nobles derived their income from the plains.

On receiving this news the Company looked to its resources in real earnest. Not since Tipu's stand at Seringapatam had its troops been resisted so stubbornly, and the effect on others of allowing the situation to remain unchallenged might be incalculable. A force 18,000 strong was assembled at Dinapur and given to the successful Ochterlony to command. It was to make straight for Katmandu, setting out in January, the healthiest time of the year. He crossed the pass through the Churia hills, outwitting the defenders by going secretly up a side track at night. Next he had to tackle Makwanpur Garhi, one of a series of *garhi*, or forts on the passes through the Mahabharat range, which guarded the inner territory of Nepal.

At Makwanpur there was fierce fighting. Even after Ochterlony's guns had been brought up the Gurkhas scorned to fall back and were killed in large numbers. But inevitably the fort fell to superior force, whereupon, just as Bahadur Shah had done with the Chinese at Betrawati, Bhimsen Thapa sued for peace. Foreigners must be kept out of the Valley itself at all costs.

In fact, with the Terai now lost, the bitterest opposition was against the clause in the treaty which provided for a British Resident in Katmandu. Ochterlony was adamant, however, and the treaty was signed at Segauli, now in North Bihar, in 1816, over a year after the fall of Makwanpur.

Thus ended the war between the British and the Gurkhas, which was followed by perpetual peace and increasing friendship. Many of the place-names mentioned in this account became well known in British India. Dehra Doon and Almora both became Gurkha regimental depots. Simla became the summer capital of the Indian Empire after the government had been transferred from Calcutta to Delhi. Sirmoor lent its name to one of the first regiments to be formed. Gorakhpur became a Gurkha recruiting depot.

That party of the treaty which was to permit the British to recruit soldiers in Nepal had, in fact, been anticipated from the very beginning of the war. Ochterlony's immediate reaction on seeing the mettle of his adversaries was to say that he could use some of them himself, and they soon began to come over to him in considerable numbers.

It may seem strange, when we consider what we know of the loyalty of the Gurkhas, that these men could so easily change sides, but the truth is that the villagers of the Himalayan foothills in the early nineteenth century had little conception of being citizens of the nation of Nepal. Neither Nepal nor the East India Company were nations in the modern sense of the term. The fighting man was a soldier in the original meaning of the word—a man who engages for his "solde" or pay, and is prepared to fight for the master who engages him. If the master is defeated in spite of his best efforts, and if he himself survives, he must look elsewhere for employment. In many cases the British officers were mercenaries too. Colonel Gardner, who captured Almora, had been serving the Mahratta king, the Peshwar Baji Rao, whose capital was at Poona and who subsequently usurped Bhimsen's place as the chief thorn in the flesh of the Company.

Furthermore the stern rule of the Gurkhas was far from popular, particularly in the recently conquered western hills, where Gillespie and Ochterlony were operating. It was in these hills, now outside the frontier of Nepal, that the first three regiments of the Gurkha Rifles were raised. The men were engaged as

irregulars after the Gurkha defeat at Malaun, and were not at that time specifically designated Gurkha troops.

The first of these, the 1st King George V's Own Gurkha Rifles, now serving the Indian Army as its senior regiment, was made up of men from the various principalities freed from Gurkha rule by the advance of the Company's men. It was called the Nasiri Battalion—the battalion of the "friendlies"—and was actually formed in time to take part in the operations against Malaun, though the Commander-in-Chief's orders to embody it in the army were not issued until after Amarsing's capitulation.

The 2nd King Edward VII's Own Goorkhas, now in the British Army, were formed a few months later by Lieutenant Young, who had earlier been captured by a small band of Gurkhas after his own irregulars had run away. The Gurkhas, admiring his courage at not trying to escape with his men, had treated him well, made friends with him and finally released him. He in turn, full of admiration for their manly qualities, asked for permission to raise a battalion from the Gurkha prisoners held at Dehra Doon. It was called the Sirmoor Rifles after the region from which most of the men came. Alone amongst the Gurkha regiments it has retained the old spelling of Goorkha, which much more accurately transcribes the name as it should be pronounced. If all of them had retained this spelling, the Gurkhas might not be called the "Gerkas" by most people today.

Captain Mundy describes Dehra Doon as it was a few years after the 2nd Goorkhas settled there. "On the 12th of April," (1828), he says, "Colonel Dawkins and I left Hardwar, and commenced our march through the valley of Deyra Doon. Our route was most beautiful, and reminded me much of some of the milder and least wild regions of the Alps. The road, which is made with great art, winds down through a woody declivity, sometimes closely hemmed in by abrupt rocky banks, and at others traversing a luxuriantly wooded plain. We found our tents pitched in a thick forest near the small chokee of Karsrah.

"On the summit of the hill above our encampment is a small bungalow, built for the accommodation of persons travelling without tents; and similar buildings are established at nearly every stage through the Doon. From this point we enjoyed a magnificent prospect. Below us lay the beautiful valley of Deyra, luxuriant with many-tinted forests, and refreshed by the rippling

little rivers which run in a meandering course through the whole length of the vale, from the Ganges to the Jumna. The view is bounded on all sides by mountains. In the north and west, those of Garhwal and Sirmoor rise, series after series, till they are terminated by the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. In the south the prospect is abruptly closed by the range of woody hills which form the boundary of the Deyra Doon, and cut it off from the plains of Hindustan.

“During breakfast a *hurkarah* arrived with a note from a gentleman who passed by this same route yesterday, informing us that, as he was fishing in a mountain-stream near at hand, a tiger came to drink at it within pistol-shot of him, and retired without seeing him. We determined to look for him in the evening, though our chance of success is small in a country so full of ravines, by which the tigers can sneak away to the woods when they hear the crashing approach of the elephants.

“*April 14th*—Marched eleven miles to the town of Deyra, whence the name of the valley. The first half of the day’s journey led through a thick forest of very lofty trees, many of them strangers to the plains of India. The underwood was formed of richly flowering plants, among which the corinda sent forth its well-nigh sickening fragrance; and parasites of the most gigantic proportions twined round the trunks and branches of the larger trees, resembling, in their grotesque writhings, the folds of huge boa-constrictors. In the immediate neighbourhood of the town of Deyra the jungle has been cleared away, and the wheat-crops are remarkably fine.

“On arriving at our tents we received a polite invitation from Mr. Shore, the political agent for this province, to pass the day in his house. He is a remarkably tall and handsome man, has adopted the Mussulman costume and wears a long beard. He is also distinguished as the scourge of all the brigands and wild beasts that infest his province. In bringing the former to justice he seldom trusts to inferior agents, but, taking one or two determined assistants, mounts his camel or his horse, slings his rifle on his shoulder, and with no better food than rice, and no more efficient night-shelter than a good blanket, makes two or three forced marches to the lurking-place of the robbers. His most remarkable exploit was the following:

“A numerous and determined banditti, being pursued by the

battalion of Ghourkahs cantoned at Deyra, took refuge in a small fortress. Mr. Shore, with Major Young, the commandant of the corps above-mentioned, arrived before the walls, but having no guns capable of effecting a breach, Mr. S. proposed that they should cut down a tree, and, forming a battering-ram, force the gates in this primeval method. The machine was prepared and carried up to the gate in spite of the fire of the garrison. The instrument did its work—down went the gates, and in rushed my hero and Major Y. at the head of their men.

“The verandah and rooms of this active persecutor of the wild animals of the forest are adorned with the grim skulls and stuffed skins of tigers, bears, boars, monkeys, and other characteristic drawing-room furniture: and while we were at breakfast two black bears, with silver collars round their necks, strolled quietly into the room and took possession of the posts of honour on the right and left of our host.”

The 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles, now in the Indian Army, like the Nasiri or Malaun Regiment, was raised at the same time as the 2nd Goorkhas, from amongst the men who had been defeated at Almora, which lies to the north of the modern hill station of Naini Tal. It was called the Kumaun Battalion. Thus the first three regiments, though recruited in the hills, were originally composed of men who were not from present-day Nepal at all.

The important thing, however, is that they were men of the hills with the common characteristics noted by many observant officers at the time. The men of the hills looked down on the men of the plains, the *deshi* as they called them from the word *madesh*, meaning “middle land” and used to denote the wide plains between the Himalayas and the Vindhya, in contrast with the narrow valleys of their own homeland. They considered them soft, superstitious and lacking in fortitude.

They had some grounds for this belief. The plainsmen lived in the heat of the Indian summer with only a few brief weeks of cooler weather in the winter after the monsoon rains. The hillmen lived in a cooler climate, varying according to the altitude but never experiencing the enervating and debilitating heat of Bengal and Bihar. Their hot weather, on average, would be something like a Mediterranean summer. Their cold weather, dry and crisp, was like a winter in Northern Italy with plenty of snow and ice

above the 10,000-foot line, and with frost in the villages. In between the spring hot weather and the cool and cold autumn and winter came the summer rains.

This climate bred a robust and sturdy character. The people of the lower Himalayas are small and stocky, in contrast with the taller Biharis to the south and the Bhotias and Tibetans to the north, who are typically giants amongst men. Their trails are too rough and precipitous for the use of pack animals, so they have to carry all their goods on their backs. The typical receptacle for both men and women is a big wicker basket with a strap to put across the forehead, called the *doko*. Carrying heavy loads in this way up and down steep mountainsides gives them powerful bulging muscles in their short bandy legs. Use of the *doko* with its headstrap from an early age—for even the children are accustomed to carrying their share of the loads, weighed out according to age from six or seven years upwards—may be the cause of the pronounced flatness of the forehead which is noticeable in many of them.

In addition to their physical sturdiness observers noted a sturdiness of character not to be found so much in the plainsman of the day. On the plains the villages had lain open and unprotected for centuries, always at the mercy of the changing master, be he maharajah or nawab, vizier or sultan, or the Company's tax-collector satirized as the Collector of Boggleywallah in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Caste was piled on caste. The earlier inhabitants were classed as pariahs. It was social death to eat or drink with them—sometimes literal death, for no one knew the causes of cholera and plague and the other diseases bred in dirt like dysentery and typhoid. The later inhabitants, in turn, were ruled by Moslems under whose influence the women were driven into partial seclusion behind the veil, and then by Englishmen, who were very much concerned with the fortunes they might eventually take home with them ten thousand miles away.

All this bred a hopeless slave mentality. In the hills things were different. Each valley, in the seclusion of its surrounding mountains, was self-sufficient. The chiefs dispensed rude justice, but they could not ride roughshod over their people. The clansmen would not tolerate it. By and large the people owned their own land. They were freehold yeomen farmers. This bred in them a spirit of independence. Though man was nominally the master, woman

was far from servile, and woe betide the man in the village who tried to interfere with the women's traditional rights and customs.

The men who went out to war, either for Amarsing, the Gurkha, or for Ranjit Sing, the Sikh, or for Lord Hastings, the Company's *Lath Sahib*, the Commander-in-Chief, did so in the knowledge that other members of the family and the women were at home tending the farm, looking after the stone and mud terrace walls to prevent the fields from being washed away, carefully planting out the grain and harvesting it.

They went either because their chiefs demanded their services, or because there were too many mouths to feed at home, or simply out of a spirit of adventure to see the world and try out their own hardihood and endurance. Life was basically an adventure to them, an episode between the cradle and the grave, and between other lives before the cradle and beyond the grave. They were not responsible for who was fighting whom or for the politics and intrigues going on above their heads. But they were responsible for acquitting themselves well both in the eyes of the world at large and in the eyes of their fellows.

To go for a soldier and then be turned down by the recruiting officer was more than a man could bear. He would rather wander away elsewhere than return to his village with his tail between his legs. To go for a soldier and be called a coward was death to the soul. In the words of the motto of the 1st Gurkha Rifles, whose home is now back again in the original place where they were formed at Subathu in the Simla hills:

Kayad hunu bhandu marnu ramro

It is better to die than be a coward.

4

In the Plains of India

FOR more than forty years no more regiments of the hillmen were raised, though there were many Gurkhas in the regular battalions of the Indian Army. The three battalions from the western hills continued their existence, wearing the green jackets of the light infantry, the British Army's first attempt at camouflage, which was originally introduced in the American War of Independence to make the rifleman inconspicuous in the woods of New England. But at the end of these forty years an event occurred which was to tie the friendship between Briton and Gurkha into a firm knot. This event was the Indian Mutiny.

The Gurkhas had already shown their mettle in two campaigns. First there was the siege of Bharatpur, then called Bhurtpore, the capital of the Jats fifty miles west of Agra on the edge of the great plains. This was the fortress to which Bhimsen Thapa brought the attention of the Court of Nepal after Lord Lake had been thrown back from it at the beginning of the century.

The ruling family of Bhurtpore was descended from Jat *zamindars* who fought the Mahrattas for their estates. They formed an alliance with the Company against the Mahrattas, but later intrigued against the Company with the Mahratta Raja Jaswant Rao Holkar. This led to Lord Combermere's siege of the walled city and inner fort of Bhurtpore in 1826. The siege lasted six weeks and gave the Gurkhas their first battle honour.

Mundy, continuing the narrative of his travels in India, has related how he met a veteran of Bhurtpore whilst going up into the hills beyond Dehra Doon. It was at a place called Khotekie on the trail leading to the Shattoul pass north of Simla.

"We took up our abode," he says, "in the stage-bungalow, near which is the comfortable residence of a Subedar, or native commissioned officer, of Captain Kennedy's regiment of

hill-rangers, who was promoted to that rank by Lord Combermere for his bravery at Bhurtpore. The wooden eaves of his house are carved and ornamented much after the fashion of the better buildings in the mountain hamlets of Switzerland. The gallant inhabitant paid us a visit immediately on our arrival, presenting us his sword, as is usual with native officers, in lieu of a *nazar* (a gift of homage in honour of a visit). In these cases the superior touches the sword with his right hand and makes a salaam. The Subedar was particularly civil, and provided us with an abundance of milk, butter, eggs, walnuts, etc.

“In the evening the Subedar showed us his favourite charger, of which he is, and has a right to be, proud. The manner in which he became possessed of this horse is perhaps worth recording. During the siege of Bhurtpore, and after our parallels had been pushed to within 300 yards of the counterscarp, a white horse was observed to be picketed close under an outwork of the fort, and in a situation so exposed to the fire of both besiegers and besieged, that no one on either side seemed willing to run the risk incident upon an attempt to appropriate him. The poor neutral nag was therefore in a fair way of being shot or starved to death. Our hero—then Jemadar and doubtless too poor to be well mounted—cast the eye of covetousness upon the snowy charger; and one morning, determined to ‘do or die’, jumped over the gabions, and, running across the glacis, reached the horse, cut him adrift, and, under a heavy fire of musketry from the walls, trotted him in triumph into the trenches, himself unscathed, and his prize receiving only one bullet through the nose, which scarcely blemished him. The right of conquest is so well established in British India, that there is no fear of the gallant Subedar being disturbed in his acquisition.”

The next battles in which the Gurkhas took part were fought much closer to their mountain homes. They were in the first war of the British against the Sikhs, in which they first met the enemy at Aliwal on the left bank of the River Sutlej on the road from Ludhiana to Ferozpur. The battle took place on January 16th, 1846 at the spot commemorated by an obelisk inscribed in English, Persian and Gurmukhi, the language of the Sikhs. They met them again at Sobraon in the same region.

Meanwhile the court at Katmandu, still true to its familiar condition of intrigue and treachery, was suffering another of its

periodic convulsions. The Prime Minister, Bhimsen Thapa, was overthrown and cast into a filthy dungeon on trumped up charges brought by his rivals of the Pande clan. There, in 1839, he committed suicide with a *kukri* left purposely at his side, after he had been told that his wife had been forced to walk naked through the streets.

The Pandes now tried to manipulate the throne and control the heirs to the first king, Prithwi Narayan Shah. They were uncontrollable. The queens held the power over their weak and vacillating menfolk. The queen who supported the Pandes died, and another queen, favouring the Thapas, replaced her. She sent down the Pandes in a blood bath. Three years later there was another blood bath, triggered off by this same queen, whose lover had been murdered. The slaughter, which took place in the quadrangle of the royal guard, brought the hero of Nepal, Jangbahadur Rana, to power and drove the House of Shah into a seclusion which continued until 1954.

The tale of Jangbahadur is told in the children's story books of Nepal and in the histories of the nation. It is worth telling here as well, for the mighty hunter, Jangbahadur—brave, stubborn, a staunch friend and a ruthless enemy, a gambler with a devil-may-care reckless temperament—embodies in one man the qualities which the Gurkhas most admire.

He was born in 1817, the second of seven sons. A tale of his youth is told by his son, which is reminiscent of the young Hercules. One day, when he was about eight years old, he was playing in the garden of his father's house at Thapathali when he saw a snake under a tree near a shrine. Instead of running away from it he went and caught it by the head and ran with it to his father to show it to him. As he was doing so, the snake coiled itself round his arm, squeezing it tight. But Jangbahadur did not release his grip behind its head. If he had done so, the snake would have turned and bitten him, very probably fatally. His father uncoiled the snake from the tail and dashed it to death against a stone.

Jangbahadur was married at the age of eleven and entered the army, in which his father was a General, when he was eighteen. As a young junior officer he was a great sportsman, a great gambler, and impatient of authority. One might suppose he would be popular with the other ensigns and admired by the men.

At this time he could neither read nor write and was too impatient to learn.

Jangbahadur and his father both belonged to the Thapa faction and lost their jobs when the Pandes came into power. Jangbahadur's reaction was typical. He went elephant hunting in the Terai, hoping to pay off his debts and make a living from the sale of ivory. He made little money, but gained a reputation as a hunter in the region which remains today the largest surviving big game area in the world. He returned to Katmandu when the Pandes went down in their turn.

The seal was set on Jangbahadur's reputation and prowess as a hunter by his capture of a mad elephant that was on the rampage near Katmandu. The elephant had gone *mast* whilst it was being washed on the bank of the Bagmati, and killed its *mahout* before he could get the shackles on its legs. Like the Cretan bull that Theseus went out to meet in single combat on the outskirts of Athens, the animal was terrifying the neighbourhood and no one had the courage to try and capture it. Jangbahadur went out and watched its habits. He climbed out on to the roof of a house in the bazaar of Singhasatal, past which the elephant was expected to pass, and he waited. When at last the beast came by, he dropped down on to its neck. Jangbahadur was a small light man, but as compact as a ball and as tough as steel. He clung on like a leopard with all four arms and legs, and managed to goad it in the direction of Tripureshwar, where a trap had been prepared for it. So the elephant was restrained until its fit of madness died.

In the same year Jangbahadur was watching a buffalo fight in the courtyard of the royal palace at Basantpur. After fighting fiercely for some time one of the buffaloes dashed out of the arena into the royal stables. Maddened by the pain of its wounds, it held everyone at bay until Jangbahadur came along with a blanket, which he threw over its eyes, thus blindfolding it. He then went behind the buffalo and twisted its tail, which had the effect of persuading it to come quietly out of its stronghold into captivity.

Many other tales are told of the hero's courage and magnanimity. On one occasion a leopard had got into a Newar's house in Katmandu, causing its occupants to run out in terror. Jangbahadur came up to see what all the fuss was about, armed himself with a *doko*, a basket of woven strips of bamboo, and went

inside. He clapped the basket over the leopard's head to muzzle it, then called on others to help him capture the animal, which he subsequently presented alive to the Crown Prince. On another occasion he killed a leopard with his sword in single combat in the presence of the King on the slopes of Mount Dahchowk.

Jangbahadur became known as "the man who has no heart". In Nepal the phrase means being completely destitute of the emotion of fear. The Crown Prince, Surendra Bikram Shah, unstable and hardly sane, was a supporter of the Pandes and detested Jangbahadur as a weak character detests a strong and popular man.

One day the Prince and his entourage were out walking by the Trisuli river across the hills from Katmandu. As they were crossing the suspension bridge above the river, a mounted officer came towards them, but did not notice the Prince and did not dismount as he should have done. The Prince took it to be an intentional insult and ordered him to be thrown off the bridge still mounted on his horse.

The bridge was eighty feet above the water, and it was, in fact, a death leap. Ranbir, the officer thus sentenced, prepared himself for the end. He had one last request—that he should be allowed to visit his family before he died. "You won't be killed," the Prince answered, and refused his request. "Only Jangbahadur could get out of that alive," Ranbir commented.

This remark seemed to be a heaven-sent hint to the imbecile Prince. He called for Jangbahadur and told him what had happened. He wanted him to take the leap in Ranbir's place. Captain Jangbahadur agreed on condition that no more Herculean tasks would be imposed on him. The Prince thereupon granted him an exemption for six months, and said he would "eat his father's flesh and bone" if he broke the pact.

Jangbahadur mounted Ranbir's horse and leaped. Keeping his feet out of the stirrups, he managed to strike the water away from the horse. Then both rider and horse disappeared under the surface of the turbulent river and were given up for lost. The Prince sent a party downstream to look for the bodies. They found Jangbahadur a mile down, sitting on a shingle bank wringing out his clothes.

As soon as the truce was over the mad Prince was up to his tricks again. They were walking past Bhimsen's watchtower, the *Dharara*, on the edge of the vast parade-ground at Katmandu,

when he turned to his captain and ordered him to jump down from the top.

The Dharara was 250 feet high before it was damaged by the earthquake in 1925, and the leap would have meant certain death. Jangbahadur resorted to subterfuge. "I can jump down from the tower with the help of two parachutes, which will take two or three weeks to make," he said. "After that I shall invite a large crowd of spectators to watch the feat in your Royal Highness's presence."

During the interval of time the Prince thought better of it and appeared to forget the whole business, which is what Jangbahadur had hoped. But the legend remains in the folk tales of Nepal, that, in fact, he accomplished the leap—and on horseback.

The next task imposed on him for the Prince's amusement was to jump down into a disused well that was utilized as a refuse dump for the bones of slaughtered buffaloes. Jangbahadur obtained a day's stay of execution, during which his father had bales of cotton thrown down into the well to break his fall. On the appointed day he leaped, damaging his right ankle but nothing worse.

Jangbahadur appeared to be indestructible. His uncle was Prime Minister. Even when the King handed over the reins of power to the Prince, the latter was not strong enough to destroy him. Then came another twist in the palace intrigues. The King declared to Jangbahadur that his uncle, the Prime Minister, was planning to force him to abdicate in favour of the Prince as a first step to seizing the throne. He ordered him to assassinate his uncle. Jangbahadur obeyed.

It was a ruthless act, and Jangbahadur has often been censured for it, but a story related by his son, Padma Shamsher, throws light on the way things stood at the time. The weak King had handed over absolute powers to the Queen. In his official declaration those powers included the following:

1. Passing sentence of imprisonment, mutilation, banishment, execution and dismissal from office.
2. Appointing, dismissing, transferring or promoting any servant of the state.
3. Negotiating with China, Britain and Tibet.
4. Declaring war or making peace.

The Queen, with her hundreds of maids of honour, thus had everything in her hands. It was petticoat government, and lovers got preferment. Jangbahadur was not a backward man. He persuaded one of the Queen's chief confidantes to be his mistress, and the breach with his uncle started with a dispute over promotion.

One of the maids of honour had got a written order from the Queen promoting her lover from Subedar to Lieutenant. She gave this order to him. Seeing the Lieutenant whom he was to replace coming towards the Darbar, the newly promoted man waved the order under his nose and snatched his officer's badge of rank from him in order to put it on his own headdress. Devibahadur, the Lieutenant, sought redress in vain from the Prime Minister. His anger boiled over, and in the course of an indignant speech he brought in a few choice hints about the Queen's lover, Gagan Sing, who had been brought up a slave in the royal household.

This was duly reported to the Queen who, acting as royal regent, ordered him to be put in chains. At her insistence the Prime Minister convened the Council, which sentenced him to death.

Devibahadur was Jangbahadur's cousin and the Prime Minister's nephew. Jangbahadur tried to intercede for him. "What can I expect," he said, "from you, my own uncle, when you make no effort to save my innocent cousin, who is also your own nephew?"

The Prime Minister was in despair. He mentioned the power of the Pandes. "You know I have only recently been appointed Prime Minister," he said, "and it does not do for a new man to oppose the orders of the Regent. If the Queen takes away the life of my own son, I can only obey her."

"But surely," Jangbahadur insisted, "it should be the duty of the Prime Minister to direct the opinions of the King and Queen. You admit that the sentence passed on Devibahadur is unjust, yet you do nothing for him."

The Prime Minister could bear no more. "If the Queen orders, I shall kill you," he burst out. "And you shall kill me."

"Do you mean to say," Jangbahadur said, "that although I'm your nephew, I shall be justified in killing you by the Queen's order?"

"Yes, I do."

The reply was thus ironically fulfilled. Now the demented royal family was left with no one at all to curb them. The already mentioned slaughter in the *kot*, the quadrangle of the guard followed. All these events occurred with a few years of each other. In Katmandu it was tough at the top, and life hung by a thread.

The *kot* massacre was started by Queen Lakshmi Devi and finished by Jangbahadur, his brothers and kinsmen, and the three regiments which he commanded. Hundreds, from ministers and generals to humble retainers, died in the holocaust. Jangbahadur emerged as Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief. Shortly afterwards the King and Queen were forced into exile in Benares. The Prince, who had formerly persecuted Jangbahadur, was appointed Regent, but Jang was now secure in his power. The following year he gave striking proof of the power at his command to the British Company. He offered it six regiments of his troops to help it against the Sikhs. The offer was refused by Lord Dalhousie.

Having had his offer of aid turned down, Jangbahadur marched his army into the Terai—more than 30,000 men ostensibly on a big game hunt—and kept everyone guessing as to which side he was going to come in on!

In the end he returned home without fighting in time to welcome the widowed Queen of the Sikh King, Ranjit Sing, who had escaped from confinement in the fortress of Chunar by substituting a female slave in her place. Travelling as a religious mendicant, she reached Bichhakhori in Nepal in April 1849 and then announced her identity. The British requested her extradition, but Jangbahadur would not give her up against the Hindu laws of hospitality and provided a house for her near his own.

Two years later, leaving his brother, Bombahadur, in command in Katmandu, Jangbahadur went on a year's journey to Calcutta, London, Edinburgh and Paris, in the course of which he met Queen Victoria, the Duke of Wellington and Prince Louis Napoleon. Of his meeting with the Iron Duke he said, "When that great warrior called on me, I felt it to be the proudest moment of my life."

He also called on Lord Gough, who complimented him on the meaning of his name "Brave in War". Jangbahadur replied courteously, "My name means "warlike bravery" by a mere trick of

language, but the name of Lord Gough has become synonymous with the conquest of the Punjab."

Jangbahadur's main interests were, of course, in armaments and animals. One day he went to visit a horse-dealer in Piccadilly, who quoted him a price of three hundred guineas for a horse that took his fancy. Jang wanted to see if it would jump, although the dealer insisted that it was only a hack. Overriding the dealer's objections, he mounted the horse and jumped it over a naked sword held out by his brother, Dhir Shamsheer, a foot or two above the ground. The dealer immediately raised his price to four hundred guineas. Jang offered two hundred, but said that if the dealer had not made up his mind by the time he had gone fifty paces, the offer was to be considered reduced to a hundred and fifty, and by the time he reached his carriage it would be down to one hundred. The horse-dealer was too flustered to make up his mind, hesitated till the last moment, and in the end was glad to accept a hundred guineas. Jang gave him an extra twenty-five to soften the blow.

Jangbahadur seems to have had a native capacity for adapting himself to civilized manners, which is quite outstanding when one considers the relatively barbarous conditions he had come from in Katmandu. When asked by a lady what he thought of English ladies, his reply was supremely diplomatic. "They have the wonderful tact," he said, "of exercising unquestionable control over the male sex, whom they have subdued so completely that they cannot rest without the company of women."

To crown it all Thackeray himself composed a slightly satirical Irish ballad in honour of the lion of the season of 1850:

*O will ye choose to hear the news,
Bedad, I cannot pass it o'er:
I'll tell you all about the ball
To the Naypaulse Ambassador.*

*O fair the girls, and rich the curls,
And bright the oyes you saw there was!
And fixed each oye, ye there could spoi,
On General Jung Bahawther was!*

*This General great then tuck his sate,
With all the other Ginerals,*

(*Bedad his troat, his belt, his coat,
All blazed with precious minerals*);

*And as he there with princely air,
Reclonin on his cushion was,
All round about his royal chair
The squeezin and the pushin was.*

Six years later Jangbahadur again offered military assistance to the British, in spite of the fact that his army had just returned from a difficult campaign in Tibet. And this time the Governor-General, Lord Canning, was glad to accept.

The Indian Mutiny started at Meerut towards the end of the hot weather in 1857. It was always an explosive time of year, when tempers were critical under the searing blaze of the Indian sun. The mutiny had been planned for some time, with the plotters playing on the grievances of the soldiers and their superstitious objection to biting off the caps of the greased cartridges. But the hillmen of the three Gurkha battalions were quite outside the orbit of the plotters, and some of them made a point of asking to be issued with the greased cartridges in order to show the *deshi* sepoys that they were not with them in the matter.

The fortunes of war gave the 2nd Goorkhas the chance to win undying fame at this fateful time. They were with the beleaguered force on the ridge outside Delhi and they took part in the eventual recapture of the city from the mutineers. Delhi Day is still celebrated in the regiment with a traditional early morning ceremonial parade, in which the men march past the Queen's Truncheon.

The truncheon is called the *Nishani Mai*—the mother symbol—by the Gurkhas, and on it the new recruits swear their allegiance to the regiment. It was presented by the Commander-in-Chief in India at a parade of ten thousand troops in Lahore five years after the events to which it relates, and it takes the place of a regimental colour or flag. The head of the truncheon represents three Gurkha soldiers standing on top of the Delhi Gate of the Red Fort at Delhi, supporting the Queen's crown. Inside the tower of the gate there are two crossed *kukris*. On rings of silver above and below the gate the words "Main Picquet, Hindu Rao's House, Delhi, 1857" are inscribed in English and in the Nagri script.

When the mutiny broke out, the 2nd Goorkhas, still called the

Sirmoor Battalion, were in their lines at Dehra Doon in the pleasant vale below the Garhwal hills. A camel-rider brought the desperate message, and within four hours they were on the march with arms and personal ammunition and the barest necessities. They took with them two elephants to carry the reserve ammunition and set out on foot through the Sewalik hills down to the plains.

Arriving at Roorkee, where the Indian Sappers and Miners were on the verge of following the example of their comrades in Meerut, the Gurkhas embarked in fifty boats on the Ganges canal, which had been completed three years before. This was an imposing artificial waterway over three hundred miles long, cut for irrigation purposes, and in three days it took them to a place called Nanoo, which was the point on the canal nearest to Meerut.

However, they were ordered to carry on downstream another sixty miles to Bulandshahr, where the sepoys were expected to revolt at any minute. Along the canal they found locks destroyed and armed men on the bridges, but at only one point were they actually attacked. Retribution was swift. They burnt the offending village, tried thirteen men by drumhead court martial and shot them. Five of them were of the priestly caste of Brahmins, whose lives were normally inviolate, but this consideration did not deter the Gurkhas.

They found Bulandshahr destroyed and the treasury sacked. Whereupon the battalion took up a position behind defensive entrenchments and erected a gallows, which they used to string up three more Brahmins who were found to have government property in their possession.

All was now quiet in Bulandshahr. They went on down the canal bank, marching twenty-seven miles in one night through country that had been flooded where the irrigation banks had been destroyed. The next day they met the 60th Rifles for the first time. It was the beginning of an association which has lasted to this day. The depot of the Greenjackets, who are the successors to the 60th Rifles, at Winchester is also the home of the men of the 2nd Goorkhas when they go to England, and the two regiments are now officially affiliated. They fought together in the great siege of Delhi, which started a few days later.

The Gurkhas of the Sirmoor Battalion were the only Asian fighting men in the British force which now assembled at Alipore

twenty miles north of Delhi. They were placed alongside the artillery, who had secret orders to turn their guns on them at the slightest sign of mutiny. In the conditions of the times it was a natural precaution, but in the fighting advance down the main road to Delhi the Gurkhas proved that the British suspicions were groundless. They fought their way on to the Ridge to the north of the city and held the house of Hindu Rao, which was the southernmost point and nearest to the mutineers. They went down from the Ridge to meet a sally from the Mori gate less than a mile away, and as they dragged themselves, exhausted, back up on the Ridge at the end of the day, the British cheered them to a man.

It was in the blazing heat of an Indian June that all this took place. The Ridge, running from north to south, was the forward edge of the ruined cantonments, and the big house of the Hindu merchant, which the Gurkhas occupied, was at the forward end of the Ridge. The British force, originally consisting of three thousand men and the Gurkhas, was encamped behind the Ridge, and thus concealed from the city.

This small force at first intended to storm the great city of Delhi with its high thick walls seven miles in circumference. But the mutineers were 40,000 strong and had over a hundred heavy guns mounted on the walls, with sixty field guns and a large magazine of shot and shell. They were in fact the principal strength of the Indian Army and nearly all trained soldiers. It was soon apparent that the besiegers were themselves besieged, and their forward defences were the main picquet at Hindu Rao's house and the subsidiary picquets on either side of it held by the Gurkhas and the 60th Rifles.

The enemy attacked repeatedly from the city, and the Gurkhas went out to meet them. On one occasion, during a lull in the firing, the sepoy called out, "Come over to us, we won't fire on you!" The Gurkhas answered, "We're coming!" and shot thirty or forty down with a single volley.

At this time the main picquet was under fire from the Mori and Kashmir bastions of the city. Besides causing casualties that could ill be spared the rebel guns knocked Hindu Rao's house to pieces. On one occasion the sentry guarding the Sirmoor Battalion's colour was cut in two by a cannon ball. The corporal of the guard imperturbably posted another sentry and then removed the body.

In two weeks of almost daily fighting the Gurkhas lost 103 killed and wounded out of 490 men.

The rains came at last, but there was no respite. By the middle of July half the battalion had gone. Their forward outpost was now in a temple courtyard, nicknamed Sammy's house, only half a mile from the walls. On it fell the first wave of a great attack at the end of July, which was timed by the eighty-year-old Mogul King of Delhi, Bahadur Shah, to coincide with the Moslem festival of Id-ul-Fitr. Close on 10,000 men swarmed out of the city, but their repeated attacks were warded off, and the last of them, the twenty-fourth attempt of the rebels to take the Ridge, ended as unsuccessfully as the first.

At the end of August the King himself came out of the Kabul gate to watch the fighting. He had seats set up for himself and a large retinue, which included the ladies of the court, in the village of Kissenganj beside his artillery batteries. And he offered a reward of ten rupees for every head, British or Gurkha, brought to him.

At that time the King could not have known that the end was near. But in fact Nicholson's force had already arrived from the Punjab, and a few days later General Wilson, who had succeeded two dead generals and one sick one in the command, felt strong enough to attack. Breaches were made in the walls at two places—the Water bastion on the edge of the River Jumna, and the Kashmir gate close by—and the supreme assault took place through these holes hammered in the defences.

The Sirmoor Battalion, now joined by the Kumaon Battalion, formed part of the force that captured the enemy stronghold of Kissenganj outside the city, whilst the successful attack went in through the main walls. Their losses were severe, and by the time victory was complete, 327 men out of their total strength of 490 were casualties, and eight British officers out of nine were either killed or wounded. Lieutenant Lockart had been recommended by the Commanding Officer for the Victoria Cross, but as the recommendation and citation had been sent in pencil they were not considered official. The Sirmoor Battalion had been at its post unrelieved for over three months under constant fire.

After the fall of Delhi the strength of the mutiny was spent, and there remained the grim business of retribution and punishment of the ringleaders. The son of the King of Delhi, who might

have been a new Mogul Emperor, fled to Oudh. This was one of the few regions where the mutiny had developed into a general rising of the people, and it took a full year to pacify the land of Cawnpore and Lucknow, Fyzabad and Bareilly. Meanwhile the Prince Feroze Shah disappeared and was never seen again.

It was in this area that Jangbahadur and his Nepalese Army operated. In June 1857 he received an ornamental wallet for transmitting royal despatches called a *kharita*, in which the Governor-General stated that he would now be very glad of Nepalese assistance as the situation in Oudh was critical.

Less than a week after the receipt of this message six regiments of Nepalese infantry were on the march towards Lucknow. They entered British territory at a point north of Gorakhpur, but instead of turning westwards, they were ordered to continue in a southerly direction across the Gogra river towards Benares and occupy Azamgarh and Jaunpur, where law and order had broken down.

Azamgarh and Jaunpur are forty miles apart, and for a month the Gurkhas were unmolested in both places. But in the middle of September a large band of rebels entered Azamgarh again, and the Nepalese garrison called upon their comrades in Jaunpur for assistance. The Gurkhas started from Jaunpur at ten in the morning, marched the forty miles in a single day, and fought and routed the rebels the same night.

These six regiments were Jangbahadur's advance force. After being assured by the Company that all expenses would be paid, the wounded rewarded and medals issued to all, he himself took the field. The country was by no means unanimously with him in his support for the British, but he stood firm in his determination. A plot to assassinate him on his way to the plains was scotched, and the ringleaders were executed.

Jangbahadur split his forces into three groups and put himself at the head of the first group, which consisted of his own body-guard and eight other regiments. Nor did he forget to take artists with him to record the scenes of battle. Gorakhpur had fallen into the hands of the rebels, but was easily retaken by his superior forces in the course of their advance.

It was early in the new year, 1858. The force did a sweep through the Gorakhpur district, then, leaving two regiments in Gorakhpur, it headed for Lucknow, which it reached in March.

Gorakhpur, meanwhile, with its garrison of 1,200 Nepalese and 300 British, was attacked by about 12,000 men under a rebel leader named Mohammed Hussein. The rebels were fought off with considerable loss.

Outside Lucknow the Maharaja of Nepal was greeted by the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Colin Campbell, with a salute of nineteen guns as a mark of special honour. The siege of Lucknow was already under way, following the relief of the Residency and surrounding buildings, in which the British and loyal sepoys had held out for more than six months. Sir Colin, with all his officers in full dress, received the Maharaja in the large pavilion tent that had been pitched for him, and had a guard of honour drawn up outside. He expressed his great pleasure that the Maharaja had arrived at a moment when he could be of immense service to the British, and Jang replied by saying that he was ready to place the whole army of Nepal at the disposal of the British Government whenever they needed his services.

Whilst these courtesies were being exchanged, the attack on the Begum's Kothi—the Queen's House—had already started. It was the Highlanders of Scotland and the Himalayas who together seized the strong point after nine hours of cannonading. This was the turning point of the siege. It was the same regiment, the 93rd Highlanders, as had provided Jangbahadur with his guard of honour at Edinburgh five years before, that now went forward.

The combined British and Nepalese force then took the other perimeter positions of the rebels one by one, and went on into the city to put down the boy King of Oudh from the throne on to which the mutineers had raised him. They went into the Kaisarbagh, the square which formerly enclosed the hareems of the queens of Oudh, and set themselves to plunder and vandalism. There were jewels, weapons mounted with gold and studded with diamonds, gold and silver brocades, pictures of rare worth, Kashmir shawls of great delicacy, mirror work and porcelain to be had for the taking.

The soldiers smashed the porcelain and ripped up the paintings. They burnt up the brocades for the sake of the gold and silver they contained. One Gurkha soldier, not recognizing the pearls on a necklace as having any worth, broke them and threw them away in order to get at the gold thread on which they were strung. Others went off with fine shawls and used them as bed-sheets.

The Nepalese fought for a hundred days in the Mutiny, and then they returned home. Jangbahadur, himself, went to Allahabad to meet the Governor-General in order to receive his thanks and the promise of a more tangible token of his esteem. He then went to holy Benares for a few days before going back to his palace at Thapathali in Katmandu.

There the Maharaja received a curious letter from the Nawab of Oudh, which runs as follows:

“It is well known that my ancestors gave the English a footing on Indian soil. It was we that wrested the province of Benares from the Maharaja who owned it, and put the English in possession of it. In recognition of these favours, they signed a treaty the purport of which was that they would remain faithful to our house as long as the sun and moon lasted. But after a short time these ungrateful *Feringhees* cancelled that treaty, and with the aid of some of our treacherous servants, dethroned my father, Wajid Ali Shah, seizing his state, palaces, jewels and everything else that belonged to him. They then collected a large force and a vast quantity of ammunition at Colonelganj, near the foot of the hills, for the purpose of overrunning our country.

“We are quite astonished that the Nepalese, pure Hindus as they are, should be induced by the English to come down to India, to assist them in their diabolical work of demolishing holy temples and mosques, and to fight against their own brothers of the plains. I appeal to your honour to come forward, not as the destroyer of religion, but as the defender of the faith of both Hindu and Moslem.

“In the name of all the Hindus and Mohammedans of India, I sincerely pray that Your Highness will not hesitate for a moment to combine your strong arms with our own in the cause of our ancient faith. We assure you that, without your help, the English will not be able to stand against us, and that thus the Kingdom of Nepal shall extend as far as the banks of your sacred Ganges, and shall be recognized by one and all as the suzerain power of India.”

This was a letter from a Moslem ruler, Ali Khan Mirza, to a Hindu Prime Minister. The bait in the letter is in the last sentence, and if Jangbahadur had not already been to England and seen the might of which a modern industrial nation was able to dispose, Nepalese sovereignty over India might have seemed eminently

possible to him. As it was, he replied like an uncle giving friendly advice.

"I acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated 13th of Jeth, 1915 (May 1858)," he said, "stating that the English are resolved to destroy the faith of the Hindus and Moslems, and calling upon me to side with the natives of India in defence of their religion. It is more than a hundred years since the English first established their power in India, and yet it has never been heard that they attempted to interfere with the faith of the people in a single case.

"Be it known to all that, as both Hindus and Moslems have been guilty of the murder of innocent women and children and of other excesses of which humanity should be ashamed, the Hindu government of Nepal will never uphold their cause against the authority of the English.

"As you have addressed me a friendly letter, I, as a friend, advise you to make your surrender with all possible speed to Mr. Montgomery, the Commissioner of Lucknow, and I assure you, you will be pardoned along with your followers, with the exception of those who have murdered English women and children."

This was not the end of the story, however. Next year a large band of the mutineers was discovered coming through the jungles into the Nepalese Terai in the region below Tansing in the West. They were found to be the personal followers of the Nawab, who was accompanied by his mother, the Begum Hazrat Mahal. Jangbahadur met them at Nuwakot, offered them his protection, and gave them a house near his own palace and an allowance to live on in Katmandu.

There was an even larger band of the defeated rebels at Surhi. They had formerly been followers of Nana Sahib, the adopted son of the last of the Mahratta Peshwas, who had been the notorious perpetrator of the massacre at Cawnpore. He and his chief lieutenant, who had started life as a waiter in an English household, were said to be dead, but their families were also given houses to live in on the outskirts of the capital of Nepal.

Jangbahadur also allowed many of the ex-rebels to settle down in uninhabited stretches of the Terai, but those against whom there was evidence of having taken part in atrocities he sent back to British India under guard. Eighteen British men, women and children were handed over to him for safe conduct back to their own people.

5

The Queen's Peace

AFTER the mutiny of the Bengal Army had been successfully put down, great changes took place in India. The rule of the East India Company was wound up, and India became a proper part of the British Empire. Queen Victoria was thenceforth Empress of India. Eventually the seat of government was moved from Calcutta to Delhi, the former capital of the Mogul emperors, but that was not until the twentieth century.

During the Mutiny the British power in India had hung in the balance. If the power had slipped out of her hands, there were plenty of wolves—Sikhs, Afghans and Mahrattas—ready to come in at the kill. The Gurkhas had swung the balance in her favour.

It was therefore not surprising that the reconstituted Indian Army recruited an increasing number of the men of the hills. The 4th and 5th Gurkha Rifles were both raised at the time of the Mutiny. The former, like the 3rd Regiment, was raised in Kumaun, but it found its permanent home further west in the mountain village of Bakloh above the hill station of Dalhousie in the Punjab mountain state of Chamba. The latter was raised still further west at Abbottabad in the province of the North-West Frontier.

These regiments were the fruit of the seed that Brian Hodgson, the man who dedicated his career to his work as British Resident in Nepal, had sown more than twenty-five years before. Hodgson, a great student of all things Nepalese, including the races, fauna and flora and religions of the country, had seen service for Gurkhas in the Indian Army as a kind of safety valve for the superabundant energies of the military caste of the country, which was now confined within the borders laid down by the Treaty of Segauli.

Whilst still Assistant Resident he had advocated this course, but Edward Gardner, the Resident, his old colleague and friend from

the time of the pacification of Kumaun, had objected that the Gurkhas' own patriotism would prove a stumbling block. Replying in 1825 to the Commander-in-Chief's proposal to recruit Gurkhas from Nepal as well as from the neighbouring provinces, he gave it as his opinion that, "Even on entering our service the Gurkhas would not separate themselves entirely from their native country, as they could not remove their families from Nepal. However faithfully they might conduct themselves on general occasions, in the event of any future rupture with Nepal they possess that feeling of patriotism which would induce the greater part of them to adhere decidedly to their natural allegiance. A better plan would be to negotiate with Nepal for the service of a portion of her organized troops as mercenaries."

But this was against the policy of the Government of India, and nothing further was done, though seven years later Hodgson wrote a full report for the Government in Calcutta couched in the strongest terms.

"These Highland soldiers," he said, "who despatch their meal in half an hour, and satisfy the ceremonial law by merely washing their hands and face and taking off their turbans before cooking, laugh at the pharisaical rigour of our sepoy who must bathe from head to foot and make *puja* ere they begin to dress their dinner, must eat nearly naked in the coldest weather, and cannot be in marching trim again in less than three hours—the best part of the day. In war the former carry several days' provisions on their backs; the latter would deem such an act intolerably degrading. The former see in foreign service nothing but the prospect of gain and glory; the latter can discover in it nothing but pollution and peril from unclean men, and terrible wizards and goblins and evil spirits.

"In masses the former have that indomitable confidence, each in all, which grows out of national integrity and success; the latter can have no idea of this sentiment, which however maintains the union and resolution of multitudes in peril better than all other human bonds whatever.

"I calculate that there are at this time in Nepal no less than 30,000 soldiers off the roll by rotation, belonging to the Khas, Magar, and Gurung tribes. I am not sure that there exists any insuperable obstacle to our obtaining in one form or another the services of a large body of these men; and such are their energy of

character, love of enterprise, and freedom from the shackles of caste, that I am well assured their services, if obtained, would soon come to be most highly prized. In my humble opinion they are by far the best soldiers in India, and if they are made participators of our renown in arms, I conceive that their gallant spirit and unadulterated military habits might be relied on for fidelity; and that our good and regular pay, and noble pension establishment, would serve to counterpoise the influence of nationality."

And so, with more and more Gurkhas helping to safeguard it, the Queen's peace now reigned in the Plains of India, and a man could travel in safety from Calcutta to Peshawar and from Cape Comorin to Simla. It was the age of railway construction, of opening up communications, of founding schools and colleges, of public works.

In Nepal the peace of Jangbahadur, now styled Maharaja, reigned. But he saw no reason for opening up his country. Building railways into the hills was an expensive business, hardly possible without foreign capital, and he did not want foreigners coming in from the plains. The British Resident in his Victorian country house on the outskirts of Katmandu was now an accepted feature of the Nepalese scene, but Jangbahadur wanted no more busybodies from down below interfering with his mountain people, and he only issued entry visas for very special purposes.

Thus on either side of Nepal there was bustling activity. To the east the mountain railway up to Darjeeling was built, hillsides were laid out for tea plantations, and a busy trade route to Tibet was opened up. To the west another mountain railway was constructed, and the capital of all India for the hot months of the year was set up at Simla. In between the two, Nepal remained in its rustic simplicity, exporting one commodity—soldiers.

The belt of land in the plains of Northern India, which had been taken from Nepal after the Anglo-Nepalese war, was restored in recognition of services rendered during the Mutiny crisis. According to Sir Henry Lawrence, who had formerly been Resident at Katmandu, and was subsequently killed during the defence of his Residency at Lucknow, the peasantry were not likely to have rued the change, for he wrote, "The Gurkhas are the best masters I have seen in India. Neither in the Terai nor in the Hills have I witnessed or heard of a single act of oppression since I arrived a year-and-a-half ago, and a happier peasantry I have nowhere seen."

At this time eight of the present day eleven Gurkha regiments were in existence. The first five, as we have seen, were raised in the Himalayas to the west of Nepal. The 6th and 8th Gurkha Rifles had their genesis in the Assam hills to the East. The 6th, although they trace their pedigree back to the Cuttack Legion, which was formed at the town of that name in Orissa on the western shore of the Bay of Bengal, enlisted Gurkhas only from 1824, when it went to war against the Burmese. After the Burma war it remained in Assam to keep watch and ward on the North-east Frontier, until it moved to join the 5th Gurkhas in the north-west.

The 8th Gurkha Rifles started life in Assam at Sylhet and later moved to Shillong, the capital, where its home remained until 1943. They quickly built up a reputation as jungle-bashers in the tangled forests of the Manipur hills, where the forgotten Fourteenth Army fought it out with the Japanese in the Second World War. Their task was the pacification of the tribes—the Nagas, the Mishmi and the Lushai—and the exploration of unknown country. They travelled light and the accent was on mobility. In a famous forced march at the time of the Mutiny they covered a hundred and ten miles in forty-eight hours in order to cut off a band of mutineers.

The last of these eight regiments, the 9th Gurkha Rifles, actually traces its origin back, like the 6th to 1817, but it did not recruit Gurkhas until after the Mutiny and did not get its present name until 1910, when its home was moved from the hill station of Lansdowne to Dehra Doon.

Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century there were eight regiments of Gurkhas helping to keep the Queen's peace in India. Each had its regimental home in the hills, with its cantonment containing the men's lines, the family quarters, the officers' mess and the married officers' houses.

The officers holding the Queen's commission were all British, but the Gurkhas, in common with the other Indian Army regiments, had their own officers for whom there was no equivalent in the British Army. They received their commissions from the Viceroy of India and were known as Viceroy's Commissioned Officers. They commanded platoons and sometimes companies—duties which would be performed by a Queen's commissioned officer in the British Army—and they also carried out tasks that

would normally be the responsibility of a warrant officer in the British Army. They were an invaluable and indispensable link between the British officers and their Gurkha soldiers.

The senior V.C.O., invariably a man of long and distinguished service, was called the Subedar-Major. To his judgment the Commanding Officer deferred on all matters concerning Gurkha custom and religion, for it must be remembered that the British officers themselves were not permitted to travel in Nepal and so had no opportunity of seeing how their men lived at home.

The religious ceremonials were conducted by the *bahun*, the regiment's resident Hindu priest. He also dealt with births, weaning ceremonies and funerals. The marriages nearly all took place back home in the hills.

The Subedar-Major's influence was great. Military and criminal offences, which were rare but inevitably did occur from time to time, were brought before the offender's Commanding Officer to be dealt with either summarily or by court martial as the case merited. But matters occurring within the unit, such as matrimonial disputes, of which a most serious view was taken, or fraud or peculation, were usually investigated by a *panchayat* of Gurkha officers. *Panchayat* means a group of five, and is the traditional number of village elders in India and Nepal, who form a quorum for dealing with village government and administration. The *panchayat* investigated the case and tried to get at the truth. If it decided in favour of the suspect he was exonerated. If it found him guilty, although the *panchayat* had no standing as a legally constituted court, the offender, having been condemned by his elders and having vitiated the honour of the regiment, would have to go.

Such cases were, of course, very rare. The Gurkha soldier is the keenest, the most amenable to discipline and the most law abiding to be found anywhere. The Subedar-Major always had the full support of his officers and men in upholding the reputation of his unit.

The other Viceroy's Commissioned Officers were the Subedars and Jemadars. Like the British officers they were always addressed as "Sahib" and they had their own V.C.O.'s mess in the lines. The Havildars were the equivalent of Sergeants and the Naiks corresponded to Corporals. These were all the normal ranks throughout the Indian Army.

And so year by year a tradition of service grew up in the Gurkha regiments. Son followed father in the profession of arms. The musket gave place to the rifle, the sword to the bayonet. The *kukri*, the ubiquitous symbol of the Gurkha, remained. It has a hundred uses as well as being a lethal weapon at close range.

At the regimental homes—Abbottabad and Dehra Doon, Almora, Bakloh and Shillong—there was deep and lasting peace. In Nepal Jangbahadur Rana died. Typically enough he was engaged in his favourite sport of big game hunting when the illness set in which proved fatal. It was 1877, and he had been entertaining the Prince of Wales at his camp in the Terai. Peace was maintained, not without the usual intrigues and assassinations, by his successors, who were to follow one another from brother to brother rather than from father to son.

From these peaceful homes the Gurkhas went out to the wars that kept India secure. They were wars against the Afghans and the Burmese and the innumerable lesser expeditions into the tribal territories of the north-west and north-east frontiers, which continuously extended the frontiers of India as more peoples were brought within the law of stable government.

A mere two years after the Mutiny Gurkhas were on the far side of the Punjab and the great Indus river campaigning in the wild bare mountains of the Pathans on the edge of Afghanistan. The 5th Gurkha Rifles were raised just too late to take part in the Mutiny and first saw action at Palosia in Waziristan in 1860. It was a part of the world they were to come to know well, for they were raised as part of Sir John Lawrence's Punjab Frontier Force Rifles, nicknamed the "Piffers" for short.

The 5th soon became expert in the warfare of the frontier. Whilst the main body of the troops wound its way up the valleys, the Gurkhas would scale the ridges on either side to clear them of tribesmen lying in wait amongst the rocks and boulders. They would establish strong-points called *sangars* from the stones of which they built their walls. These would be in commanding positions, not overlooked by higher ground, where the men could rest secure under the protection of their sentries.

There were casualties, of course, and things did not always go according to plan. The Mahsuds and Wazirs and Mohmands, the tribes of the Pathans, were dead shots with a rifle. A gun was the

most prized possession of a man, and he would commit murder on occasion to get one. In some places they had their own smithies for making arms.

The territory was vast and peppered all over with ravines and rocky places and broken cliffs, which afforded a thousand opportunities for ambush even against the most vigilant opponent. The penalty for capture was severe. It usually meant mutilation, and sometimes, after being mocked and subjected to degradations by the women, captives were flayed alive. Therefore it was a strict rule that no wounded should ever be left to be taken by the tribesmen.

Conversely, if one were taken in amongst the tribesmen as a friend, the hospitality of their villages was sacrosanct and one went with them in perfect safety. On one occasion Gurkha and Pathan were discussing a past battle, and the Pathan told the Gurkha he was lucky to be alive as his men could easily have got into their sangar at night. The Gurkha replied that he had realized this, and so he had hidden his men outside the sangar all night waiting for the Pathans to come.

In these rugged mountains the 5th played their part in the gradual establishment of the chain of forts to the west of the Indus—Quetta and Fort Sandeman, Wana and Razmak—set up to keep the tribesmen back in their hills and stop them plundering the plains. They campaigned at Ambeyla in 1863, and on the Black Mountain in 1868 together with the 2nd and the 4th.

These operations against the tribes were more or less continuous right up to the Second World War, and were the staple diet of a soldier's life on the "Frontier". But from time to time things developed into a full-scale war, either with the tribes on the rare occasions on which they united to wage a *jihad*, or holy war of Moslems against infidels, or with the Afghans.

After the Russians had moved into the Khanates of Central Asia—Bokhara and Merv and Samarkand—Afghanistan became the buffer state between the empire of Czar Nicholas and the empire of Queen Victoria. Twenty years after the inconclusive Crimean campaign war between the British and the Russians again appeared to be imminent, and both sides tried to get Afghanistan into their own orbit. The British made a treaty with Emir Yakub Khan, but he proved powerless to enforce it. The

British envoy in Kabul was murdered, together with his entire staff and escort of Guides. As a consequence Lord Roberts marched across the border with the Kurram Field Force.

As usual on the North-West Frontier the 5th Gurkha Rifles were in the forefront of the operations. In the advance on Kabul they took part in the storming of Peiwar Kotal. A *kotal* is a precipitous escarpment, seemingly specially devised by nature for defence against anyone trying to get up to the higher ground beyond. Fighting alongside the Seaforth Highlanders, they successfully stormed the position, thus opening the way up above the Kurram valley. When complimented on their success, they replied with typical Gurkha humour that it was only to be expected, since being so much shorter than the Scotties, they had escaped the fire aimed at the taller men.

This was the beginning of a comradeship in arms between the British and Nepalese Highlanders that was cemented for all time in the next engagement. The place was Charasia in the Logar valley, close to Kabul. The account of the battle given by General Sir Ian Hamilton in his foreword to the regimental history reads like a true period piece, and conjures up to the mind the pictures of past battles in pen and colour wash, with men manœuvring over the plain and white puffs of smoke coming from the artillery pieces, that used to grace our Victorian homes and are still to be seen in military messes at home and abroad.

“The battle of Charasia on September 6th, 1879,” he says, “furnished history with one of those spectacles which adorn the galleries of a soldier’s retrospect. When he closes his eyes and saunters down those galleries of memory he would be more than human if he did not experience a feeling of superiority to those mild creatures of the future who may have to content themselves with unconvincing Hollywood encounters.

“I had been watching the turning movement of the 72nd Highlanders, the 5th Gurkhas and the 5th Punjab Infantry against the right flank of the Afghan Army, for we still believed then in pursuit of men armed with breech-loaders by men armed with lances and swords. During two very anxious hours the attack hung fire. The heights were steep, the defence was stout, and neither gun nor rifle-fire seemed to make any impression. All at once, in a long line of scattered groups, our infantry left the cover of their rocks and began to scramble up the last 150 yards or so of the ridge. There

was a lull in the firing. The smoke-cloud lifted and down came the Afghan Regulars!

“Right on top of the Gurkhas they charged. Our lives—everyone’s life—hung upon the conduct of this battalion. They stood firm. If those Gurkhas had given way not one of us (in my opinion) would have got back to India. Lord Roberts himself always said that this battle was the most touch-and-go affair of his career. The tops of the high mountains overlooking Charasia were literally white with masses of armed tribesmen watching to see which way the struggle would turn. Compared with our battles on the Dardanelles the casualties seem trifling, but the penalty of defeat, or even repulse, would have been annihilation.”

The victory over the Afghans at Charasia was followed by the occupation of Kabul. Then came the news that Yakub Khan’s brother, Ayub Khan, who had established himself in the west of the country, had cut the British garrison of Kandahar to pieces at Maiwand to the west of the town. Roberts set out from Kabul on his famous relief march, in which the 2nd and 4th Gurkhas took part as well as the 5th. Three hundred and five miles were covered in twenty-three days, an average of thirteen to fourteen miles a day in hostile country.

After the war, when Roberts was raised to the peerage and became Field Marshal Earl Roberts of Kandahar, he chose a Gurkha soldier as the left-hand supporter of his coat of arms and a Seaforth Highlander to support the right. The Seaforths still have the Gurkha shield in their sergeants’ mess, which the 5th Gurkhas presented to them on their return to India.

But the victory at Charasia might not have been possible if the 3rd Gurkhas had not stood firm on the defensive outside Ghazni a few miles further south. There at Ahmed Khel they formed the traditional hollow square and met all the charges of the enemy until they had spent themselves. Ahmed Khel day is still celebrated in the regiment as the following extract from the Indian Army magazine *Gorkha* of 1961 light-heartedly recounts:

“Jemadar Lalbahadur in cross-belt, sword and Wolseley helmet, made a most convincing Lyster V.C. as he gallantly formed square and decimated the charging Pathan cavalry, conveniently provided for the occasion by the local Animal Transport Company.”

There were many more engagements with the restless tribesmen in the confused mountain tracts where the Himalayas meet

the Karakorum and the Hindu Kush. North of Kashmir the long arm of the Indian government had stretched by 1890 as far as the secluded state of Chitral, close to the end of the long finger of Afghanistan where three empires—the British, Russian and Chinese—had come to meet.

Chitral was attacked by tribesmen from Kohistan. The 2nd Goorkhas went to Abbottabad and marched out in 1895 with the Chitral Relief Force on the long trail to the roof of the world. One result was the Kashmir *topi*, from which the wide-brimmed felt hat was adapted, which is now commonly worn in barracks on guard duties. Two years later the same regiment was fighting alongside the Gordon Highlanders in the Tirah campaign and storming the heights of Dargai.

Battles were not everything, however. The Gurkhas were explorers too. When Lieutenant Younghusband, who subsequently led the British expedition to Lhasa, went exploring unknown peaks in the Karakorum, he took six men of the 5th with him. After enduring many hardships in the wilderness they returned to base and thanked him for being so *kush* or “good” to them. They had been warned by their own officer not to return alive and bring disgrace to the regiment if anything happened to him. On the trek their favourite joke when looking for a camp site was, “Let’s find some soft stones to lie on.”

This may have been the first of many exploration and mountaineering tasks in which the Gurkhas have taken part, culminating in participation in the expedition which conquered Mount Everest in 1953. Gurkhas were also in on General Bruce’s attempts on Everest from the Tibetan side between the two world wars, for the General himself had been an officer of the 6th Gurkha Rifles.

Throughout the time of the Afghan wars and the campaigns on the North-West Frontier Gurkhas had been no less active to the east of the five-hundred-mile stretch of forbidden Nepal—a stretch of the Indian frontier of which the friendly Ranas and their own Nepalese Army took adequate care.

In the hill tracts of Assam, where the MacMahon line, which is the nub of China’s current border dispute with India, had not yet been defined, the two Assam regiments were continuously engaged in one adventure after another. Names which seemed new to the British public in 1942, when the Japanese tried to get through the jungles into India, were already written in the history

of the 6th Gurkha Rifles. They were at Kohima. They went into Manipur in 1891 to avenge the massacre of the British Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Political Agent and their staffs.

It happened that there was a rebellion in the little independent state of Manipur on the border marches of India and Burma, and a new raja was set up, whom the Indian Government did not recognize. The Commissioner went there from Assam, picking up five hundred Gurkhas at Kohima on the way, in order to restore the status quo.

Unfortunately things went very wrong. The palace and citadel of Imphal, the capital, was square in shape, surrounded by earthwork ramparts and a shallow moat. There were four large ornamental gateways, one in each of the four sides. The Commissioner's men were installed in the compound of the Agent's Residency only 250 yards from the fort, and some firing took place. It looked as though the earthwork fort would be no hard nut to crack if things came to such a pass.

That night, however, the Manipuris sounded a "cease fire" and sent an invitation to the officers to attend a *darbar*, or parley, inside the walls, unarmed. Apparently the Commissioner and the Agent and surprisingly enough the Commanding Officer and three officers of the Gurkhas took them at their word and gullibly walked into the trap that was set for them. They were never seen again, but from the story pieced together later it seems that, as soon as they were safely inside past the grinning stone leogriffs at the gates, they were shut in the *darbar* hall. After the sun had gone down they were told to move to the palace. But wild crowds were out that night, and they were uncontrollable. In the light of flaming torches the officers were thrown down, and their heads were cut off by a Naga head-hunter wielding his *dao*.

The Gurkhas, now practically leaderless, broke up into small groups and got away. A new force was assembled at once as soon as the news came through, and three columns converged on Manipur, two from India and one from Burma. But the Manipuris were in no mind to resist, and the only fighting that took place was on the way up from Burma. The 4th Gurkhas, in company with the 60th Rifles, the comrades of the Sirmoor Battalion, took the entrenchments at Palel at the point of the bayonet.

At the same time the Gurkhas went overseas to Malaya, the beginning of a long association with South-East Asia which con-

tinues today. It was the 1st Gurkhas who were there in 1875 during the Chinese faction fighting in the tin-mining areas of Perak, Selangor and Negri Sembilan, which led to the British intervention and the federation of the Malay States. The Victoria Cross was won in this campaign by Captain Channer in a charge against a stockade, and two riflemen won the Indian Order of Merit, which was at that time the highest award for which they were eligible. So the Gurkhas were already chasing bandits in Malaya ninety years ago.

Service overseas involved certain problems of a religious nature for the Gurkhas, since the majority of them being Hindus, crossing the ocean away from the Hindu motherland brought loss of caste unless purified by the appropriate ceremonies on their return. The Gurkha normally wears his religion lightly, however, and was not deterred by the Brahmin's metaphysics from extending his activities to the world at large. Three years later Gurkhas went west of Suez for the first time. Their destination was the island of Cyprus and they were part of a force designed to act as a deterrent in dissuading the Russians from attacking Turkey.

A few years later there was trouble in Burma. Lower Burma had already been annexed and formed into the Province of British Burma, following attacks on the British trading community and the breakdown of law and order. In 1878 King Mindon died and was succeeded by his son, King Thibaw, who secured the throne by executing his rivals in Mandalay. He was anti-British and favoured the French and Italian merchants. This policy culminated in the imposition of a swingeing fine on the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation. In default of payment those of its employees he could lay his hands on in Mandalay and elsewhere were clapped into jail.

The Gurkhas marched with the force that took Mandalay in 1885 and annexed Upper Burma, just as sixty years later they were to march into Mandalay from the Chin hills on the border of India to the west. King Thibaw was sent in exile to India.

Soon after Burma had been incorporated into the British Empire for the brief fifty years, during which the country captured the hearts of nearly all who worked there, two more regiments of Gurkhas were raised. They were the 7th and 10th Gurkha Rifles, both of which remain in the British Army today.

The 10th was raised but a year or two after the action in which King Thibaw was deposed. It remained in Burma at its home in Maymyo, the beautiful spot in the Shan hills to the east of Mandalay, until it moved to Quetta.

The 7th Gurkhas were formed shortly after the turn of the century at Thayetmyo, overlooking the Irrawaddy, which was formerly the frontier station of British Burma. But it moved to Quetta as soon as peace had been restored in the land. These two regiments were raised mainly from the Burma Military Police battalions, for by this time Gurkhas were coming down from the hills to enlist in the police as well as in the army.

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, Gurkhas had served overseas in Malaya, Burma and Cyprus. At the beginning of the twentieth century they went to China. The occasion was the Boxer rebellion, a movement intended to heave infiltrating foreigners, missionaries and so on out of the celestial Middle Kingdom. The Manchu administration had not enough power to put the popular revolt down, so a United Nations force was formed from countries that are rarely united, in order to protect the lives and property of their nationals. Britain, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia and the U.S.A. were involved. India sent the 1st/4th Gurkhas.

The battalion left Bakloh on July 5th, 1900 at 3 a.m. In those days even the trek down to the railhead could be something of an adventure. There was a water shortage at Dhar on the direct route to Pathankot, so they set out via Dunera and Baterah. But soon there was too much water. As they left Dunera at 11 p.m. on the same day, the rains broke. A spate came roaring down the Chakki river whilst they were crossing it in the small hours of the following morning, and the Commanding Officer, three other officers and parts of six companies were stranded on an island of shingle. Later the spate subsided, and the crossing continued in daylight. Two rifles and bayonets, which had been lost, were recovered by the police the next day. And so they finally reached Pathankot at 10 a.m. on July 7th.

The battalion disembarked at Stonecutter's Island, Hong Kong on August 1st to form part of the 2nd Brigade of the China Expeditionary Force. This was composed of four Indian Army battalions, but one of them, the 14th Sikhs, had been left behind in India because cholera had broken out amongst them.

Delay in Hong Kong robbed the Gurkhas of the chance of taking part in the relief of Peking, and when they sailed again on August 10th it was for Shanghai, where they disembarked after three days of uncertainty hovering off the mouth of the Whang Poo river at Woosung. There they joined a force 1,700 strong, which included Germans, French and Japanese, in garrison duties in the city.

The Chinese liked the Gurkhas on the whole, and many of them did not at first realize that they had European officers. On one occasion a British officer was startled by a Chinese woman lifting up the fly-sheet of his tent whilst he was in his canvas bath-tub and exclaiming, "Why, he's white!" The Gurkhas would probably have liked a fight, but they did not get it. The biggest occasion during their stay in Shanghai was the commemoration service for the death of Queen Victoria, which was held in the cathedral. The Gurkha pipers played "Flowers of the Forest" to speed the great Queen to the next world.

Two riflemen had some excitement, however. Both of the Thapa clan, they were posted as orderlies to a lieutenant-colonel on the staff of Count Waldersee, the German commander of the international force. The Count mentioned them in his despatches to the Emperor of Germany and recommended them for medals for their skilful use of their *kukris* in cutting the wires connecting various land-mines, thus enabling the Germans to advance. This may well be the only occasion on which Gurkhas and Germans have operated together up to 1962, when a Gurkha Signal squadron went to Germany as part of the N.A.T.O. forces.

After nearly a year in Shanghai they went north to Shanhai-kwan, the "Pass between Mountains and Sea", at the eastern end of the Great Wall of China. There they joined an international force of British, Indians, Russians, French, Germans, Japanese and Italians that was garrisoning the country up as far as Tientsin.

As might be expected in such a variegated force, there was a certain amount of friction at times. There was the incident at the railway station, where the Gurkha rifleman on sentry duty outside the staff room had orders to let no one in whilst the staff officer absented himself for a few minutes. Whilst the staff officer was still away, a Russian appeared and demanded admittance. The Gurkha said "*Hukum* no, Sahib!"—"The order is 'No!'"—and barred his way. The Russian struck the sentry twice, whereupon

the sentry split the Russian's ear with his cane. Later the Russian demanded the execution of the rifleman, but his Commanding Officer promoted him to Lance-Naik for his devotion to duty.

The experiences of another sentry at Shanhaikuan are also recorded. He was on duty in one of the group of forts at the end of the Great Wall when a small tent was stolen from near his post. He was severely reprimanded for negligence. Some months later, again on sentry duty, he saw several Chinamen stealing coal from the commissariat store. He waited until two of the thieves were in line and then fired, bringing down two with one shot. A young officer noted in his diary that: "The people who were loudest in their complaints about the pilfering of coal were now full of indignation at the sentry's action."

After a year in North China the 4th Gurkhas embarked for home on the *Jelunga*, but the ship developed a cracked propeller shaft and they hung about on board in Singapore docks for a week before being transhipped to the *Landaura*. Eventually they reached Calcutta a month after sailing from Shanhaikuan, and in another week they were back home in Bakloh, recipients of the China medal and battle honour "China 1900".

During this time there were innumerable smaller expeditions, which were none the less arduous enough for those who took part in them. In 1865 the 3rd Gurkhas had to march into Bhutan, the independent mountain kingdom, which is now a protectorate of India. They suffered more from sickness than from enemy action.

Twenty-four years later the same regiment was out reconnoitring the Himalayas between the North-east Frontier and Tibet because of rumours of Tibetan fortifications being put up in the undefined border area. They crossed the Himalayas at 18,000 feet, higher than the Nepalese on the Hatia pass returning from the plunder of Tashi Llumpo, and perhaps higher than any other organized body of troops has ever been on the march.

This was, in a sense, a curtain raiser to the more far-reaching expedition in which the 1st/8th Gurkhas took part in 1903. The Russian scare was the root cause of British suspicions of the Tibetans, who were rumoured to be receiving Russian arms. A political officer went up to the border north of Darjeeling to discuss matters with representatives from the forbidden country. After waiting four months in vain, Younghusband, who as a young man had taken Gurkhas mountain scrambling in the

Karakorum, had Gurkhas with him again in his advance on Gyantse.

The force assembled at Siliguri on the plain below Darjeeling, and there the men were issued with sheepskin overcoats like the *pushteen* of the Afghan, and fur-lined gloves, lambskin vests and quilted overalls. The supply problem was immense, and the pack train consisted of no fewer than 10,500 mules and ponies, 9,225 bullocks and yaks and 400 donkeys under the control of 18,000 drivers and supply and transport coolies.

Although the campaign was a "bow and arrow" adventure it all took part in the wildest surroundings at great heights. Resistance was met in several places. In one sortie from Gyantse a company scaled a 2,000-foot cliff in a snowstorm in order to dislodge some Tibetans at an altitude of 18,000 feet. If it can be called a battle, it must be the highest ever fought. In the storming of the actual *dzong*, or fort, of Gyantse a V.C. was won by Lieutenant Grant, who scaled the sheer rock a second time after he had been struck down and wounded at the first attempt.

The Gurkhas had a new weapon—the maxim gun—which was water-cooled, but such was the severity of the climate, with fifty degrees of frost not unusual in some places, that the water froze, and rum was used instead. Rum is traditionally issued to Gurkhas as part of their rations, just as it is in the Royal Navy, but in order to discourage anyone who might be tempted to take a swig from the maxim gun, the rum used in the guns' water-jackets was well laced with kerosene.

As the Tibetans refused to negotiate at Gyantse the advance continued to Lhasa. The 8th Gurkhas did what the 4th had done in North China, putting some of their men on ponies to form a body of mounted infantry. This makeshift cavalry ranged far beyond the main column in forays and reconnaissance and kept the communications open along the supply route. When finally they reached Lhasa they found the Dalai Lama fled and the great Potala powerless to resist them. The rumours of Russian influence proved to be groundless.

Six years later the same battalion was in the thick of another campaign against men armed with bows and arrows, who could hardly be called an enemy. They were the Abors, the hill tribes covering the Assam border area east of Bhutan. It was a punitive expedition to exact retribution for the murder of a frontier officer

and a doctor in 1911. But it was also more than that. The expedition was taken as an opportunity to explore the unknown country bordering Chinese Sikiang with a view to eventual demarkation of the frontier.

The Gurkhas trekked up the section of the Brahmaputra river where it pours down the Himalayan gorges from the Tibetan plateau to the Assam plain. This part of the river is called the Dihang, and they went up the left bank as far as Jido, a few miles short of the MacMahon line, which was defined later. It was a reconnaissance which paved the way for the explorers Bailey and Kingdon Ward to state definitely a few years later that the River Tsangpo, which runs the length of Tibet, and the Brahmaputra river of Assam and Bengal are one and the same.

The resistance of the Abors was, of course, soon overcome. Together with the new weapon, the maxim gun, they took with them for the last time "Bubble and Squeak", the two seven-pounder guns which had gone with them to Lhasa, but which had just been declared obsolete in all battalions. The regiments were allowed to retain them, and many are still to be seen standing highly polished outside guard rooms and officers' messes.

The Chinese Army, descending through these regions in 1962, was a very different proposition from the Abor tribes.

6

France and Turkey

By the time of the outbreak of the First World War the pattern of the Gurkha Brigade of the Indian Army had been set. There were ten regiments, each with two battalions, with regimental depots at Dehra Doon, Almora, Bakloh, Shillong and Quetta, at Dharm-sala in the delectable Kangra valley not far from Amarsing's old fortress at Malaun, and at Maymyo in Burma.

Recruitment was mainly from the Magars and Gurungs in the hills west of Katmandu in the provinces of Number Three and Number Four West and Palpa, the land of "Eight Thousand Mountains". As it was forbidden for British officers to go north of the border, recruiters called *galla wallas* were entrusted with the task of going into the villages and selecting none but the best for service. Many recruits would be sons of serving officers and men and particular villages would build up a tradition of service in the Brigade. They would come down from Kaski and Lamjung, Ghandrung and Baglung and the other villages of the Mangranth and the Annapurna Himal to the railhead at Nautanwa just within Indian territory, and from there they would go to the recruiting depot at Gorakhpur for their initial "breaking in" before being despatched to their regiments.

The two Burma regiments, the 7th and 10th Gurkha Rifles, on the other hand, recruited from the hills of Eastern Nepal, from amongst the Kiranti people in the provinces of Ilam and Dhan-kuta. They belonged mainly to the Rai and Limbu clans, and a recruiting depot was set up for them at Ghoom, a few miles short of Darjeeling on the tea-garden railway that loops and spirals its way up to a height of 7,000 feet in the shadow of Kanchen-junga.

Whilst the Indian Army and Police drew their men from West and East, the hills around the central Valley of Nepal, where the Tamangs are the main tribe, were reserved for recruitment to the

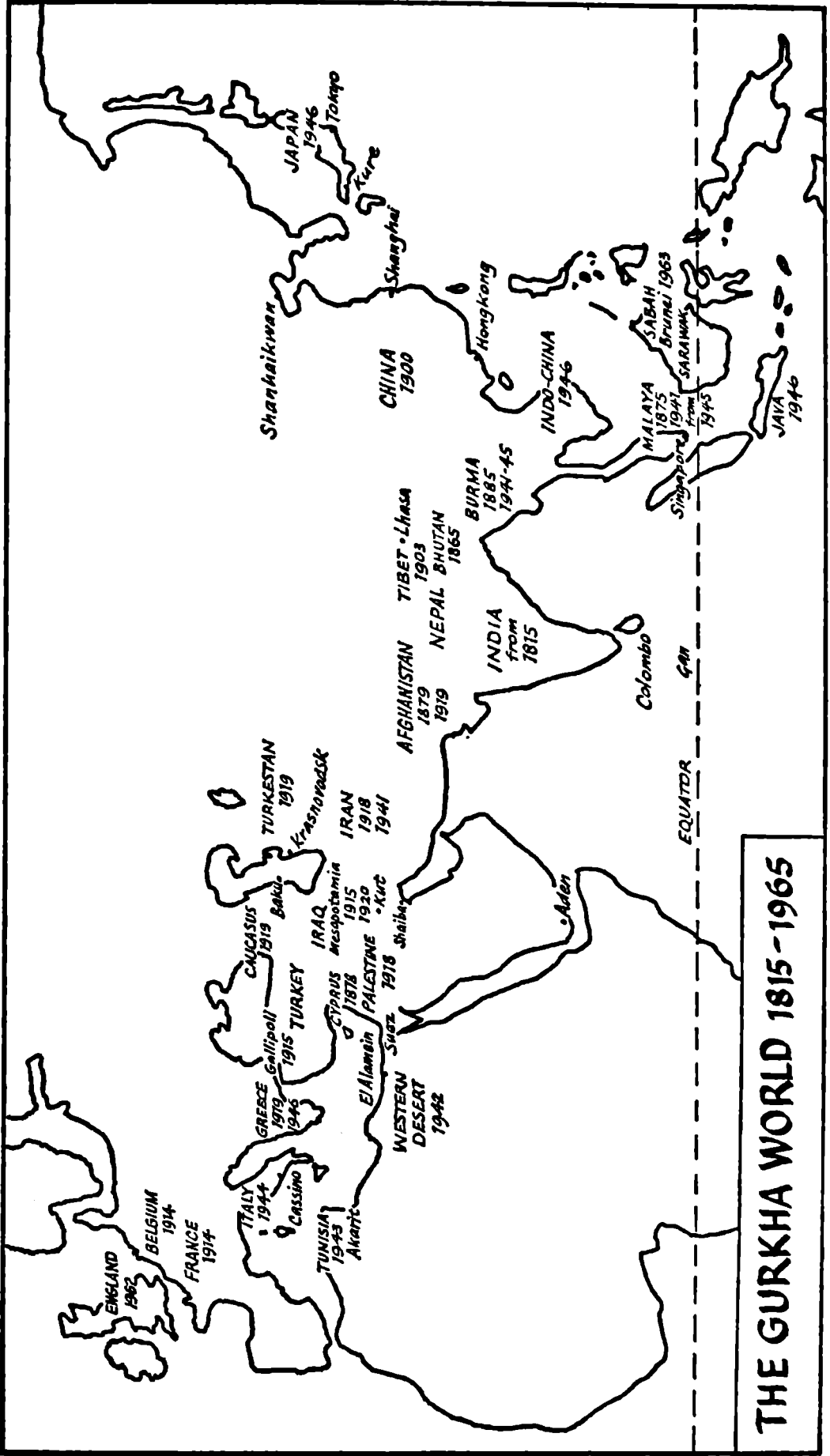
Nepalese Army, which had come to the aid of the British in 1857 and was to do so again in 1914 and in 1939.

At this time Chandra Shamsheer Rana was in the middle of his long reign as Maharaja of Nepal, succeeding his brother in 1901. His relationships with his own King were good and with the British King excellent. He had made friends with King Edward VII during his visit to England in 1908, and with King George V, who went big game hunting with him in the Terai in 1911.

As far as Chandra Shamsheer's own army was concerned he was hamstrung in his attempts to improve its efficiency by a number of difficulties. Firstly, military appointments had to be found for large numbers of the ruling caste, and in a small army less than 30,000 strong there were simply not enough to go round. The clan of the Ranas themselves had swollen to enormous size with the huge families the Shamsheer Ranas had produced from their own numerous wives. There was also the royal family to be considered. Thus there was a large number of generals and senior officers, many of whom were non-effective. Some were promoted to the rank of general as soon as they attained their majority.

Secondly, and worse, this system denied promotion into the senior ranks to the fighting men of the hills. Thirdly, the accommodation was poor and the force remained for the most part, like a private army, in and around Katmandu, the residence of its Maharaja and Commander-in-Chief. It was not even altogether a standing army, since it assembled for periods of training and then dispersed again. With China weak and the Pax Britannica in India there seemed to be no great urgency about the matter, and the defences of Nepal itself were not, in fact, strong. As far as Nepalese citizens serving in the Indian Army were concerned, the Maharaja's view was that the more trained soldiers he had in his country the better.

This was the situation when the First World War broke out in 1914. Within a few days Maharaja Chandra Shamsheer Jangbahadur Rana declared wholehearted support for the British Government and freely put all the assets of his country into the war effort. Though, he did, in fact, donate some money, the principal asset was, of course, manpower. The men of Nepal offered their services quicker than arms and equipment could be provided for them, and in a short space of time the 25,000 or so men in the



Indian Army's Brigade of Gurkhas were multiplied eight-fold to 200,000. Meanwhile the Nepalese Army itself, commanded by a future Maharaja, General Padma Shamsher, marched 20,000 strong to the North-West Frontier, where it took over garrison duties from Indian Army units, thus releasing them for service in the Middle East and Europe.

During those four grim years the Gurkhas left their dead in France, Mesopotamia and Gallipoli and many other places besides. They went straight from their sunny homes in the Himalayas to the winter of Western Europe, and were thrown into the hell of the trenches in 1914 without proper winter clothing or up-to-date arms. There they were required to fight Germans equipped with the latest marks of machine-guns and trench mortars, using only the weapons that kept the tribesmen on the frontiers of India at bay. They suffered grievous losses. The total toll by the time the conflict ended was 20,000 casualties.

As part of the Indian Corps in France the Gurkhas fought at La Bassée, Festubert and Givenchy. At Neuve Chapelle, better equipped at last, they broke the German line for the first time in the war. The 2nd Goorkhas were in the forefront of the battle, as they were at Aubers and Loos. The following year, 1915, battalions of other Gurkha regiments were attacking further north at Ypres.

At La Bassée again the Gurkhas won their first Victoria Cross. It was Rifleman Kulbir Thapa, of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Gurkha Rifles, who though wounded himself, went out through the wire to bring back British and Gurkha wounded. He stayed out in No Man's Land all night, though they begged him to go back to his own lines. At first light he brought the wounded back, the last one—a man of the Leicestershire Regiment—after day had dawned and under fire.

Then at Loos again, further to the right on the long front, it was the turn of the 2nd Battalion, 8th Gurkhas, who in refusing to yield to the German attacks ceased to exist as a fighting force. At the end of the day they were reduced to one British officer and forty-nine Gurkhas. As the Corps Commander said, "The Battalion found its Valhalla." Later he wrote, "I have now come to the conclusion that the best of my troops in France were the Gurkhas."

Later in 1915 the Gurkhas were withdrawn from France to the

Middle East into country that was more like the terrain they were used to in India. At this time the force was assembling that was intended to storm the heights above the Dardanelles and drive the Turks out of Europe with a sudden hammer blow, capturing Constantinople in the process. The plan might well have succeeded if the High Command had known before ordering the withdrawal that the Gurkhas were at that very moment securing the dominating position.

It was the 1st Battalion of the 6th Gurkha Rifles that performed this feat. In early 1915 they went ashore with the units that landed on the western end of the Gallipoli peninsula from the Aegean sea. The peninsula is a narrow neck of land between the bottleneck of the Dardanelles and the Gulf of Saros, but the neck is tough, being made of almost sheer cliffs rising to a spinal ridge between 700 and 1,000 feet high.

The Gurkhas landed with the British and Australian and New Zealand forces, and forced their way up to an important height above Cape Helles. To underline the importance of their achievement Headquarters 29 Division decreed that, "In order to mark the good work done by the Gurkha Rifles in capturing the bluff on the coast west of Krithia, the General Officer Commanding has ordered that this bluff will in future be known as "Gurkha Bluff".

The main force was unable to exploit their success, however, and the war went on with casualties ever mounting as Mustapha Kemal brought in his reinforcements. In bravery and contempt for death the Turkish peasant soldier was not unlike the Gurkha. Both sides dug in. Here the 5th and the 10th played their parts as well as the 6th. The tale is told by the same General Sir Ian Hamilton as witnessed the battle of Charasia in Afghanistan nearly thirty-five years before. "Through the entanglements they swept northwards," he recalls, "clearing our left of the enemy for a full thousand yards. Heavily counter-attacked at night, they killed or captured every Turk who had penetrated their incomplete defences, and today stand possessed of every yard they had so hardly gained."

But the main feature, the 715 foot peak of Achi Baba dominating both sides of the peninsula, still lay beyond the grasp of the attackers as the numbers of dead and wounded steadily increased on both sides. When the Turks counter-attacked in July, two thousand of them fell to the Gurkhas in a single day.

Then the Gurkhas were withdrawn to rest and re-form on the Aegean island of Imbros. They went in again on the west coast of the peninsula at Suvla bay, and it was here that the crowning achievement of the 6th Gurkhas took place. The high spine of the peninsula ran between Suvla bay and the Dardanelles in an uneven ridge, with the high points of Sari Bair, Chunak Bair and Achi Baba ranged along it. These points were all heavily defended by the Turks.

Nevertheless the 6th climbed Sari Bair, the dominating feature of the whole area, and there for ten minutes they fought with their *kukris* in hand to hand combat until the Turks broke and ran. The Gurkhas now held the key to the whole area, and looked down the other side at the gates to the Sea of Marmora at the northern end of the narrows. If they had been followed up, the peninsula could have fallen into the Allied hands. But this was not to be. Every British officer was killed or wounded, and Subedar-Major Gambirsing of the Pun clan of the Magars was in command of the battalion. He carried out his orders to retreat.

Gallipoli, a costly failure in the strategy of the war, was evacuated, and the abortive attempt to seize the nerve-centre of the Turkish Empire, which had been within an ace of being a brilliant success, was replaced by a policy of attack and attrition on the periphery. The main line of approach was up the Mesopotamian plain, the valley of the two rivers, now known as Iraq.

All ten Gurkha regiments had battalions fighting in Mesopotamia at some time or other during the war. The operations here had already started before the Gallipoli landings. The first advance on Baghdad was a lightning surprise attack by a small force, forced marching across the desert and fighting battles as they went. The 2nd Battalion of the 7th Gurkha Rifles, after taking part in the critical defence of the Suez Canal against Djemal Pasha's attacks in the first year of the war, formed part of this force.

After the voyage down the Red Sea, across the Arabian Sea and up the Persian Gulf they landed at the head of the gulf and descended on Shaiba in the broad, marshy estuary of the two rivers. From there they marched more than five hundred miles, first up the Euphrates and then across to the Tigris, taking Nasariyah, Amara and Kut-al-Amara on the way. In the ruins of the ancient Sassanian city of Ctesiphon, but twenty-five miles short of Baghdad, they were brought to a halt. The Turks at last proved



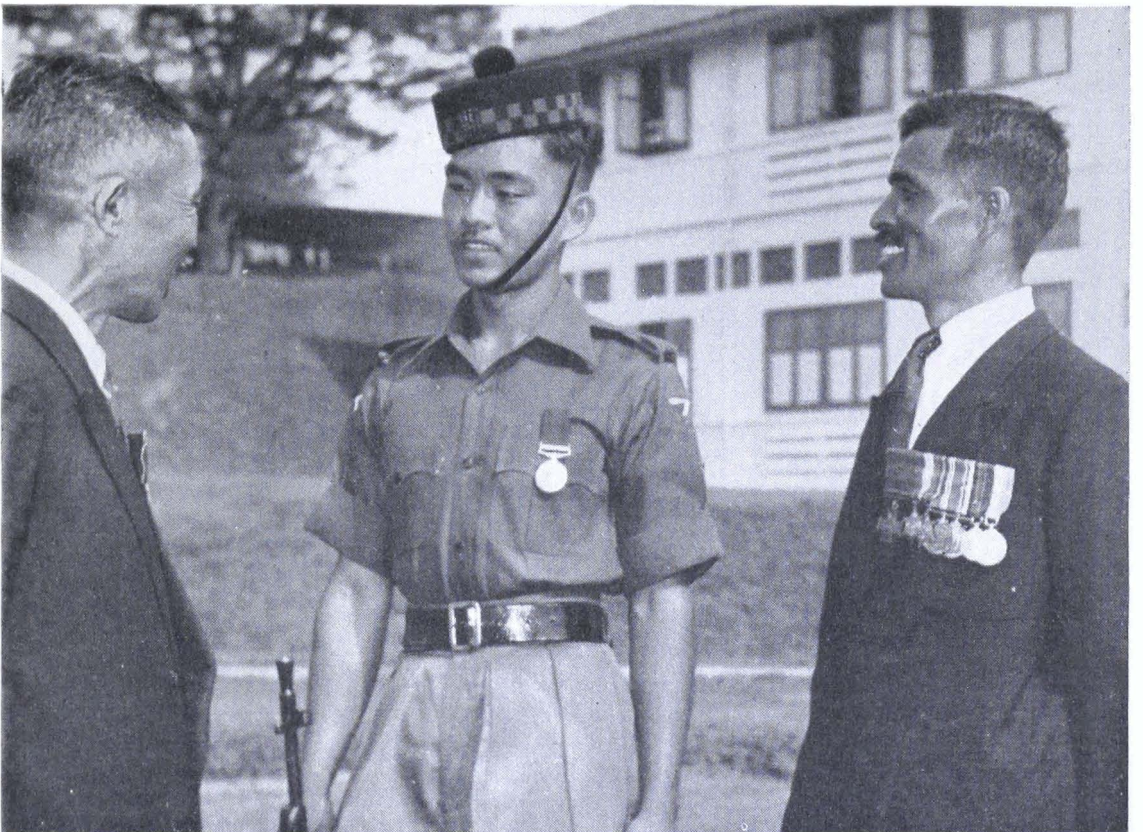
Gurkhas marching through Kure, Japan



Gurkhas in Italy—men of the 2nd/3rd crossing the Ronco



Testing the blade of the Gurkha Kukri



2nd Gurkha V.C.s visit Singapore—Captain Lalabhadur Thapa and Havildar Bhanbhagta Gurung

too strong for them, and they had to retreat to Kut, where they stood on the defensive within the fortifications of the town. The retreat was covered from the hillock which became known as Gurkha Mound.

Many more Gurkhas marched with the force that attempted to relieve Kut, but after a siege of many months supplies ran out, and the besieged men had to surrender. The war in Mesopotamia went on, however. Strengthened by reinforcements from India, the main army eventually achieved what the small force, now suffering the hardships of life in Turkish prison camps, had nearly done. Fighting every inch of the way, they finally got round to the west of the defences round Kut, and forced their way up the right bank of the Tigris to Baghdad. The key to this success was the crossing of the river, which was over three hundred yards wide at this point. It was achieved by the 2nd Goorkhas, the heroes of Delhi and Neuve Chapelle, who crossed the river on pontoons in the company of two other battalions, and carved out a bridgehead on the other side under heavy fire.

This was the turning point of the campaign. From there the advance continued. The comrades of the 7th Gurkha prisoners of war in the new 2nd Battalion took part in the recapture of Kut and the surrender of Baghdad. They went on up river to Sharquat another two hundred miles.

Thus Mesopotamia was cut away from the Turkish Empire. Further west, on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean at the other end of the fertile crescent round the deserts of Arabia, Gurkhas were prominent in prising Palestine and Syria out of its grasp. The 7th Gurkhas were again in the thick of the fighting with their comrades of the 1st and 3rd. Their battle honours include Megiddo, the prelude to the capture of Jerusalem, and Sharon of biblical fame.

These engagements took place towards the end of the war. But although hostilities of the major powers officially ceased with the surrender of Germany in November 1918, there was a lot more to be done before the soldiers could go home.

Following the conquest of Mesopotamia Gurkhas moved on by road up into Iran and reached the shores of the Caspian at Resht. Here they saved the British consul in the nick of time. His consulate had already been set on fire by the Jangalis, the "wild men" of the rebel leader, Kuchik Khan. A few miles down the coast at

Bandar Pahlevi, then known as Enzeli, some of the Bolsheviks, the first Communists to take over power from the Czars, landed to bring the revolution to Gilan and Mazanderan. The Gurkhas manned posts at key points, kept the road open and did much to save Iran from the fate that had overtaken Russia.

Though the consequences of neglect might have been incalculable, this was a small affair. But it was linked with a more considerable confrontation of the Communists launched from the west. After the Russian debacle, the Turks had advanced into the Caucasus and taken over Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan from Batum on the Black Sea to Baku on the Caspian. In the last week of 1918 the 2nd/4th Gurkhas embarked at Salonika in Greece, and in the first week of 1919 they landed at Batum as part of the Allied Occupation Force.

They found Batum a place of indescribable filth after a year's occupation by the Turks, with dead and dying animals lying everywhere, walls ripped off the houses for firewood, and rooms fouled with excrement as no latrines had been dug. They were glad to entrain for Baku after three days, though the rail journey, which normally lasts twenty-four hours, took a whole week.

From Baku they went north to Petrovsk, which was the port for the Daghestan region and also the headquarters of General Deniken's White Russian force. The picture was confused, to say the least of it, for whilst General Deniken was trying to persuade the infant Republic of Daghestan to fight the Bolsheviks, he would not promise independence, and meanwhile private armies had sprung up in the Caucasus and were skirmishing with one another. The situation was further complicated by the refugees from Armenia, where over a million people had either been slaughtered by the Turks or died of disease.

But whatever opinions they may have held of one another, the locals seem to have had a healthy respect for the Gurkhas. Many tales were told of the strange little men, and one writer in a local newspaper claimed that they could go uphill on all fours faster than a horse on the level. He further asserted that they were accustomed to hanging head downwards from trees and slashing off the heads of people passing below, that they threw their knives to kill and at the same time ran after them to retrieve them, and that in thick country they carried their knives in their mouths cutting a path as they went along. He added that whilst engaged in all

these remarkable activities, they laughed with glee all the time.

In March two companies of Gurkhas sailed for Krasnovodsk on the eastern side of the Caspian, which the White Russians in Central Asia were hoping to reach after working their way up through Tashkent and Bokhara. They found it to be part of the new Republic of Ashkhabad, which was run by the Turkomans and was both anti-Bolshevik and anti-White Russian. The rest of the battalion joined them there in the following month, but it was too dangerous to stay long. The Bolshevik Caspian fleet had been ice-bound in the northern port of Astrakhan, but now the ice was breaking up and soon they would be able to head south and cut off the line of retreat. The Gurkhas went back to the western shore, and in August the whole of General Dunsterville's "Dunsterforce" pulled out, with the 4th Gurkhas bound for Constantinople. The task of occupying the Caucasus had been allotted by the peacemakers to the Italians, but they declined the honour, and the whole region was eventually sucked into the U.S.S.R.

Yet another postscript to the Great War was written closer to home when the Afghans, thinking the British power had been bled white and weakened to a shadow by events in Europe and the Middle East, crossed swords for the third time with the Indian Army.

The third Afghan War was fought in 1919, but it was a direct consequence of the World War and the Gurkha regiments include it in their battle honours of that conflict. Habibulla Khan, Emir of Afghanistan, had been murdered. His brother, Nasrulla, had seized power and thrown to the winds the neutral policy of his predecessor. All the Gurkha regiments were represented in the fighting that followed the Afghan encroachment on British territory at Landi Khana at the head of the Khyber Pass.

This was in May, and very soon, as the months dragged on without a conclusive battle, the heat became the worst enemy. In the long run Nasrulla Khan could not hope to win against the whole might of the British Empire, but for the time being it was not possible for that empire to bring sufficient force to bear on him to oblige him to come to terms. Even the hawk-eyed Afridis of the Khyber area seemed overcome by the heat, and were no more than half-hearted in their harassing and looting activities.

When part of the 3rd Battalion of the 5th Gurkhas went up the

Khyber, they entrained at Peshawar for the fifteen mile journey to Jamrud fort. But they were almost too heavy for the little engine, which had to take three runs at the final slope before it got the train up successfully.

The Officer Commanding went into the fort and was greeted with the words, "Thank God, we're saved! We've lost the pass! We're expecting an attack by five thousand tribesmen from the north-east at any minute!"

The O.C. then asked where he was to put his men for the night. He was told that unfortunately there was no room in the fort and that the perimeter defences were fully manned with every man ready for instant action, but that he could find a place for his men on the north-eastern side outside the perimeter. They occupied their allotted place and slept undisturbed.

This was a small, unsatisfactory war, which set the pattern for the endless campaigns into tribal territory that took place in the next two decades. Casualties of this same battalion were one killed, eight wounded and five died of heat-stroke, for the Gurkha is no more a "hot weather" man than the Englishman. It was a petty appendix to the great events in which the Gurkhas had been engaged for the previous four years.

The happenings of the following year were more critical, however. In Iraq, which was a new state formed out of the Mesopotamian provinces of the Turkish Empire, Arabs were celebrating the exchange of Turkish protection for the British mandate with a general rising against the British administrators. They objected strongly to paying their share of the taxes, murdered a number of civil servants, and tore up railway lines and telegraph poles. The reinforcements sent from India were nearly half Gurkha.

The Arab revolt in Iraq was in the nature of a holy war against the infidel and lasted for six months, which were the hottest of the year. The first task of the Gurkhas was to get the Basra to Baghdad railway working again. They passed by Ur of the Chaldees, the birthplace of Abraham, where excavations had not yet revealed the full extent and magnitude of the ancient city, and went up the line towards Samawa.

It was a painfully slow progress, since they were tied down to the speed at which the railway could be repaired. There were four trains constantly on the move. The first contained the actual

materials for the reconstruction of the railway, the second carried supplies and water, the third ran daily between base and camp, bringing up fresh supplies and personnel, and the fourth was used for building the blockhouses which they had to construct as they went along to guard the line against Arab attacks.

Although the line went up the plain of the Euphrates, it did not follow the windings of the river, and water was often in very short supply.

The first meeting with the Arabs was between the river and the desert at Khidr, half-way up the line from Ur to Samawa. At this time their horsemen were still gathering to the tribal standards and advancing with them flying aloft. They thus provided ideal targets. But with their usual hit and run tactics, the Arabs were never properly brought to battle, and the force went in for punitive destruction and burning of Arab villages in order to destroy their will to carry on with the fight. For the infantry it was hard going, foot-slogging over the hard scrub in the blazing sun clad in khaki shorts, with long puttees wound round the legs and the solar topee or felt hat on the head.

They found humour where they could. On one occasion some officers had been bathing in the Euphrates, which they had at last reached, and were walking back to their men with their white towels draped over their shoulders. The sappers, who were preparing a river crossing, mistook them for marauding Arabs and opened fire. The officers ran for their lives.

On another occasion three platoons, under their Gurkha officers, were withdrawing to their defended positions for the night when they were set upon by a band of four or five hundred Arabs, who had girded up their loins and were crying out to Hassan and Hussein to aid them in battle. Subedar Kabir Thapa, loaded with the rifles, equipment and hats of three wounded men, was determined not to leave anything behind. But it was one hat too many. Three times, during the rushes from cover to cover, he dropped the hat, and three times he stopped to pick it up. Each time an Arab dropped on to one knee to take aim and fire at close range. Three times his gun misfired. The Subedar received the Indian Order of Merit.

And so the hot, dry campaign came to an end.

7

El Alamein to Hiroshima

AT last there was peace again. By 1921 all the Gurkha battalions were back at their homes in the hills of India, counting their dead and reorganizing the survivors into the peacetime strength of two battalions per regiment.

Many British officers had joined them from civil life to serve alongside the regular officers of the permanent cadre, and retained a lifelong admiration for the Gurkhas. To at least one of them it was the beginning of a life's career. Professor Sir Ralph Turner, who later became the first Director of the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London, began compiling his scholarly and comprehensive Dictionary of the Nepali Language whilst serving with them in the Middle East. His eloquent tribute to them in his preface can hardly be equalled.

“As I write these last words,” he says, “my thoughts return to you who were my comrades, the stubborn and indomitable peasants of Nepal. Once more I hear the laughter with which you greeted every hardship. Once more I see you in your bivouac or about your fires, on forced march or in the trenches, now shivering with wet and cold, now scorched by a pitiless and burning sun. Uncomplaining you endure hunger and thirst and wounds, and at last your unwavering lines disappear into the smoke and wrath of battle. Bravest of the brave, most generous of the generous, never had a country more faithful friends than you.”

The First World War finished for the Indian Army with the operations in Afghanistan, but long after that the restless North-West Frontier simmered and bubbled constantly, and from time to time it came to the boil. The whole army was orientated in that direction. The main strength was in the Punjab and North-Western India. Even the Staff College was in the far west at Quetta, and schemes and operations were nearly always devised for troops operating in bare, open country against a relatively

unmechanized enemy. The first of these conditions was applicable later on in the Western Desert against the Germans, and the second in South-East Asia against the Japanese. But both conditions together were only found in the lesser operations in the Middle East. No serious precautions were taken against invasion from East Asia.

Historians will argue as to whether all the extensive military operations in tribal territory were really necessary. In army circles, however, it was said that, whatever might be the political merits of these efforts, they were good training in field service for the troops.

So the Gurkhas went off with their British and Indian comrades to Waziristan in the twenties and again in the thirties. Most of it was dull work—construction of roads and picketing, foot-slogging across some of the most inhospitable country in the world, which was as bitterly cold in winter as it was hot in summer. The greatest danger was always from snipers hidden behind the rocks, who would wait all day and more, if necessary, in order to get in a good shot. On one occasion the Gurkhas were amused to see the brigadier and his staff come unexpectedly under fire and unceremoniously throw themselves flat on their faces on the ground.

This country of the Mahsuds and the Wazirs, with the Indian Army's "Beau Geste" forts at Wana and Razmak and the Persian sounding names of its mountains and ravines, was as foreign to the Gurkha as it was to his British officers. Occasionally they were called to the distasteful duty of burning villages as reprisals for outrages committed by the tribesmen. Sometimes this work was done by means of Royal Air Force bombing.

Road construction and motor transport eventually made the old, slow, self-contained expeditions, with their long camel trains carrying supplies and equipment, out of date. But this stage had not been reached when the Mohmands from north of Peshawar started raiding into the well-developed and protected region of Swat. So in the thirties the Malakand Field Force was formed, and Gurkhas marched with it, based on Dargai and Malakand. The tribesmen were egged on by their mullahs and faqirs, who urged them to fight for the Prophet's sake.

Again, just before the Second World War, the tribes were stirred up. The Faqir of Ipi was the man behind the scenes. By this time the road to Razmak had been built, and the task was to

organize Road Open Days two or three times a week. This involved the Gurkhas in Road Protection of the seventy-mile stretch up from Bannu. Snipers were the danger. Some had their pet names, like "Bakshi Bill" who operated near a picket of that name. Sometimes the men went out after them, but the proverbial needle would have been easier to find.

In 1928 a Gurkha War Memorial was at last unveiled. The site chosen was in the main recruiting depot at Gorakhpur, where it would be seen by more Gurkhas than in any other place. The unveiling ceremony was performed by the Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Birdwood.

In 1934 the Maharaja of Nepal, Juddha Shamsher, was appointed Honorary Colonel of all the Gurkha regiments, with the rank of Lieutenant-General in the British Army. But three years previously he had been given that honour by the 4th Gurkhas, as a result of which they sent a deputation to Nepal to present a sword to him.

The reception in Nepal of the party from the 4th Gurkhas can be regarded as rather typical of the way invited Englishmen would be received at the Court of Nepal. The group, led by the Commanding Officer, went on the little Nepalese government railway from Raxaul through the Terai to Amlekhganj, and then in a special bus to Bhimphedi at the foot of the hills. They took the steep bridle path up to Chisapani Garhi, colloquially called Sisagarhi, riding Tibetan ponies, and were welcomed by the Commander of the fort, which is perched high above the valley. The Commander, acting on the Maharaja's orders, gave them a goat, chickens, fish, vegetables, fruit, sweets and milk, and there they spent the night.

Next day they went over the two passes to Thankot, whence a car and a lorry took them to Katmandu. Two days later they went to the Darbar hall to make their presentation. They were met at the head of the stairs by the Maharaja himself, wearing the full dress uniform of his new regiment. They were then led by him to the three chairs of state at the end of the hall, through two lines of high military and civil officials in their glittering uniforms and plumed headdresses.

The Ambassador and the Commanding Officer were motioned to their seats, whilst the Court Murmurers muttered and ejaculated, concealing the sallies of protest and counter-protest over the

courtesies of seating. When this was over, the two Subedar-Majors of the battalions went to the other end of the hall to collect the sword from the Subedar who was standing guard over it. They then walked slowly the whole length of the room with it whilst the C.O. made his address.

After receiving the sword the Maharaja presented a silver shield to the regiment in return. There followed some small talk for a short while. Then the deputation rose to take their leave, whereupon the Murmurers immediately set up their curious chanting again. The Maharaja offered the traditional *attar* and *pan* to the visitors and escorted them out.

Two days later the group went to an evening party at the same place and watched films of the Commander-in-Chief's recent visit to Nepal and of the Prince of Wales' big game shooting in the Terai. They were then entertained by dancers wearing huge devil masks, and gifts were made to them of *kukris*, gold and silver coins, carved ivory work, musk pods and photographs in frames of silver and carved wood.

At the time this presentation took place Maharaja Chandra Shamsher, whose unstinted support had been so effective in the First World War, had been dead for five years. His brother, Bhim Shamsher, had taken over the reins of government, but only outlived him by two years. The younger brother, Juddha Shamsher, was to prove as loyal a friend in the Second World War as his brother had been in the first.

When the war broke out, Nepal was again first in the field, offering her warriors for the common cause. The Maharaja, who knew more of the ways of dictators than our own Prime Minister, had even offered help at the time of the Munich crisis the year before. It had been politely refused. On the outbreak of war the offer was renewed. It was still not accepted by the slow-moving government in Delhi until the following year.

Events were moving so fast that it would have been understandable if the tardily accepted offer had been withdrawn. In the summer of 1940 the Germans had overrun the whole of Western Europe, and half the world was expecting Britain to go down under the air attacks of the Luftwaffe. Juddha Shamsher, whose Nepalese contingent was already in India under the command of his sons, reacted by giving permission to the Indian Army to recruit a further ten battalions and to send Gurkhas again on service overseas.

The status of the British Resident in Katmandu had previously been altered to that of Minister to emphasize the fact that Nepal was an independent sovereign state, and that no other nation had a right to interfere in her affairs. There was therefore no question of bringing pressure to bear on Nepal as though she were a vassal state.

The Minister of the day, Lieutenant-Colonel Betham, has related how he went to the Maharaja in council with his difficult task in the darkest days of the war. First he sought permission for the Gurkhas to go overseas. Juddha Shamsher asked him sharply why he had not approached him before. Betham replied that he had only just received his instructions from the Commander-in-Chief. Whereupon the Maharaja answered, "Of course."

Next the Minister asked if the Indian Army might increase its Gurkha strength to thirty battalions. The Maharaja, fully realizing the implications of the evacuation of the British Army at Dunkirk and the capitulation of France, and with sublime disregard for the doubters in his own council, again replied, "Of course."

Betham could not conceal his immense relief at the Maharaja's decision. Seeing this the Nepalese autocrat said that he could not have read the terms of the 1816 Treaty of Segauli, for in it were written the words "perpetual friendship".

So the Gurkhas came striding down from the hills and strolled into the regimental depots, laughing and joking in their casual comradeship like guests coming to a party. Permission to raise ten more battalions was requested and granted, and yet another ten, making fifty in all. Yet more battalions were raised for garrison duties in India, for armed police units and for the new parachute battalions. The latter, formed in the North-West Frontier Province, were something quite new to Briton and Gurkha alike, and the story went round about the Gurkha who went aloft for the first time. He was quite prepared to jump, but tentatively suggested that the plane might go a little lower first, not realizing that the function of the parachute was to break his fall.

In this party there was no front in France as there had been before, so the Gurkhas sailed for the Middle East and Malaya. In the former theatre of operations their first adventure was a comparatively painless one. As part of the Persia and Iraq force known as Paiforce they landed at Basra and took the road to Teheran via Baghdad, whilst Reza Shah, the Persian King of Kings, was being forced to abdicate, as he was considered to be too friendly with the

Germans. Thus in 1941 the country was divided between the British and the Russians into the southern and northern zones of occupation, and the two allies, distrustful and suspicious of one another, met in the capital. The 5th Gurkha Rifles camped out at Doshan Teppe, now Teheran's military airfield. Others secured the oil refinery at Abadan and the oil wells of the region.

Next year the First Battalion of the 2nd Goorkhas left Persia and crossed the desert bound for Cyprus, where they had first seen service overseas in 1878. There, together with many other Gurkha battalions in the 4th Indian Division, they trained for the operations in the Western Desert, which took place in the latter part of 1942. Here in the desert west of Cairo in North Africa the light infantry were thrown into battles where the major weapons were the tanks and guns. They suffered accordingly. Rommel's Afrika Korps had come across the Mediterranean to take over from the discredited Italians, who had surrendered in hundreds of thousands to Wavell's small ill-equipped army in the early days of the war. The battle surged back to Egypt. In the cauldron battle of Libya the Second Battalion of the 4th Gurkhas was practically annihilated and had to be completely reconstituted later. In isolated Tobruk Gurkhas fought to the last alongside British and Australian troops.

At the battle of El Alamein, which was to mark the high tide of the German advance, the Gurkhas played their part. They also shared in the pursuit, which brought about the ebb of the Afrika Korps across Libya and Tunisia. El Alamein, Akarit and Tunis are listed as major battle honours of the 2nd Goorkhas, and of these three the story of Akarit is the most stirring to tell, for it is the story of thirteen men who opened the way for the advance of a division.

Wadi Akarit is a river that flows in a deep cleft in the bare hills of Southern Tunisia and reaches the sea in the bay north of Gabes. To the south of the river the Mareth line on the Matmata hills in the borderland between Libya and Tunisia had already been pierced. The next task was to climb out of the valley of Wadi Akarit on to the plateau and the roads that lead to Tunis.

But this was not easily done. The cliffs to the north of the Wadi were rugged and steep, and they were well defended. The attack went in at night. Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa was Second-in-Command of a company. He took a dozen men from two sections

of a platoon and silently crept up a gulley. It was a winding funnel in the cliffs and the only way up. The Subedar held his fire. When he reached the first outpost he went in with bayonet and *kukri*, and he and his Gurkhas finished off the lot. They carried on up the defile. The alarm was raised, and heavy enemy fire came in from the machine-guns positioned on the cliffs on either side. The Gurkhas, using whatever cover they could, went on up and eventually reached the open ground above, which they were able to hold on to, enabling the rest to follow.

For this action Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa was awarded the first Gurkha V.C. of the Second World War.

So the Eighth Army went on to Enfidaville and Tunis, and drove the Afrika Korps out of Africa with Gurkhas continually in the van. They sailed across the Mediterranean to Sicily and then across the Messina straits to Italy. There the battle front was squeezed between the Tyrrhenian and the Adriatic seas, and after Naples had been captured, it was squeezed still further into the great bottleneck of Cassino.

In the first onward rush Gurkhas very nearly succeeded in capturing the German positions near the famous Benedictine monastery. If they had been able to do so, the whole commanding feature might have been taken there and then. But this was not to be, and with all the weight of his forces already concentrating on this mountainous section of the main road to Rome, General Freyberg decided that he must force a way through at all costs.

In March 1944, a fortnight after the first attack, the Gurkhas were in again and clinging on to the lower slopes of Monte Cassino. For nine days the 9th Gurkha Rifles hung on to the crag which came to be called Hangman's Hill. Physical contact with the rest of the army could only be made at night, and even then under fire. When an attempt to supply them by air was made, half the containers rolled down the hillside out of reach.

Hangman's Hill in this way became the focal point of the battle for Cassino. The troops dug in there were the key to the storming of the monastery, which was essential if the New Zealand Army Corps, of which the 4th Indian Division now formed a part, was to advance. So, whilst the Gurkhas clung on like limpets with the great walls of the monastery looming above them, the battle raged on both sides—artillery fire and air strikes above, and the

fight for the town below. Shell cases, base plugs and smoke canisters rained down on them. On the third day they were called upon to join with the Essex Regiment in a frontal assault against the men of the German *corps d'élite*, the 1st Parachute Division, who now manned the monastery above. But the attack was called off when the diversionary operations misfired. The Essex men descended to Cassino castle. The Gurkhas remained on Hangman's Hill.

The scene has been described by a New Zealand eye-witness in the following words:

"If we were not altogether happy about our own position, it was at least preferable, with its slit trenches and firm base of supply, to the undefined area among the barren rocks of the hillside where our Indian friends held on under a hail of mortars and shell. Our own twenty-five pounders appeared to rake most of the area. One wondered how men could live in such a place.

"I remember a night on which they endured a ferocious bombardment. In the darkness shells and mortars crashed among the rocks, burst in spraying red circles upon the flinty surface and sent their echoes rolling down the hillside. Our own guns from behind Trocchio replied with a hurricane of steel which rushed over our heads to plaster the face of the mountain to the south and west of Hangman's Hill. I thought I could see the occasional flash of grenades. As the shoot subsided, through the comparative silence came the rip of an occasional Spandau and—by contrast—the slow rattle of a Bren in reply. The Indians were still there."

On the seventh day the New Zealand Corps offensive was abandoned, and the Gurkhas, who were the Indian friends to whom the New Zealander refers, were ordered to withdraw at night. This they did two days later. Secrecy was essential, and three officers, each armed with a carrier pigeon, set out from Cassino town to deliver the instructions by word of mouth. Two of them got through and released their pigeons. The following morning the codeword for the withdrawal came through, and the Biffins, as the Gurkha soldiers were nicknamed, were warned to be ready to move. Some of them wanted to know who would be relieving them.

The Commanding Officer has described the descent to the main force. "Once over the ridge," he relates, "a weird scene came into view. It was a clear fine night. The castle could be seen standing

up on its knob in the distance. The Brown House stood bold and desolate between us and the Castle. Above the Brown House there was a line of bursting shells stretching right across the face of the hill, their flashes making a queer glow in the clouds of smoke and rock dust they threw up. Just before us a similar curtain of shells was drawn across the hill above the town itself. Between these walls of fire lay the way to the Castle. We continued to move slowly across the face of the hill. The artillery fire quite covered any noise we made as we stumbled over the loose stones. A slight deviation allowed us to give the Brown House a wide berth as we were uncertain whether it was held or not. No sound came from this ruin and we continued, hardly believing our good luck, to the Castle. We filed up the narrow path and were challenged by the West Kents."

A great boulder on Hangman's Hill now bears the crossed *kukris* badge of the 9th Gurkhas and the story of their exploit.

Cassino fell at last. Rome was taken, and the battle surged northwards up the lacerated leg of Italy to the last German line of defence before the Plain of Lombardy. This was the Gothic Line, running just north of Pisa and Florence, and south of Rimini.

The Gurkhas of the 4th Indian Division had gone over to the Adriatic side of the Appenines. Three battalions from the 6th, the 8th and the 10th were formed into the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Infantry Brigade, in which for the first time the formation sign of the crossed *kukris* on the dark green background was seen, which is now the sign of the Gurkha Division of the British Army.

The Indian Division was under the command of General Sir Francis Tuker, who had himself served with the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Goorkhas from the time of the First World War, eventually receiving the command in 1937. Under his leadership they spent September battering their way through to Lombardy.

At Coriano and Santarcangelo, Monte Chicco and Tavoletto the Gurkhas left their mark. The night attack on the Passano-San Sevino ridge and its capture was called by Churchill himself "a brilliant feat of arms". This was hill country that seemed made for their particular skills—the night attack, the surprise from the rear, the small patrols, the hand-to-hand combat with the flashing *kukri*.

Here, at Monte San Bartelo, Rifleman Thaman Gurung won the third Gurkha Victoria Cross given in the Western theatre of war. He was on a reconnaissance patrol probing the enemy's

positions prior to his battalion's attack. It was daylight, and they were seen by some Germans, whereupon they fought them. Thaman Gurung got amongst their defensive positions and stalked the enemy one by one like a hunter after game. When his patrol leader decided to get away, Thaman stood up and emptied the magazines of a Bren gun into the Germans, enabling his comrades to withdraw. He himself was shot down and killed.

The war moved forward, and rivers became the main obstacles. The Ronco, the Lamone, the Senio and the Santerno, the Sillaro and the Gaiana all presented their particular difficulties, which had to be overcome. The 2nd Battalion of the 10th, clawing their way up the Adriatic coast, crossed the Ronco, took part in the capture of Faenza, crossed the Senio and the Santerno, did an expert night attack across the Sillaro, fought their way into Medicina and finished up at Padua. It was the end of the Axis in Italy, and Mussolini was hanging by his heels in a Milan square.

The Gurkhas liked Italy. In the periods of respite between the battles there was ample opportunity to fraternize with the local people and to pick up enough Italian to get by. The mountain villages and the smiling friendliness with which they were frequently greeted must have often reminded them of home.

On the other side of the world the Gurkhas ranged just as far afield. In September 1941 a Gurkha Brigade of three battalions returned to fight in Malaya for the first time since 1875, and this time circumstances were very different. They were pitted against a well-trained and well-prepared enemy by a High Command that appeared to be unable to think of the Japanese invasion in any terms other than the defence of Singapore.

Instead of being given the chance to show their innate skill in ambush and infiltration, in encirclement and surprise attack, and in close combat, the Gurkha Brigade was held to a progressive line of retreat down a single road, which led inevitably to the disaster at the end. From Alor Star to Johore Bahru it was rearguard actions all the way. At Jitra, Kampar and Slim River they stood and fought, only to receive the order to retreat again. By the time they reached Singapore one battalion had been reduced by casualties to a quarter of its original strength. They were robbed of a final battle by the surrender, and went into captivity with the British, Australians and Indians.

Early in the year after the surrender with their unexpectedly

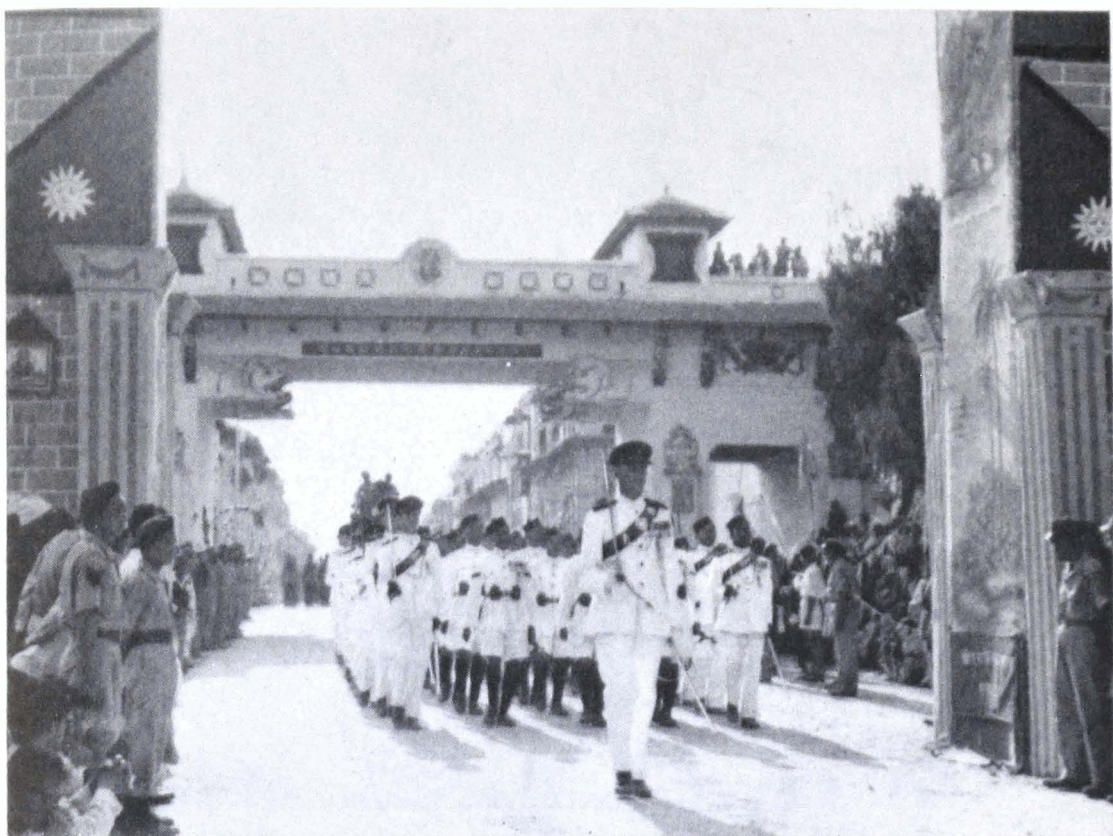
easy conquests in Malaya still ill-digested, the Japanese attacked Burma. Again it was a confused retreat. In all six Gurkha battalions took part. They gave the Japanese a smart rebuff at Pegu, the ancient capital of the Burmese kings, at Prome on the Irrawaddy and at Kyaukse thirty miles south of Mandalay. The 10th Gurkhas, fighting near their home at Maymyo in the hills to the east, stood and battled at Monywa on the banks of the Chindwin.

It was to no avail. The remnants of the four brigades in Burma painfully dragged their way along the jungle tracks up into the Lushai and Naga hills between Burma and Assam. Meanwhile fresh troops had gone up from the camps in India to cover the retreat, and for a while there was a lull whilst the Japanese swallowed yet another country. The line of defence ran through Kohima and Imphal in Manipur state—places that the Assam regiments of the Gurkhas knew well.

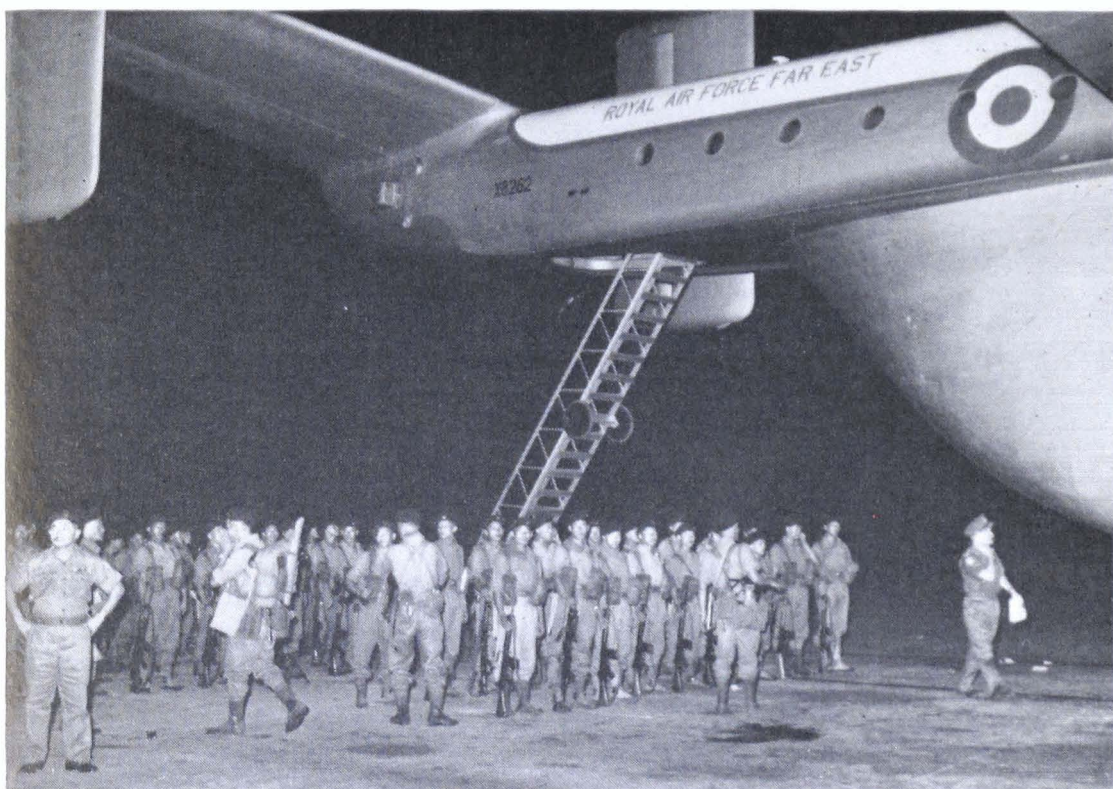
Whilst the main front remained fairly quiet, the High Command in India sought other means of harassing the enemy. They put a force down the eastern coast of the Bay of Bengal in the region called the Arakan. If it prospered, it would provide a shorter route to Rangoon than over the northern hills and down the Irrawaddy.

The Arakan force unfortunately did not prosper. It was never big enough to advance, and all it could do was to stab at the Japanese here and there and stop them getting any nearer up the coast to Calcutta. Communications were appalling, as they were everywhere between India and Burma. But this went for both sides. The climate was as bad. These conditions were a challenge to the Gurkhas engaged in operations, and often they would descend on the Japanese outposts under cover of drenching rain and surprise the occupants as they sat huddled under their shelters. Gradually the fiction of the Japanese superiority in jungle fighting was dispelled.

It was in the Arakan that Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung won his Victoria Cross. His company was attacking a hill dubbed Snowdon East. His own section got pinned down by heavy fire from light machine-guns and mortars and by enemy grenades. They went to ground, but a sniper up a tree only seventy-five yards away began picking them off one by one. Bhanbhagta could not get at him properly from the lying position, so he stood up in full view and shot him dead.



British Gurkha Coronation Contingent in Katmandu, led by Major D. H. Houston M.C., 6th Gurkha Rifles



Getting airborne with the R.A.F.



7th Gurkhas fly off to
Borneo



Chasing rebels in a
Brunei waterway

After that the section was able to advance again, but twenty yards short of its objective, it was again halted by heavy fire. Bhanbhagta did not wait for an order. He leapt forward into the first trench and killed two men with a grenade. Without stopping he leapt across into the next trench and killed with the bayonet. Fire was now coming at the section from two other trenches. Bhanbhakta again went ahead and cleared them with grenade and bayonet.

He had now cleaned up four trenches on his own initiative, and he was in mortal danger from the accurate and sustained fire of a machine-gunner in another trench further to the north. He reckoned that this gunner was not only holding up his own platoon, but was also stopping another platoon coming in from the west. For the fifth time he ran forward, and jumped on to the roof of the machine-gun post. His grenades were all finished, so he took a smoke bomb and threw it in. Two Japanese staggered out blinded by the smoke. One by one he killed them with his *kukri*. A third remained, still pinning Number 4 Platoon down with his machine-gun fire. Bhanbhagta Gurung crawled inside, killed him and took the gun.

In spite of these moments of high courage, however, nothing of strategic importance was achieved in the Arakan, and the British and Indian forces were still on the defensive in the Naga hills when the Japanese started their "March on Delhi" in the spring of 1944.

For nearly two years there had been continuous patrol activity, increasing in intensity and sometimes flaring up into sharp engagements as the Japanese built up their strength on the Chindwin. During this time the Gurkhas had often penetrated deeply into the enemy lines. They took part in the Chindit long range penetration expeditions, the second of which established airstrips around Myitkina in North-East Burma.

In these remote areas the Gurkha, when the nature of the task was clearly explained to him, was unrivalled. He was accustomed to living much more simply than his British counterpart, his woodcraft and hunting instincts were developed to the full, and he proved himself, man for man, more than a match for his opponents.

Meantime the Japanese, to whom the Chindit adventures were simply pinpricks in the larger view of the war, launched their attack on Manipur with a strength of three divisions. The

Fourteenth Army was waiting for them and ready with superior strength, but the Japanese were prepared to die for their Mikado and could not have been held back by faint-hearted men.

The 7th and the 10th Gurkhas were in the thick of the fight where generations before they had gone out after the head-hunters who were now their friends. At Imphal and Bishenpur and Tammu the fighting was fanned into a flame. The hill features had nicknames which every soldier knew. And they were more than nicknames, for these were the names by which they went in the orders for attack and defence. The Gurkhas decimated the Japanese on Scraggy and Gibraltar at Shenam. At Tuitum the 10th fought them into the ground.

In these initially defensive operations, which developed into the general offensive leading to the recapture of Burma, 17 Indian Division played a leading part. Its successor today is 17 Gurkha Division with its headquarters at Seremban in Malaya. The battle resolved itself into a contest for the mastery of the hill tracks which afforded the only practicable means of communication for a mechanized army, and of these the one between Bishenpur and Silchar was vital.

Seven Gurkhas won Victoria Crosses in the Burma campaign. Three of them were won by men of the Second Battalion of the 5th Gurkha Rifles in the fighting round Bishenpur. Havildar Gaje Ghale won his as a platoon commander in May "for dauntless courage and superb leadership". Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa, V.C., died in the defence of Mortar Bluff, an isolated and vital position, which he held for a whole night with a handful of men against overwhelming odds, often in hand-to-hand combat. For the part he played in the same action Naik Agansing Rai was also awarded the highest decoration.

Another of the heroes was Rifleman Ganju Lama of the First Battalion, 7th Gurkhas, whose tale is known to every Gurkha N.C.O. because it forms part of the Gurkhali reader that is required study for the educational examination that is included in the qualifications for promotion to corporal. Ganju was with his battalion when it was ordered on June 11th 1944 to relieve the 2nd/5th Gurkhas at the village of Ningthoukong.

On the following day the Japanese attacked the men of the 5th with tanks, placing them in a dangerous situation. B and D Companies of the 1st 7th went to their assistance. They attacked

vigorously, but were held up by the fire from three Japanese tanks. Ganju crawled forward towards the first tank with his own weapon, an anti-tank mortar and grenades. He was hit and badly wounded in the arm and legs, but went on crawling forward until he got to a point where he could set up his weapon.

Ganju Lama fired and had the satisfaction of seeing the leading tank go up in flames. Although bleeding profusely from his wounds he managed to load another bomb into his mortar and fired again. The next tank was destroyed. As the tank crew emerged from the turret, he hurled his grenades and killed them. His company was still held back by the third tank.

Rifleman Ganju Lama crawled back for more mortar bombs and dragged himself back to his firing position. He fired again and destroyed the third tank and its crew. The Gurkhas rushed forward. Ganju was evacuated to a military hospital in Delhi. Twenty years later he was an officer in the Indian Army. A boil developed on his leg. It swelled up and burst, and out of it dropped a Japanese bullet.

A month later the Fourteenth Army was moving out of the hills where it had sweated for nearly two years and coming down into the valley of the Chindwin and back to Mandalay. The Gurkhas were with them. Early the following year, just after they had crossed the wide Irrawaddy at Myinmu the Japanese put in a fierce counter-attack in an attempt to throw them back out of their bridgehead into the river. The Gurkhas of the 10th were with their comrades fighting the enemy off.

Gurkhas of the 6th were in at the kill at Mandalay itself, where they forced their way into Fort Dufferin and up Mandalay hill to ring the temple bells. The Japanese were then pursued down the Rangoon road and forced into the hills between the Irrawaddy and the Sittang, where they met their end as a fighting force.

It was at Taungdaw on the road and railway twenty miles north of Pegu that Rifleman Lachhiman Gurung fought off a violent Japanese attack, which started with a shower of grenades. He threw them back before they exploded—all but one, which went off in his hand, smashed his right arm and tore the skin off his face and legs. The two men of his section who were with him were severely wounded. He himself loaded and fired his rifle with his left hand, and held the enemy off. After the battle thirty-one dead Japanese soldiers were found near his position.

Lachhiman received the last Gurkha Victoria Cross to be won in the Second World War, which officially came to an end three months later after the Americans had dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As after the First World War the Gurkhas remained far afield mopping up and helping to restore order out of chaos. The invasion of Malaya became an unopposed landing when the troops went ashore in October of the same year. No one envisaged then that the fighting would be more arduous ten years later against the Communist terrorists than it was then.

Things were quiet in Thailand also, and in Japan itself. But shooting was still going on in Indo-China and the East Indies. All these countries saw the cheerful brown face of the Gurkha and learnt to respect that face when the grin changed to a frown. Perhaps the record in dispersal is held by the 5th Gurkhas, the heroes of the Bishenpur struggle. In 1946 the Second Battalion was in Japan, having been selected as part of the British-Indian Occupation Force, the Third Battalion was in Java and then in Malaya, the Fourth Battalion was in Thailand, whilst the First Battalion had just left Italy.

In Java the Gurkhas were having a tricky time of it trying to protect the Dutch and Eurasians, of whom there were some 50,000 in the Bandoeng area alone, from the wild Indonesian hot-heads. The Indonesians were shouting *Merdeka!*—Freedom—and the British officers were finding difficulty in explaining to the men their role in fighting them to protect the Dutch.

In Japan, on the other hand, in the midst of their former deadly enemies, the Gurkhas were surrounded by perfect peace and order. They were stationed at Hiro, just outside the shattered naval base of Kure on the Inland Sea, which later became the base for the Commonwealth operations in Korea. They were interested in seeing the midget submarines and the underground factories tunnelled into the mountains. They visited the flattened wilderness of Hiroshima, which had been destroyed by the atom bomb. Up in Tokyo a company was accommodated in the suburb of Ebisu for guard duties in the capital.

The Second World War had cost the Gurkhas 10,000 dead, and 15,000 suffered from wounds or imprisonment out of a total of upwards of 100,000 men.

8

Year of Decision

THE GURKHA BRIGADE was still scattered when political events occurred which forced every man to make a great decision. The year was 1947. In that year two new nations were born—the Republics of India and Pakistan—amidst such slaughter that the total sum of the dead was greater than all the battles of the recent war had accounted for.

All was courtesy and smiles in the cloud-cuckoo land of New Delhi as the Viceroy of India handed over power to the Indian Congress Party and abdicated after he and his predecessors had ruled for nearly ninety years in the name of the British Emperor. But in the Punjab, where the demarcation line of the two countries had been drawn like a knife across lands made populous by the greatest irrigation schemes the world had yet seen, light had returned to utter darkness. The Sikhs had decided that their part of India, at any rate, was going to be Hindu. Never had they had such killings since the days of Ranjit Sing. And the killings of the Sikh marauders, who had roamed the country after the death of Ranjit Sing, had been as a flea is to a plague of locusts compared with the harvest of 1946 and 1947. For in Ranjit Sing's day the Punjab had been a poor, dessicated land with a few populated areas clustered close to the five rivers and in scattered areas of fertility. A hundred years of peace and development had turned it into a province of teeming cities and widespread farmlands thirty-three million strong.

Thus, whilst Gandhi, the Mahatma, the Great Spirit, the acknowledged leader of 300 million Indians, would not eat meat, would scarce step on an ant that was in his path or swot a mosquito that was bothering his repose, his subjects went on the rampage in the greatest carnage since the Mongol hordes swept in from the steppes of Central Asia half a millenium before.

Sikhs dressed in the uniform of their caste—the high-crowned

turban called the *pagri*, with the long hair tied up into a topknot and fastened with a comb—and each with the proud surname of Sing, or Lion, sharpened their broad *kirpans* and behaved like jackals as the Muslims gathered to make their way into the new Islamic state of Pakistan. Nor were women and children spared.

Large numbers of the Muslims were ex-soldiers, who had been settled in the new river lands at the end of their military service. They hit back when and where they could. The forces of law and order disintegrated in the face of loyalties strained to breaking point, and the vilest elements of the people satisfied their secret lusts in murder, rape, disembowelings, castrations and mutilations.

Refugees, who might have been allowed to go in peace to their new life of pain and hardships, landless, uprooted, homeless, thrown on the poor charity of Mohammed Ali Jinnah's arid new country, were torn from the trains and butchered. The aged and the babes in arms were battered to death with the long staves or cut down with the knife along with the rest.

In this terrible time the Gurkhas, though mostly Hindu themselves, carried out the tasks required of them by their British officers with strict impartiality.

They had had a good deal of experience already in the thankless task of bringing force to bear in aid of the civil power. In such circumstances the soldier frequently finds himself in a situation in which he must make the decision, although he is in theory only permitted to act under the authority of a magistrate. For instance, a religious or a political or a politico-religious demonstration develops. The crowd is whipped up into a frenzy by rabble-rousing demagogues, and becomes a menace to life and limb. The eyes of the hooligans gleam at the prospect of arson and loot under cover of a mob supposedly demonstrating for liberty or democracy or Hinduism or Islam or some other abstract principle. The magistrate orders the crowd to disperse. A soldier fires a warning shot. Those at the back cry "Forward!" whilst those at the front shout "Back!" Now, if the soldiers do not shoot to kill, they will be overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

Afterwards the dead and wounded are counted. The lawyers and the politicians then get to work and make martyrs. Passions are roused against the very men who saved the place from general riot and butchery.

Such an occasion was the incident in 1919, which became known

as the Massacre at Amritsar. As massacres go in these days of coldly planned savagery and long-range murder it was more a ghastly mistake than a calculated slaughter for General Dyer later declared that he had never realized the crowd was trapped by a high garden wall and could not escape. Twenty-five Gurkha riflemen were required to do their duty on this occasion, and carried out their orders coolly and dispassionately.

They did so again on hundreds of other occasions. When the Indian Congress Party chose 1942, the time when the Japanese were consolidating on the eastern frontier, to make their bid to destroy the government of India and immobilize the army that was holding back the invader, by attacking the railways and disrupting communications, Gurkhas on police and garrison duties were instrumental in defeating their purpose.

At this time very many Gurkhas had come down from the hills, not only of Nepal but also of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, where a big Nepalese colony had overflowed over the eastern frontier, and from the other big Gurkha colony round Dehra Doon, to join the armed police and riot squads specially formed to maintain the internal security of the country.

They were to be seen in many of the big cities of India with their wicker shields for protection against stones and other missiles, and their staves, called *lathis*, to show the crowd that they could deal a salutary blow if necessary. They were still following their old traditions, for many of the regiments were first formed as police field forces, and they showed the same coolness and steadiness in this kind of duty, when properly led, as they did on the battle fronts.

Attacks on the loyalty of the Gurkhas came from many quarters but it was the prisoners of war who suffered the greatest trials. The tale of the steadfastness of the many Gurkhas who were ordered to surrender in Singapore, and their resistance to subversion in the Japanese prison camps, is a stirring one. It might have been thought that, being in a sense mercenaries from a foreign country, they might consider that, having been led into surrender, their contracts were at an end. In fact, the men, held firm by their senior Gurkha officers, refused to give in to continual Japanese pressure to join the Indian National Army that was being raised by their puppets.

Those few who did go over revealed their true motives as soon

as they reached the battle front in Burma. They seized the earliest opportunity to escape and make their way over to the British lines. The I.N.A. had simply been the shortest way home for them.

Others endured brutalities and tortures in order to keep faith and remain true to their salt. One Jemadar, confined in Taiping in Malaya, on being approached by a former Indian Army captain, released such a stream of protest that all conversation was brought to an end. A Subedar-Major, imprisoned in Kuala Lumpur, was told that all Gurkhas in Singapore had joined the I.N.A., so he and his men might as well do the same. He replied that he must be allowed to go and see for himself first.

After the Japanese had despaired of subverting the Gurkhas to their side, they followed a policy of dispersal, spreading the prisoners out over South-East Asia, even as far as New Guinea. Some were never heard of again, others were thought to have escaped to the jungle and taken up with the life of the native tribes.

After all this it is a pity that the general who commanded the Indian National Army is now described as a hero to the Nepalese children who live in West Bengal. The General, Subhas Chandra Bose, was born in 1897. He passed into the Indian Civil Service, but gave this up to carry on revolutionary activities for the Indian National Congress, of which he became President in 1938. During the Second World War he left India secretly, visited Burma, Singapore and Japan and formed the I.N.A. under the protection of the Japanese. It achieved nothing significant, and Bose himself was killed in a 'plane crash. There was bitterness after the war at the light sentences the traitors in the so-called Liberation Army received at their courts martial, and it was obvious that military justice had been bent by political expediency.

Nevertheless in due course Bose became *Netaji*, the "dear leader". In the primer published by the Presidency Library, Calcutta, and approved by the Director of Public Instruction of West Bengal for use in Class I in all Nepali vernacular schools the six-year-old infants are shown his photograph and taught this jingle almost as soon as they can read the letters:

*Mero gharma daseinma sabai bhela bhae,
Subhasji Bharatko neta thie.*

At Dasahra everyone gathers in my house,
Dear Subhas was India's leader.

In the first reader, by the same author, Sri Babulal Pradhan, B.A., B.T., there is another photograph of Bose and a short biography:

“Subhaschandra Bose was quick to learn from childhood. He went to Britain. He became an officer in the Indian Civil Service. He returned to India. Everyone hoped he would now become a high official of the English government. But as soon as he got to India, he began to work for Indian independence. For this reason the English government put him in jail many times. Jail indeed became his home. One day, without telling anyone, he went to Japan.”

In the second reader there is a full-page photograph for the young seven-year-old Nepali residents of India to look at, and the biography is continued:

“Abroad, as well, he worked for India's independence. He gathered together the *Azad Hind* (Free India) Army. In this Azad Hind Army there were Hindus and Mussalmans. There was no question of any sectarianism in it. Nepalese were also enlisted into this army. This Azad Hind Army came as far as Imphal and gave the English a cold. It's motto was *Jai Hind!*”

The story is further elaborated in Part Three of the *New Nepali History* by M. B. Pradhan and Indramani Pradhan for the ten-year-olds of Class V:

“His army got as far as Manipur in the East, but as Japan was defeated in the war, his army was unable to advance on its own. Our dear leader gave a shining example of patriotism to the citizens of India.”

In the turmoil which accompanied the hand-over of power to the Indian leaders the Gurkha battalions, still under their British officers, stood like rocks in the surging sea of change.

The first of the great communal massacres was the Calcutta killing of August 1946. August 16th had been declared Direct Action Day by the Moslem leader, Mohammed Ali Jinnah. It would be a day of protest against what was considered to be a sell-out of Bengal to the Hindus. Politicians, both Moslem and Hindu,

ensured that the protest was not likely to be according to the non-violent principles of the Mahatma. As usual, in this killing the poor and defenceless suffered most. The military included the 1st/3rd and the 3rd/8th Gurkha Rifles. They were called out on the second day of the carnage to keep the main roads of the city open for the police to deal in detail with the side streets.

Calcutta is a huge, sprawling metropolis, however. In the main roads the mobs were out, surging back and forth, and a dead body here and there showed that they were not out for fun. But it was in the side streets and crowded *basti* slum areas that the murderous *goondas* were really at work. The total of the slaughtered poor will never be known. It was certainly well over 4,000, with more than twice that number injured.

After Calcutta the communal rioting flared up in East Bengal, where a Moslem gang was going about the Hindu minority, giving them three alternatives—payment of tribute, circumcision and forcible conversion, or death. Gurkhas went down from Calcutta with the force that was distributed over the area to keep the peace. The ringleader, Ghulam Sarwar, was tracked down by a company of the 1st/3rd Gurkhas, and in spite of unfounded allegations by politicians that the troops were showing favouritism to their co-religionists, and viciously inflammatory articles in the press of Bengal, the casualties were kept down in the hundreds, though the destruction of property was widespread.

Nevertheless the chain reaction of accusation and counter-accusation was already set in motion, and it was too late to stop it. Refugees were getting on the move, rumour and panic were abroad. The stage was set for the Hindu revenge—the autumn carnage in Bihar. This bore all the evidence of a planned uprising with the object of slaughtering the Moslem minority in the countryside around the crowded city of Patna.

Mobs, whipped up to bestial fury by the agitators, gathered in multiple thousands round the Moslem villages, determined to wipe out the little communities that had lived there peaceably for upwards of ten generations. In some cases they succeeded, in others the men of the 4th/10th Gurkhas and the Madras Regiment were able to get there in time to save the intended victims. They brought in some 15,000 refugees in safety from the Hindu terror, which left half as many dead.

So the flames spread up the Ganges. They stopped for a moment

at Garhmukteshwar in the United Provinces, where the Muslims were slaughtered in their thousands by Jats attending the annual fair and ritual bathing in the waters of the sacred river. They leapt onwards to the greatest butchery of all in the Punjab.

This took place after the partition of India into two states had been announced. The dividing line cut through the heart of the Punjab, with Bakloh, the home of the 4th Gurkhas only just to the east of it. The Sikhs concentrated on the trains carrying Moslem refugees westwards and on the Muslims converging on the railway stations. Instigated by the evil Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, the extremist wing of the militant Hindu organization, the Hindu Mahasabha, they despatched, in round figures, between a hundred and two hundred thousand persons to the next world, accompanied by a liberal measure of gratuitous torture. The Muslims murdered hardly less Hindus amongst those who were seeking refuge in the east, trekking in long columns of up to 50,000 people, sometimes stretching for ten miles across the plain.

In an attempt to curb this chaos the Punjab Border Force was formed. The Gurkhas were prominent in it, enforcing law and order in the mass migrations where they could.

But there was change to come for the Gurkhas too, as acute, in its way, as the changes that were sweeping through the structure of Indian life. With the division of the Indian Empire into India and Pakistan the Indian Army was split in two. It had been built up on non-communal lines, with men of both religions in single units. Some infantry regiments—the Mahrattas, Garhwals and Dogras—were a hundred per cent Hindu. The Baluchs were predominantly Moslem. But the majority were a mixture, some mainly Hindu like the Sikhs, and some half and half like the Punjab Regiments and the Rajputs.

The predominantly Moslem units went to Pakistan, having shed their Hindu element. Gurkhas, being Hindu, remained on the Indian side, and yet they themselves were not Indians, but subjects of another independent country. In this situation an agreement had to be drawn up between the three countries concerned—Britain, India and Nepal—to decide their future. Eventually this was done, and it was called the Tripartite Agreement.

The ten Gurkha regiments, now old in tradition and experience, were still in being. Britain, although her home forces were being run down at high speed through demobilization of the wartime

soldiers, and although she was losing the great Indian Army as a source of manpower for her world-wide commitments, only requested the retention of four out of the ten. This was agreed. The other six were to go to India. The question of where to place the future homes of these four regiments and what their peacetime role was going to be, weighed heavily in the decision to ask for only the minority.

At the same time it had to be decided which regiments were to transfer to the British Army and which remain in India. This was a most difficult question, as many of them had close connections with the British crown and at the same time had been long established in their cantonments in India. For instance, the original Malaun Regiment was now the 1st King George V Own Gurkha Rifles, the Sirmoor Rifles had become the 2nd King Edward VII Own Goorkhas and had been at Dehra Doon for a hundred and thirty years, the 5th based on Abbottabad, which was now well inside Pakistan, had been granted the title "Royal".

Eventually it was decided that the 2nd and the 6th, together with the 7th and 10th, originally the Burma battalions, should be transferred to the British Army. They were not to be transferred lock, stock and barrel, however. In each battalion the men were to make an individual choice as to whether they wished to serve the new republic or the old crown.

In the uncertain state of the times it was not an easy decision to make. The British government was pulling out of India with precipitate haste. The Gurkhas still trusted the integrity of their own officers, but they knew full well that these officers, and indeed the army as a whole, were bound to carry out the instructions of the civil government. Burma, the home for many years of one of the regiments, had been handed over to the wild private army of young Aung San and was in a state of chaos. The Gurkhas were told that they would be serving in Malaya, but what if the government in London suddenly decided to pull out of there too? Would it be Africa or Arabia or England itself? Nobody could say.

On the other hand, in India they would be nearer their own homes. Quarters were available in the old cantonments for their families. Schools existed for the education of their children. Though, after serving for so long under British officers, there was apprehension and uncertainty at the prospect of them being

replaced, at the same time there might be more opportunities for promotion to the officer cadre of their senior Viceroy's Commissioned Officers, and for their sons to be selected for cadetships at the Indian Military Academy.

In making their decision the men were guided by their Gurkha officers. The new conditions of service in the British Army had not yet been clarified. They knew that the rates of pay would be the same as in India, but that there would be an extra allowance to compensate for the higher cost of living in Malaya. As far as the rest was concerned, those who transferred were taking a plunge into the unknown. In the event the majority elected to remain in India.

So the ranks of the battalions that sailed for Malaya in 1948 were much depleted, and there were many painful farewells. The first to arrive were the 1st/6th, who did not return to India, but sailed straight from Burma on the troopship *Dunera*, and disembarked at Penang. The other seven battalions were all carried on a P and O liner and arrived at Singapore in March.

Fortunately the abundant reserves of manpower in the hills were still available to make good the deficiency, and two new recruiting depots were set up for the British Gurkhas, one below the western hills at Lehra, near the Indian Army depot at Gorakhpur, and the other in the east at Jalapahar, up in the hills close to the old depot at Ghoom. From these depots the men travelled by train to Calcutta, where they staged at a transit camp in the appropriately named cantonment of Barrackpore ten miles north of the city. From Calcutta they embarked for Penang, and from Penang they went twenty miles north into the State of Kedah where a training depot was set up at Sungei Patani.

Meanwhile these events in India had their repercussions in Nepal. The rule of the Ranas, staunch friends of Britain for a hundred years, was coming to a close. The Nepali Congress Party, organizing on Indian soil with the knowledge of Indian officials, prepared to invade Nepal. Amongst their leaders were men of the Rana clan itself, which had become so large that there were not nearly enough official appointments to go round for them all. Having been born from the lesser wives in the harems of the Rana barons, they considered themselves to be underprivileged. Others of the leaders were Newars of the people of the Nepal Valley, who had been conquered by Prithwi Narayan

Shah. One important leader hailed from the Gurkha colony in Burma.

This mixed group of ambitious men and political theorists assembled to attack the Rana government. Juddha Shamsher was in retirement, Mohan Shamsher, Chandra Shamsher's son, was in command. He had neglected his army, and spent too much on himself and his own family and too little on his country. Many Gurkha ex-soldiers were bitter at the juggling of the rate of exchange between the Nepalese and the Indian rupee, which had robbed them of forty per cent of their wartime savings. As yet there was nothing to show for the contributions to the Indian Army post-war development fund.

The Ranas, though acknowledged as the leaders of their country, had always been remote to the Gurkha highlanders. The Nepal Valley was another, alien world to them, which they rarely visited. Conversely the Ranas hardly ever travelled in the hills, and postings for them away from the Valley were regarded as going into exile.

Consequently the Gurkhas did not raise a hand to help the Rana oligarchy. The invasion of Nepal in 1950 by the forces of the Nepali Congress Party was a small, tatterdemalion affair, but the resistance was not much better, and it was only thwarted after some months of confusion. After its defeat the King of Nepal, King Tribhubana, fled to Delhi, where he was well received by the ministers of the new Indian government. India brought such pressure to bear on Nepal that next year the King returned to Katmandu and a cabinet was set up composed of Rana and Congress members in equal proportions. The mixture did not last. In April 1951 the King took over most of the power of the Maharaja, and at the end of the same year Maharaja Mohan Shamsher left the country for decent retirement.

Thus ended the autocratic rule of the Ranas, which had, on the whole, been sympathetic to the Gurkhas. At its worst it had left them free to pursue their own destinies unmolested in the hills. At its best it had protected them from the encroachments of men with more agile brains but less honest purposes.

The new government did not tamper with the arrangements for recruiting Gurkhas, and was, in fact, far more ready to allow British officers into the country than its predecessors had been. For the first time considerable numbers were able to visit the regions

from which their men came. Most were extremely eager to do so, and the Brigade of Gurkhas saw to it that as many as possible were given the opportunity of trekking in the hills of Nepal. They received a great welcome in the mountain villages, and those who sent ahead warning of their approach could always count on special entertainments being laid on to celebrate their visits.

These trips to Nepal were facilitated by the Nepalese Liaison Officer with the Brigade of Gurkhas, who kept in close touch with his government in Katmandu.

A new agreement concerning the recruitment of Gurkhas was drawn up in 1953. The impetus for this pact had come from India, who though still a member of the Commonwealth, found it inconvenient to have the British Gurkha recruiting depots remaining on Indian soil. It was therefore agreed between Britain and Nepal that there would be a new recruiting depot within the latter's borders. The site chosen was at Dharan on the edge of the hills due north of Biratnagar in the extreme east of the country.

The agreement was for five years and was renewed for a further ten years in 1958. On this basis of tenure the large new depot at Dharan was opened and the old depots of Lehra and Jalapahar were closed down. It was realized, however, that this new location was very remote from the Magar and Gurung country from which half the recruits come, so the site at Paklihawa, which had formerly been a seasonal tented camp acting as a collecting point for the recruits *en route* for Lehra, was turned into a subsidiary depot.

This was the organization when Gurkha trooping followed the rest of the British Army into the air age. The voyages between Calcutta and Penang and Singapore, with the short stop at Rangoon, in the British India Steam Navigation Company's ships became a thing of the past, and the Gurkhas exchanged the gangway for the steps as they climbed into the strato-cruisers with their wives and children. Some of the rules drawn up for the passengers might sound superfluous. One was that no fires will be lit and no cooking will be done during the flight!

9

Jungle-Bashers

NO sooner had the Gurkhas arrived in Malaya than they were thrown into another war. In June 1948 a state of Emergency was declared, following wide-spread acts of Communist terrorism. It lasted for eleven years, and although it gave the Gurkhas valuable experience in dealing with a pattern of warfare that has become all too familiar in the last two decades, it delayed and bedevilled the formation of the Gurkhas into a modern fighting force.

Hitherto the Gurkhas had always been regarded as infantry only. It was as infantry that they made their world-wide reputation, and in the eyes of many it was difficult to see them in any other role. An amusing tale is told of training Gurkhas to drive lorries in Italy during a quiet period between battles. A level field was selected, completely enclosed by nice thick hedges, which would check as gently as possible any vehicle that might decide to run away. Then everybody but the instructor and the pupil was warned off the ground. The motor transport officer walked away, well satisfied that he had taken every precaution. All went well until a worried rifleman came up to him and told him that unfortunately his instructor had got out of his truck, and the truck had started up, chased after him and run him down.

Nevertheless, with the formation of the Brigade of Gurkhas of the British Army, it was decided that as far as possible there should be a complete Gurkha Division, capable of operating on its own. With this aim in mind training of Gurkhas for signals, engineer and transport duties was started, and this was followed by the formation of the Gurkha Military Police. A beginning was made with the training of Gurkha gunners, but this was abandoned when the situation in Malaya worsened and the men were thrown into the jungle to hunt the terrorists.

The Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army had come into

being during the Japanese occupation, with the aid of British officers and equipment. Between the surrender of Japan in August 1945 and the arrival of the British-Indian force, which was to have taken part in an invasion against an armed enemy, two months elapsed. During this interval the M.P.A.J.A. came out of the jungle and proclaimed themselves liberators of the country from the Japanese. When eventually they handed over their weapons to the British Army, the Communist core of the movement kept a good store of arms and equipment hidden deep in the jungle.

In the next few years, encouraged by events in China and the success of Ho Chi-minh in the northern part of Indo-China, the Malayan Communists, Chinese almost to a man, sought to seize the power in Malaya by commanding the will of the people through political manoeuvres and propaganda. When this failed, shortly after the meeting of the Asian Communist parties in Calcutta, they decided on armed revolt.

Earlier in the same year the Federation of Malaya had been inaugurated, to include all the states and territories of the peninsula up to the Siamese border, except for Singapore. The terrorists, working from the interior of the country, sought to establish firm bases, from which they would gradually extend their area of control by means of intimidation. They would thus wrest the country bit by bit out of the hands of the effective administration of the Federation government.

The policy included murder of the managers of economic enterprises, particularly tin mines and rubber estates and particularly European managers, and destruction of machinery and equipment in order to try to bring the economic life of the country to a standstill. It also included forced requisitioning of supplies from the civilian population, and murder of anyone who resisted or supplied information to the security forces. They were organized into the Malayan Races Liberation Army, with the Min Yuen movement secretly supporting it in the towns and villages.

To fight the terrorists the army had to work in close co-operation with the police, both in the co-ordination of arrangements for guarding essential installations and in operations to seek out and destroy the enemy. The main function of the army was the latter, and they relied heavily on the Special Branch of the police for information about the Communist Terrorists, or bandits as they came to be called.

Many of the bandits had already spent years in the jungle and were as familiar with its tracks and clearings as the aborigines. Some of the hard core, like the tough Hakka woman of Johore nicknamed the "Pineapple Queen", who had remained in the jungle after the liberation of Malaya, had been inside its tangled depths almost continually for fifteen years by the time the Emergency ended. They had developed such sharpened senses that they could smell a sweat-soaked soldier fifty yards away and slip out of an ambush before it could be sprung.

It was against such men and women and their hidden lairs that the Gurkhas footslogged along thousands of miles of jungle tracks in the following years. As they were now part of the British Army, changes in nomenclature had taken place. The Viceroy's Commissioned Officers were now called Queen's Gurkha Officers, with the ranks of Major, Captain and Lieutenant corresponding to the old Subedar-Major, Subedar and Jemadar. Some senior Queen's Gurkha Officers were now promoted to the ranks of the British officers and were known as Gurkha Commissioned Officers to distinguish them from the Q.G.Os. The ranks of Havildar and Naik were now changed to Sergeant and Corporal.

Names were changed, but the old traditions of discipline and endurance continued. The majority of the soldiers were still raw recruits when the jungle operations started. Led by the older men with experience from the Assam hills and other theatres of war, they soon learnt the rules of the game.

It was a hunting game, and this, with their own inborn hunting instincts never far from the surface, they could well understand. The jungle was, of course, thicker, hotter and wetter than the forests of their own native land, but the countryman's eye for country and the lie of the land, for types of vegetation, for signs of human or animal habitation, for water, for a trail or an opening, stood him in good stead. As for the fatiguing marches up and down mountains and hills, he was used to using his legs. In many ways he actually preferred the adventure and freedom from barrack routine of the patrols to the more formal military life in camp.

A typical adventure of this type would be a patrol of platoon strength, say thirty men, going four days into the jungle. The platoon might or might not have a British officer with it. It would carry all its equipment on its back, including a wireless set, both

for receiving from and transmitting to base, and a light machine-gun. The men were usually armed with the machine carbine or "burp" gun, which was the best weapon in the circumstances, as the occasions on which it was possible, in the dense undergrowth, to get a long shot with a rifle were rare in the extreme.

They carried their guns between the forearm and the hip, ready for instant action, and they were dressed from head to toe in green—a green canvas sun hat, green shirt, and green cotton trousers tucked into green calf-length boots to give the maximum protection for the legs against insect bites, leeches and other snags.

Even the sweat rags worn round the neck were green. They were, in fact, the same article, dyed the appropriate colour, as the quartermaster issued in different circumstances as a dish-cloth. The jungle boots were made of canvas, and had rubber soles to give the most silent tread possible. Later on a waterproof jungle boot was invented. It did not prove a success, as whenever one crossed a stream, it would fill with water, and for the rest of the day one marched in one's own private puddles.

These equipments, together with various ration packs for individuals or for a group of men, came into use gradually. At the beginning there was no specialized gear, and men might creep barefoot for a couple of miles to get to an ambush position rather than give themselves away with the noise of their ammunition boots.

As likely as not a patrol would start at dead of night with a drive in unit transport from camp to the point of entry into the wilderness. For the first part of the journey they would probably be travelling through a rubber estate or a mining area, and it was essential to get past before the labourers came to work, as one of them might easily pass on information about them to a Communist courier. And in the rubber estates the tappers start work before dawn in order to collect the sap from the trees before it hardens in the heat of the day.

Having dropped the men at the appointed place the transport returns to base. Meanwhile the patrol sets out. It very probably begins by following a track, and the going is quite easy in the cool of early morning. But soon enough they must go into the trees, following a compass direction, in order to search properly the area they have been allocated.

In the primary or virgin jungle it is not too bad. The giant trees

stand widely spread out, with smaller ones in between them. Their foliage spreads out twenty or thirty feet above your head like a canopy, keeping out the sunlight. Underneath this umbrella of green it is dark and gloomy, but apart from patches of low palms and ferns there is very little undergrowth.

It is when you get into the secondary jungle that the real difficulties start. This is land that has previously been cleared and cultivated, either as part of a plantation or as a farm, and has then been abandoned. The wild vegetation has grown again very quickly and has made a vicious tangle of saplings, bushes and creepers. Here the *kukri* comes into play, and the leader must hack a way foot by foot through the maze. He must do the same in bamboo thickets, in which both the living and the dead canes make an almost impenetrable fence.

The normal time for the Gurkha's morning meal is between nine-thirty and ten-thirty, and about this time the patrol will look for a stream, sit down and put out their protective screen to guard them against surprise attack. The special Gurkha ration packs of rice and lentils, called *dal*, will be fished out of the haversacks and cooked up after adding water. Probably the solid fuel cooker will be used in preference to an open fire as being quicker and leaving no tell-tale remains of charred wood and embers, for in this game of hide and seek the patrol wants to move just as secretly as the bandits.

After the morning meal they footslog on in the increasing heat of the day, ever on the alert for signs of other human beings. A broken branch, a footprint or a cry of alarm from an animal all have a tale to tell to the man who is skilled at interpreting it. At midday they stop again for a tea break and to make their daily radio contact with the intelligence section at battalion headquarters. The platoon commander will report his position by means of a six-figure map reference, in so far as he is able to ascertain it, and he will receive any further orders there may be, or additional information about the terrorists that may help him in his search.

They move on again, over a hill perhaps, or along the bed of a stream. The going is difficult, and the distance covered according to the map is always disappointingly short. Night falls swiftly in the tropics, and in the jungle it is dark by seven o'clock. Before that time they must be settled in their bivouac and organized for

the night. The *kukri* again comes into use for hacking out a rude shelter. No tents are carried, but the green poncho capes are waterproof and make a reasonable roof provided the rain does not drive in from the side.

For the second time in the day the platoon commander gets into radio contact with his base and reports his position—if he has been able to work it out. The guards are put out and the guard roster is organized. Then, at dusk, there is stand-to in order to check that every man is present and every man at his post. This is followed by the evening meal and the daily paludrine tablet taken as a prophylactic against malaria. The jungle grows loud with insect noises. No lights are allowed, and there is little else to do except turn in and sleep.

So the day has gone by. Most probably no bandit has been seen, but vigilance must never be relaxed, for when contact is made, it is sudden and murderous. And if you have been patrolling for months without any tangible result, you do not want to miss the chance of a kill by coughing at the wrong moment or facing in the wrong direction.

Three such encounters are described in the following pages. They are in simple language as they are direct translations from the Gurkhali in which they are written. The Gurkhali, in the Roman script, forms part of an educational text-book specially written and printed for young soldiers studying for their Second Class Certificate of Education, and it is a continuation of the imaginary story of two recruits, Balbir and Ranjit, whose experiences have been followed from the day they left the hills of Nepal to join the British Army. The recruits are imaginary, but the incidents described here are fact.

On the 20th of August 1952 Rifleman Khargabahadur Rana formed part of a patrol searching for a wounded bandit. This bandit had been wounded the day before. Khargabahadur was the leading scout of a section of twelve men led by Corporal Hoshyarsing Gurung.

“This was a very important job,” Balbir said.

“Yes, it was,” the Sergeant answered. “This patrol was following a jungle path. Just as they were coming out of the jungle on to open ground between thirty and forty bandits opened fire. These bandits were on the steep side of a hill. They were raining down

fire from at least three Bren guns and other automatic weapons.”

“What happened after that?” Balbir asked.

“Corporal Hoshyarsing Gurung and Rifleman Khargabahadur Rana were wounded at once. Hoshyarsing Gurung was hit in the arm. Nevertheless he collected his section together and gave the order to attack. Rifleman Khargabahadur Rana was injured in the arm and leg but went on firing, and when he got the order to attack, he got up and went into the attack,” the Sergeant said.

“That was a very brave thing to do,” Balbir said.

“Yes, it was a brave thing,” the Sergeant said. “Some time later, many times wounded, he was sent back.”

“And what happened to the rest of the section?” Ranjit asked.

“The enemy’s heavy fire stopped the attack. Two riflemen were killed and three wounded,” the Sergeant said. “After that Corporal Hoshyarsing Gurung gave the order to retreat with as many of the arms as possible, and after that the section retreated. The Corporal, who was badly wounded himself, dragged a wounded man sixty yards, unseen by the bandits, and hid him under a small bush.”

“The Gurkhas always try to save their comrades,” Balbir said. “After that what happened?”

“The enemy came and took the dead soldiers’ arms and equipment, then made off.”

“The Gurkhas don’t make off like that,” Balbir said.

“That is true,” the Sergeant said. “Because of the brave fight the patrol put up, with the help of Corporal Hoshyarsing Gurung and Rifleman Khargabahadur Rana, the enemy made off.”

“They must have felt very proud,” Ranjit said.

“Yes, they were,” the Sergeant said, “especially when they were decorated for their bravery. Rifleman Khargabahadur Rana got a Military Medal, and Corporal Hoshyarsing Gurung got a bar to the M.M. he had already won in the previous war.”

A few days later Balbir and Ranjit were sitting talking under a tree. Seeing them, the Sergeant came over and sat down with them.

“Tell us some more about the daring deeds of the Gurkhas,” Balbir said.

“Certainly,” the Sergeant answered. “I’ll tell you about Sergeant Sahabir Thapa of the 2nd/2nd Gurkha Rifles.” He lit a cigarette.

“Sergeant Sahabir Thapa was the leader of one of two platoons chasing a band of the enemy. This enemy band had ambushed a police patrol near Sungei Siput in Perak on August 4th 1954,” the Sergeant said. “On the 8th of August he found a recently used jungle track. He sent a message to his Company Commander about it, and the Company Commander ordered the two platoons to advance on both sides of the track.

“A few moments later they came to the end of the track,” the Sergeant said. “After that they saw a recently felled tree lying beside a small pool, and they heard the sound of voices. The Company Commander ordered the two platoons to encircle the place where they could hear voices, and to attack if they saw any of the enemy.”

“I’d say the bandits didn’t think they would be followed so quickly,” Balbir said. “Otherwise they wouldn’t have been talking so loud.”

“That’s true,” the Sergeant answered. “Well, Sergeant Sahabir’s platoon went round to the left of the place. The other platoon took up a good position for an immediate attack.”

“That was a good plan,” Ranjit said. “What happened after that?”

“As they were going to take up their positions, Sergeant Sahabir’s section Bren-gunner suddenly ran into four bandits. He shouted ‘Fire!’ This alerted the bandits and they began to fire at the two platoons.”

“It was a great pity the bandits were given the alarm.”

“Yes, it was a pity,” the Sergeant answered. “But so it was. And so Sergeant Sahabir attacked the bandits, who had got up and were firing their automatic weapons. The other platoon, which had remained in position, also opened fire on the bandits.”

“How was it the other platoon wasn’t afraid of hitting their own men in Sergeant Sahabir’s platoon?” Balbir asked.

“That was an important point,” the Sergeant said. “But Sergeant Sahabir and his men were Gurkhas, so they didn’t get flustered. Sergeant Sahabir himself killed one of the enemy Bren-gunners in the attack. The Bren-gunner had been firing on the Company Commander and other men.”

“Sergeant Sahabir must have been a very brave man,” Ranjit said.

“He was,” the Sergeant answered. “Seeing his courage, the

other men took courage, went in to attack the enemy position, and killed three more bandits.”

“What happened after that?” Balbir asked.

“The rest of the enemy escaped into the jungle,” the Sergeant answered. “As well as the four dead men, a light machine-gun, four rifles and one shot-gun were taken. Sergeant Sahabir got the M.M.”

A few days later Balbir and Ranjit were reading the story of “Seven Brave Men”.

This is the story of seven brave men. They were seven brave Gurkhas. They got no medals for their bravery, but they tasted to the full the pride of their own actions. They were seven soldiers from the 1st/10th Gurkha Rifles. Being Gurkhas they fought courageously. They fought according to the code of their own regiment and of all Gurkhas.

On June 28th 1950 Sergeant Rhimdal and six other men were returning to their base camp. They were seven sick men returning to the base camp to get medicine and medical treatment from the doctor Sahib. They were coming in to the base camp, which was in a village surrounded by jungle hills. There was no path to this place from where they were, and they had to use a compass to give them the right direction.

As they were sick they got tired easily, and they chose a moment to sit down and rest. They had only just sat down when they heard a sound. It was the sound of someone chopping a tree. Sergeant Rhimdal immediately ordered his men to take off their packs and put down the wireless set they had with them. He detailed two men to stay and guard the packs and wireless set. The rest of the men all went towards the place the noise of chopping was coming from. Suddenly they saw bandits.

Sergeant Rhimdal ordered Lance-Corporal Birkabahadur and Rifleman Tasbahadur to go to one side without being seen or heard. When they were all in position, they all opened fire on the bandits at the same moment. Four bandits were killed and the rest fled. After that these Gurkha soldiers went into the bandits' camp. They found weapons, documents and eating utensils there. They kept the weapons and documents and destroyed the eating utensils. Sick Gurkhas can still kill the enemy.

One more small incident of violence was ended. And so for

eleven long years the patrolling continued. Gurkhas went deeper and deeper into the jungle, and gradually one by one the black areas were redesignated white as the terrorists were eliminated. They got more and more used to travelling by air as landing zones were laid out far from the roads, where helicopters could drop the men and save days of trekking.

In some areas the terrorists got the aboriginal tribes—the Sakai and Senoi and Temiar, the little men with blowpipes and poison darts—to work for them and grow food for them, and these tribes had to be gathered into defended villages described as “forts” deep in the jungle. It was a British officer of the Brigade of Gurkhas who became the first army officer to attain fluency in the Temiar tongue. Many Gurkhas, of course, became quite fluent in colloquial Malay.

War in the Himalayas

WHILST the Gurkhas in the British Army were plodding their way through the jungles of Malaya, other events were unfolding in India which brought warfare into the ante-room of their own mountain kingdom, where scarcely a shot had been fired in anger for over a hundred years.

The communal troubles, which resulted in the Hindu-Moslem massacres that accompanied the partition of the Indian sub-continent, spread to Kashmir. Thus the mountain state in the extreme north-west, famous for its Shalimar gardens and the lazy life of the houseboats on the lakes near Srinagar, for the skiing at Gulmarg and for mountain expeditions in the Karakorum, became a cockpit of contention for the two new nations.

In 1947 Moslem raiders from the Murree and Hazara hills strode eastwards into Kashmir. They were followed by a much larger band from the tribes of the North-West Frontier, mostly Mahsuds. In a trice the patient pacification of the tribes, which had kept the Indian Army and the Indian government political agents busy for half a century, was set at naught. They stormed up the gorge of the Jhelum river, took Muzaffarabad and Domel, and went on to sack Baramula less than forty miles from the state capital. They left a trail of murder and rapine and some 3,000 dead. The date was October 16th.

It had always been assumed by the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, that Kashmir, although it had a Hindu Maharaja, would accede to Pakistan because of the Moslem majority in its population. Maharaja Sir Hari Singh belonged to a dynasty of Dogra descent, which had been founded by Gulab Singh. The latter, as Raja of Jammu, had conquered the land of Kashmir, operating as a vassal of the Sikh King, Ranjit Singh. After the Second Sikh War, Kashmir had been handed over by the Sikhs to the East India Company as an indemnity, but the Company, wanting cash

rather than territory, had sold it to Gulab Sing for seven and a half million rupees.

The picture was changed by the ill-timed atrocities of the Mahsuds. Hari Sing acceded to India and then fled. The Viceroy, now Governor-General and busy shedding his powers as quickly as he could, accepted the accession. But he added a rider. "To remove any apprehensions that the people of Kashmir may have with regard to accession," he said, "in consistence with the policy of the Government of India that, in the case of any state where the issue of accession has been the subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the state, it is my Government's wish that, as soon as law and order have been restored and the soil cleared of the invader, the question of the state's accession should be settled by a reference to the people."

That was in 1947. Now, seventeen years later, the soil has still not been cleared of the invader, and the question of the state's accession has not been settled by a reference to the people.

On October 27th, eleven days after the sack of Baramula, Indian troops and supplies were flown to Srinagar in an airlift of over a hundred civil and military aircraft. As Pandit Nehru said in the Indian parliament in August 1952, "The fact that Kashmir did not immediately decide whether to accede to Pakistan or India did not make Kashmir independent for the intervening period. Since she was not independent, it was our responsibility as the continuing entity to see that Kashmir's interests were protected."

The following month the raiding tribesmen retreated. Baramula was retaken, and the Indian troops advanced down the Jhelum gorge in commandeered buses as far as Uri, where they were held up by lack of petrol. The cease-fire line remains to this day a mile or two west of this small staging-post on the trans-Himalayan trail.

That winter the Indians, in the face of great difficulties caused by ice and snow, built up their line of communication from Pathankot, through Jammu and over the Banihal pass to Srinagar. In the spring of 1948 they mounted an offensive to clear the Moslem irregulars out of the country, and managed to take Rajauri due south of Poonch and Tithwal to the north of Uri.

The same summer the army of Pakistan joined in the fray. A Gurkha battalion, sent south from Uri up the Urusa nallah,

climbed nearly 11,000 feet up the Pir Kanti ridge and finished up with a *kukri* charge that accounted for fifty-four enemy dead counted on the ground. Their own casualties were seven dead and fifty-one wounded.

A fortnight later, on July 10th, the United Nations Commission arrived. But the agreement to refrain from offensive action was not observed on the battle fronts. This was particularly so in the far north on what came to be known as the "Arctic Front".

During the winter of 1947 to 1948 the tribal irregulars had advanced eastwards up the Indus valley through Gilgit, far to the north of Srinagar between the Himalayas and the Karakorums. They had kept the garrison at Skardu locked up in its fort and had taken Kargil and Dras on the trail to Leh and Tibet. Leh prepared to defend itself, and in May and June two companies of Gurkhas were flown there in Indian Air Force planes. They had to land on an airstrip eleven and a half thousand feet above sea level, where the engines of the planes had to be kept running for fear that they would not start again in the rarified atmosphere.

On July 11th an attack by a thousand men, who had somehow manhandled a 3.7 inch howitzer along with them, was repulsed, and the following month another company of Gurkhas flew in. They were closely followed by two more companies with eight hundred rifles, which arrived after a trek of over two hundred miles along the remote mountain track from Manali in the lovely Kulu valley. Leh was safe, but at the same moment Skardu fort fell. It had proved impossible to relieve it.

That autumn the 5th Gurkhas took part in the operations to reopen communications between Srinagar and Leh by the main route through Kargil. Seven Stewart tanks were brought in secrecy 260 miles overland from Jammu in order to force the 11,500-foot high Zoji La pass. The action cost forty dead, eighty-six wounded, thirty-seven missing and three hundred and fifty cases of frostbite. The Brigadier who directed the operations was a former officer of the 9th Gurkhas. He died the following year and was posthumously awarded the Mahavir Chakra, the Indian Army's Military Cross, for his gallantry. A memorial orphanage was subsequently opened in his memory, to which all ranks contributed one day's pay.

The 5th Gurkhas received five more gallantry awards and got eight mentions in despatches for their part in the push to the Zoji

La. A month later the relief of Poonch was under way. In this small town in the hills of south-west Kashmir the 3rd/9th Gurkhas had been bottled up for ten months suffering the heaviest casualties in the Kashmir fighting. The 8th Gurkhas, who had been in Kashmir before for the Gilgit campaign of 1898 to 1901, joined in the link up. The Gurkhas attacked the Pir Badesar peak to the west of Rajauri in the moonlight and took the enemy by surprise in the village of Giran.

Poonch was relieved on November 20th. On January 1st 1949 the ceasefire took effect, and the line has remained to this day as it was then. The war between former comrades in arms, that should never have taken place, ended in a stalemate. The two entrenched armies sat down where they were on January 1st, and as was to happen a few years later in Korea, they stayed there facing each other as year succeeded year. Roughly speaking Kashmir was divided by a line running from west to east about forty miles north of Srinagar. The northern part, including the main range of the Karakorums, together with the western fringe, was in the hands of Pakistan. The southern part, with the trans-Karakorum region of Ladakh in the east, was in India.

The Indian Gurkhas sent some of their officers to Korea in the neutral nations supervisory commission for the exchange of prisoners of war, which worked through 1953, but neither they nor the British Gurkhas took part in the actual fighting. Nevertheless they had plenty to do in other directions. Of all the Indian Army units that the British handed over in 1947 the Gurkha battalions had, perhaps, presented the most difficult problems.

In all other Indian Army regiments the addition of Indians to the officer cadre had been steadily taking place, and this Indianization had been enormously accelerated by the war as the regiments expanded and additional officer manpower had to be found. But this had not happened in the Gurkha regiments. It was thought that Gurkhas would not serve happily under men who were akin to them in race and creed, but whom they had learnt to look down on as plainsmen unfamiliar with the mystique of the hills.

This meant that, when the handover took place, there was an almost complete turnover of officers. In the first instance the Indian officers were mostly found from the Baluch and Frontier Force units that had gone over to Pakistan. At the same time a number of older Viceroy's Commissioned Officers, now known

as Junior Commissioned Officers, were granted Short Service Commissions for five years to fill the gaps and give the benefit of their experience in Gurkha ways to the new officers.

The British officers loyally observed the conditions of the agreement and handed over their battalions complete with their equipment and all the trophies and mementoes treasured through the years. It was the end of a world for them, but for the few who sat out their last days in bitter silence in the mess, there were the many whose prime concern was to help the Indians take over their units in the best condition possible and to assist them in every way to maintain the fine traditions of the regiments.

These traditions have, in fact, been preserved with the most scrupulous care. The regimental days and other customs have been carefully and regularly observed, and there has always been a warm welcome for British officers connected with the Brigade, some of whom remained on for limited periods after the handover in the training depots and other key appointments. Johnny Gurkha is still "Johnny" in India. Nicknames and Christian or first names are still the rule amongst the officers.

Whilst those concerned with the Gurkha Brigade made every effort to preserve continuity, they were still subject to the changes taking place in the Indian Army as a whole. The crown as a badge of rank was replaced by the leonine triptych of the three Asoka lions, which was taken from the time of the great peace-loving Buddhist emperor of antiquity as the symbol of the republic. The pip was replaced by the *chakra*, or wheel. Chakras also replaced the crosses of militant Christianity in awards for gallantry.

The highest award of all became the Param Vir Chakra. The Maha Vir Chakra and the Vir Chakra also came to be awarded for high courage and competence in war, but it is as well to remember that the V.C., highest in the scale in the British Army, is now only the third in the Indian Army. The other principal awards are the three classes of the Asoka Chakra, which are given for gallantry in non-operational areas.

Gurkhas have received the latter playing their parts in two rather unsatisfactory "police actions". The first concerned the 5th Gurkhas, and was the Indian Army's entry into the South Indian state of Hyderabad in order to force the Moslem Nizam to accede to India. The second, a much longer drawn out affair which still persists like a running sore in India's eastern side, was

the action in Nagaland, where the tribes that had been pacific for half a century under the prudent British District Commissioners, responded to the shock of the change in administration with armed revolt.

The Indians took their six regiments of Gurkhas and added another, the 11th Gurkha Rifles. The regiment had been in existence at the end of the First World War, when it had raised four battalions and had a brief life of four years from 1918 to 1922. It was raised again because of the problem of what to do with the 3,398 men of the 7th and 10th Gurkhas, a seventy per cent proportion, who had declined to transfer to the British Army. It was first known as the Indian Gorkha detachment, but in 1948 Army Headquarters at Delhi authorized the formation of two battalions of the resuscitated regiment.

There was a good deal of coming and going in the early post-war years, but by 1952 the whole of the training organization had been concentrated in or near Dehra Doon. The system was rationalized into four Gorkha Training Centres, No. 14 and No. 11 at Clement Town for the 1st and 4th Gurkhas and the 11th Gurkhas respectively, and 39 and 58 Gorkha Training Centres for the 3rd and 9th and the 5th and 8th Gurkhas. The Doon therefore continued to be the heart and centre of Gurkha affairs in India. As the home also of the Indian Military College and the Indian National Defence Academy, where the Gurkhas already had thirty-seven cadets, it was well placed.

In December 1952 Juddha Shamsheer J.B.R., the last Maharaja of Nepal but one, died there. After a reign of thirteen years, which he had entered, as the *London Times* said, "inured to hard work from boyhood, methodical, active and with a mind enriched by travel," he had retired. As a devout Hindu he had followed the custom of the old Kshatriya kings and gone to Riri on the banks of the Kali Gandaki river for meditation and prayer. Later he had settled in Dehra Doon, where he was a close and respected friend of the Gurkha regiments even after the revolution that deposed his clan. He presented to them the football trophy that bears his name.

Juddha Shamsheer had the K.C.S.I. of Britain and the Supradipta Manyavara Nepal Tara of Nepal. On his death at the age of seventy-seven he left four sons, one of whom was the Commander-in-Chief of the Nepalese Army and another a major in the new mountain artillery of Nepal. His body was taken thirty miles by

road to Hardwar, one of the three places of great sanctity in the Hindu world where, every twelve years, when Jupiter is in Aquarius and the sun in Aries, a great festival takes place.

Here he was cremated, his body being burnt beside the Ganges, where on the great festival day half a million people wash away their sins. The Gurkhas gave him full military honours, and their buglers sounded the "Last Post" and "Reveille".

Juddha Shamsher lived just long enough to see the beginning of the Indian Military Mission to Nepal, which began its work earlier in the year. The invasion of Tibet by the Chinese Communists in 1950 was the impetus which had lent a sense of urgency to its formation. Though heads of governments still talked peace, their army commanders were well aware of the possibilities of the Chinese spilling over further south into the northern back blocks of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, where the people are of Tibetan stock. India stated that she would regard a threat to Nepal as a threat to her own frontiers.

An added impetus came in January 1952, when the ill-disciplined armed police, called the Raksha Dal, which the Congress Party had created virtually as its own bodyguard, staged a *coup d'état* in the capital. A thousand men rose, released their former leader at the time of the revolution, the left-wing Burma Nepali, Dr. K. I. Singh, from jail and set him up in the Singha Darbar as the nation's leader. The revolt collapsed and Singh escaped to Tibet and China, protesting his loyalty to the King.

The Military Mission started its work with a severe pruning of the top brass, involving the reduction of the number of generals from forty-nine to five. Over two hundred and fifty lower ranking officers were also cut from the establishment. The troops, who had been living in the bazaar and doing about two hours training a day, were put into barracks. They were issued with free rations and their pay was improved, particularly that of the junior officers. Training cadres for officers were set up, and weapon training was, to some extent, modernized.

Meanwhile in India the Gurkhas remained spread across the northern part of the country. The last of the Maharajas was still Honorary Colonel of the regiments with the sonorous title of "Honorary Lieutenant-General His Highness Ojaswi Rajanye Projjwala Nepal Tara Om Ram Patta Atul Jotirmaya Trishakti Patta Ati Pravala Gorkha Dakshine Bahu Prithuladheesha Nepal

Pratap Bardhak Sri Sri Sri Maharaja Sir Mohan Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana, G.C.I.E., G.B.E., Sainik Dirgha Sewa Patta Honorary Colonel in the British Army, Prime Minister and Supreme Commander in Chief of Nepal". From time to time he would visit regimental centres.

And so, whilst training and ceremonial occasions filled life in the foothills, the active battalions sat high up amidst the ice and snow of the Himalayas. Gradually they were changing. When General Thakur Nathu Singh, Colonel of the 9th Gurkhas and G.O.C.-in-C. of India's Eastern Command affirmed that recruitment should now be open to all classes, he was voicing, in an extremer form, the same sentiments as his predecessor in the Command, General Sir Francis Tuker. The Indian General was prepared to open the doors of his own regiment to a wider field than the Thakurs and Chhettris alone and do the same for others. The British General has said that the greatest service Britain can render to troubled Nepal is to spread the net of recruitment across all battalions.

In the Indian Army this trend has gone further than in the British Brigade of Gurkhas. It is linked with the general desire to break down caste and creed distinctions, and to mingle the diverse races in order to replace group and tribal loyalties with a general patriotism for the nation.

So life went on. The Training Centre of the 1st and 4th Gurkhas left Dehra Doon and went back to the ancestral home of Subathu in the Simla hills, where electricity was laid on for the first time in 1962. The former raised a third battalion and sent it off to the Congo, where it joined the chaotic muddle under the United Nations command and took part in the confused scrapping in Katanga.

Other regiments raised more battalions too, thus far exceeding the manpower total that had existed at the time the Tripartite Agreement on recruitment was signed by Britain, India and Nepal. The 5th Gurkhas sent their fifth battalion to the Congo, whilst their second battalion reported from Kashmir a pleasant interlude in a secluded valley renowned by the Urdu poet, Ghaleb, for pretty women, fat chickens and scenic beauty.

The 1st battalion of the same regiment added Ladakh Day to their list of regimental occasions in memory of their role in opening up the road to Leh, and celebrated the promotion of their

Commanding Officer in that action to the rank of General. In 1961 they were presenting an honour guard to King Mahendra of Nepal, who was on his way to visit China and Outer Mongolia in the fifth year of his reign. It reminded them of the guard they had mounted for his father, King Tribhubana, when he flew to Delhi eleven years before at the time of the overthrow of the Rana oligarchy.

In 1961 also men of the 3rd Gurkhas were completing a period of "planned parenthood" with their women folk and bidding farewell to their families and other baggage before setting out again for another spell in the bunkers of the Himalayas. In the 9th Gurkhas all the battalions with the exception of the newly raised fourth, were above 10,000 feet, strung out in groups of company strength along the peaks and valleys of Kashmir and enjoying the cheap apples and apricots.

In the same year a battalion of the 8th Gurkhas was emerging on to the plains after three years in the Naga hills, with a bronze rhinoceros presented to them by the Assam government, and was being relieved by their comrades of the same regiment. They travelled in a special troop train of the kind which the Indian Railways have been running unchanged for generations. It was uncomfortable, slow and unpunctual.

The second battalion, sending its families and heavy baggage down to Dehra Doon in order to strip themselves for action in the mountains, was experiencing the further genius of the Indian Railways. The coaches containing the families were left behind in Saharanpur goods yard in shunting operations during the night. Arriving at Dehra Doon next day, the depot party, which included some husbands, found that the wives and children were missing. The battalion departed to the strains of a Sikh band playing "Auld Lang Syne".

In the same year, 1961, the 1st/8th Gurkhas were up in India's remotest outposts on the bleak ranges of Ladakh on the far side of Leh. They were still there when the Chinese went for them in 1962 by Lake Panggong. In July and August the Gurkhas fought for the outposts by the long finger of the lake, and Major Dhan Sing Thapa, nicknamed Dhanu, received India's highest award, the Param Vir Chakra. It was the prelude to the massive attacks in October, which transformed the simmering frontier dispute into a hot war.

The dispute went back to 1958, when the pundits in distant Delhi woke up to the fact that the road the Chinese had been busy building for two years to link Yehcheng in Sinkiang with Gartok in Tibet ran through an area which their current maps showed to be part of Indian Kashmir. This was the desolate, barren soda plains of the Aksai Chin, which had been considered to be in the Chinese Empire in the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth century were brought into the State of Jammu and Kashmir behind a line marked "frontier undefined".

In October 1959 a serious encounter took place near the Konga pass, and in 1962 the Indians were chagrined to hear that the Pakistanis had agreed with the Chinese on their common frontier up to the Karakorum pass at its easterly end. They had given up the regions beyond the Karakorums which, in any case, were practically inaccessible to them, and this had left Ladakh as a pan-handle sticking into the Chinese territories.

The Chinese struck at dawn on October 20th 1962 both in Ladakh in the west and in the North-East Frontier Agency. The 1st Battalion of the 1st Gurkhas was flown straight from their Dasahra celebrations in Delhi, where they had been on ceremonial duties as escort to the President of India. They remarked that, whilst Mahakali's nectar was still on their tongues, the Goddess was thirsting for more blood. The 3rd Battalion, after only six months at home following their voyage back from the Congo on a United States ship, followed them.

The 3rd/4th, with the Indian Railways still running true to form, steamed out of Dehra Doon to the strains of "Colonel Bogey" after a delayed departure. They left the train at Ambala to carry on by road and air. The 4th/4th, raised again at Ambala in March to the sound of the Mandalay bell ringing in the unit temple, were anointed on their foreheads with the red *tika* spot by the wives of the railway officials before going off to battle.

In the east the fighting was more critical than in the west, for the Chinese threw large forces across the "undefined frontier" of the MacMahon line, and the whole of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam lay below them. The 1st/9th Gurkhas, with their kindred comrades of the Kumaun Regiment, bore the first shock of the attack. They had just entrained for their new peacetime station at Yol when the call to arms came and sent them marching up to 14,000 feet still in their olive green tropical kit. When they were

pulled out to refit at Ramgarh, they had lost their Commanding Officer, seven other officers and a hundred and sixty-seven men dead or prisoners. Another battalion, the 5th, was immediately raised.

Men of the 8th Gurkhas were thrown into the same battles. A few months before they had been in Nagaland, looking at the memorial stone near Imphal which commemorates the successful stand of the 43rd Gurkha Rifles of the Bengal Infantry against the troops of Manipur State from 1st to 9th April, 1891. After two months at Ramgarh they moved up into the mountains at forty-eight hours' notice. They too lost their Commanding Officer, who died of exposure in the bitter conditions of the frontier war.

The sudden incursion ended on December 1st, and the following year some prisoners were returned. Most, after their first hardships in the fighting zone, had been treated reasonably well. China was careful to have no quarrel with Nepal.

II

At Home in Malaysia

AT last the Emergency in Malaya ended and the British Gurkhas were able to settle down for a while to routine training for their role as a fighting force in an international war. The troops were redeployed from Malaya, and the pattern of deployment became three battalions in Malaya, two in Singapore and three in Hong Kong, with Engineers in two of the territories and Signals and Service Corps in all three. A battalion might expect to remain in one location for about two years, and then there was a kind of general post as they moved around, the main object being to ensure that each battalion had a tour of duty on the different terrain of Hong Kong, with the cool winter there giving a climatic change.

A new step was taken when it was decided to have one Gurkha battalion, with Signals and Service Corps in England. The first of these went in 1962, leaving only two in Malaya. This was the picture when in 1963 I visited all the Gurkha units of the British Army in Malaya and Singapore.

My centre for this tour was the Headquarters of the Gurkha Division in Seremban, the quiet little capital of the State of Negri Sembilan. The Gurkha elements of this division are administratively controlled by the Headquarters of the Brigade of Gurkhas, which was also at Seremban, and in so far as there is anything permanent in the Gurkha service, the long huts of stained weatherboard with corrugated roofs, in which the Headquarters' offices were located, were their permanent centre.

My own quarters in Rasah Camp were in a similar hut, with a covered way of palm-leaf thatch leading to the mess in case one's mealtime coincided with a tropical downpour. Every morning at half-past six the Malayan nightjar, called the tock-tock bird, would sound off its monotonous cry until the sun was high. Then it would lie low until the sun was down again, when it would join

its loud voice to the lesser chirpings of the crickets and beetles and other insects of the night. Little lizards stalked flies across the walls, and sparrows flew in and out of the spaces between the ceiling and the roof. In the mess a coloured photograph of the King of Nepal, with the sceptre of office in his hand and wearing the crown with the long plumes of the bird of paradise, faced portraits of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh.

I set out first for Singapore and went to Slim Barracks, where the oldest of the Battalions, the 1st/2nd Goorkhas, was in residence in the first permanent barracks to be allotted to the Brigade of Gurkhas. The buildings, named after Field Marshal Slim, who was himself a Gurkha officer before commanding the Fourteenth Army in Burma and then becoming Governor-General of Australia, stand on a low hill with a large area of army married quarters on one side and a Chinese cemetery on the other.

The officers' mess tells the story of this historic regiment as vividly as any regimental history. As is the custom wherever possible, it stands on a high point with an open outlook. In front of it the ground falls away gently to Buona Vista Road, with the Chinese village called Holland beyond, and to one side lie the houses of Nepal Park.

From these suburban surroundings one enters another world. To the left of the lobby there is a large oil painting of a night scene. Dimly lit by the red glow of battle above, a Gurkha soldier is creeping up a steep gully in a cliff-side with his *kukri* drawn, making a silent assault on those that stand higher up. It is Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa winning his Victoria Cross at Wadi Akarit in Tunisia.

On the other side, in the more formal layout of an older style, is the scene of the regiment's third battle honour, Sobraon, where they fought those very Sikhs who first discovered the fighting qualities of the Gurkhas and enlisted them at Lahore.

In the cool shade of the mess ante-room itself the top of a large table stands flat against the wall. It is black and polished and spotlessly clean, the table from the house of Hindu Rao on the ridge overlooking Delhi, where the 2nd Goorkhas held on for two months with their comrades of the 60th Rifles against the mutineers from the Bengal Army. Further on, in the dining-room, there stands another piece in black. It is an ornately carved mantelpiece, supported by two griffins, which was presented to the

regiment in 1904 by the then ruler of Nepal, Maharaja Chandra Shamsher.

The usual time for the Gurkha morning meal is half-past nine, and I was starting my breakfast with a plate of fried rice in this same dining-room when I was introduced to one of the junior subalterns who represented, in his person, the result of the new policy of training Nepalese cadets at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, to take their places alongside the British officers of the infantry battalions. This young man had been to school in India, had done his two years' training and was now on the officer strength. The one difference was that he was not eligible for language pay.

In Slim Barracks I went to the instructional centre, where squads of men were learning to read and write in Roman Gurkhalī, the romanized script of the language of the Gurkhas, which was specially devised for use in the Brigade when it became separated from the Indian Army, in which Hindustani had been the lingua franca. The men were studying under their own trained instructors and working through one of a series of ten text-books based on their life in South-East Asia.

From Slim Barracks my Gurkha driver took me in a unit Land-Rover past the military base installations in Ayer Rajah Road and down to Jardine Steps, the landing-place in Keppel Harbour. There I got on to a Royal Army Service Corps launch, which took me to the nearby island of Blakang Mati. After pressing through the strong current of the narrow waters past the moored ocean liners, we landed on the island.

On Blakang Mati the concrete gun emplacements of the coastal artillery, that had been built to resist a landing from the sea, had fallen into disrepair and decay. The Singapore Artillery Regiment had been disbanded. In its place the 2nd/10th Gurkha Rifles were installed, thus ending a century of occupation by the gunners.

In his office beside the square, with its panoramic view of the Singapore Strait and the islands running out to Raffles Light and Indonesia beyond, the Commanding Officer of this battalion launched into a discussion about the teaching of English to the men. This had for long been a vexed question. Many of the older officers from Indian Army days, brought up in the tradition of making themselves expert in their men's language, instinctively

resisted the idea of the Gurkhas becoming proficient in English. Some felt that there was a danger of them becoming confused and disorientated if they became answerable to others besides their own officers. Others, and not only older men, thought that they could easily become swayed from the straightforward simplicity of their lives by too much intercourse with other races and the British soldiery, and lose their moral virtues.

But the Commanding Officer was not of this mind. The horizon of the Gurkha was inevitably widening. If he could so easily be diverted from a straight and moral life, then his much-praised stalwart characteristics were hollow indeed. With more and more of the techniques of modern life to be mastered, with more and more Gurkhas going to England for technical instruction, and with whole units being stationed in England for two years at a stretch, it seemed essential. With this in mind he had organized classes of instruction, decreed that orders should be given to the Q.G.O.s in English, and arranged for them to have rooms in each company where they could study. The officers were thus obliged to learn, since anyone not understanding the orders would have to ask his colleagues what they meant, and obligate himself to someone almost certainly competing with him for promotion.

The 2nd/10th Gurkhas, sitting amidst the flame of the forest trees and the green swards of the island "Behind the Dead", were available to descend on Singapore to sort out any of the riots and commotions that periodically disturb that volatile city. In such an internal security operation army landing crafts and launches would be available to land them wherever they might be most effective.

But their days of tenure were numbered. It had been decided that the whole island, with its fine barracks and woodlands and beaches, would be handed over to the Singapore Government for conversion into a free port when Singapore joins the customs union of Malaysia. The internal security responsibility was to be taken over by Malaysian forces.

I myself left the island's jetty for Jardine Steps by means of a sampan with a small outboard motor on it, tended by an aged Chinaman in blue denims. A canvas awning kept off the sun's heat for the five-minute ride.

I started the next day with a visit to Alexandra Grammar

School, which stands on the ridge that runs up to Mount Faber, the highest point in Singapore. After the Second World War, when the Japanese victory monument on Mount Faber had been torn down and the British forces, leaving India, made Singapore their main base east of Suez, the former elementary school became the Grammar School for the children of personnel of all three services who had been selected for academic education as a result of their performance in the secondary selection tests.

Gurkha boys were admitted to the school, and because of their backgrounds were allowed two years' grace in the tests. If they did well, they became candidates for the Military Academy. They lived as boarders in the nearby boarding hostel, which had previously been a mess for civilian employees of the War Department, and they mixed as equals with the British boys and girls, excelling on the sports field and in positions of responsibility. They found some of the academic work rather heavy going, but this was not surprising considering that they were studying in a language that was not their mother tongue. The head boy was a Gurkha.

With the headmaster I met the ten boys and one girl who were studying there. They ranged in age from thirteen to seventeen and were scattered through the classes of the school. They were all accustomed to speaking English more or less fluently, but of course the inevitable question arose in my mind that arises in the minds of those who have them in their care. By bringing them up in a British school, are we turning them into something that is alien from their own homeland? Will those who do not join the army get completely out of touch with Nepal, and turn their backs on their native country, or will they take their knowledge and *savoir-faire* back there to benefit their own people as best they can?

There is no simple answer to this question. But the fact remains that English today in Nepal, as throughout Asia outside the Communist bloc, is the most coveted language of all, and an English education is prized even more than it was in the days of so-called "colonialism". The pressure for this type of education comes, not from the administration, but from the Gurkha officers themselves, who try as hard as they can to get their children into the British Army schools in preference to the vernacular schools. They see this as the only avenue with any chance of success towards higher education and an entry into the professional classes for their sons,

who will then be able to match up to the foreign educated Ranas and the university graduates of Katmandu.

At the time of my visit there were over a hundred Gurkha children being educated in English in British Army Children's Schools in the Far East. Many more were attending locally administered English medium schools in Malaya, such as the King George V School at Seremban and the Sultan Ibrahim School at Sungei Patani. This was in comparison with nearly 1,700 children being educated in the Nepali vernacular schools run by the British Army in Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Nepal and Tidworth, Wiltshire.

I left the school on the hill and went to visit a small group of Gurkhas tucked away in the great sprawling Base Ordnance Depot alongside the railway between Alexandra Road and Henderson Road. A Gurkha Major was there, not far short of his pension, who was responsible for producing each week the Gurkha newspaper *Parbate*, the "Hillman". It contains news of the various units, the latest happenings in the world and in Nepal, and stories, articles, jokes and poetry in Roman Gurkhali and in the devanagri script, together with plenty of photographs to enliven the page.

With Major Padamlal Rai, a man from the eastern hills, I thumbed back through the files to the first issue in January 1949. It was like a pageant of history in the making—settling down in Malaya, fighting the bandits, going to Hong Kong, the two coronations of Queen Elizabeth of England and King Mahendra of Nepal to both of which the Gurkhas sent a contingent, fighting on the football field for the coveted Nepal Cup, going to England, going to Borneo, always some unit on the move, someone arriving, someone being given a farewell, always change.

Padamlal, himself, was soon to make the biggest change of all. He was to leave the service and return home on pension, to become a *burho*, an old man, like his predecessor as editor, Captain Ramparsad Khattri of the 2nd Goorkhas, who had come from Delhi specially for the work and had been known affectionately by everybody as *Baje*—Uncle.

I went on from the offices of *Parbate*, placed conveniently near their army printers, and drove out to the centre of Singapore Island, where a motor transport company and a signal squadron were stationed within the garrison of Nee Soon. The latter were

away in Borneo, but they had left their families behind them to be looked after by the Gurkha Army Service Corps, and the school was still there, catering for both units. I was surprised to be welcomed with a Tibetan style of greeting by the headmaster. As I entered the *attap* palm-thatched building, a white scarf was placed round my neck instead of the usual garland of flowers.

I lunched at Nee Soon in the large transit mess, whilst my driver went down to the Gurkha lines for his *bhat*. There I discussed the recent revolt of the Kedayans in Brunei, which had been engineered by the revolutionary Azahari, with an officer who had been sent over there in the early stages of the rising to interpret in Malay for the Sultan. Now the Gurkhas were in Brunei and Sarawak in strength, not because of Azahari's abortive putsch, but because of the sabre-rattling confrontation policy of Indonesia against the formation of the Federation of Malaysia.

After lunch we went back over the causeway to the mainland of Malaya and north-east into the rubber and jungles of Johore. Fifteen miles from Johore Bahru yet another detachment of Gurkhas had to be accommodated, fed and equipped and their families provided for. They were the demonstration platoon of the Jungle Warfare School, where all the lore of fieldcraft in the jungle and all the tricks of tracking and survival are taught. The Gurkhas meet their match here in the navigation of wild country, when they work alongside the Sarawak Rangers, former head-hunters from the Iban tribes of Borneo, who can track a man down by reading the jungle signs almost as accurately as a dog can with its sense of smell.

From Baird Camp, Ulu Tiram, I returned to a place just outside Johore Bahru called Majeedee, and here at the officers' mess of the 1st/10th Gurkhas I sent my driver back to Singapore and was shown my room for the night. At the same moment a torrential downpour began, accompanied by blinding flashes of lightning and violent cracks of thunder. In a moment the background of jungle behind the cleared area of the camp was blotted out, the deep monsoon drain in front of the quarters became a rushing torrent and the laterite tennis court a sea of red mud.

I was accommodated in the room of a subaltern, who was away on a weapon-training course. It was a primitive kind of basha, ill-decorated and ill-maintained, a room that no one could ever call a home. Yet amidst the scattered books and papers, which the

young man had left lying about, there were works on philosophy and the appreciation of art, and manuscript notes on psychology and the interpretation of the culture of our times, which betokened an unexpected thoughtfulness and quest for learning. I wondered what kind of a person it was, who had the determination to delve into these subjects in his colourless monastic cell of a room after a hot day in the sweat of Malaya.

When the sheet of rain, falling like water turned out of a gargantuan bucket, had diminished to the spray from a giant watering-can, I dashed across to the mess for a drink before dinner. It was a large bungalow, formerly the residence of the Commanding Officer of the Johore State forces, and shortly to be returned to the Malays for use by the expanding army of the Federation. Like the mess in Slim Barracks it contained the visual testimony to the regiment's exploits far and wide.

As befitted one of the more recently raised Gurkha regiments the most conspicuous exhibits were from recent times. At one end of the verandah overlooking the rear patio there was a framed escape map of Central Burma done on fine silk to enable it to be folded up small and save it from rotting away as a paper map would have done. It reminded me of the story of the Gurkha who escaped from the Japanese, and after incredible privations managed to cross jungle-clad ranges and get back to India and his friends. When asked how he had done it, he replied that it was quite easy because he had a map with him. He showed his questioners the map. It was a tattered, dog-eared piece of paper in the last stages of disintegration, but you could still just see that it was a street map of London.

In a central position on the verandah another frame contained a most moving testimony to the part played by the battalion in the long years of jungle-bashing in Malaya. Done on white silk with a blue border, it was addressed to "the Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. J. S. Bolton, D.S.O., officers and men of the 1st/10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles" from Bentong in Malaya's central jungle state of Pahang, dated February 28th 1952. It read as follows:

Sir,

YOUR battalion arrived in Pahang over a year ago when spirits were low; we need not remind you of those days of

terror, of murders and ambushes which took their dread toll of all nationalities. Through the skill and energies of your men the district has now been improved beyond recognition. The name of the battalion has struck fear into the hearts of the bandits many of whom have fallen to your guns. It would be foolish of us to say that the district has been entirely cleaned up, for much still remains to be done, but during your stay you have achieved one important thing—you have won the complete confidence of the people.

NEVER before, we believe, has so mixed a community taken a battalion to its heart so readily. The battalion has been integrated with the civil population quite spontaneously at all levels. There has never been the slightest friction; nothing but continual displays of mutual trust.

WE are grateful to you. We shall never forget you. We know that your successes have cost you hardship and discomfort, but we hope that our sincere and lasting gratitude will be some consolation.

TEH ENG SUAN, J.P.

ZAINAL ABIDIN

DR. V. M. B. PANIKKER

K. MUTTUKUMARU

Beside this letter stood a gong, flanked by two elephant's tusks, two Malay krisses and a shield of crossed *kukris* presented by the labour force of Telemong Estate, an isolated rubber plantation to the east of the town. More recent still were the souvenirs from Borneo—a model of a *perahu*, with a sail of white and blue stripes, from Sandakan on the pirate coast of North Borneo, and a broad *parang* like a meat-cleaver with a sheath of woven bamboo strips.

I talked to the officers as they came in to dinner. They were preparing for yet another move, this time to Sungei Udang on the west coast near the big new British Commonwealth cantonment at Terendak a few miles north of Malacca. No one was unduly worried. Continual movement was part of their life. Two officers, one of them an Australian, had just returned from a few weeks of duty in Vietnam and were alternating descriptions of the guerrilla warfare against the Viet Cong with stories about the night life of Saigon and Cholon.

After waking up to the sound of the pipe band practising

Scottish lays in their vests, shorts and P.T. shoes, I spent the day at Majeedee and then went on by train to Kluang. I got there at midnight, and after driving from the station to the camp, I staggered sleepily into the room to which the Gurkha driver took me. I was too tired to wonder why there were ten pairs of boots lined up in a row beside the door.

Next morning I soon found out. At six o'clock a Gurkha orderly stamped in, switched on the light, and began cleaning the boots. He showed no surprise at seeing me there. When I thought of calling out to him to stop, I decided that I could not stop him doing his bounden duty.

Then, one by one, the owners of the boots came in to change from the civilian clothes in which they had come from their homes into the jungle-green shirts and shorts, Sam Browne belts, boots, hose-tops and puttees that they would need for first parade.

I stuck my head out from under the mosquito-net and greeted, one by one, my acquaintances in the Gurkha Engineers. There was much movement amongst them too, and before long many of them, warned for new postings, were trying to sell me their cars.

In the mess of the Gurkha Engineers at Kluang, overlooking the grassy air-strip, I had a discussion with a Personnel Selection Officer from Headquarters, who had been called in to advise on the best means of obtaining the right kind of men for the Corps. Was it sufficient for recruiting officers in Nepal simply to pick on "likely-looking lads" or lads with family connections in the service? Should there not be some assessment of their inborn intelligence, and of their ability to learn and capacity to absorb training as well? This was a particularly burning question for the technical arms, in which it was necessary to train men up to a high level in specialist trades.

Uneducated youths from the hills were still preferred to educated young men from the plains for their qualities of steadfastness and loyalty, so it was necessary to devise some simple test, by means of which one might fathom the amount of intelligence that could be drawn out from behind the rustic features. I suggested dominoes or matrices or any other of the standard apparatus. He was not convinced. Neither was I. To measure how much intelligence lies in the sleeping brain of a country lad, capable of being developed in more dynamic circumstances, is certainly a most fallible task.

I went out past the guard room, where the guard were wearing the *gol topis*, the round hats of their dress uniform, in honour of a social function to be held that night, and from Kluang I returned by train to Seremban.

The following week I was off again on my travels. After a quick look at the Gurkha boys in the Bourne School at Kuala Lumpur, which was named after a former director of the operations against the terrorists, I took the night train to Ipoh, the centre of the tin country in the Kinta valley, to visit the 1st/7th Gurkhas.

Two in the morning is an awkward time to arrive anywhere, particularly after a long, hot ride in a Malayan train, but the Gurkha driver was at the station to meet me, and we drove out in the moonlight along the broad avenue between the schools and colleges and the big old-style mansions of the tin magnates to Suvla lines, close to the steep limestone crags and cliffs which enclose the valley.

Due to a pardonable misunderstanding I was not expected by the mess sergeant, who had taken Tuesday night to mean the night following Tuesday instead of two o'clock on Tuesday morning. All was closed up, for the battalion was away in Brunei, and only a rear party had been left behind, mainly to guard the camp and protect the families from the local ne'er-do-wells.

Eventually we found a prowling Gurkha guard and sent him to look for the Number One Boy of the mess, who was discovered in his quarters to the rear and came running up in his white vest and blue shorts to open up the guest room for me. One lone officer was sleeping up above. He had just come down from the Training Depot and was living-in whilst making arrangements for his family to join him. It seemed churlish to disturb him at such a time.

The Chinese boy ran about getting sheets and pillow-slips. I walked round the guest-room looking at the pictures. They invoked yet another episode of Gurkha history, for they were a series of colour prints from "Sketches in Afghaunistan". One depicted the pavilion of the king's throne in the capital city and was captioned, "The Durbar Khaneh of Shah Shoojah-ool-Moolk at Caubul." Another was a panorama of Kabul and its fortress—"The Balla Hissar and City of Caubul from the upper part of the citadel." It was a mass of square, flat-roofed houses of baked mud, with a snowy mountain range in the background. Yet another

showed "The wild Pass of Siri Kajoor", and a fourth was called "Caubul Costumes" and included His Majesty Shah Shoojah in the centre, and a lady on the left, front and rear view, with long raven hair hardly concealed by her *chador* and wearing baggy pantaloons.

I slept for the remainder of the night, and next morning found more Afghanistan sketches in the ante-room. There was "The City of Candahar" and "The approach to the Fortress of Kwet-tah", nowadays more easily recognized as Quetta. In other parts of the mess there were mementoes of more recent exploits than the Afghan war. There were two roughly-made Japanese flags, covered with names written in Japanese in red on coarse white canvas, and a Japanese White Tiger commando belt taken at Tiddim on the Indo-Burmese border in 1944. There was a worn-out rifle with a battered stock and roughly repaired sling, taken off the last Communist terrorist killed in Malaya after ten and a half years of jungle operations by a new recruit.

In the lobby there was a photograph of the Colonel of the regiment, Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, who had directed the operations for three of those years. There was also a flag with a yellow circle containing a palm tree at its centre, the colour of the Australian Pacific Islands Regiment, with whom the Gurkhas became allied in 1954 as a result of their association in jungle warfare.

The lone officer came in to breakfast, and afterwards we went together over to Suvla lines, so named from the bay in the Aegean where the Gurkhas landed to fight the Turks. Except for the sentries at the gate and in the quarter guard in their broad-brimmed hats, and a few clerks in the offices, the lines were practically empty. But, of course, the families were still there.

The headmaster of the school, a Roman Catholic from the Darjeeling district of India, showed me round his classrooms, and introduced me to his wife, who was also a qualified teacher and a member of his staff. Like the rest of the Gurkha schools in the Far East his school was better staffed and equipped than any of the comparable primary schools in the home country.

There was a large variety of material for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to the lower classes, adapted into Nepali from English activity equipment. Each child had to go through the work books for writing Nepali and learning number bonds,

Pipers and drum-
mers welcome a
troopship from
Hong Kong





A family of the 1st/7th Gurkhas disembarks from the *Nevasa*

1st/6th Gurkhas fitting out for Tidworth



written in the Far East and published by the Chief Education Officer of the Far East Land Forces in Singapore. In addition the first school geography and history of Nepal to be put into general use, together with a book in Nepali describing the journey from Nepal and India to the Far East and others on social studies, from the same source were there.

The headmaster was a keen photographer and insisted on a group photograph before I left. For background we had the airy wooden building of the school and the Kinta valley cliffs that were being blasted for the sake of the iron ore inside them. They were cliffs which the latest recruit to the teaching staff, a young Tibetan wife of one of the men, might have liked to scale. She was a qualified mountaineer from Sherpa Tensing's mountaineering school in Darjeeling.

From Ipoh I carried on north by train, heading for my last destination, which perhaps ought to have been my first. It was the Gurkha Training Depot at Sungei Patani in the state of Kedah, not far from the Siamese border. There the raw recruits were received on arrival from Nepal and turned into soldiers.

A driver from the depot met me at Bukit Mertajam, the junction of the lines for Penang and Thailand. We drove across a flat plain of flooded rice fields, which was a welcome relief from the monotonous rows of trees of the rubber plantation and from the thick wall of encircling jungle. One could see for miles across the fields, which were like square lakes divided by the narrow raised footpaths between them. The villages in the shade of their coconut groves were like islands in the lakes.

A few miles short of Sungei Patani, however, the rubber began again. The buildings of the Depot were, in fact, within the bounds of an old rubber plantation. The trees gave shade to the platoons drilling and training, and they were still being tapped for their latex. But the training area also extended beyond the trees on to open grassland, where a range was located and, on occasions, a windsock was erected to direct light planes, or a landing panel was laid out for helicopters.

My arrival coincided with one of the rare regimental guest nights, which were opportunities to extend hospitality to the local government officers, such as the Chief of Police and the commander of the state forces, and to the community of planters. Due to the shortage of military quarters several of the British officers

of the Depot were living on a nearby large rubber estate in bungalows that had originally been put up for scientists conducting a programme of rubber research, and they had formed cordial relationships with the planters at the estate club. There were, in addition nearly a dozen young officers, either newly joined from Sandhurst or seconded from their corps for service with the Gurkhas, who were at the Depot for six weeks studying the Gurkhali language.

The following morning I was awakened by the sound of sharp cries and shouts across the road. There was a yelp and a grunt, and then a noise which sounded like *Assiaarr!* The same shouts were followed by the same *Assiaarr!* repeated again. A new word that I had not yet come across in Gurkhali, I surmised. Perhaps some phrase from the tribal dialect of the Magar or the Pun.

I looked out of my open door. Recruits were engaged in the time-honoured activity of leaping forward with bayonets fixed on their rifles and plunging the bayonets into sacks stuffed with straw. Every time the *Assiaarr!* was sounded by the corporal, they leapt back and did it again. At last I realized that *Assiaarr!* meant "As you were!"

Other squads were numbering and drilling. They numbered not *ek, dui, tin*, but "one, two, three", and drill orders were in English, as they had been for years before pressure was put on to teach English right from the start.

The lads from the hills put a great zest into their training. They are so keen to do their best and outshine their rival squads that they frequently get up even earlier than the routine demands in order to practice privately. Sometimes they have to be restrained from overdoing it and exhausting themselves in the hot, humid Malayan days. The contrast with the Englishman's reluctance to be regimental is complete.

They come with little or no knowledge of the world at large. The exciting trip on foot and by road, and perhaps by rail as well, to the Recruiting Depot, and the miraculous flight to the Royal Australian Air Force station at Butterworth on the coast of the mainland opposite Penang are all the experience of sophisticated life that they have.

To start with they must learn to sit on benches or chairs at a table instead of on the floor, to eat with a spoon and fork instead of with their fingers, and to use the lavatory instead of the hillside

behind the village. Then they must get used to wearing boots instead of going barefoot, to wearing web equipment and to carrying weapons.

They are determined to learn as quickly as they can. A large proportion of them come from families that have sent their sons into the army for generations. They are keen to uphold the reputations and standards of their fathers. The rest wish to emulate them and do as well. They have implicit faith in their non-commissioned officers and officers, who in return treat them with cheerful firmness and fairness. The problems of discipline, which bedevil the depots of the British regiments, are practically non-existent. A recruit who returns home having been found unsuitable for service, does so in disgrace.

Outside the main perimeter of the Depot in accommodation grouped round the former drill hall of the Kedah Volunteers, the Gurkha Boys Company was situated. The boys spent three years there, between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, and it was, in effect, a kind of school, in which a certain amount of military training, rather more than a cadet force might do, was included in the curriculum.

The new policy of teaching the Gurkhas English was even more marked here than amongst the recruits. The boys had more time to concentrate on the subject, and with the shortage of British instructors, teachers had been specially recruited from England to do the bulk of the work. Many of the boys were sons of serving officers and men, and had already gained a smattering of English in the vernacular schools. Most would be destined to learn a trade in one of the technical corps.

I watched the boys during their hobbies period. One group was doing carpentry, another making model aeroplanes, and a third was fascinated by the possibilities of building working models in Meccano. All these hobbies were training their minds constructively as well as giving pleasure. Others were being introduced to draughts and dominoes, and a group of older boys had become passionately fond of chess. I would have liked to show these young chess-players to the critics who say that the Gurkha's mental make-up precludes the development of reasoned judgment and forethought.

Leaving the boys, I went out past the Kedah Volunteers' war memorial, where they assemble once a year to pay their tribute to

the dead, and returned to the main Depot. The cool of the evening had come at last, and the sharp cries were still to be heard in several directions through the trees, but this time they were in sport. The men were playing their favourite game of basket-ball which comes next to football in popularity. Playing amongst each other their short build is the same for all, and playing against the *goraharu*, the "white men", as they call the Europeans, they make up for their lack of height with their agility, stamina and verve.

I returned from Sungei Patani to Seremban to learn that the anticipated blow had fallen. After six months of rumour and uncertainty the Secretary of State for War had announced that the Brigade of Gurkhas was to be reduced by approximately a third of its strength to 10,000 over the next three years. There were lean days ahead for the Training Depot if, indeed, it was to survive at all.

The Indian Army was busy raising its forty-second battalion.

China Patrol

IN the same year, 1963, I flew 1,400 miles north-east of Singapore and visited the Gurkhas in Hong Kong. It was still the cool weather when I came down on the landing strip of the big new Kaitak airport, which is built half a mile out into the shallow waters of Kowloon bay, and plunged into the crowded, bustling city streets of Kowloon.

In the heart of the city stood Whitfield Barracks. They were an oblong, wooded oasis above the roads and alleys that have swirled round them since the nineteenth century, when the barracks were built. Part of this area, not far from Stonecutter's island, where the Gurkhas staged on their way to Shanghai in 1900, was occupied by a Gurkha Motor Transport Company. Their vehicle park, where the three-ton and quarter-ton trucks were parked in immaculate lines, was a well regulated and spacious section of the barracks. But as soon as a driver got out of the main gate, he had to take a plunge into the maelstrom of Chinese traffic. It was an exacting test for a young man who might never have seen a wheeled vehicle at all before he was sixteen or seventeen years old.

The men of the transport company were the only Gurkhas in town, and their barracks, standing on immensely valuable land in the most densely built up part of the city, were scheduled to be handed over to the Government of Hong Kong in return for rehousing further out. The battalions of infantry, signals and engineers were spread out in the New Territories. They were only ten or fifteen miles away, but the country, on the other side of the mountains behind Kowloon was like another world....

I was based on the new officers mess of the Headquarters on Hong Kong island, which had an unsurpassed outlook over the recently completed Naval Base and the great busy harbour of the most fabulous city in the Far East. There I found a Queen's Gurkha officer, messing on equal terms with the British officers.

He commanded the detachment that was doing its month of guard duties at the Headquarters and at Government House. I had known him before, and I asked him how he liked being in the mess with the British officers and lady welfare workers.

“*Ramro chha*,” he said. “Very good. The television is very good too.”

“You like the food?”

“It’s all right,” he said, “for a couple of weeks.”

In the evening those men of the guard who were not on duty would change out of their dark green ceremonial uniform with the round pill-box hats into civilian clothes, which were also uniform in pattern and style. They wore white shirts with long ties, and trousers of sombre, sober hue for walking out. Though it was ordinarily not difficult to mistake the Mongoloid features of a Gurkha for those of a Chinaman, one could pick them out immediately in the streets of Hong Kong by their general appearance.

They walked out in groups, looking at the city lights and at the passing show of life. Having little money to spend, you would not see them like the American and British servicemen in the bars of Wanchai. In any case to allow oneself to be relieved of one’s hard-earned cash by the pseudo Suzie Wongs of the waterfront would strike them as being weak and absurd. Sex thus wrapped up in bogus sentimentality was not for them, and if they indulged at all, it would be with a country girl of their own ilk in the farmsteads of the borderlands.

I set out from the island, joined the rush hour crowd on the Star ferry, and met my driver in the car park by the terminus of the Kowloon-Canton railway. He had been in the Boys Company in Kedah, and you might say he was a typical ex-boy soldier. He was more talkative than an ordinary recruit, spoke English quite well and was more at ease with an officer. With a three-year start over the soldiers coming from the hills at the age of seventeen and a half, he knew more of the “answers” to the problems of military life and was more independent minded.

We motored through the heavy traffic down the long, straight road that runs behind the Kowloon docks, along the double highway nicknamed the Kowloon autobahn, over the first headland, and down past the huge apartment blocks in the Tsuen Wan new town with its hundred thousand resettled squatters. From there we

turned sharp right into the mountains on the winding road called Twisk, which passes close to Tai Mo Shan, the highest mountain in the New Territories, and then plunges down, through acres of hillsides replanted with conifers, into the plain of Sek Kong, where the Brigade Headquarters lies.

Without stopping there we went on northwards to Fan Ling, three miles from the border of mainland China, and turned right into the flat valley where the streams are named after the great rivers of the Punjab—the Indus, the Chenab, the Jhelum and the Beas. Here at Sen Wai the new white buildings of Gallipoli camp stood on the left-hand side of the road, with the 2nd/6th Gurkha Rifles in residence.

It was an enclave of bright modernity set in the midst of an ancient land of paddy fields and vegetable gardens, where the Hakka women, half hidden under their huge black hats, squelched about the garden plots, planting out lettuces in meticulous rows, gathering spinach and tending ponds of water lilies. Behind the camp, on the final range of hills screening it from the border in the Sham Chun valley and the Communist barracks opposite, the rows of jars containing the bones of the ancestors stood on narrow terraces. In a bare space on the slope the Glosters had laid out their regimental crest—the sphinx with the word Egypt—in white stones good and large for everyone to see, like the chalk emblems on the hills of Salisbury plain, before they went off to fight in Korea.

The 2nd/6th Gurkhas were pleased with their new barracks, which in view of the relatively low temperatures of the Hong Kong winter, had been built with glass in their windows and substantial walls. I heard a criticism that the *mandir*, the Hindu temple, had been built too centrally, close to the parade ground, instead of to one side of the camp. Otherwise there was general approval.

When they were not being called upon to assist the police in rounding up illegal immigrants, the men were out on training schemes up and down the steep hills or manning the observation post overlooking the Chinese border patrols. A company had just come in from a sweep through the hills round Tai Mo Shan in search of a British gunner reported lost. They had eventually found him sitting exhausted and bewildered on the heights above Shatin, and their comments on his sense of direction and fieldcraft were not exactly complimentary.

The main drawback to training in the New Territories was the restricted area available. Before long the men knew all the features of the landscape by heart, and there was no longer any new route or rendezvous which would set them a problem to find for themselves. Activities were occasionally varied with the landing-craft taking them across the water amongst the coves and inlets and hundreds of islands of the jagged coast.

The Gurkhas, of course, are in their own element in the hills, and each year they take part in a traditional event called the *Khud* Race, an eastern variation of the races which take place annually over the Westmorland fells and the Dartmoor tors. Going up hill the best of the British soldiers can keep up with the Gurkhas reasonably well, but when they come to the descent of the mountainside the Gurkhas go right out in front. From then on it is no longer a contest of nationalities, but a competition between Gurkha units and individuals. With the agility and sure-footedness of goats they leap downwards, instinctively placing their feet on the best and firmest patches of ground and picking the least arduous route. The great strength of their short, stocky legs comes into play, where ordinary knees would be jarred into jelly by the weight of the descending body pounding down on to them with each flying pace.

I left Gallipoli camp by the eastern route, driving through Taipo at the end of the long Tolo inlet on the east coast. Here a company of the 2nd/7th Gurkhas was situated, overlooking the thick clusters of the junks of Hong Kong's Boat People. Their main body was on the western side of the hills, however, and I went there a few days later on the road that runs alongside the miles of reclaimed land of the misnamed Deep Bay.

Acres of ponds, constructed with the dual purpose of rearing ducks and fish, gleamed in the sunlight like Dutch polders, and along this road the Gurkhas were spread out in several camps, waiting for the completion of their new barracks at the place called Norwegian Farm. Their families were in Tam Mei, their headquarters and lines were in the area of the stables and training paddocks of the Hong Kong Jockey Club, alongside the Beas river, and their officers mess was in a mansion that had formerly belonged to a Chinese general.

From these scattered places they were all in the throes of organizing themselves at twenty-four hours' notice to be flown

to Singapore. From there they were to be transported to Borneo. In spite of the inconvenience of packing up and going off without a second to spare most of them were looking forward to a spell of soldiering in a larger, wilder country.

In the place of honour in the hall of the mess I saw the Nepal Cup, the football trophy presented by the King of Nepal, which is competed for every year by all the major Gurkha units. The winning battalion in Hong Kong sends its team down to Malaysia to compete in the semi-final. If they win, they go on to the fiercely contested cup-final, which takes place at the Training Depot during Brigade Week.

I reached the last of the three Gurkha battalions in Hong Kong by train, getting out at Fan Ling, two stations short of Lo Wu, where those who have the necessary papers must get out and walk across the frontier bridge in order to board another train for Canton. The 2nd/2nd Goorkhas were in the new camp named Meiktila after a battle honour of the Burma campaign. They had recently held a regimental reunion, to which some of their famous pensioners, winners of the Victoria Cross and other honours, had been flown from Dehra Dun and Nepal. It was probably the last occasion in their lives on which these men would see their old regiment.

The last unit that I saw in Hong Kong was the most recently arrived. It was a squadron of the Gurkha Engineers, also housed in new barracks. They were at Tai Lam near the fishermen's market of Castle Peak. Stationed there a hundred yards from the sea, overlooking the fleets of junks sailing back and forth between Wong Ka Wai and the estuary of the Canton river, with the grassy peaks of Lantao island in the background, they could not have had a healthier spot to live and work in. As I looked over their brand new buildings and their round guard-room that looked like the control tower of an airport, and considered all the other new quarters that I had seen, it was clear to me that it was intended that the Gurkhas would be in Hong Kong to stay. They had even put up a bright red jungle gym for the children to climb on. After years and years in makeshift camps they were at last in permanent accommodation—until the next twist of the political wheel.

The twist this time was the revolt in Brunei, followed by the confrontation policy of Indonesia against the Borneo territories of

the new Federation of Malaysia. It brought the Hong Kong Gurkhas down south again on a rotation system of two to three months at a stretch, back to their old role of jungle fighters. This time they were up the rivers in the deep forests of Sarawak.

13

Borneo Adventure

THE Emergency in Malaya officially ended in 1959, and as related, the Gurkhas were able to settle down at last in their barracks and camps to a steady period of training. In the military life, however, nothing is ever certain or settled, and three short years later they were off to add yet another area to the long list of their theatres of operations. This was the great island of Borneo, which is still widely unexplored.

The background to this Borneo adventure is contained in the decision of the British government to relinquish sovereign power over the two colonial territories of Sarawak and North Borneo to the government of the new Federation of Malaysia, which had been promoted by the Prime Minister of Malaya, Tengku Abdul Rahman. These two territories occupy the northern part of the island. Sarawak is hilly and jungly with rivers practically the sole means of communication except for aircraft. It is rather like the eastern side of Malaya used to be a generation ago. North Borneo is mountainous, and its long indented coastline encircles the central core, which rises up to the jagged peaks of 13,500 foot Mount Kinabalu. Both territories used to be run as more or less private concerns, the former by the White Rajas of the Brooke family and the latter by the North Borneo Company, which had an autonomous status reminiscent of the East India Company of the old days. Both are capable of development in the same way as Malaya.

Sandwiched between these two lands is the Sultanate of Brunei, which in former days extended its sway far and wide, but now owes its importance to the oilfields of Seria. At the time of these events it was a British protectorate. Opposite Brunei lies the island of Labuan, which is a free port. To the south of this band of British protected territory, seven hundred miles long and on average a hundred miles wide, is the rest of the huge island of

Borneo, together with the thousands of islands to the south and east, which make up the restless Republic of Indonesia.

The idea of Malaysia was that all these territories should be combined in the new Federation, with a central government at Kuala Lumpur. But at the end of 1962 a sudden revolt broke out in Brunei, led by one, A. M. Azahari, a former resident of Singapore. He had managed to persuade a considerable section of the population that they were about to exchange one form of exploitation for another, and that Malaysia would be a new form of colonialism directed from abroad. Relying on support from Indonesia, and possibly from the Philippines, he decided the time was ripe for a *coup d'état*.

The first indication of the revolt was the disappearance of young men into the bush and of jungle-green clothing from the shops. Some of the young men reappeared in the early hours of Saturday, December 8th, in a band of about three hundred armed rebels of the Raayat People's Party, which attacked the Sultan's palace and the police station in the town of Brunei. At the same time arms and ammunition were seized from police stations throughout the state by other bands, and the oil town of Seria was captured. Europeans were taken as hostages and others placed under confinement in their houses.

The Sultan appealed for help, and at 5 a.m. the same morning the 1st/2nd Goorkhas in Singapore were warned to move immediately. Six hours later the whole battalion was ready to go. The same evening the first company was landed at Brunei by the Royal Air Force. The situation was bad. The Sultan's small force and the local police were still fighting and the police station in Brunei town was still holding out, but other police stations were in the hands of the rebels.

A Gurkha guard was immediately mounted over the Sultan's palace, which became the operational headquarters, and a company set off in the small hours in commandeered vehicles to help the police at Penaga, who were reported to be in difficulties. They had only reached the village of Tutong, however, when they ran into a heavy concentration of rebels in the police station and other buildings, who opened fire on them.

The fire was returned, and the men went on towards their destination, but a little further on the Company Commander's Land-Rover crashed after his driver had been hit by heavy fire

from two houses. Not realizing in the darkness that this had happened, the rest went on. The Company Commander and his Sergeant-Major dragged the wounded driver into a ditch, where they hid until they could creep away to a small shack. There they lay hidden until dawn, although the rebels were out searching for them. By this time the company had come back for them. They cleared the village, killing seven rebels and taking a hundred and eight prisoners at a cost of eleven casualties.

The Signals Corporal in the Command vehicle had also been severely wounded in the ambush. Nevertheless he got his radio equipment out of the Land-Rover and took up a defensive position with the rest of the small party. In spite of his wounds he remained absolutely quiet during the remainder of the night, whilst the rebels were searching for them, and when dawn came, though weak from loss of blood and hardly able to move, he joined the rest of the Company in clearing the village, then worked on his radio set to restore contact with Headquarters.

Thus the first Military Cross and the first Military Medal were won in Borneo by Captain Lea and Acting Corporal Sombahadur Thapa. The Company was then ordered back to Brunei town, where more rebels had infiltrated under cover of darkness. The Gurkhas came back through the narrow streets against fire from windows, rooftops and ditches, and regained control. A British officer and a Gurkha Lance-Corporal were killed in the process. Thirteen more were wounded. The rebel loss was twenty-four dead and many prisoners.

The remainder of the battalion and a troop of sappers were flown in during the day. Together with British troops they soon recovered the little country from the rebels, although at one stage the presence of hostages in the hands of the revolutionaries presented a tricky problem.

The sequel took place six months later, when Rifleman Nainabhadur Rai who had flown down from Hong Kong with the 2nd/7th Gurkhas, captured the rebel leader, Yassin Affandy, who had been left to face the music when Azahari fled the country to the Philippines.

Twenty-three-year-old Nainabhadur, a married man with a wife in his home village in Okhaldunga in Eastern Nepal, was lying in ambush with his mates in an overgrown rubber plantation on the northern side of the Brunei river. The rebels were hidden

in a nearby marsh. Suddenly the Gurkhas heard the sound of firing, and eight armed men appeared, pursued by some other men of Nainabhadur's Company. Four of them came running towards him. He saw them at seventy yards distance, but held his fire for fear of hitting his own comrades.

At thirty yards distance the leading rebel saw Nainabhadur and drew a pistol. The other three charged forward with him. At fifteen yards distance Nainabhadur fired. His first shot felled both the leading man and the next one close behind him. The other two ran for cover, but they were wounded, and Nainabhadur went forward and took them prisoner. One of them was Affandy. Later the Gurkha rifleman was nominated the British Army's "Man of the Year" and flown to London to take part in the festivities at the Savoy Hotel.

The revolt was over, but this was not the end. The situation became tense and disturbed in Sarawak and North Borneo as well as in Brunei because of Indonesian encouragement for the rebels. Police stations were attacked and arms stolen in widely scattered places, and there was evidence to show that the Communists were preparing to go into action in Sarawak.

It was therefore quite on the cards that in this thinly populated country of lonely villages the Malayan pattern of subversion would repeat itself. There had never been any army in the whole of the region, and up till now the police field force had been the only armed unit. So it was essential to send a body of troops to man the frontiers and go out on protective patrols.

The Gurkhas went. Sometimes they were ferried across from Singapore on the Commando Carrier, H.M.S. *Albion*. Sometimes they flew. Sometimes they went over on the ship named after James Brooke, the last White Raja of Sarawak. From the little coastal towns of his former domain they were ferried up the rivers either by local boatmen or by their own engineers, and went out along the jungle tracks in search of the roving bands that were equipped and supplied on the Indonesian side of the border as part of the policy of *Confrontasi*.

The havens on these jungle patrols were the long houses of the Ibans, where there was generally a friendly welcome. The long house was a complete village in itself, containing anything up to fifty or sixty families. Each family had its own room, with a door leading on to the communal verandah and another door leading

out of the back. The Gurkhas were accommodated in these families. The Patrol Leader would be taken into the Headman, or *Penghulu's* rooms and the others taken into the commoners' quarters.

The Ibans are much the same size and colour as the Gurkhas and got on well with them. Many of them, seeing that the Gurkhas had come to eliminate the enemies of Sarawak, did not see why they should not be allowed to join in the business too. The blackened skulls of former victims, whose heads they had hunted in the old days as part of the pre-marital ritual, were still hanging in the place of honour outside the Headman's door. There was no lack of recruits when it was decided to recruit a second battalion of the Sarawak Rangers and rename them the Malaysian Rangers.

The Gurkhas went into the familiar routine of hunting terrorists with their usual professional patience. They were aided by helicopter communications and by their own parachutists. But the territory to be covered was a large one—larger than the whole of Malaya and far less populated. Big patches on the maps were covered with solid green and simply labelled "Rain Forest", without contour lines or spot heights. There was no quick or easy supremacy to be gained so long as Indonesia was prepared to feed in enough bands of guerillas to keep the pot boiling. It looked as though the Gurkhas would have a task big enough to occupy their main strength for a long time to come.

Fortunately life was not grim all the time under these conditions. Corporal Karnabhadur Sunwar of the Gurkha Signals has sent back a light-hearted account of a photographic trip, which he calls "My Two Days' Journey".

"After arriving in Brunei," he says, "I got no chance of going anywhere, since I was working continuously as Signals Centre Supervisor, but on 3 Aug 63 the C.O. of 22 S.A.S. Regiment and our Signal Squadron O.C. and Troop Commander decided to have some photographs taken of the S.A.S. Regiment on operations. They planned to take photographs in the Marudi District of Sarawak. I was detailed to go, and my Troop Commander was my assistant [*sic.*].

"The C.O. Sahib of 22 Special Air Service Regiment organized our transport, and on 6th Aug 63 we went off by plane. I didn't know where we were going. We flew from Brunei airport to Bareo, and there we stopped for an hour. During that time the

Bareo schoolteacher organized the children of the Bareo Kelabit School to play their bamboo instruments for us. In order to welcome us they played 'Scotland the Brave', and I was very pleased, because the tune is the Regimental March of the Gurkha Signals.

"After that we went off with packs on our backs like mountaineers, and a Patrol Commander of 22 S.A.S. and an officer of the Border Scouts led the way to Long Arurbayu. We had to go about four miles along a jungle path, though it's not true to say it was a path. We all know these jungle paths!

"On reaching Long Arurbayu we started photographing seriously, since 22 S.A.S. Regiment were there training recruits from the local inhabitants and the Kelabits, who had just joined the Border Scouts. They were teaching them how to organize themselves for defence against infiltrators from across the border and so on, and at the same time we were asked to take photographs of them training the people of the neighbourhood in treating wounds and injuries and in junglecraft. The long house had a lot of inhabitants. The time came to make arrangements for the night, and I was asked whether I was going to sleep in the long house. I thought I would like to stay with my friends in the long house, so I got permission to stay there, whilst the Lieutenant Sahib stayed with the S.A.S. men.

"A lot of people live in a long house. Their cooking places are set up inside the house. They cooked my evening and morning meals, and a girl named Jaini was specially detailed to cook my curry and rice. This girl knew a little English and was a very fine cook and very polite. Seeing that I was a stranger, they all crowded round me after the meal and sat down and wanted to talk, and I was very sorry I couldn't speak Malay or the Kelabit language. They all made Jaini interpreter for the things they wanted to ask me, and when I wanted to get them to tell me things, I explained the question to Jaini.

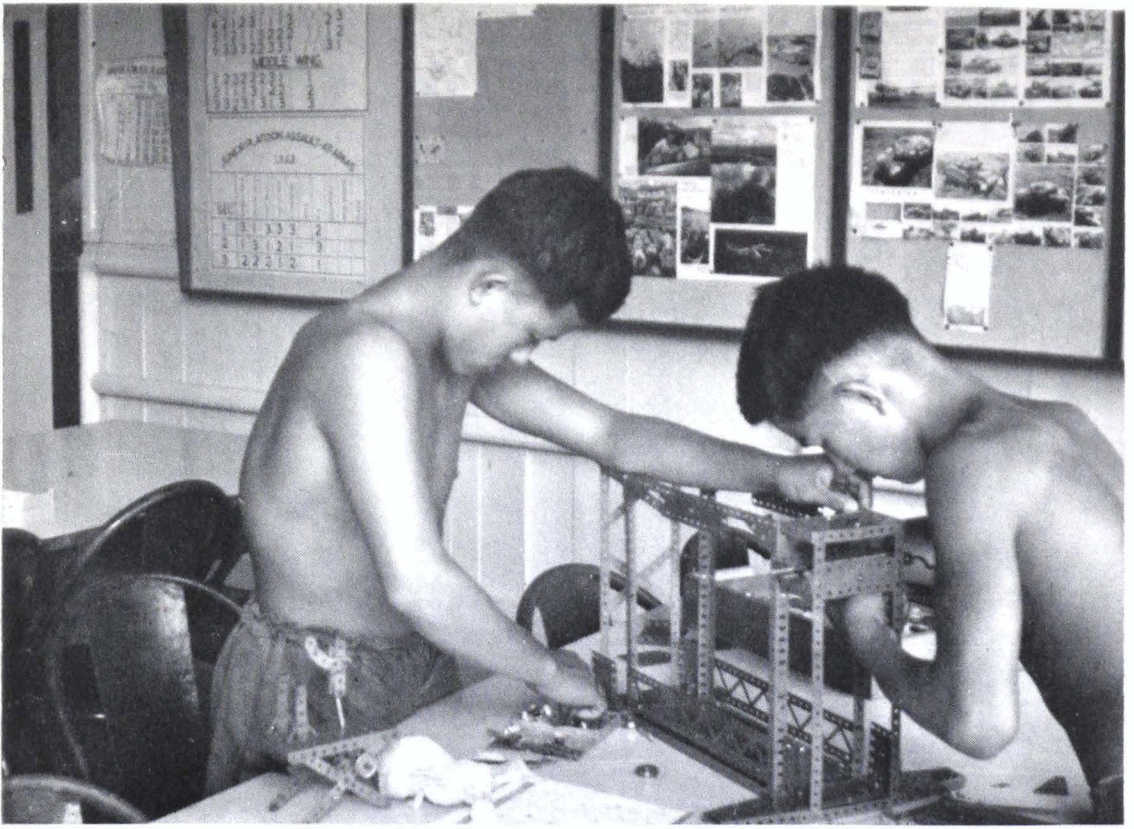
"I slept the night with them. When they talk amongst themselves, they speak with a peculiar sighing sound. I very much liked their way of life. Getting up early in the morning they cooked up some food, and they woke me early too. Jaini made tea and served it to me, but before giving it to me she licked the spoon to see if the sugar had been put in or not, and said (in English), 'Oh, no good.' Then she added some sugar with the same spoon. I said (in English), 'Thank you,' and took the tea.

Gurkha nurses fly off to
England for training as
Q.A.R.A.N.C. sisters



Krishna and his con-
sorts—children of the
1st/2nd Gurkhas





Gurkha boys at the training depot master the intricacies of Meccano



Gurkha radio announcer, Lina Devaraj, interviews a Nepalese general

“After breakfast we went back along the track to Bareo airfield taking photographs. A second after we reached the airstrip a plane arrived from Brunei. After that, as there was no seat in the plane going to Long Banga for my Troop Commander Sahib, he sent me on my own. A British soldier, who had been on the 22 S.A.S. Regiment special course for Medics, acted as my guide, as he had already been there once. So I and the pilot and my guide went to Long Banga. It took about fifty-five minutes to get there.

“As soon as we landed there the Kelabits, men and women, all came running up to us and shook us by the hands, and they gave us rice beer they had brought from their houses. My two comrade brothers drank it, but I didn't because I wasn't used to drinking beer and spirits. We took a lot of photographs in that place, then went back to Bareo, and from there to Brunei.

“The main things we saw were:

- (a) The work of the Border Scouts.
- (b) Jungle Patrols.
- (c) Methods of giving medical assistance to the local population.”

And so the Corporal returned to his routine work in the Signals Centre. Lieutenant R. B. Limbu describes the scene further to the north-east in North Borneo now renamed Sabah, with C Company of the 2nd/7th Gurkhas, as the riflemen turn themselves into marines on pirate-chasing expeditions.

“In March,” he says, “having been ordered to take over from the 1st Greenjackets in North Borneo and Brunei, our battalion reached Nee Soon, Singapore, from Hong Kong *en route* for Borneo. There we had a week's training, during which we collected our equipment for Borneo. At the same time the companies were allotted to their various areas. Tawau in North Borneo was selected for my company. It was about two hundred miles away from Battalion Headquarters.

“On March 22nd all the Advance Parties flew from Singapore to Labuan in a Beverley and spent one night there. In the next few days the Companies went to their own areas. A., B. and D. Company went to Brunei by boat and our company went to Tawau in a Valetta. After reaching Tawau the platoons were sent out to their various destinations. 7 Platoon went to Lahat Datu 120 miles away, and 8 Platoon went 52 miles to Semporna. Company H.Q.,

9 Platoon and the Support Platoon Mortar Section stayed in Tawau. The Lahat Datu and Semporna platoons went out after pirates as soon as they arrived, and each platoon got a boat with an outboard motor for this task. 7 Platoon spent a month at it and 8 Platoon two months before returning to Tawau.

“When 7 Platoon got back it did nothing in particular for a while, then, after sixteen days, it had to do a patrol from Kalabakan to Sandakan. Our men joined the police in this task. It worked like this: there was one section of C Company with five policemen and fifteen porters. I was responsible for a section, and the Divisional Commander of Police was responsible for the police and porters.

“On May 27th we went by police boat from Tawau to Kalabakan. We spent a night at Kalabakan arranging for porters and supplies and distributing rations. We had to carry rations for fifteen days. On May 28th we went fifteen miles in a Land-Rover provided by the Bombay Burma Company’s manager. From then on we had to go on foot, led by an Iban guide. This Iban had gone from Sandakan to Kalabakan twenty years before. And so we spent three days on the march. During this trek our guide fell twenty feet from a wooden bridge, which collapsed. Luckily he was not injured much, but the butt of his gun was broken and his hand was hurt.

“After two days we reached a river, which flows down to Sandakan, and as we had to go by this river, we made nine rafts, which were enough for everyone. This took two days. At 0700 hrs. on the morning of June 7th we loaded all the baggage and set out. Our men on three or four of the wooden rafts, being scared or what have you, couldn’t get used to them for a long time. But what was to be done? We had to go by water, so even if it meant being scared, we had to use the rafts.

“It was a pity we could get absolutely no wireless communication with Company Headquarters. For this reason the Commander Sahib came up in an Auster from Brunei and spent three days in Tawau. He himself tried to find us, searching in the direction in which we had gone, but he did not make any contact. He came up on the air continuously for three days, but did not make contact on a single day.

“In this way we spent four days on the rafts, and then we had to negotiate a fifty-foot high waterfall. Although our guide had

passed this way as much as twenty years before, he hadn't forgotten the waterfall, and before we reached it, he told us to stop the rafts. The D.C., the guide and I decided to throw the rafts over the waterfall. The men went down by a jungle path, and we did this, but in the end two rafts were damaged beyond repair, and we had to make two more.

"After making these two we started off on our journey again. We probably had more trouble going by water than we would have had going through the jungle. After going for a hundred or two hundred yards the rafts started rocking. Doing this they would not go through the water properly, and we all held our breath as nine rafts jerked and jolted along. So with much trouble and difficulty we reached a place called Kwamat after six days. But unfortunately our rations were finished, and we now had to decide what to do. We went into the jungle in search of food, some looking for bamboo shoots, some fishing and some hunting. Eventually the men searching for bamboo shoots brought back some jungle fruits, the fishermen came back with fish, and the hunters brought in a weak old wild pig.

"Now everything was all right, but the pig looked pretty foul, and we only took out its liver and heart, throwing away the meat. Finally the police boats reached Sungei Kwamat from Sandakan with the rations, and boarding these boats we got to Sandakan in two days.

"We spent two days there, looked after by the police. The day after we arrived the chief citizens of Sandakan laid on a drink party in the Recreation Club for us. Everybody in the town came to it. The party began at 20.00 hrs. On the following day the Chief of Sandakan invited us for a drink party in his house at 22.00 hrs. We enjoyed ourselves very much at the two parties. On the next day, June 17th, a Beverley came to take us back to camp, but it had some fault and couldn't take us, so another plane, a Valetta, arrived and we went back in that."

Thus the Gurkhas made their mark in Borneo with work and pleasure intermixed. Corporal D. P. Limbu of the 1st/10th seems to have almost left his heart behind in Sibiu. "Our *jawans*," he writes, "had very good relationships with the local people, and we did not have any difficulty on our operational trips.

"After our operations and other special military tasks were over our *jawans* enjoyed their leisure time talking and laughing

and walking under the twinkling stars with the pretty girls of the neighbourhood and looking at their ornaments. In a few days time the people there were looking at us with loving eyes.

“Unfortunately after a few days the 2nd/6th arrived from Hong Kong to relieve us. As it came to the point of leaving our young men seemed numbed. *Pahila janu gahro, pachhi chhorhnu sahra*. ‘It’s hard to go, but then it’s difficult to leave.’ The way of life of the Sibu people, their humour and their manners and customs in the home are very like our own and attracted me very much.

“The ship *Fisketon* came to take us away, and leaving this delightful place there were handkerchiefs in the hands and tears in the eyes of many. Everything was calm and dignified. The memory of the place is imprinted in the hearts of all of us.”

After nearly a year of adventure in Borneo the Gurkhas earned their reprieve. The Government in London announced that the cut in the number of Gurkha troops was to be postponed because of Indonesia’s “confrontation” policy towards Malaysia.

I 4

Kaski and Lamjung, Tidworth and London

SOME time before these events in the Far East the decision had been taken to station Gurkhas in England as part of the British Army's Strategic Reserve. Thus it came about that in 1962 the 1st/6th Gurkha Rifles with Engineers, Signals, Transport Company and Military Police, went to Wiltshire to install themselves in Jellalabad Barracks, Tidworth.

This was, of course, by no means the first time Gurkhas had been seen in England. They had been there in the First World War and at the victory parade at the end of the Second World War. They had gone again in strength to the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, and soon afterwards two special appointments had been created at Buckingham Palace. They were the Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officers, who attend Her Majesty at a number of functions during the year and have been on the royal shoots in Scotland.

At this time Gurkhas were also coming to England in considerable numbers to attend courses of instruction. They went to Beaconsfield in Buckinghamshire, the home of the Army School of Education, and attended English classes there before going on to their specialized training courses, and many of them came to regard Beaconsfield as their English home.

This was certainly so for Lance-Corporal Bhadrasing Gurung of the 1st/2nd Goorkhas, who was sent to England for an operation for tuberculosis. T.B. is, unfortunately, all too common in the hills, and in the early days of recruiting after the split between the British and the Indian Army a number of men were signed on before the system for X-raying recruits for signs of latent T.B. had been organized. A group of men prone to the disease therefore came into the army, and those who became active cases were later treated at the British Military Hospital at Kinrara near Kuala Lumpur. Lance-Corporal Bhadrasing Gurung was one of these,

and has recounted his experiences in the following typically simple sentences:

“I enlisted on October 14th 1947. Thanks be to God I kept in good health, and in August 1961 my turn for leave came and I had even got my orders, but unfortunately on 2nd August 1961 I became a sick man. At that time we were in Majeedee Barracks, and from there I was sent to the B.M.H. Singapore, where a doctor examined me and took X-rays and announced that I had T.B. He said I had to go to the B.M.H. Kinrara. On 29th August 1961 I went to the B.M.H. Kinrara and later, on 6th October 1961, my family also came to Sungei Besi (near Kinrara).

“A few days later the Doctor Sahib said I had to go to the U.K. for an operation. I answered, ‘All right,’ and went to Sungei Besi to tell my wife and discuss it. My wife said, ‘It’s best for you to go in order to save your life, but it would be a good thing if you could arrange to send us home, since we’re only five months off being five years in this country.’

“This struck my mind strongly, and when I got back to the B.M.H., I explained everything to the Doctor Sahib and put up my request. The Doctor heard my request and said, ‘All right. You can have two months’ leave,’ and on 23 Oct 61 I went on leave.

“On 8 Jan 62 I reported back. On 24 Jan 62 I reached Singapore and on 29 Jan 62 I went to the B.M.H. Kinrara and reported to the Doctor Sahib and told him I was ready for the operation. The Doctor Sahib made all the arrangements for sending me to the U.K. and at 1010 hrs on 16 Mar 62 my voyage started. Colombo was reached at 1515 hrs on 19 Mar 62, and setting out from there at 0430 hrs., we reached Aden on 25 Mar 62. Our arrival at Aden was at 0730 hrs. I felt very hot there. The ship sailed from Aden at 1600 hrs, and at 2000 hrs on 29 Mar 62 we reached a harbour called Port Said. The Suez Canal, which took us the whole day to get through, was very good. On 30 Mar 62 we were off the coast of North Africa and had a very fine view. There were high snow-covered hills. On 3 Apr 62 at 1315 hrs we reached Gibraltar. This is a splendid place, but they were having trouble with a water shortage, so the ship went straight past.

“I reached the port in England at exactly 0800 hrs on 7 Apr 62. In this place I saw some of the Queen’s swans. From there I went straight to Cambridge hospital, where I met and shook hands with the doctors, sisters and nurses and was made to rest. On

8 May 62 the operation took place, and after waking up 6 hours later I was in pain for some days.

“A few days later the Doctor Sahib said I must go to London for three months’ leave. On 4 Jul 62 I went to London where I enjoyed myself very much. Whilst I was there I got the idea of visiting Scotland. In London I was staying at Beaconsfield, and there I said to the Doctor Sahib, ‘Sir, I request to be allowed to do a tour of Scotland.’ The Doctor Sahib said, ‘All right,’ and gave me a week’s leave, and away I went. I liked Scotland very much, but it seemed four times as cold as London.

“In this way I got the chance of seeing two or three important places in *Belayat* (Blighty). After that the Doctor Sahib said, ‘You’re fit now and you must go back to your unit. On 7 Sep 62 you must leave by ship for Singapore.’

“But I went by plane, for the biggest holiday for us Gurkhas is Dasahra, and I put up a request to get there in time for Dasahra. So the Doctor Sahib granted my request, and on 28 Sep 62 I was ordered to go by plane. But the plane did not go on 28 Sep 62, and we were sent back. The plane actually flew on 29 Sep 62, and Sergeant Kharkabahadur Thapa of 28 Company said, ‘Brother, we won’t get any chance of coming back again. This is the last time.’ So together we went off to Piccadilly Circus, and on 29 Sep 62 the Singapore plane began its flight from London airport. Going via the Sudan, Aden and Colombo, we landed at Singapore on 31 Sep 62 [*sic*] and we celebrated Dasahra at the Transit Camp. After that I reported to the B.M.H. Singapore, and on 11 Oct 62 I went to the B.M.H. Kinrara. I was discharged from there on 25 Oct 62 and went back to my unit, and now I am going on pension.

“Pokhara Bazaar below, Bijaypur Hill above, in No 3 District Pokhara, Kaski is my village, the place is Naule Hill.”

If Lance-Corporal Bhadrasing Gurung had gone to England a little later in the year he could conceivably have been placed under the care of one of the Gurkha girls who are now going to England for training as nurses.

And so, in the large body of more than 1,500 Gurkhas who went to England in the first half of 1962 there were some who already had some idea of what to expect. In the previous year the units destined for the United Kingdom had sent large leave parties to Nepal, as they did not expect to be able to send men on home

leave from England. A larger number than usual had to leave their families behind in Nepal, since the family accommodation in England was much more limited than in the Far East.

Then, whilst the main party was proceeding by sea on the troopship route which was finally closed six months later with the last trooping voyage of the *Devonshire*, the advance party flew into Lyncham to be greeted by a large and high-powered reception committee, headed by the Secretary of State for War. Some of the reporters were disappointed to see a group of smart young men dressed in regimental blazers and dark trousers instead of a band of kukri-toting toughs.

The main party in the *Nevasa* arrived in May after many other planeloads had flown in. The modernized buildings into which they went, with names familiar in Indian history—Jellalabad, Lucknow, Multan—were far more luxurious than anything they had been used to before. The small barrack rooms with their central heating, individual bedside lamps, comfortable junior ranks clubs and television rooms, provided in fulfilment of the Government's promises to the new post-war regular army, would have opened the eyes of many a pensioner in wonder. The Gurkhas accepted these things casually just as they would accept privations and hardships when fate decreed. Perhaps of more importance to them was the fact that they were now on British rates of pay and could pay their own way on equal terms with their British comrades.

To start with, the central heating and the new experience of television, coupled with the unfamiliarity of their surroundings and the language difficulty, tended to dissuade them from going out much. But soon they were out of barracks whether they liked it or not on the wide windy expanses of Salisbury Plain. It was virtually their first experience of training in open country since they had left the Plains of India behind them fifteen years before.

In these exercises in England the Gurkhas had to gain a knowledge of the principles of nuclear warfare, which had hardly been touched on in the different conditions of training in the Far East. The daunting task fell to the officers of getting across in Gurkhali the meaning of nuclear strikes and radiation and the modern atomic jargon, with which most Englishmen have now become familiar through Civil Defence.

The Gurkhas based on Tidworth went on training exercises to

Wales, to Northern Ireland, to Germany and to Aden, flying off at short notice to test the Strategic Reserve's capacity for instant action anywhere in the world. A popular tale has come back from Dusseldorf, where a few "brothers" agreed on an evening out and met some British soldiers. The squaddies decided to go to a *gasthaus* called the Hollander and hailed a taxi. The Gurkhas hailed another taxi, said "Holland" and were driven sixty miles to the Dutch border. They returned to their unit wiser and a good deal poorer.

The excursion to Aden was much further afield, involving a thirteen-hour flight across Europe to El Adem in North Africa and then down the Red Sea. They went into the reinforcement camp at Khormaksar for three days, feeling severely the sudden change from cold to heat, and from there they went a hundred miles up country to Laudar along the stony track which starts off coastwise past the old mud forts of the Arabs.

They spent three weeks there on training schemes and then returned. Rifleman Dhanman Limbu was in a small two-man tent in the midst of this desert country of primitive tribes, yet he was able to see English films provided by the NAAFI in the evenings. He remarked that the locals were dead shots with a rifle as they learnt to shoot from childhood, and he was also interested in their camels, goats and cattle. Such things naturally attract the attention of men who are nearly all farmers back home, and one of the commonest queries one first heard from Gurkhas arriving in England was, "How do you manage to breed such big cows?" It was a question to which there is no short or simple reply.

Back in Tidworth films to some extent solved the problem of the week-end. When British troops had been there, the barracks had been practically empty from Friday night to Sunday night with most of the single and unaccompanied men away on forty-eight hour passes, but the Gurkhas had nowhere else to go. Consequently, when a series of Hindi films was imported and shown at the local cinema, they proved immensely popular.

By degrees, however, the Gurkhas found their way about and formed connections in other parts of the country, travelling on their own. Making use of their new-found wealth they began to acquire motor-scooters, radios, cameras and all the paraphernalia of twentieth-century civilization.

Whilst the men were liable to fly off anywhere at a moment's notice, the hundred families were busy settling down in their new

quarters. There was a big contrast between the simple homes of Kaski and Lamjung and the houses of Tidworth, fitted up with their modern cooking appliances. But with the indispensable help of English well-wishers the difficulties were soon mastered. The next step was to master the problems of shopping in unfamiliar surroundings. The Gurkha wives are naturally shy, and at first preferred to send their husbands out for the household goods, even when it was simply a matter of going down the road to the special NAAFI shop with its Hindustani speaking staff. But in a short time, following the lead of the children, they ventured out with their shopping baskets like any other housewives.

As far as the children were concerned, they had their own Gurkha teachers, brought with them from Malaya to teach them in their own mother tongue, and a school for some hundred and twenty children was soon set up with the invaluable assistance of the Wiltshire Local Education Authority, working in co-operation with the Royal Army Educational Corps. Some of the children, who had mastered enough English to appreciate what was going on, were admitted to the local Tidworth school.

The Gurkhas brought their own pipes and drums with them to England. Each regiment has its own pipers, wearing the Scottish tartan chosen for them by reason of connections with a particular clan. They learn their trade under their own Director of Music, and master the Scottish lays to such good effect that one soon grows accustomed to hearing "The Haugh of Cromdale" and the "Skye Boat Song" and "The Back o' Benachie" from the bagpipes of the Highlanders of Nepal. When the pipers and drummers combine with the buglers and the Staff Band at the Beating of the Retreat during Brigade Week there may be as many as a hundred and fifty making music together.

They come into their own on ceremonial occasions. The Tidworth Gurkhas took part in the Bath military tattoo in 1963 and were again before the eyes of the crowd at the tattoo held during the Edinburgh Festival. But undoubtedly their most memorable occasion was the parade before Her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham Palace which took place shortly after their arrival. There is no record of any such parade being held before the Sovereign previously in all the long history of the Brigade, and it was a sure sign of the high regard and esteem in which the Gurkhas are held by the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army.

Gurkha Families

THE young men who come from Nepal to join the British and Indian armies are not normally married when they enlist as recruits. For their first three years in the British Army they must live in the single men's barracks. They then go home for six months' leave, to which is added the length of time it takes to get there and back. This adds anything up to a month to the time that they are away from their units, so that in calculating the available strength of a battalion, one always has to reckon on the fact that over a fifth of the men at any one time will either be travelling in the hills or at home in their villages.

The trooping seasons also have to take into account the times of year during which it is practicable to trek along the mountain trails. During the monsoon season, when it rains more or less continuously from the end of May to September, rivers are impassable and tracks get obliterated by landslides. The hill folk have to stay at home. So the leave parties either go before or after the monsoon in spring or autumn. At these times air lifts are organized between Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang, and Calcutta, whence the men continue by train, bus or on foot.

The young Gurkha frequently gets married during this first period of leave. He normally marries a girl of the same tribe as his own, who is chosen for him by his family from amongst the girls in his own and the neighbouring villages. She will probably be a girl he already knows, and perhaps has grown up with from childhood, so it will hardly be a question of seeing his bride for the first time at the wedding ceremony. Usually he accepts the family's plans for him, but if the choice is very much against his own feelings, he can frequently get a hearing in the family circle and get things changed if the negotiations for the marriage are not already too far advanced.

There is one thing that creates a difficulty, however. The

Gurkha's only means of communicating with his family is through the slow Nepalese postal service or through messages sent by means of other men going on leave to the same district. He, himself, as a soldier in the British Army, is taught to write in the roman script. But in the hills, apart from ex-soldiers, those who are literate read in the devanagri script. So whichever way the message is written, there will almost certainly be a third party in the affair, either as translator from one script to the other or as writer or reader.

The upshot of it all is that Johnny Gurkha does not bother his head too much about marital affairs whilst he is away on service, and relies on being able to sort things out when he arrives in the village. By that time the plans for the marriage may be well advanced and the auspicious date calculated from the Hindu horoscopes. Change at this stage involves trouble and loss of face. The soldier usually says, "*Hunchha!*"—So be it—and lets them get on with it.

Marriages amongst the Gurkhas present a complete contrast with those of the Malays, amongst whom they have been living for over a decade. They are for life. The easy divorce of the Malay is unheard of in the hills. Bigamy and polygamy, though not against the law, are not very common, and usually for some solid reason such as the inability of the first wife to bear children or bringing into the home some member of the wife's family, who would otherwise be unprovided for.

Once married Gurkhas are faithful husbands and expect their wives to be faithful too. The villages have their own methods of dealing with adulterers. If nowadays they escape with their lives, they are still driven out into vagabond disgrace. Naturally those who try to take advantage of a wife, whose husband is away on active service, are considered to be the worst.

It is an exacting test, for if the soldier's newly-wed wife is lucky enough to come back with him for the next three-year stint, she must return to the village with him on his next leave. If he has by that time become a non-commissioned officer and wants to serve on, his third three-year tour of duty will almost certainly have to be unaccompanied. Anyone who has seen desire smouldering in the eyes of a young, active, spirited girl from the hills, may well wonder how it can last that long unassuaged.

Fortunately by this time the young woman will probably have

two or three children to occupy her attention. Birth control is not practised, and the Gurkha has little truck with any device that thwarts a man's virility and its natural consequences. In return he is generally speaking a thoughtful and affectionate husband and does not consider it beneath him to help about the house. The women are by no means subservient to the men, and it is not unusual for Lale, after a day on the ranges, to come home and cook the evening meal, whilst Lila sits fanning her golden face and dreaming of the cool Himalayan snows.

Nowadays childbirth is helped along with all the resources of the army medical services, but this was not always so. When Major Rakamsing Rai, S.B., M.B.E., I.O.M., M.C., O.B.I. wrote his memoirs of his childhood in Maymyo with the 1st/10th Gurkhas, in which his father was serving, he had this to say about family welfare:

“Before 1935 family arrangements only existed for the barest essentials. There was a room and a kitchen for each family. There was no family hospital, family welfare room, W.V.S. lady or *dhai* [nurse]. So if the women and children were ill or dying, or babies were being born, it all took place in the one room. As there was no *dhai*, the women had to get together and help one another. No advice about not doing this or not doing that was given by the government.

“In fact the old times were times of plenty. There was no shortage of food and drink or clothing. In order to make the fire in the cooking place husband and wife had to go out into the forest and cut firewood. The women sat at home all day long knitting stockings and scarves. Their chief responsibility was cleaning the house, caring for the children and helping their husbands prepare the curry and rice.

“There was no concern for educating our sisters then. Nor was there any trace of the growth of the refined manners of these days to be found in their minds. Nevertheless they spent their days happily in company without quarrelling with one another. They were all honest and sincere, and no one thought of getting jealous of another or squabbling or getting riled at the success of another.

“The cares of the family lines and all their various problems were shared by all. Any sickness or death in the lines, and the lying in of childbirth, they dealt with amongst themselves. There

is little of this harmony to be seen today. At that time, since there was no *dhai* or hospital, and everyone had to be prepared to help others, our sisters lived lovingly together. Nowadays these things are taken for granted. For this reason there is no such necessity to help one another, and since these mutual ties do not exist the loving kindness of the past never gets any chance to grow.”

This venerable critic of the welfare state also paints a nostalgic picture of the family amusements in the happy days in pre-war Burma. “In the old days,” he says, “there were no regimental grocery stores or butcher’s shops. There was nothing like the NAAFI and the Army Kinema Corporation of today. Football was the main game; hockey was not played, and no one had even heard of basketball, volley ball or badminton. When the battalion was in Maymyo there was swimming, and there were other kinds of sport like running, jumping, climbing, putting the weight and so on. On holidays men went into the jungle to amuse themselves hunting with shot guns, catapults and any other weapons they could get hold of.

“My father usually liked to go out and divert a stream, and then catch the fish out of it in a bucket. When I was small he always took me and my mother on holidays to the river to go fishing. At that time Sundays and Thursdays were whole holidays and Saturday was a half holiday. On these holidays the whole family went off fishing, carrying cooked rice and shooting birds with the catapult on the way. And so we reached the river with a few birds in the bag.

“Mother set about preparing curry from the birds in the cooking pots we had brought with us. We two, father and son, started diverting the stream and emptying a pool. After a while doing this we got tired, and that was the time to eat the rice and the curried birds. There was no question but what they tasted delicious.

“After the meal the family got busy collecting the fish out of the dried up pool. On the way back to the lines in the evening we picked fern shoots, chillies, jungle fruits, mushrooms and so on. Although in those days there were no recreation rooms, canteens, etc., like today, the men passed the time well and happily, going out hunting or walking about the neighbourhood.”

Those were the days when the Gurkha’s head was shaven all

over except for the tuft of hair on the crown, which was popularly regarded as being left to pull him up to heaven when his time came. It was only after the Second World War that they were allowed to keep their hair. This did not, of course, apply to the women, who normally grew their black tresses as long as possible. They still wear them in long, braided pigtails, which are often finished off with an artificial woollen tail.

After birth the first landmark in the baby's life is the naming ceremony. The last name is the clan name and is the same as the father's. The number of these names is very limited in comparison with European surnames. Puns and Gurungs, Rais and Limbus, Tamangs and Lamas are commoner than Smiths and Browns in England. They are the tribal names of the yeomen of the hills. The more exalted Thakurs and Thapas, Chhettris and Pradhans are common enough too.

It is by their first names that brother is distinguished from brother, but these are also limited in variety. The commonest are combinations of *Bahadur*, meaning "brave", or *Sing*, meaning "lion", with some other word that has a meaning, such as *Dil*, heart, or *Man*, spirit, or *Bhakta*, loyal. So Manbahadur Limbu means Limbu Brave in Spirit, but there may be several other Manbahadur Limbus, even in the same company, so in order to distinguish between them on duty, the last three figures of their regimental numbers are called out together with their names.

The weaning ceremony is the next significant occasion. The *bahun* ceremonially gives rice pap to the infant, which thenceforth gradually goes on to solid food. The soldier gets line leave in order to take part. After that the next big event for the young Gurkha will be his first day at school, which will be in his fifth year. He may well have spent the preceding three years in the hills, or schooldays may be delayed for him because there is no school in the home village, and he has to wait until his father gets family permission in the army again.

Consequently in the Gurkha school there may be children up to ten or eleven years old in the so-called infants class because they are having to start reading and writing from the beginning. In Major Rakamsing Rai's day only boys went to the school, which was run by the regimental priest and clerk, who was known as a "writer". Officers' children paid four annas, N.C.O.s' two annas

and riflemen's one anna a month. An anna was worth about a penny. Now the schools are co-educational and free, with qualified teachers from India and Nepal, who have been through the training colleges at Darjeeling, Kalimpong or Katmandu.

The schoolchildren enjoy the holidays of the Hindu year, which the Gurkhas celebrate. The year follows the *Samvat* calendar, which dates from 57 B.C. and starts in February, but in spirit the first festival of the year is the Maghe Sankranti. This takes place on the first day of the month of Magh in the middle of January and marks the end of winter in the warmer parts of the country. Ceremonial bathing and rubbing with oil takes place, and new clothes and ornaments are worn.

The next holiday hails the advent of spring, and is called the Basant Panchami, and this is followed about the end of February by Sivaratri. This is Siva's night, when there is a night-long vigil in honour of the Mahadeo, the Great God of Nepal. Later, at the vernal equinox, the spring Saturnalia of Holi lasts for two days. Some of the more basic manifestations of this merry-making, in which the young men caper with enormous *phalloi* strapped to their waists, have lapsed, but the squirting of red and yellow water and general buffoonery still goes on.

In the rainy season after Holi they celebrate Rikhi Tarpan, when the string is tied round the wrist to ward off ill-luck. This is followed by the birthday of Krishna on the day called Janam Ashtami. This refers to the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Sawan, which is the traditional day. Ceremonial bathing takes place and images of Krishna are worshipped with offerings of the *tulsi* plant.

The biggest feast of all, however, takes place after the rainy season. It is the ten days of Dasahra, held in October, which for the Gurkhas is essentially a harvest festival. It is the time for family reunions and the gathering of the clans in their ancestral villages. It is a thanksgiving for blessings received during the year, and a supplication to the goddess Durga or Kali, the consort of Siva, for prosperity in the future.

The story celebrated at Dasahra is the great epic of Hindu India, which is told in the Ramayana. This vast storehouse of Aryan mythology, many times longer than Homer's *Iliad*, was translated into Nepali by Kawi Bhanubhakta, the father of Nepalese poets, who lived in the nineteenth century. Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana* is

read and studied by the Gurkhas and their children, and all of them know the famous tale.

It starts in the realm of the gods when Indra, the Indian Jupiter with his thunderbolts and rain, was king of the gods. He called on Dashratha, King of Ayodhya in present day Bihar, to come to his assistance in putting down the devils who were trying to overthrow him. Dashratha took his two wives, Kausallya and Kakaye, with him into battle with the devils. At a critical moment the axle-pin of his chariot broke, and Kakaye put her finger in its place, thus enabling him to carry on fighting and gain the victory. To repay her for this noble action Dashratha promised to fulfil any two wishes she liked to make. Kakaye reserved her wishes for a time when she might need them badly.

Dashratha grew old and decided the time had come to nominate one of his three sons, Ram, Lachhman and Bharat, to be his successor. He chose Ram, the eldest, but no sooner had the heir been acclaimed by the people than a holy man came to Dashratha and pleaded with him to help free his people from a band of evil demons.

Dashratha sent off his two elder sons, Ram and Lachhman, who travelled far to carry out their task. On their return home they came to Janakhpur, which lies in the lowlands of Eastern Nepal. The King of Janakhpur was holding a contest to choose a husband for his daughter, Sita. The task was similar to the test Penelope set her suitors in Homer's *Odyssey*. It was to lift a giant bow, string it and shoot an arrow from it. After all the local lords had failed Ram, the stranger, stepped forward, lifted up the bow and bent it to such good effect that it broke in his hands.

Ram married Sita and continued on his way home. On his arrival he found the preparations for the coronation well advanced. But this was the moment Kakaye chose to make her two wishes known. Ram was Kausallye's son, Bharat was her own. Her first wish was that Ram should be exiled for fourteen years, her second that Bharat should be crowned king in his place. Dashratha, bound by his promise, could not refuse.

So Ram went off with Sita into exile, leaving Bharat to bequeath his name to the land of India, Bharatbarsha. Lachhman went with them. Together they experienced all the hardships of wandering exiles, which culminated in the abduction of Sita by Ravana, King of Ceylon, who had been one of the unsuccessful suitors at Janakhpur.

Ram and Lachhman, after a long fruitless search, met Hanuman, King of the Monkeys, who produced some jewellery and told them that a lady had thrown it out of an aerial chariot. Ram recognized the jewellery as Sita's so Hanuman led him to the place where she was held prisoner.

Ravana was known to be the mightiest warrior alive, and Ram knew that he would need every resource to overcome him. So before attacking him he consulted a holy man, who advised him to spend some days in the worship of Durga Devi, the Goddess of Victory, prior to attempting the seemingly impossible task.

This is the point in the story at which Dasahra begins. It is the *Dasein*, the ten days of Durga Puja, the worship of Durga. But as well as the titantic struggle of Ram with Ravana, the supernatural cosmic battle between Durga and Mahishasur is also celebrated on these days. The terrible Mahishasur's father was Rambha, who had been granted a boon by the God Brahma. This was that no member of the opposite sex would be able to resist him, and that his son would rule Tribhubana, the Three Worlds.

On his return from a journey Rambha attracted a milk-white cow, which followed him under the influence of Brahma's boon. The cowherds thereupon killed Rambha and placed him on a funeral pyre. When the flames were at their height, the white cow jumped into them, and from the ashes the huge buffalo-headed giant, Mahishasur, was born. He too was granted a boon. It was that no member of the male sex would be able to kill him.

Mahishasur was ravaging the universe and had even overpowered Indra. The gods appealed to Siva, who created the beautiful Goddess Durga. She had eighteen arms, and each of the gods gave her a weapon. Vishnu gave her the wheel and conch-shell, Siva the trident, Agni a bow and arrows, Biswakarna his sword, axe and *kukri*. More commonly the Gurkhas show her with eight arms only, carrying these weapons, but the full compliment of eighteen arms is sometimes represented, carrying the rest of the gifts from the celestial armoury as well.

Durga Devi set out mounted on a lion, or some show her on a tiger, and fought for six days. On the seventh she killed Mahishasur's demon lieutenant, and on the ninth she slaughtered the buffalo giant himself, using the heavy curved type of *kukri* called the *khanra*.

The celebration of Dasahra combines the commemoration of

the two great contests, symbolizing the victory of good over evil, with the harvest festival. On the first of the ten days, which is called Jamare Aunsi, the "Barley New Moon", seeds of barley are planted by the priest near the spot where the festivities are to take place. The sacred flame, called the *Homa*, is lit and prayers are offered up. Throughout the Dasahra period the seeds and the flame are both carefully tended, the former being sprinkled daily with water.

From the second to the sixth day the *bahuns* continue with their worship of Durga Devi in imitation of Ram's preparation for battle, chanting the ancient Aryan hymns. On the seventh day the weapons are blessed. It is called Phulpati, the flower blessing, and nowadays it is, of course not swords and tridents that are garlanded, but self-loading rifles and machine-carbines.

*Bhaneshwari Durga Mata
Dhanya timi jagat data.
Charhaunchhaun phulpati
Hami bir Gorkha jati.*

*Great Goddess, Mother Durga,
We thank Thee, Mistress of the World,
We offer up flowers and leaves,
We the brave race of Gurkhas.*

The eighth day is Kalaratri. It is the night before the battle. The priests make their first sacrifices of goats and chickens, and the Gurkhas dance. They wear their tribal costumes. The male dancers are called Pursenges and the females, impersonated by young men, since it would be unchaste of women to take part, are called Marunis.

They dance the night long to the beat of the drums, before an audience which includes their own officers and invited guests. The guests enter the Dasahra house under an archway with some such words as *Ramailo Dasain*—Happy Dasahra—or *Bijaya Dashami*—Victory Tenth—written on it, and are shown to their seats facing the dancing arena or stage. They are garlanded with flowers, and then, whilst they are regaled with hot curries and strong drinks, the show goes on.

There are many traditional folk dances in the repertoire, which vary from tribe to tribe and therefore from unit to unit in the

army. In some they dance behind a leader capering in the mask of a clown, in others they prance about in animal masks, in others the Marunis sway and beat their feet to the rhythm of the *madals*, as the drums are called, looking convincingly womanlike in the subdued light. But nowadays there is a tendency to make the whole thing more of a stage show and a varied entertainment rather than a long sequence of tribal dances.

In one such entertainment I attended the programme began with a song and dance in honour of Krishna, in which the young Hindu Saviour stood with crowned head in the centre, playing his flute, whilst the Marunis circled round him carrying trays of lighted candles. Other dance songs followed, some traditional and some modern. They had titles like *Reshami Rumala*, the Silk Handkerchief, *Barkha Ritu Ayo*, the Rains have come, *Gangaiko Tirama*, On the banks of the Ganges, *Phulko Thunga Hatama*, A Bunch of Flowers in the Hand, *Chhamm Chhamm Chhamm Bajyo*, The Drums went Bang Bang Bang! *Tyo Danra Timi Yo Danra Hami*, You on that Hill and Me on this Hill.

The songs were interspersed with comedy numbers in which Gurkha mimicry, which spares neither the high and mighty nor the humble and lowly, came into play. One was called *Juware*, the Gambler, another "Johnny Walker—Sweet Sixteen", and another "Gurkha Twist". The big Limbu drums were brought in for the Chyabrong dance. The programme was a long one with thirty-four items in it, but this is normal, for the dancing and merry-making goes on throughout the night. And all the time the priests are quietly carrying on with their ritual chanting in worship of Durga Devi.

The next day, the ninth, is Mar, the killing, also called Balidan, the sacrifice. This is the day of the battle, in which Durga slew Mahishasur and Ram slew Ravana. It is symbolized in the sacrifice of the buffalo at the painted post called the *maula*. It takes place in the morning after the long night of dancing. A young man, carefully selected for his strength and skill, brings his heavy *khanra* down on to the neck of the tethered beast, and with one mighty slicing blow, which he has practised many times before, he severs the head from the body.

The priest blows the conch and everyone lets out a gasp of satisfaction, for this practically painless execution of the animal augurs well for the next year. The successful executioner marches up to

his commanding officer, who winds a special white turban round his head. If he had bungled it and not taken the buffalo's head off cleanly, the omens would have been bad and he himself would have been in disgrace.

The tenth and last day is Tika, the day of celebration of the victory. It takes its name from the spot made up of rice grains, which is placed on each man's forehead by the priest as a sign of the blessing of the gods. It is also called Bijaya Dashami, the Victory Tenth, and commemorates the day on which Ram returned home with his wife, Sita, and his brother, Lachman, to enter into his rightful heritage. It is the day for family reunions and for rejoicing in the home. The green shoots of the barley, planted nine days before, are picked and given out to the people, who put them behind their ears or in their buttonholes or pockets.

The next holiday after Dasahra is Diwali. Five days are devoted to the worship of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. It is the festival of lights, and in the early autumn evening the village houses are decorated with the lights of candles and tallow lamps. In the seasonless modernity of South-East Asia the oil and wick sometimes give place to coloured electric decorations like the garlands of bulbs on our Christmas trees.

It is the gambler's season, for the Gurkhas are naturally prone to trying their luck on the wheel of fortune. At all other times, in order to protect them from throwing away their hard-earned savings, gambling is forbidden within the unit, but at Diwali, under the protection of the Goddess of Wealth, the rule is relaxed.

In the regiments the number of days is cut down to three, the first two—*Kukur Tiwari* and *Kag Tiwari*—being dispensed with. On the first of these days dogs and other animals are garlanded, and on the second crows and other birds are fed and blessed. The third is the day of the Nepali carol singers, the fourth the gambler's paradise, and the fifth, Bhai Tika, is the day on which sisters anoint their brothers with the red spot on the forehead.

And so the year comes to an end. Two more holidays have been added to remind them of modern developments. They are Nepal National Day, commemorating the day on which the King proclaimed the new Constitution of Nepal, and the King's Birthday.

The children are thus brought up in the Hindu religion, the forms of which are strictly adhered to in the Gurkha regiments under the careful influence of the Gurkha Majors. Changes have

recently taken place, however, that will modify matters as far as the law is concerned. The new *Muluki Ain*—words derived from the Persian meaning Law of the Land—was promulgated by the royal government of Nepal in July 1963. It abolishes many of the old caste laws which forbade inter-marriage between classes and gave privileges to the upper castes that were denied to their humbler compatriots. Instead, it places the law on a secular basis, with equal rights for all sections of the population.

Many consider also that the *Pani Patiya* cleansing ceremony on return from overseas, which the government used to insist on in deference to the Brahmin's might well be dispensed with, and the *Pani patiya* certificate, which a man takes with him from the depot, be declared redundant.

In general religion lies lightly on the Gurkhas. They leave it to the professionals, the Bahuns, and stick to their own profession of arms. They carry out the rites because they are expected to do so, and being traditionalists in sentiment, they are reluctant to initiate changes. Life is an episode between the life before birth and the life after death, and it has its own rules which they do not often question.

At the end of his service the Gurkha takes his family home for the last time. It is a moving experience to attend a farewell party for a middle-aged senior officer. The *Burhos*, as the old and bold are nicknamed, have a lifetime of experience behind them in countries spread far and wide. The party will probably be held in the Q.G.O.'s mess. There will be food and drink, and there will be garlands for the *Burho*. Then there will be speeches recalling past exploits and wishing God Speed. Men who have faced the enemy unflinchingly in a dozen campaigns have been known to break down in tears.

Back in the village a retired officer is a man of substance, who commands respect. In the past such men have been largely content to sit back on their lands and retire from active participation in world affairs in accordance with the ancient Hindu custom. But nowadays they are taking an increasingly active part in the affairs of Nepal. As village headmen, chairmen of school boards and of ex-servicemen's organizations, participators in development schemes and sometimes even provincial governors, they make the weight of their judgment felt.

The majority of men still go back to their home villages, but as

the regiments grow older there are more and more who have lost the original tie. The most important factor in the retirement decision is the question of land, for one of the most cogent forces that persuades a father to send his son off to try his fortune in foreign service is the necessity to keep the home farm solvent. Though loot is no longer the accepted perquisite of battle that it used to be, with a pension of over a thousand rupees a year a retired officer can find enough capital to improve the family farm and live the life of a country squire, offering his hospitality to visitors from outside. A son in the army might well save another thousand a year to add to the family stock.

On a lower plane a man might inherit a plot of land too small to support a complete family. He joins the army and returns at the end of his service with enough money saved to buy an addition to his original holding and turn the whole into a viable farm. Whilst he is away, his original piece of land is worked by a relative, possibly even his wife.

If a man has land, he will go to it when he leaves the army. At the Resettlement Centre for pensioners, which was initiated by the Royal Army Educational Corps in 1960, he is most keenly interested in the courses in building and joinery. He wants to learn the practical use of the mason's and carpenter's tools, which will enable him to build his family a comfortable house to live in, and when he goes on the last trek home, he takes a set of tools with him. For in the hills self-help is essential. Every man is his own handyman.

Other factors are taken into consideration by the landless Gurkhas of Darjeeling and Dehra Doon. It may even be a son's education that is the deciding factor in persuading a man to settle near the school in which he has obtained a place, or having learnt a trade, he may go where there is an opportunity to practise it. This may not even be in Nepal, since the number of trade trained Gurkhas now leaving the army is outpacing the number of technicians Nepal is able to absorb into her own economy. A profitable trade in the future may well be that of radio mechanic, for large numbers of transistor radios are now going back into the hills and providing the Gurkhas with a link with world affairs. In these days a visitor to the hills may well be asked his views on current affairs topics that would hardly have had any impact before.

Basically, however, the Gurkha's heart is still with his home farm in the mountain vale. He feels the natural rhythm of the seasons in his bones, and the hand that wields the *kukri* with wild *elan* plants out the rice with a woman's tender care. His unvoiced feelings are summed up in this fine translation from Gurkhali of "The Dance of the Paddy Growers", written by an officer of the Brigade:

*Oh paddy growers! See the star-filled sky
And soft clouds fringed with silver tears of rain.
Across the rice fields hear the cuckoo cry
And watch the swaying wind-swept pools of grain.
Of milk-white rice we'll later eat our fill;
Now dance for joy! Yield to the drumbeat's will!*

*Now take the tender seedlings in your hand
And sink them softly in the monsoon clay.
Outshone by Nature's magic in the land
Our human joys and cares have paled away.*

*In cooler wintertime when nights are long
The earth is bare, yet love we it no less.
Our hearts still filled with gay and cheerful song
We kiss the soil to show our happiness.*

*If we had wings to sweep us in the air
Our lives might be imbued with Heaven's bliss.
But earth around us here is sweet and fair;
We ask for nothing lovelier than this.*

Index

- Abadan, 107
Abbottabad, 74, 79, 83, 124
Abors, 89, 90
Achi Baba, 95, 96
Aden, 13, 182, 183, 185
Adriatic, 108, 110
Aegean, 95, 160
Affandy, 173, 174
Afghanistan, 79, 80, 83, 95, 102, 159, 160
Afghans, 49, 50, 74, 79-82, 99
Afghan War, First, 81-3
 Third, 99
Afridis, 99
Afrika Korps, 107, 108
Agansing Rai, V.C., 114
Agra, 57
Ahmed Khel, 82
Akarit, 107, 150
Aksai Chin, 147
Albion, H.M.S., 174
Ale, 32
Alipore, 67
Aliwal, 58
Allahabad, 72
Almora, 49, 51, 54, 79, 91
Alor Star, 111
Amara, 96
Amarsing Thapa, Gen., 41, 48-50, 52, 56,
 91
Ambala, 147
Ambeyla, 80
Americans, 22, 115, 166
Amlekhganj, 104
Ampipal, 26
Amritsar, 118
Ankhu Khola, 24
Annapurna, 91
Appenines, 110
Arabia, 97
Arabian Sea, 96
Arabs, 100, 101, 185
Arakan, 13, 112
Armenia, 96
Army, Eighth, 107-109
 Fourteenth, 77, 113-15, 150
Arughat, 25
Arun, 40
Asof-ud-Daulah, 46
Asoka Chakra, 142
Assam, 77, 83, 84, 90, 112, 130, 146, 147
Astrakhan, 99
Aubers, 94
Australians, 95, 107, 111, 160, 162
Ayodhya, 193
Azahari, 155, 172, 173
Azamgarh, 70
Azerbaijan, 98
Baghdad, 96, 97, 100, 106
Baglung, 91
Bagmati, 34, 60
Bahadur Shah, 41, 69
Bahuns, 25, 78, 195, 198
Bailey, 90
Baji Rao, 51
Bakloh, 74, 79, 86, 88, 91, 123
Baku, 98
Balajiu, 17
Baluchs, 123, 141
Bandar Pahlevi, 98
Bandoeng, 116
Banihal pass, 139
Bannu, 104
Baramula, 138, 139
Barang Burung, 23
Bareilly, 70
Bareo, 176, 177
Barrackpore, 125
Basant Panchami, 192
Basantpur, 60
Basra, 100, 106
Batar Bazaar, 20
Batum, 98
Beaconsfield, 181, 183
Benares, 38, 64, 70, 72
Bengal, 54, 90, 112, 120-22
Bentong, 156
Betham, Lt.-Col., 106
Betrawati, 41, 50
Bhadgaun, 33, 34, 37
Bhagte Thapa, 49
Bhairewa, 15
Bhai Tika, 197
Bhanbhagta Gurung, V.C., 112, 113
Bhanubhakta, 192
Bharat, 193
Bharatpur, 57
Bhimphedi, 104
Bhimshen Thapa, 47, 50, 51, 57, 59, 61
Bhim Shamsheer, 105
Bhirkot, 33
Bhitri Madesh, 16
Bhotias, 16, 55
Bhurtpore, 47, 57, 58

- Bhutan, 88, 90, 144
 Bichhakori, 64
 Bihar, 33, 46, 51, 54, 55, 122, 193
 Biharis, 55
 Bilaspur, 49
 Biratnagar, 127
 Birdwood, F.-M., 104
 Birganj, 20, 22
 Bishenpur, 114
 Black Mountain, 80
 Black Sea, 98
 Blakang Mati, 151
 Bokhara, 80, 99
 Bolsheviks, 98, 99
 Bombahadur, 64
 Borneo, 11, 13, 154, 155, 157, 169, 171-3,
 179, 180
 Boxers, 86
 Brahma, 194
 Brahmaputra, 90, 147
 Brahmins, 22, 25, 28, 32, 33, 36, 67, 85, 198
 Bridgemanganj, 15
 Britain, 62, 86, 92, 105, 120, 123, 125, 127,
 145
 British, 22, 47, 49, 50, 71, 77, 80, 83, 87,
 92, 95, 99, 100, 111, 124, 166
 British Army, 26, 52, 57, 77, 78, 106, 107,
 110, 124, 125, 127-9, 138, 174, 181,
 187, 188
 Brooke, Raja, 171, 174
 Bruce, Gen., 83
 Brunei, 155, 159, 169, 171-5, 177, 178
 Buddha, 15
 Buddhism, 33
 Bukit Mertajam, 161
 Bulanshahr, 67
 Buri Gandaki, 17, 25
 Burma, 10, 30, 77, 84-86, 91, 112-15, 120,
 124-6, 150, 156, 169, 190
 Burmese, 77, 79
 Butterworth, 162
 Butwal, 48

 Cairo, 107
 Calcutta, 15, 22, 26, 31, 46, 51, 64, 74, 76,
 88, 112, 121, 122, 125, 127, 129, 187
 Cambridge, 182
 Campbell, Gen., 71
 Campierganj, 15
 Canning, Lord, 66
 Canton, 166, 169
 Capuchins, 36
 Caspian Sea, 97-9
 Casino, 108-10
 Castle Peak, 169
 Caucasus, 98, 99
 Cawnpore, 70, 73
 Celebes, 30
 Ceylon, 193
 Chait, 20

 Chaite Dasein, 20, 24
 Chamba, 74
 Chandra Shamsher, 92, 105, 126, 151
 Channer, V.C., 85
 Charasia, 81, 82, 95
 Chhettris, 20, 145
 China, 13, 41, 46, 62, 83, 86-8, 92, 129,
 146, 148, 167
 Chindits, 113
 Chindwin, 112, 113, 115
 Chinese, 41, 46, 47, 50, 83, 85, 87, 90, 146,
 147, 165-7
 Chin hills, 85
 Chisapani Garhi, 104
 Chitor, 31
 Chitral, 83
 Chunak Bair, 96
 Chunar, 64
 Churchill, Sir W., 110
 Churia hills, 16, 48, 50
 Colombo, 182, 183
 Colonelganj, 72
 Combermere, Lord, 57, 58
 Comorin, 76
 Congo, 145, 147
 Constantinople, 95, 99
 Coriano, 110
 Cornwallis, Lord, 46
 Crimea, 80
 Ctesiphon, 96
 Cuttack Legion, 77
 Cyprus, 85, 107

 Daghestan, 98
 Dalai Lama, 30, 89
 Dalhousie, Lord, 64
 Dalhousie (place), 74
 Danuvanta, 35, 37
 Dardanelles, 82, 95, 96
 Dargai, 83, 103
 Darjeeling, 40, 76, 88, 89, 91, 119, 160, 161,
 192, 199
 Darondi, 17
 Dasahra, 20, 147, 183, 192, 194, 195, 197
 Dasein, 20, 194
 Deep Bay, 168
 Dehra Doon, 30, 48, 51-4, 57, 67, 77, 79
 91, 119, 124, 143, 145-7, 169, 199
 Delhi, 46, 48, 51, 66-9, 74, 105, 113, 115,
 117, 126, 146, 147, 150, 154
 Deniken, Gen., 98
 Deorali, 30
 Devibahadur, 63
 Dhading, 24, 25
 Dhai, 189
 Dhankuta, 91
 Dhar, 86
 Dharan, 127
 Dharara, 61, 62
 Dharmasala, 91

- Dhir Shamsher, 65
 Dihang, 90
 Dinapur, 50
 Division, 4th, 108, 110
 Division, 17th, 10, 114
 Diwali, 197
 Djemal Pasha, 96
 Dogras, 123, 138
 Dola Jatra, 27
 Domel, 138
 Doshan Teppe, 107
 Drabya Shah, 31, 33
 Dras, 140
 Dufferin, Fort, 115
 Dunera, 86, 125
 Dunsterforce, 99
 Dunsterville, Gen., 99
 Durga, 192, 194-6
 Dusseldorf, 185
 Dutch, 116, 185
 Dyer, Gen., 118

 East India Company, 37, 46, 48, 50-52, 55,
 57, 64, 74, 138, 171
 Ebisu, 116
 Edinburgh, 64, 71
 Edward VII, 92
 Egypt, 107
 Eighth Army, 107-109
 El Alamein, 107
 Elizabeth II, 154, 181
 Enfidaville, 108
 England, 181-6
 Enzeli, 98
 Euphrates, 96, 101
 Everest, 40, 83

 Faenza, 111
 Fan Ling, 167, 169
 Ferozpur, 58
 Festubert, 10, 94
 Florence, 110
 Fort Dufferin, 115
 Fort Sandeman, 80
 Fourteenth Army, 77, 113-15, 150
 France, 10, 86, 94, 106
 French, 87
 Freyberg, Gen., 108
 Fu Kang, Gen., 41
 Fyzabad, 70

 Gabes, 107
 Gagan Sing, 63
 Gaiana, 111
 Gaine, 16
 Gaje Ghale, V.C., 114
 Gallipoli, 10, 94-6
 Gambirsing Pun, 96
 Gandaki, 33, 143
 Gandhi, 117

 Ganesh Himal, 24
 Ganges, 53, 67, 72, 122, 144
 Ganje, 23, 25
 Ganju Lamma, V.C., 114, 115
 Gardner, 49, 51, 74
 Garhmukteshwar, 122
 Garhwal, 40, 46, 48, 49, 53, 67, 123
 Gartok, 147
 Gauri Sankar, 40
 George V, 92
 Georgia, 98
 Germans, 87, 94, 103, 105, 107-11
 Germany, 86, 97, 185
 Ghandrung, 33, 91
 Ghazni, 82
 Ghoom, 91, 125
 Gibraltar, 182
 Gilan, 98
 Gilgit, 140, 141
 Gillespie, Gen., 48, 51
 Giuseppe, Father, 36, 37
 Givenchy, 10, 94
 Gogra, 70
 Goorkhas, 2nd, 26, 53, 54, 66, 67-9, 82,
 83, 94, 97, 107, 110, 124, 134, 150, 154,
 169, 172, 181
 Gorakhnath, 20, 22, 28
 Gorakhpur, 9, 15, 46-8, 51, 70, 71, 91, 104,
 125
 Gordon Highlanders, 83
 Gorkha, 15, 17, 20, 22, 26-31, 33, 34, 38
 Gosainthan, 40
 Gothic line, 110
 Gough, Lord, 64, 65
 Grant, V.C., 89
 Greece, 98
 Greenjackets, 67, 177
 Gulab Sing, 138
 Gulmi, 33
 Gurkha Bluff, 95
 Gurkha Brigade, 91, 94, 117, 127, 128, 142,
 145, 149, 164
 Gurkha Brigade, 43rd, 110
 Gurkha Division, 17, 110, 117, 128, 149
 Gurkha Mound, 97
 Gurkha Rifles, 1st, 30, 52, 56, 86, 97, 124,
 147
 3rd, 10, 54, 74, 82, 88, 94, 97, 122, 146
 4th, 10, 74, 82, 84, 86-8, 98, 104, 107,
 123, 147
 5th, 10, 74, 77, 79-83, 95, 99, 100, 107,
 114, 116, 124, 140, 142, 145
 6th, 77, 83, 95, 96, 110, 115, 124, 125, 167
 7th, 86, 91, 96, 97, 113, 117, 124, 159,
 168, 173, 177
 8th, 77, 88-90, 94, 110, 122, 141, 146, 148
 9th, 10, 77, 108-10, 140, 141, 145-7
 10th, 86, 91, 95, 110-13, 115, 122, 124,
 151, 152, 155
 11th, 10, 143

- Gurungs, 20, 23, 31, 33, 75, 91, 127
 Gyantse, 89
 Habibullah Khan, 99
 Hamilton, 48
 Gen., 81, 95
 Hangman's Hill, 108-10
 Hanuman, 194
 Hardwar, 53, 144
 Hari Sing, 138
 Hastings, Marquess of, 49, 56
 Hatia, 41, 88
 Havildar, 78, 130
 Hazara hills, 138
 Helles, Cape, 95
 Highlanders, 93rd, 71
 Himalayas, 13, 15, 16, 22, 24, 40, 53-5, 82,
 88, 140, 145, 146
 Hindu Kush, 83
 Hindu Rao, 66, 68, 150
 Hindus, 32-4, 40, 64, 72, 73, 85, 90, 117,
 118, 121-2, 138, 143-4, 188, 192, 197
 Hindustani, 151
 Hiro, 116
 Hiroshima, 115, 116
 Ho Chi-minh, 129
 Hodgson, 74, 75
 Holi, 192
 Hong Kong, 13, 86, 87, 149, 154, 165-70
 173, 177, 180, 187
 Hoshyarsing Gurung, M.M., 134
 Hyderabad, 142
 Ibans, 155, 174, 175, 178
 Ilam, 91
 Imbros, 96
 Imphal, 13, 84, 112, 114, 121, 148
 India, 31, 33, 51, 53, 58, 72-4, 76, 77, 79,
 82-4, 88, 112, 117, 119, 121, 123-7,
 139, 141, 144, 151
 Indian Army, 15, 20, 22, 52, 54, 57, 74, 78,
 86, 91, 92, 94, 103, 105, 106, 123, 124,
 138, 141, 142, 145, 164, 181
 Indian Congress, 117, 119, 120
 Indian Corps, 94
 Indian Division, 4th, 107, 108, 110
 17th, 114
 Indian Military College, 143
 Indian Military Mission, 144
 Indian Mutiny, 57, 66-74, 76, 77, 79
 Indian National Army, 119, 120
 Indian National Defence Academy, 30,
 125, 143
 Indian Police, 22, 119
 Indians, 17, 35, 87, 111
 Indo-China, 116, 129
 Indonesia, 13, 155, 169, 172
 Indonesians, 116, 174
 Indra, 193, 194
 Indra Jatra, 37
 Indus, 79, 80, 140, 166
 Inland Sea, 116
 Ipi, Fakir of, 103
 Ipoh, 159, 161
 Iran, 97, 98, 106, 107
 Iraq, 100
 Irrawaddy, 86, 112, 115
 Italians, 87, 99, 107
 Italy, 26, 86, 108-11, 116, 128
 Jalapahar, 125, 127
 Jamare Aunsi, 195
 Jammu, 138, 139, 140, 147
 Jamrud, 100
 Janakhpur, 193
 Janam Ashtami, 192
 Jangalis, 97
 Jangbahadur Rana, 59-66, 70-73, 76, 79
 Japan, 13, 86, 116, 120, 121, 129
 Japanese, 10, 77, 83, 87, 103, 111-16, 119,
 120, 129, 153, 156, 160
 Jaswant Rao Holkar, 57
 Jats, 57, 123
 Jaunpur, 70
 Java, 116
 Jaya Prakash Malla, 33, 34, 36, 38
 Jemadar, 78, 120
 Jerusalem, 97
 Jhelum, 138, 139, 167
 Jinnah, 118, 121
 Jitra, 111
 Johore, 130, 155
 Johore Bahru, 111, 155
 Juddha Shamsher, 104-106, 143, 144
 Jumna, 53, 69
 Jyapu, 36
 Kabir Thapa, I.O.M., 101
 Kabul, 81, 82
 Kailas, 39
 Kakani, 17
 Kalabakan, 178
 Kalaratri, 195
 Kali, 28, 192
 Kalika Darbar, 22, 28
 Kalimpong, 119, 192
 Kalunga, 48-50
 Kampar, 111
 Kanchenjunga, 91
 Kandahar, 82
 Kangra, 41, 49, 91
 Karakorums, 83, 89, 138, 140, 141, 147
 Kargil, 140
 Kashmir, 83, 138-41, 145-7
 Kasiram Thapa, 34
 Kaski, 33, 91, 186
 Katanga, 145
 Katmandu, 9, 15, 17, 20, 22, 23, 27, 28, 30,
 33-6, 39, 41, 47, 48, 50, 51, 58, 60,
 61, 64-5, 72, 76, 92, 104, 126, 154, 192

- Katunje, 23
 Kedah, 125, 161, 163, 166
 Kedayans, 155
 Kelabits, 176, 177
 Kennedy, 57
 Khancha, 33
 Khanchowk, 27
 Khargabikram Rana, M.M., 134
 Khas, 32, 75
 Khidr, 101
 Khinchit, 20
 Khyber Pass, 99, 100
 Kinabalu, 171
 Kingdon Ward, 90
 Kinloch, 37
 Kinrara, 181-3
 Kiranti, 39, 40, 91
 Kirkpatrick, 48
 Kirtipur, 35-7
 Kissenganj, 69
 Kluang, 158, 159
 Knox, 48
 Kohima, 84, 112
 Kohistan, 83
 Konga pass, 147
 Korea, 116, 141, 167
 Kosi, 39
 Kot, 20, 64
 Kowloon, 165, 166
 Koyapani, 26
 Krasnovodsk, 99
 Krishna, 192, 196
 Krithia, 95
 Kshatriya, 32, 145
 Kuala Lumpur, 120, 159, 172, 181
 Kuchik Khan, 97
 Kukri, 9, 20, 35, 59, 66, 79, 87, 96, 105,
 108, 110, 113, 132, 133, 140, 150, 157,
 184, 194, 200
 Kulbir Thapa, V.C., 94
 Kulu, 140
 Kumaun, 40, 46, 49, 74, 75
 Kumaun Bn., 54, 69
 Kunraghat, 15
 Kure, 116
 Kurram, 81
 Kut-al-Amara, 96, 97
 Kutai, 40
 Kyaukse, 112

 La Bassée, 10, 94
 Labuan, 171, 177
 Lachhiman Gurung, V.C., 115
 Lachhman, 193, 197
 Ladakh, 13, 141, 145-7
 Lahore, 49, 66, 150
 Lahures, 49
 Lake, Lord, 57
 Lakshmi, 197
 Lakshmi Devi, Queen, 64

 Lalbahadur Thapa, V.C., 107, 150
 Lamjung, 33, 36, 91, 186
 Lamone, 111
 Landi Khana, 99
 Lansdowne, 77
 Lantau, 169
 Lawrence, Sir H., 76
 Sir J., 79
 Lea, M.C., 173
 Leh, 140, 145, 146
 Lehra, 15, 125, 127
 Leicestershire Regt., 94
 Lekh, 31
 Lhasa, 40, 83, 89, 90
 Libya, 107
 Limbus, 91, 196
 Lockart, 69
 Lombardy, 110
 London, 46, 64, 156, 174, 183
 Loos, 94
 Lo Wu, 169
 Loralai, 9
 Lucknow, 47, 70, 71, 73, 184
 Ludhiana, 9, 48, 58
 Luftwaffe, 105
 Lushai, 77, 112
 Lyster, V.C., 82

 Machhapuchhare, 32
 Machhendranath, 22
 MacMahon line, 83, 90, 147
 Madras Regt., 122
 Magars, 31, 33, 75, 91, 127, 162
 Maghe Sankranti, 192
 Maha Kali, 49
 Maha Vir Chakra, 140, 142
 Mahabharat Mtns., 16, 50
 Mahendra, King, 146, 154
 Mahishasur, 194, 196
 Mahrattas, 50, 51, 57, 74, 123
 Mahsuds, 10, 79, 103, 138, 139
 Maiwand, 82
 Majeedee, 155, 158, 182
 Makwanpur, 36, 50, 51
 Malacca, 157
 Malakand, 103
 Malaun, 49-52, 91
 Malaun Regt., 52, 54, 124
 Malaya, 10, 85, 111-14, 116, 120, 124, 125,
 128-30, 138, 149, 154-6, 171, 175, 186
 Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army,
 128, 129
 Malaysia, 152, 155, 170-72, 180
 Mallas, 33, 34, 37, 39
 Mandalay, 85, 86, 112, 115, 147
 Mangranth, 91
 Manipur, 77, 84, 113, 121
 Mar, 196
 Mareth line, 107
 Marley, Gen., 48, 50

- Marmora, Sea of, 96
 Marsyandi, 17
 Marunis, 195, 196
 Matmata hills, 107
 Maula, 21, 196
 Maymyo, 86, 91, 112, 189, 190
 Mazanderan, 98
 Mechi, Khola, 49
 Medicina, 111
 Mediterranean, 97, 107, 108
 Meerut, 66, 67
 Megiddo, 97
 Meiktila, 169
 Merv, 80
 Mesopotamia, 10, 94, 96, 97
 Messina, 108
 Milna, 111
 Mincha, 33
 Mishmi, 77
 Moguls, 32, 46, 69, 70, 74
 Mohan Shamsher, 126
 Mohmands, 79, 103
 Moira, Lord, 47, 49
 Monte Chicco, 110
 Monywa, 112
 Mountbatten, Earl, 138
 Mundy, 47, 53, 57
 Murree, 138
 Muslims, 31, 32, 53, 55, 72, 73, 80, 118,
 121-3, 138
 Mussolini, 111
 Mussoorie, 48
 Mustapha Kemal, 95
 Muzaffarabad, 138
 Myinmu, 115
 Myitkina, 113

 Nagas, 77, 112, 142, 146, 148
 Nagasaki, 115
 Naik, 78, 130
 Nainabahadur Rai, M.M., 173, 174
 Naini Tal, 54
 Nana Sahib, 73
 Naples, 108
 Narabhupal Shah, 33
 Nasariyah, 96
 Nasiri Regt., 52, 54
 Nasrullah Khan, 99
 Nautanwa, 15, 91
 Nawab of Oudh, 46, 72
 Nawakot (No. 1 West), 20, 34, 37
 Nawakot (No. 3 West), 33
 Nee Soon, 154, 155, 177
 Negri Sembilan, 85, 149
 Nehru, 139
 Nepalese Army, 20, 83, 92, 94, 143
 Nepali Congress, 125, 126, 144
 Nepal Valley, 17, 20, 28, 29, 33-7, 39, 50,
 91, 125, 126
 Netrabahadur Thapa, V.C., 114

 Neuve Chapelle, 10, 94
 Newars, 20, 24, 28, 33-6, 60, 125
 New Territories, 165, 167, 168
 New Zealand, 95, 108
 Nicholas, Czar, 80
 Nicholson, 69
 Ningthoukong, 114
 North Africa, 107
 North Borneo, 171, 174, 177
 North-East Frontier, 22, 77, 79, 88, 147
 North-West Frontier, 9, 10, 74, 79, 81, 83,
 94, 102-104, 138
 Number One West, 20
 Number Three West, 91
 Number Four West, 91

 Ochterlony, Gen., 48-51
 Okhaldunga, 173
 Orissa, 77
 Oudh, 46, 70, 71

 Padma Shamsher, 62, 94
 Padua, 111
 Pahang, 156
 Paiforce, 106
 Pakistan, 117-8, 123, 124, 138-9, 141, 147
 Paklihawa, 127
 Palal, 84
 Palestine, 97
 Palosia, 79
 Palpa, 48, 91
 Panchayats, 30, 78
 Pandes, 39, 59, 60, 63
 Panggong Lake, 146
 Param Vir Chakra, 142, 146
 Parbate, 13, 154
 Pashupatinath, 34, 37
 Passano, 110
 Patan, 22, 33-7
 Pathankot, 86, 139
 Pathans, 79, 80, 82
 Patna, 122
 Patuka, 35
 Pegu, 112, 115
 Peiwar Kotal, 81
 Peking, 31, 41, 87
 Penaga, 173
 Penang, 125, 127, 161, 162, 187
 Pepeganj, 15
 Perak, 85
 Persian Gulf, 96
 Peshawar, 76, 100, 103
 Petrovsk, 98
 Phalangu, 41
 Phaluntar, 17
 Philippines, 173
 Phulpati, 195
 Piccadilly, 65, 183
 Pir Kanti, 140
 Plassey, 46

- Pokhara, 15, 16, 183
 Poona, 51
 Poonch, 139, 141
 Popti La, 40
 Potala, 89
 Pradhans, 34, 37, 39
 Prithwi Narayan Shah, 28, 34-9, 59, 125
 Prome, 112
 Punjab, 48, 65, 69, 74, 79, 102, 117, 123, 167
 Punjab Border Force, 123
 Punjab Frontier Force, 79
 Puns, 32, 162
 Pursenges, 195

 Queen's Truncheon, 66
 Quetta, 80, 86, 91, 102

 Rais, 91
 Rajauri, 139
 Rajputs, 31, 123
 Rakamsing Rai, M.C., 13, 189, 191
 Raksha Dal, 144
 Ram, 193, 195-7
 Ramayana, 192
 Ramgarh, 148
 Ranas, 33, 39, 92, 125, 126, 145, 154
 Rangoon, 112, 115, 127
 Rani Powah, 17
 Ranjit Malla, 33, 34, 37, 38
 Ranjit Sing, 41, 50, 56, 64, 117, 138
 Rapti, 39
 Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh, 123
 Ravana, 193, 196
 Raxaul, 104
 Razmak, 80, 103
 Recruiters, 191
 Resht, 97
 Reza Shah, 106
 Rikhi Tarpan, 192
 Rimini, 110
 Riri, 143
 Roberts, Earl, 81, 82
 Rohilkund, 46
 Rohillas, 46
 Rome, 110
 Rommel, 107
 Roorkee, 67
 Russia, 86, 98
 Russians, 80, 83, 85, 87-9, 107

 Sabah, 177
 Sahabir Thapa, M.M., 135
 Saigon, 30, 157
 Salonika, 98
 Samarkand, 80
 Samawa, 100, 101
 Samri Khola, 20, 22
 San Bartelo, 110
 Sandakan, 157, 178, 179
 Sandeman, Fort, 80

 San Sevino, 110
 Santarcangelo, 110
 Santerno, 111
 Sarawak, 155, 170, 171, 174, 175
 Sari Bair, 96
 Saros Gulf, 95
 S.A.S. Regt., 22nd, 175
 Scotland, 181, 183
 Seaforth Highlanders, 81, 82
 Segauli, 51, 74, 106
 Sek Kong, 166
 Selangor, 85
 Senio, 111
 Sen Wai, 167
 Seremban, 114, 149, 154, 159, 164
 Seria, 171
 Seringapatam, 50
 Sewalik Hills, 48, 67
 Shaiba, 96
 Shanghai, 87, 165
 Shanhaikwan, 87, 88
 Shan Hills, 86
 Sharon, 97
 Sharquat, 97
 Shatin, 167
 Shattoul pass, 57
 Shekar Dzong, 40
 Shenam, 114
 Shigatse, 40
 Shillong, 77, 79, 81
 Shore, 53
 Sibiu, 179, 180
 Sicily, 108
 Sikhs, 46, 49, 50, 58, 64, 74, 87, 117, 123,
 138, 146, 150
 Sikiang, 90
 Sikkim, 40, 41, 49, 144
 Silchar, 114
 Siliguri, 89
 Sillaro, 111
 Simla, 48, 49, 51, 56, 57, 76, 145
 Singapore, 10, 23, 111, 119, 120, 125, 127,
 129, 149, 151-5, 165, 169, 172, 177,
 182, 183, 187
 Singh, Dr. K. I., 144
 Sirmoor, 49, 51, 53
 Sirmoor, Bn., 52, 67-9, 84, 124
 Sisagarhi, 104
 Sita, 193, 197
 Sittang, 115
 Siva, 28, 192, 194
 Sivaratri, 192
 Sixtieth Rifles, 67, 68, 84, 150
 Skardu, 140
 Slim, F.-M., 150
 Slim River, 111
 Sobraon, 58, 150
 Srinagar, 138-41
 Subathu, 56, 145
 Subedar, 57, 58, 63, 78, 105

- Subedar-Major, 78, 105, 120
 Subhas, 39
 Subhas Chandra Bose, 120, 121
 Suez, 85, 96, 153, 182
 Sungei Besi, 182
 Sungei Patani, 125, 154, 161, 164
 Sungei Udang, 157
 Surendra Bikram Shah, 61, 62
 Sutlej, 49, 58
 Suvla Bay, 96, 160
 Swat, 103
 Sylhet, 77
 Syria, 97
- Tadi, 19, 20
 Tai Lam, 169
 Tai Mo Shan, 166, 167
 Taiping, 118
 Taipo, 168
 Tamangs, 20, 91
 Tam Mei, 168
 Tammu, 114
 Tansing, 73
 Taple, 27
 Tashi Lama, 40
 Tashi Llumpo, 40, 88
 Tashkent, 99
 Taungdaw, 115
 Tavoletto, 110
 Tawau, 177, 178
 Teheran, 106, 107
 Temiar, 137
 Templer, F.-M., 160
 Tensing, Sherpa, 161
 Terai, 9, 37, 47-50, 60, 64, 73, 79, 92, 104,
 105
 Terendak, 157
 Thackeray, 55, 65
 Thailand, 116, 161
 Thak, 16
 Thakur Nathu Singh, Gen., 145
 Thakurs, 33, 39
 Thaman Gurung, V.C., 110
 Thankot, 104
 Thapas, 39, 59, 60
 Thapathali, 59, 72
 Thaple Khola, 23
 Tharpu, 23
 Thayetmyo, 86
 Thibaw, King, 85, 86
 Tibet, 13, 39-41, 62, 66, 76, 88, 90, 140,
 144, 147
 Tibetans, 40, 55, 88, 89, 154
 Tidworth, 13, 155, 181, 184, 185
 Tientsin, 87
 Tigris, 96, 97
 Tika, 197
 Tipu, 50
 Tirah, 83
- Tirhut, 33
 Tithwal, 139
 Tobruk, 107
 Tokyo, 116
 Tribhubana, King, 126, 146
 Tripureshwar, 60
 Trisuli, 17, 20, 22, 29
 Trochhio, 109
 Tsangpo, 90
 Tuitum, 114
 Tucker, Gen., 110, 145
 Tunis, 107
 Tunisia, 107, 150
 Turkestan, 13
 Turkey, 85, 97
 Turkomans, 99
 Turks, 95, 96, 98, 100, 160
 Turner, Sir R., 102
 Tutong, 173
- Ulu Tiram, 155
 United Mission, 26
 United States, 86
 Ur, 100, 101
 Uri, 139
 U.S. Aid Mission, 22
 U.S. Peace Corps, 22, 29
 U.S.S.R., 99
 Uttar Pradesh, 46, 123
- Viceroy, 77, 139
 Victoria, Queen, 64, 74, 80, 87
 Viet Cong, 157
 Vietnam, 157
 Vir Chakra, 142
- Waldensee, Count, 87
 Wana, 80, 103
 Wavell, Earl, 107
 Waziristan, 79, 103
 Wazirs, 79, 103
 Wellington, Duke of, 64
 Western Desert, 107
 Wilson, Gen., 69
 Wood, Gen., 48, 50
 Woosung, 87
 World War, First, 10, 92-7, 143, 181
 Second, 10, 77, 105-116, 120, 153, 181,
 191
- Yakub Khan, 80
 Yehcheng, 147
 Yol, 147
 Young, 53, 54
 Younghusband, 83, 89
 Ypres, 94
- Zamindars, 46
 Zoji La, 140

