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THE DEFENCE OF AMBOOR – AN INCIDENT IN THE FIRST MYSORE WAR

Dr R N V Thomas

INTRODUCTION

It is unfortunate to relate that the eighteenth and early nineteenth century campaigns which established British rule in India are significantly less well known than those of the Victorian period and the twentieth century. This may generally be ascribed to the relative paucity of documentary material, at least in comparison to the later period, the scarcity of eyewitness accounts, the almost total lack of artefacts (uniforms, medals, badges, etc.) and of course the complete absence of photographic evidence. This, however, should not detract from battles and campaigns, which were equally as stirring and conducted under as severe conditions as those better known engagements on the north-west Frontier, Burma and Afghanistan. It is hoped that this short article will serve to increase awareness of a period which is too often neglected by historians.

BACKGROUND

The First Mysore War (1767-1769) was fought between the British represented by Col. Joseph Smith (Commander-In-Chief, Bengal) and Hyder All of Mysore, the father of Tippoo Sahib. To understand the background to the campaign, something must be said of the political situation in eastern and central India at this time. The British had obtained supreme control of the Carnatic less than ten years previously by defeating the French forces in the Seven Years War (1756-1763) culminating in the fall of Pondicherry (15 January 1761). Although that town was restored to France by the Treaty of Paris two years later, French military power was temporarily ended and the Compagnie des Indes dissolved in 1769. The British had installed Mohammed Ali as Nabob of the Carnatic in 1763, but this gentleman had designs on acquiring further territory in the form of the Deccan, controlled by Hyder Ali. The final player was Nizam Ali of Hyderabad, who greatly resented the expansionist policy pursued by Hyder but also recognised the advantages of disposing of Mohammed Ali and the British.

The origins of the war were hardly creditable to the Council at Madras, which had allowed itself to be comprehensively out-manoeuvred by Hyder Ali on the diplomatic front. Not only had he paid off the Mahrattas by returning conquered territory to them, but he had also played on the Nizam’s desire to settle old scores with the British and had persuaded him to change sides. Thus, with the departure of the Mahrattas (who, it was supposed, would attack Hyder from the north) and the miscalculation of the Nizam's intentions, the master-plan produced by the Madras Council for the destruction of Hyder Ali was in ruins even before the first troops marched.

THE DEFENCE OF AMBOOR

The campaign had not begun well for the British, and Colonel Smith was forced to retreat to the Carnatic over the Eastern Ghauts, closely pursued by the combined armies of the Nizam and Hyder Ali. However, British and Indian troops had been left as garrisons in the three forts of Tripatore,

Vaniambaddy and Amboor, situated in the mountains on the edge of Mysorean territory, approximately midway between Madras and Bangalore. Through quick thinking and skilful generalship, Smith managed to defeat the Nizam and Hyder outside Trincomalee (26-27 September 1767) thus driving them back over the Ghauts and out of the Carnatic. However, he was almost immediately forced by miserable supply arrangements to distribute his troops over a wide area and so was unable to come to the assistance of Tripatore and Vaniambaddy, which were quickly captured by Hyder. Hyder, meanwhile, turned his attention to Amboor, which he invested on 10 November 1767.

The 500 strong garrison of Amboor was commanded by Captain Calvert of the Madras Army, and consisted of a detachment from one of the three European regiments on the Madras establishment, one company of the 5th Battalion Coast Sepoys and most of the 14th Battalion Coast Sepoys. Despite having lost a total of 64 guns at Trincomalee, Hyder's artillery bombardment was of sufficient weight to force Calvert to abandon the lower fort on 15 November. With his outworks commanded by the Mysorean batteries, Calvert was forced back into the upper fort to await the arrival of a relief force.

Meanwhile, Smith recalled a column under Colonel Wood that had been sent south to Trichinopoly and immediately marched south-west along the line of the Palar River to relieve his garrisons. Fortunately, the fortress of Amboor was situated on the top of a large granite mountain and was thus of considerable strength. In addition to this, Hyder had been unable to take the fortress through intrigue, meaning that the garrison was still holding out when Smith arrived on 6 December to relieve them. During the twenty-six day siege, Calvert's garrison had lost a native officer and 11 men killed and 23 men wounded, or 7% of their strength. Having accomplished his task, Smith retired back to the Carnatic by marching due south and then east, crossing the Ghauts via the pass of Singarapettah, managing to beat off an attack launched by Hyder on 29 December. This temporarily ended field operations, which were resumed in earnest the following May.

EPILOGUE

Peace was eventually made by Hyder Ali on 2 April 1769 after an incredible march by over 6000 of his troops of 130 miles in 84 hours to the gates of Madras.

All prisoners and conquests were restored by both parties and a defensive alliance was signed, by which each would assist the other in the event of attack by a third force.

Their gallant defence of Amboor earned the 14th Coast Sepoys the award of a third colour commemorating the siege. This appears to have been relatively common practise at the time for the recognition of particularly gallant behaviour, though this is one of the first recorded incidents of such an award. The 14th were also granted the battle honour "Amboor" which was unique in the British and Indian armies. The battalion underwent various changes of title in subsequent years, but as the 1st/10th Regiment of Madras Native Infantry it participated in Wellesley's Deccan Campaign in 1803, fighting at Assaye (23 September). It also formed part of the force sent to Burma in 1824-6, and thus earned the battle honour "Ava". The regiment was disbanded in 1891 and its number was taken by the then 10th Regiment (1st Burma Battalion) of Madras Infantry, now the 10th P.M.O. Gurkha Rifles.

Of the two other battalions from which detachments participated in the siege, the Europeans became the 102nd Royal Madras Fusiliers in 1861 and were absorbed into the British Army on the disbandment of the East India Company. Following the 1881 Army Reforms they became the 1st

Bn. Royal Dublin Fusiliers and were eventually disbanded on 31 July 1922. The 5th Battalion Coast Sepoys, as with nearly all Indian regiments, underwent numerous changes of title until in 1922 it became the 2nd Battalion Corps of Madras Pioneers and was disbanded in 1933. As with the 14th Coast Sepoys, the battalion fought at Assaye and also served alongside the Madras European Regiment at Sholinghur (27 September 1781) when Eyre Coote defeated Hyder Ali during the Second Mysore War (1780-83)

APPENDIX

Probable organisation of a battalion on the Madras establishment in the mid-18th century

Although it is not known for certain how Madras battalions were organised at this time, units of the Bengal establishment, which were modelled on those of the Madras Presidency, were organised as follows between 1757-1773:

Battalion Staff:

- Captain (Commanding Officer) British
- Lieutenant British
- Ensign British
- Sergeant-Major British
- several Sergeants British
- Native Commandant
- Native Adjutant
- Eight Battalion Companies
- Two Grenadier Companies

Each company was commanded by a Subedar and consisted of:

- 3 Jemadars
- 5 Havildars
- 4 Naiks
- 2 Tom-Tom
- 1 Trumpeter
- 70 Sepoys

85 all ranks

It is likely, therefore, that the Amboor garrison consisted of less than half of the paper strength of the 14th Coast Sepoys, and that Captain Calvert was in fact its Commanding Officer.

SOURCES

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NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

Two new postcards are available, price 15p each plus postage.

'NATIVE TROOPS E. INDIA COMPANY'S SERVICE

Governor-General's Bodyguard, Bengal Cavalry and Java Volunteers.

Coloured aquatint after Lt Col Charles Hamilton Smith (1776-1859), published 1815

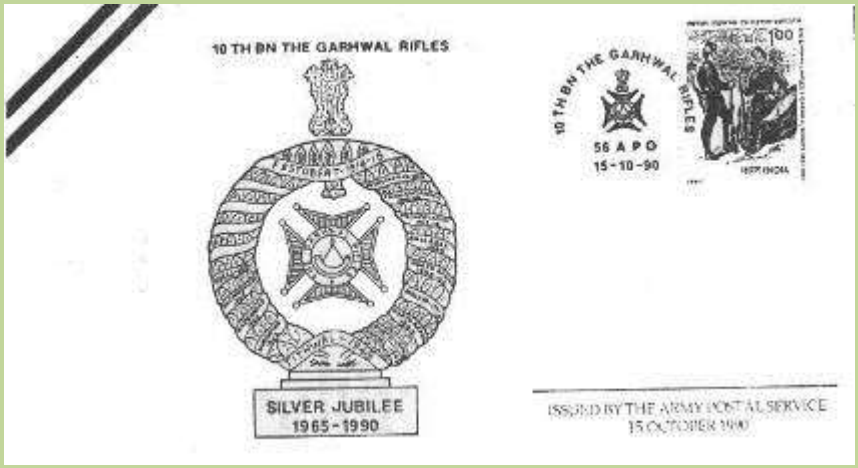
THE 5TH GURKHA RIFLES AT THE BATTLE OF PEIWAR KOTAL, 1878

Oil on canvas by Vereker Hamilton (f1 1880-1914)

THE GARHWAL RIFLES - TWO CENTENARY SNIPPETS

C.R. Walters

'The Ghost of Garhwal' was the topic of a recent article marking last year's centenary of the Garhwal Regiment, celebrated in the little cantonment of Lansdowne. During the First World War the Royal Garhwal Rifles left to fight in France accompanied by their Adjutant, only identified as 'Captain X'. He was a man whose life centred round the Regiment and his devotion to his men, from whom, however, he demanded efficiency and a meticulous turn out. While the Garhwalis distinguished themselves at Neuve Chapelle they also suffered heavy casualties, among them Captain X. A couple of years later, when the depleted Regiment had returned to Lansdowne, a guest night was held and it was then that the spectre first appeared and was seen by men on guard duty and British officers. Motionless, on a white horse, the ghostly Captain was challenged by a sentry who fired in panic as horse and rider disappeared. But the apparition helped considerably to raise the morale of the men and their initial terror turned to one of pride that Captain X had cared enough for them to return from the dead.



Above is a First Day Cover issued on 15 October 1990 to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of 10th Bn the Garhwal Rifles.

LETTER FROM MAJOR GENERAL R.S. DONKIN, KING'S TROOP

3rd MAHARATTA WAR 1817-18

C.R. Walters

Camp Bowownass, December 5th, 1817

My dear Colonel,

Your letter of the 27th has made me rather uneasy - I see by it that Ld. Hastings was not at all prepared for my halting at Kooshalgur, tho' I trust that my letters, together with Metcalfe's, will have shown that my delay was reluctant on my part, but, imposed on me by circumstance.

I send this express, and have written to his Lordship.

There were two things, however, which have combined in stopping me at Kooshalgur, independently of Amir Khan. First, Lord Hastings directed me not to enter the Kota Territory till Capt. Ford announced to me that I might do so - this he did only yesterday, and I have marched today -

Secondly, I have been too ill with an attack on my lungs, the consequence of a violent cold, neglected at first, that I myself could not have marched with the Division for the last 4 days but at the hazard of my life - I am now better - tho' I was obliged to make the early part of today's march in a Palanquin, a thing I never did before.

We are now marching forced marches with the Cavalry, Gallopers and Flank Companies of my two Bns of Native Infantry - and I shall make up by alacrity of movement, I hope for a delay which annoyed me, and which I submitted to very reluctantly indeed.

Believe me

My Friend

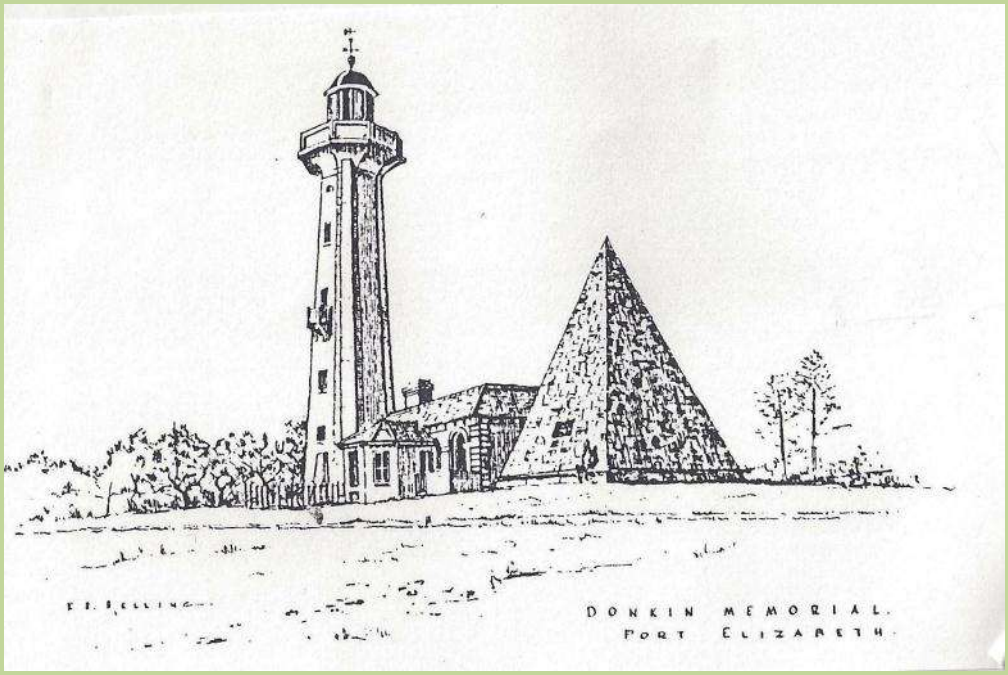
Maj Gen R S Donkin

We are now between Kooshalgur & Khernee - I hope to be at Boondie on the 7th.

Web site note: In the original *Durbar* we reproduced a facsimile of this letter but the quality does not bear repetition here.

This charming picture of a memorial pyramid was sent from Port Elizabeth, South Africa, and commemorates Elizabeth Donkin, wife of Major General Rufane Shaw Donkin who died in Meerut, India, in 1818 while her husband was serving under the Marquis of Hastings during the Mahratta wars.

Major General Donkin founded the city of Port Elizabeth following his appointment as Acting Governor of the Cape Colony, naming it after his late wife who never visited Africa.



THE REPUBLIC DAY PARADE - 1991

E S Gardner

We are not all lucky enough to get to India at all and to get there and have a seat at this most splendid of military occasions was almost too much to expect. That, however, was my good fortune this year and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The weather was fine and sunny, almost too hot in fact, as we had to take our seats two hours before the two-hour long parade began. Time quickly passed as we were able to watch the various comings and goings. The first thing to catch my eye was the arrival of the State dignitaries in a fleet of cars, which somehow looked very familiar. My subsequent enquiries revealed that they were, in fact, Morris Oxfords. When production of that fine car was

stopped the production line was offered to India and they are still being made there under the name of Ambassador.

In due time the parade began with the holders of India's highest awards for gallantry, Param Vir Chakra and Ashoka Chakra, plus the two survivors holding the VC. They were followed by various vehicles from tanks to anti-tank missiles. I shall skip lightly past them since they were not what most interested me. My interest stirred when the world's last mounted cavalry regiment, the 61st Cavalry came past followed by the serried ranks of the infantry, and a fine sight they were. There is an annual award for the best on parade and last year it was won by the Delhi Police, who did not look too bad this year either. All, however, swung past with a snap and precision that, for my money, the Brigade of Guards cannot equal. Their lines were absolutely straight with not a man even slightly out of place. Their bearing was superb; my only criticism, a matter of my own taste, being that I do not like to see the arm swung above shoulder height, as a couple of contingents did. That being said, it was a sight to warm the heart of anyone with any feeling for the parade ground, and enough to make a Guards RSM green with envy.

For sheer spectacle I suppose one must give pride of place to the camel-mounted contingent of the BSF (Border Security Force) but for me the highlight was yet to come. That was provided by the bands of the National Cadet Corps, first the boys led by the Scindia Boys School, Gwalior, and then the girls and the Birla Balika Vidapeeth Pilani. In each case they were led by three drum majors who swung their maces with a verve I have not seen for many a long year. Then to my delight the three flung their maces skywards as one and caught them with the appropriate panache. Now, I ask you, when did you last see that done in this country? The parade or pageant went on for another hour with floats representing every aspect of life in this vast country but for me it was an anti-climax; nothing could top the marching and those drum majors.

NEW INDIAN MEDALS

Major General Chand N Das OBE

In the Editorial of Volume 7, No.1, Spring 1990, mention was made of three new medals issued by the Government of India. Further details are now available as follows:

SIACHEN GLACIER MEDAL

This medal has been instituted in lieu of a clasp 'SIACHEN GLACIER' to the General Service Medal and is deemed to have effect from 1 April 1984. It is awarded to recognise the service of outstanding efforts and achievement rendered by Armed Forces personnel in Siachen Glacier under hazardous climatic conditions and may be awarded posthumously.

The medal is circular in shape, made of cupro-nickel, 35mm in diameter and fitted to a plain horizontal bar with standard fittings. It has on the obverse snow covered high mountains with a long glacier running through, a soldier in snow clothing with his rifle standing at the far end of the glacier as if guarding it. A helicopter is shown hovering on the top. (Figure 1).

The reverse has the State Emblem with the inscription "SIACHEN GLACIER MEDAL" around the edge both in English and Hindi. The medal is worn suspended from the left breast by a silk ribbon, divided into three equal parts of granite grey, white and granite grey respectively.

Web site note - We originally referred to the Siachen Glacier Medal as Saichen Glacier, as noted by the article's author. We have corrected the title for the web site.

1041.100 Siachen Glacier Medal

SPECIAL SERVICE MEDAL

Awarded for services rendered by Armed Forces personnel under active service conditions, or conditions akin thereto, for minor, short duration operations. Where appropriate, a clasp for each operation is to be instituted.

The medal is octagonal in shape, made of cupro-nickel, 35mm in diameter and fitted to a plain horizontal bar with the standard fitting. It has on the obverse the symbol of a bird, the FALCON, and on the reverse the State Emblem with its motto and the inscription "SPECIAL SERVICE MEDAL". (Figure 2) The medal is worn suspended from the left breast by a silk ribbon divided into three parts; 8mm red, 16mm steel grey, 8mm red.

Web site note - at the time of writing the article it was intended that the Special Service Medal should be issued as an octagonal medal as described in the foregoing paragraph. It was altered to a circular medal by No. 60-Pres./90 of 23 July 1990 (Haynes, E.S. and Chhina, R.T.S. *Medals and Decorations of Independent India*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2008, p. 105.

1037.200 Special Service Medal

UCCHH TUNGTA MEDAL (High Altitude Medal)

The medal has been instituted in lieu of the clasp "HIMALAYA" which has hitherto been awarded with the SAINYA SEVA MEDAL. It can be awarded posthumously.

The medal is circular in shape, made of cupro-nickel, 35mm in diameter and fitted to a plain horizontal bar. It has embossed on the obverse the State Emblem with its motto and the inscription "UCCHH TUNGTA MEDAL" on both sides of the State Emblem along the rim. The reverse has representations of mountains. The medal is worn suspended from the left breast by a silk ribbon of Azure Blue background with white reversed V-shaped strives. (Figure 3).

1049.100 High Altitude Medal

Web site note. These three images from Haynes, E.S. and Chhina, R.T.S. *Medals and Decorations of Independent India*, replace a sketch used in the original Durbar and are reproduced with the authors' permission.

THE HELIOGRAPH IN THE INDIAN ARMY

Alan Harfield

Although the heliograph system was widely used in India, including during the turbulent times of 1857 and 1858, one of the main methods of communication during the latter part of the 19th century was by means of the heliograph. The heliograph was included as part of a unit's equipment and communication by heliograph was an essential part of the communication plan for the many operations that were undertaken by the Indian Army.

The forerunner of the heliograph was the heliostat which was converted for use for Morse signalling by the insertion of a shutter between the mirror and the distant station, and in 1869 the use of the heliostat was brought to the notice of the Indian Government by Mr Mance (later Sir Henry Mance). The requirement for this type of communication was that the two stations were to be in line of sight and that the reflected ray of the sun to the distant station be sent by means of a mirror. The one main problem with both the heliostat and the heliograph was that the sun was an essential ingredient. Later it became possible to despatch messages using the heliograph in conjunction with a lime-light and messages have also been sent using moonlight.

The heliostat had a non-oscillating mirror and although it was not introduced into the British Army until 1875 this method of signalling had been used by the Indian Army prior to that date. There is, however, evidence that signalling by the use of sunlight and mirrors had been in use in the middle of the 19th century by troops of some Indian States. Where a town was guarded by hills, lookouts were posted at watch towers and signalled the approach of travellers to the town by using mirrors and the reflected light of the sun, directed towards a guard on duty in the town. In 1877, Lieutenant G.R.R. Savage, Inspector of Signalling at Roorkee, assisted by Sergeant Martin and a number of Sepoy artisans, was reported to be making the new heliograph in the regimental workshops. It was during the Second Afghan War that two companies of Bengal Sappers and Miners became classed as 'telegraph units', one of which accompanied the column which marched from Quetta to Kabul. The second company operated in the Khyber Pass area and provided a communication link via the civil telegraph route, which terminated at Landi Kotal. Messages to and from Force Headquarters were sent by the heliostat, as it was a 'fixed link'.

The heliograph replaced the heliostat and was extensively used in India where it became a popular means of communication. It is recorded in the *'History of the Corps of Signals'*, Volume I, that:

> "...enthusiastic officers carried instruments of Mance's which were their private property, and these proved useful not only in regiments which did not possess the apparatus but, being small and light, they were easily carried by officers when they were not accompanied by signallers. . . "

The Indian Army used the heliograph as a means of communication during the various campaigns and minor skirmishes on the North West Frontier during the latter part of the 19th century and in the first decade of the present century. It was also used as a means of daily communication for the transmission of routine messages. The range of heliographs that were in use in India was more extensive than in any other area of the world where the British and Indian armies were stationed. The report on Field Operations of the Khyber Field Force for 1880 gives the details of the heliographs used in that campaign and are listed as follows: -

- Captain Brown's 2-inch heliograph
- 3-inch Saddle heliograph, Roorkee pattern
- Mance's 3-inch heliograph
- Mance's 4½ inch heliograph
- 4½ inch heliograph, Roorkee pattern
- 5-inch heliograph (Army issue pattern)
- Mance's 6-inch heliograph

The operators of the heliograph in India were generally regimental signallers from the various cavalry and infantry units who were seconded to a small 'Signals Section' commanded by an Engineer officer. As a result of the lessons learned during the operations in the South Afghanistan Field Force during the 1879 and 1880 campaigns the following establishment of signallers was introduced for infantry and cavalry brigades:

Cavalry Brigade (with a field force)

- One officer and two signallers, all mounted

Infantry Brigade (two brigades with a field force)

- One officer and three signallers

For the Headquarters staff of such a field force the recommended establishment was one officer and five signallers, all mounted. The additional equipment that such a party would be required to carry was:

- 2 heliographs (cavalry pattern)
- 2 flags, white, 3 feet square
- 2 flags, black, 3 feet square
- 1 message book and pencil
- 2 pairs of field signals

In the same report the question of carrying the signalling equipment was covered as follows:

> "...Two infantry soldiers could then comfortably carry the heliograph, and a third the telescope and message book, which ought to be in a leather case. Or one mounted signaller could carry the heliograph and stand on the 'Ds' of his saddle; the telescope and book on his back... "

The following report by Lieutenant H Whistler Smith RE, as the Superintendent Army Signalling, Khyber Field Force, was submitted on 13 March 1880 and gives a clear picture of the problems of organising a heliograph signalling section, the equipment used and the conditions under which the signallers operated. Many of his recommendations were implemented.

> " . . . Organisation. The Superintendent should have entire control over the signallers in matters of discipline, pay, movements etc. Without it he cannot be expected to carry on any army signalling operations satisfactorily. On no account must signallers be moved from one station to another without his permission. If the force is distributed along a line of communications, he should have under him brigade-signalling officers; and there are few occasions in the field when a British regiment does not form part of brigade. I would suggest that the Army Signalling Instructor of that regiment be given the appointment with some staff allowance when employed on such signalling duty. At each brigade headquarters there ought also to be a sergeant to keep up the pay returns etc. The signallers then ought to be divided into parties of four, one of the four being a corporal or lance corporal; If no non-commissioned officer is available, the Superintendent of Army Signalling to have the power to giving lance rank to any soldier in charge of a party. A party to consist of four, as from experience that number is found on active service to be the most convenient; it allows three men for work at the Instrument and one spare man to look after the tent, kits, cooking etc., and to take the place of any man who gets sick..."

The report also contained the following recommendations based on the experiences gained during the Afghan campaign:

> "... Each party ought to have a cook paid by the Superintendent of Army Signalling, otherwise the services of one of the men will be lost for signalling duty. Also when men get attached to regiments and have no cook, petty charges are continually being sent in for cooking, etc., and as signallers are often changing their stations the exact adjustment of these charges is not easy... "

The Whistler Smith report also made a firm recommendation with regard to the method of transporting a heliograph signalling section stores, which by the very nature of their duty frequently necessitated the section being positioned on a hill far away from the main encampment. The recommendation reads:

- ". . . Equipment. Each party then of one non-commissioned officer and three signallers with their cook ought to be completely equipped with tents, cooking pots, carriage etc., so that they are perfectly independent of all other troops, and can move anywhere at the shortest notice. In order that signallers should be well up on the line of march and available for any signalling duty, their baggage animals ought to be good mules and they should be lightly and compactly laden. Three mules would not, I think, be too many for each party; a rough idea of the way in which their loads should be divided is as follows: -
    - 1st mule - signallers' kits
    - 2nd mule - tent, cooks' and mule drivers' kits, head and heal ropes etc. of mules
    - 3rd mule - a pair of mule trunks- one to contain -
    - 1 heliograph and stand
    - 1 telescope and stand
    - 1 Begbie lamp
    - 1 small box for 2 chimneys and 2 mirrors
    - 2 message books and pencils
    - 1 large rough note book
- the second to contain -
    - 2 Bombay deckchies **
    - 1 frypan, rations with small tin cases for tea, sugar etc., and, provided it did not injure the rations, a tin of kerosene oil
- The service tent best adapted for signalling parties is the European Mountain battery tent, weight 125 lbs.
- Each party ought also to have a bucket for washing purposes, and a pair of puckals, so that when not actually on the line of march the mule-driver and one mule might be employed in bringing water.
- To make the party complete in itself a small pal (tent), 5 feet x 6 feet and 3 feet high might be provided for the cook and mule driver. This tent to be pitched in (the) rear of the signallers' tent, and the mules behind all.
- When in camp and on duty, the white signalling flag to be lashed to the tent pole of the tent so that officers and orderlies may readily recognise the signal station. If the signal station be some little way from the camp, the flag might be tied to the bamboo pole and stuck in the ground near the station.. . "

It was in this report of 1880 that a mention is made of a distinguishing badge being used by the heliograph signallers and reads:

> "...Signallers ought to be distinguished by some badge, and I would suggest that two miniature signalling flags crossed and sewn on to the sleeve of the coat would be an appropriate one.. "

The report written in the latter part of the 19th century shows a remarkable consideration for the welfare of the soldiers of the heliograph detachments, which was very much in advance of the time. The following recommendations were included in the paper concerning the equipment that was required to be carried by the soldiers in addition to their personal equipment:

> "...Signallers are not always with their baggage, and therefore the instruments ought to be of some portable form. The present stand and box are heavy and cumbersome and a nuisance for signallers to carry. The heliograph might fit into a stiff leather case and be carried by a belt over the shoulder (author's note - this recommendation was accepted and a leather case was later provided for the various types of heliographs); the legs (telescopic) might be carried in a similar manner and by a second man; the third man carrying the sighting bar, cross wires, message book and pencil, all in one case; and the fourth the telescope. The weight so distributed would be little, a great consideration, as signallers often have a deal of climbing. Mounted signallers might carry instruments in the same manner, or fastened to the Ds of the saddle, while stands (telescopic) might either go with the picketing pegs or the cloak rolled behind the saddle, or else be strapped to the carbine bucket in the same manner as the handles of the cavalry entrenching tools are carried . . . "

As previously mentioned a number of these recommendations were implemented and the heliograph sections were organised on a brigade level when in the field.

** Note: Bombay deckchies/deckchie/deckshai/dagshai - cooking pot without handles used on open fire.

(To be continued)

BOOK REVIEW

BRITISH AND INDIAN ARMIES ON THE CHINA COAST, 1785-1985. Published by A&J Partnership (the author and his wife), available from Plum Tree Cottage, Royston Place, Barton-on-Sea, Hampshire BH25 7AJ at £39.99 plus £3.50 postage and packing in the UK (ISBN 0-9516065-06). A limited edition of 250 copies. 524 pages.

A reference work by our member Alan Harfield, produced as a companion volume to his earlier *British and Indian Armies in the East Indies 1665-1935*, this volume covers the involvement of the British, East India Company and Indian Armies on the China Coast. As the author makes clear in his Preface, it is impossible to tell the complete story of this involvement spanning more than two hundred years in one book and so he has set out to provide a basic reference guide, a starting point for future research. In this he has been successful and there will be many with a specialised interest in this area, as well as the generalists, who will have cause to thank him for his efforts.

The book is divided into chapters dealing with events (e.g. First and Second China Wars) and units (e.g. Tientsin Volunteer Corps, Shanghai Volunteer Corps). Each chapter has detailed footnotes and the book as a whole has a well-compiled index as well as a good bibliography.

There is something for all interests here. Extensively illustrated, there are good pictures of uniforms and badges (though some of the illustrations are faint). There are also extensive medal rolls for locally raised units plus lists of Mentions in Despatches for Officers in the Third China War. In addition there are numerous details of local cemeteries, a casualty list of officers of the Hong Kong Garrison during the Second World War, a list of Military Commanders of Hong Kong and China and a list of units stationed there 1841-1900.

My one small complaint concerns the clarity of some of the maps used. Usually copies of early maps, I found them difficult to read and therefore difficult to use, but that should not detract from an attractively produced and most valuable reference work. ANM

THE BAND OF THE SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY

Phil Daybell drew attention to an article in the August 1990 edition of the Royal Engineers Journal, by Major General E M Hall CB MBE DL, entitled "Presentation of Colours to the Bombay Sappers", in which he described the band being augmented by "Pipers and the band of the Sikh Regiment in their saffron uniforms". This prompted John Gaylor to reply to the Editor of the Royal Engineers Journal, his letter being published in the December 1990 edition of the same journal. John has kindly made a copy of his letter available to DURBAR.

> ". . . . I was particularly interested to read in the August copy the report by Major General E M Hall on the presentation of colours to the Bombay Sappers. However, the pipers and band which augmented the Group Band were not from The Sikh Regiment but from the Sikh Light Infantry. The Sikh Regiment normally enlists Jat Sikhs who wear the scarlet pagri. During the Second World War, when manpower was short, it was decided that we should once again recruit other Sikhs, not acceptable to the then 11th Sikh Regiment. These were known as Mazhbi and Ramdasia Sikhs and that was their first title. Not surprisingly, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Claude Auchinleck commented adversely on its length. In the nature of armies, priorities were adjusted to find a new name and a committee arrived at The Sikh Light Infantry. This type of Sikh had previously been accepted by the old Sikh Pioneers who were disbanded in 1933 and it was decided that the new regiment should continue the traditions and honours of the Sikh Pioneers.
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> Looking for a distinctive pagri, they looked at the Sikh Pioneers' colours, which were red, blue, and old gold. The red had already been appropriated by the 11th Sikhs; the blue did not find much favour, which left only the old gold so they chose that. To the untrained, lay eye, it looks remarkably like orange - or saffron - but that is old gold and that's why they wear it. I was at Fatehgarh, their regimental centre a few years ago and they are a very impressive regiment. Although formed only in 1941, they have taken precedence immediately after the Sikh Regiment on the basis of the dates of raising of the Sikh Pioneers. Three battalions were raised during the War but only one of them served in a theatre of war. They were recommended for retention in the post-war Indian Army and currently have some fifteen regular battalions."