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GLIMPSES FROM THE PAST – THE BRASS GUN STORY

Major General Chand N Das

Extract from the East India Military Calendar

Quote:

Description of a brass gun with iron cylinder as manufactured in India and cast in England in 1806 under the direction of Lt Col Constable of the Regiment of Bengal Artillery, by order of the Hon. the Marquis of Hastings:

The gunmetal is a composite of brass and iron, the cylinder smooth as glass and formed of metal of a distinct quality, rent of solid iron and gun made after the English model.

The advantages of the Asiatic ordnance are strength and lightness; in strength equal to iron ordnance, in lightness less than brass. In proof of the latter position a three pounder of the above consistency, proved at Woolwich, weighed 2 cwt., 3 qr. and 1 lb.; an English three pounder weighed 3 cwt., being a difference in metal of 27 lbs. The advantages in respect of weight are of great importance viz. facility of movement, light and easy to exercise in the field and in garrison, and a consequent saving both in men and horses. On shipboard a reduction of one-fourth or one fifth of weight of metal must be of incalculable service.

It is notorious to officers who have seen much service that brass guns are, owing to their fusibility, often rendered in the field and in batteries totally unserviceable. From the running and melting of the guns, increase of windage etc., the shot is fired without a certainty of direction or distance and hence it is evident that a brass train of artillery at siege can never be relied on."

Unquote

Note. In 1806 Lt Col Constable obtained permission of the Court of Directors to put himself under the control of the Board of Ordnance to forge and cast ordnance on the same principle as manufactured in India at Aligarh, Delhi, Agra and Leswarree. In 1809 he took over command of artillery in the Allahabad Fort where he practised and exercised the Artillery Corps in the experiment shot and shell, the principle of which he had acquired while in England.

MIDSHIPMAN R.I.M. TO COMMANDER R.I.N. - REV. E.C. STREATFEILD-JAMES OBE

W M Thornton

Commander E C Streatfeild-James OBE, R.I.N., or Jimmie to his friends, entered the Royal Indian Marine in 1921. Born in Cheltenham in 1904 he came from a military family that had served India for some two hundred years, two of his forebears having reached General's rank. Breaking the

family tradition he entered the Royal Naval College Osborne in 1917 and completed his cadet's training at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth.

Eagerly awaiting instructions to join his first ship he was, instead, informed by My Lords Commissioners that as far as the Royal Navy was concerned his career was now at an end, a casualty of post-war defence cuts. For similar reasons he was unsuccessful in entering the Merchant Navy. Then 'out of the blue' an appointment in the Royal Indian Marine was offered to him. He sailed for India in the autumn of 1921 as a 17 year old Midshipman R.I.M.

The R.I.M. was not, in those days, a navy in any sense of the word (though some ships were lightly armed). It was a department of the Quartermaster General's branch of the army and consisted of troop-ships, lighthouse-tenders and survey vessels, rather like a mixture of Trinity House and a government shipping company. After having spent a few weeks at the R.I.M's main base at Bombay, Midshipman Streatfeild-James was sent to Rangoon to join the Stationship R.I.M.S. CLIVE. His first ship's primary roll was that of a lighthouse tender. This type of service offered superb opportunities in the skills of seamanship and small boat handling. His next appointment was to a troopship, R.I.M.S. NORTHBROOK, acting as a station ship for Aden and the Red Sea. He was tasked with watch house and similar duties as he had performed in R.I.M.S. CLIVE. In 1923 the NORTHBROOK and two other troopships were paid off and many officers were axed. Luckily for Midshipman Streatfeild-James he received an appointment to the survey ship R.I.M.S. INVESTIGATOR. This was the start of a 10-year stint in Hydrographic Surveying which was to take him to most corners of the oceans surrounding India, and as far east as Penang.

At the end of his first three years in India he returned to the UK for leave and qualifying courses at RN establishments in Gunnery, Mining and Minesweeping. Promoted to Sub Lieutenant, he returned to India and was re-appointed to R.I.M.S. INVESTIGATOR. In 1925, whilst his ship was at AKYAB (Burma), notice was received that the R.I.M. was to become a combatant service. At this time the ship's main armament consisted of six rifles. Seamen were landed and trained in the niceties of drill and weapon handling at a private tennis court. As no boots had, as yet, been issued to ratings, squad drill was not without its problems. This was rectified by the purchase of boots using the balance of the mess and wine and private purse funds from the recently paid-off Troopship HARDINGE.

In 1926 Sub Lieutenant Streatfeild James married and in due course had three sons. Tragically his wife died on the last day of December 1937.

His promotion to Lieutenant came in October 1927. In 1933, after further leave and courses in the UK, Lieutenant Streatfeild-James returned to General Service and when, on 2 October 1934, the Royal Indian Marine became the Royal Indian Navy he was serving as Navigating Officer in the minesweeping sloop (Ex Despatch Vessel) H.M.I.S. LAWRENCE. The following year his ship was in Burmese waters investigating rumours of unfriendly Japanese activities. Exercises followed in the Bay of Bengal. This service culminated in a brief period of command of the patrol boat H.M.I.S. PATHAN. 1935 also saw his promotion to Lieutenant Commander. Then followed a number of shore appointments in Bombay. During the Munich crisis he prepared mobilisation plans for the R.I.N.

The outbreak of war in 1939 found Streatfeild-James attending the Naval Staff course at R.N.C. Greenwich. Also during this period he remarried. His course cut by three months, he sailed for India in the DUCHESS OF BEDFORD, arriving safely despite several torpedo attacks on his convoy. To his great satisfaction he was placed in command of H.M.I.S. RATNAGIRI, a small

coastal passenger vessel requisitioned for patrol duties. He was also appointed Senior Officer of a flotilla of five small auxiliaries to establish a local patrol off the Port of Cochin on the Indian West Coast. Besides his own ship, his command consisted of the patrol vessels PRABAVATI and HIRAVATI and the Minesweepers OOSTCAPELLE and IRAWADI. He described his own vessel as a Dinky-toy version of the QUEEN ELIZABETH. He had a ship's company of fifty, of whom only seven were active service ratings - the remainder was merchant seamen dressed as naval ratings.

The pocket battleship ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE kept the flotilla very alert as she was reported, at the time, to be in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. Weaponry was sparse. Ammunition consisted of four depth charges and twenty rounds per gun of live and practise projectiles.

A major incident took place when the flotilla engaged a surface target, which promptly disappeared. Asdic contact was then established and the four depth charges were dropped. Contact was then lost and despite efforts to regain it no further contact was made. Later it was established that two Italian submarines were in the area, one of which went missing.

On 30 December 1939 Lieutenant Commander Streatfeild-James turned over his command and spent the remainder of his service in shore appointments. The first of these was in overseeing the establishment of the 'Boy's Training Establishment' at Karachi followed by a similar task during the completion of the new R.I.N. depot at Bombay Castle. From December 1940 to the end of 1941 he served with the Sea Transport Service.

His next appointment was perhaps his most valuable contribution. Promoted to Acting Commander on 1 November 1941, he became Director of Naval Recruiting in the hinterland of India. This entailed travelling thousands of miles selling a product which was virtually unknown to the majority of the great masses of India; a task complicated by the many races and castes of the sub-continent, most of whom had never seen the sea, much less seen a ship.

Largely through his efforts the R.I.N., which in 1939 consisted of 100 officers and 1,000 ratings, ended the war with 1,000 officers and 30,000 ratings. The remainder of the war, and indeed the remainder of his service, was as a Staff Officer at Naval HQ. He was confirmed in rank as Commander on 15 October 1945. After the Naval Mutiny in 1946 he was tasked with trying to make two navies out of one. It was relatively easy to divide up the ships but impossible to do the same with the shore establishments. This, and the impossibility of accepting appointments offered by both India and Pakistan, prompted him to retire. He left India in 1948 never to return.

He spent some years as secretary of a children's holiday camp on Romney Marsh and later was accepted into the Ministry. He was ordained a Priest at Canterbury Cathedral in 1963. His three sons all entered the Royal Navy and are now all retired. One became a Captain (Commodore) and the other two became Commanders. A grandson is currently following the family tradition started by his grandfather in 1917.

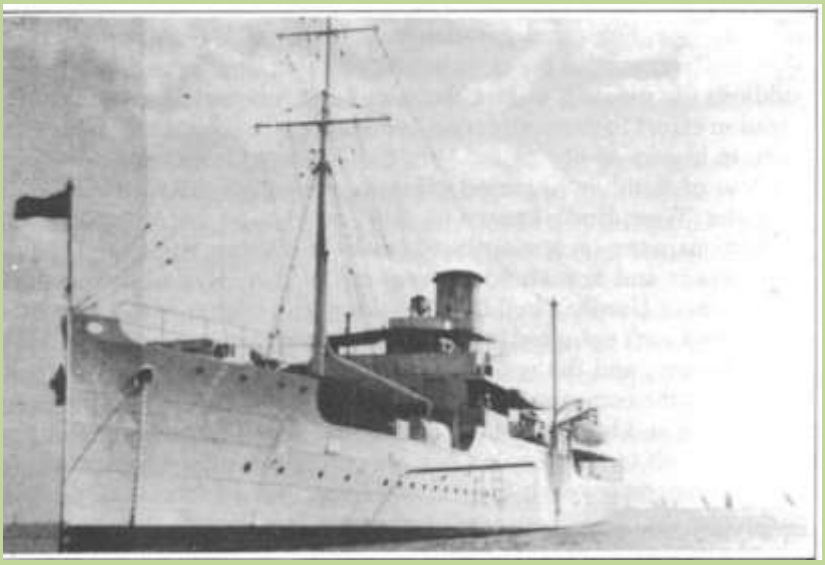
Commander the Rev. E C Streatfeild-James was made an OBE in the Birthday Honours in 1945. His medals are the OBE, 1939-45 Star, British War Medal, Indian War Service Medal and the Indian Defence Medal.

Jimmie now lives in peaceful retirement near Bordon in Hampshire.

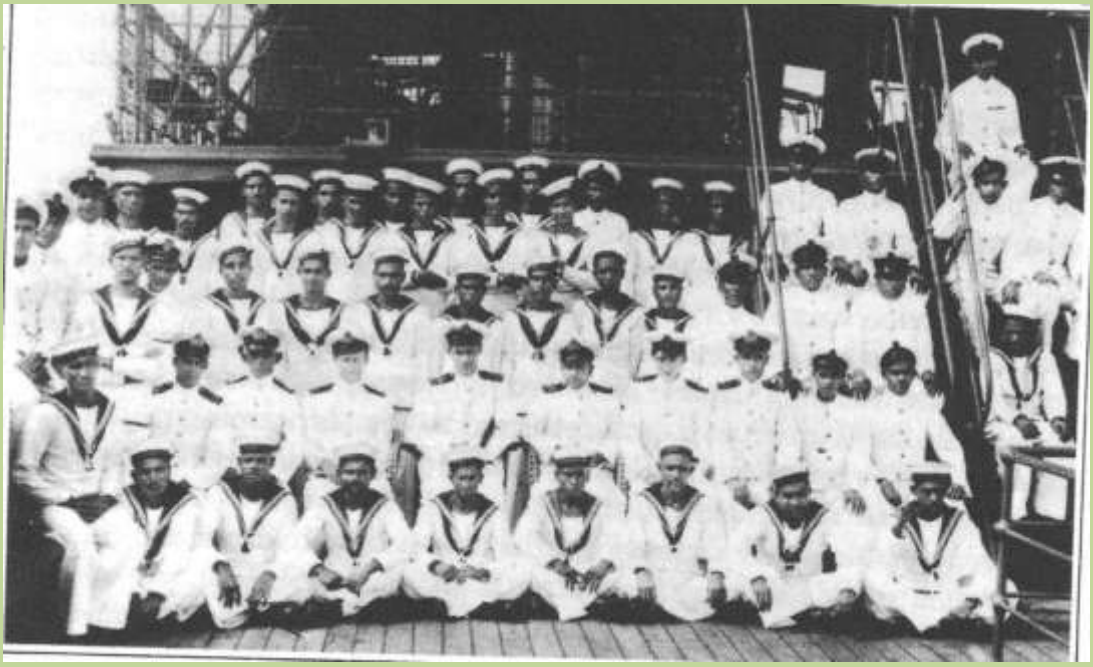
Acknowledgement. The author would like to thank Commander the Rev. E C Streatfeild-James for making available his book "*In the Wake - The Birth of the Indian and Pakistani Navies*" for the preparation of this article.

Commander Rev. E.C. Streatfeild-James OBE, RIN

As a Lieutenant Commander R.I.N. 1939



His first command – H.I.M.S. PATHAN



Ship's Company – H.I.M.S. RATNAGIRI 1939

The Late GEORGE MITCHELL, LIEUTENANT, EAST INDIA ARMY (RETIRED)

Died 14 November 1906 aged 70

T Ash

Lieutenants are, more often than not, young men in their twenties, so it may be considered unusual for a man of 70 to have his profession recorded in the Register of Deaths as a rank he had probably held some 40 years previously. It transpires that Lieutenant George Mitchell of the Honourable East India Company's 2nd Regiment of Bengal European Fusiliers was a casualty of the Indian Mutiny of 1857, though you will not find his name recorded in any casualty list. So ...

G.M., a Scot, was born at Mortlach, Banffshire, on 1st March 1836, the son of a farmer, James Mitchell. He was educated at the parish school of Mortlach and some time in his mid-teens went off to Canada. There, from early 1853, he was employed as a clerk in the office of a trading company in Quebec "holding the responsible position of Cash Keeper". At the close of 1855 he returned to Scotland, presumably on receipt of the news that his uncle, his mother's brother Alexander Simpson Esq., had obtained for him a Nomination to a Commission in the H.E.I.C's military service.

G.M's father was by this time deceased but he had little time to linger on his return to mother, family and friends at Mortlach for by January 1856 he was being 'crammed' at Mr Howard's, St Johns Wood, London, for his entry examination into the H.E.I.C. military service. On 4th June he was successfully passed by the examiners of the Military Seminary at Addiscombe and within the week he was aboard the ship "Barham" bound for Calcutta where he landed on 16th October 1856.

G.M's transformation from a company clerk in Quebec to 2nd Lieutenant of the 2nd Bengal European Fusiliers in India, more than half way round the world, and certainly worlds apart, had taken but a year. His travels, however, had not yet ceased; to join his regiment from Calcutta he had to traverse by road and river 1,300 miles of northern India to reach Subathoo, not far from Simla, in the foot hills of the Himalaya mountains.

G. M. had only a few short months to enjoy the salubrious climate of the hills, to get to know his Regiment and to familiarise himself with the ins and outs of military life in India. On 10th May 1857 the Indian Mutiny broke out at Meerut, with Delhi being in the hands of the mutineers by the close of the next day.

The 2nd Bengal European Fusiliers, along with its sister regiment, the 1st, and other European regiments in the vicinity, were hastily concentrated at Umballa in preparation for the march to retake Delhi: a march of 130 miles across the hot and dusty plains of northern India at the beginning of the hot season.

The Columns left Umballa during the fourth week of May; it is unnecessary to record a blow by blow account of the siege and capture of Delhi but in G.M's words are recorded the basic element of his service there - "present at the action at Badlee-ke-Serai, 8th June 1857, and subsequent engagements during the siege. Present at the final assault on the 14th September 1857 and commanded the advanced picquet of the Regiment and Brigade" (the 2nd Column commanded by Brigadier W Jones, H.M.'s 61st Foot) "at the Cabul Gate during the final struggle from the 14th to the 20th September 1857"

Thus at the age of 21, and with less than a full year's service in India, G.M. had undergone his soldier's baptism of fire and emerged unscathed by the shot, shell and sabres of the mutineers.

However, on 10th October, barely three weeks after the capture of Delhi, the Surgeon of the 2nd Bengal European Fusiliers recommended that G.W. should leave Delhi for the cooler climate of Subathoo and remain there until the hot season ended in October. Due to constant exposure to the heat and hard duty during the siege he had frequent attacks of fever, diarrhoea and latterly a severe attack of dysentery. It was therefore considered necessary for his recovery that he should leave the heat of Delhi forthwith.

It was not until December 1857 that G. M. was considered fit enough to return to his Regiment at Delhi, but his symptoms had not completely left him and by May 1858 had worsened with the increasing heat so he was sent off to Simla and the cool of the hills for six months. By October his health was still poor enough to warrant him being granted a further six months in the hills and a recommendation for sick leave to Europe but, in November, he decided to return to the Regiment at Delhi. He was far from a fit man and by March 1859 was constantly stricken with fever and inflammation of the liver in consequence of which he was again despatched to the hills. Though the cooler climate ameliorated his symptoms a cure was not achieved.

Regimental duty was too hard for G.M. and in 1860 he was transferred to the Commissariat Department with lighter duties to perform. All to no avail, the sickness he had contracted at Delhi remained with him and in February 1862 the Presidency Surgeon at Calcutta saw him. New treatments were tried but failed to make an impression and so in April the Presidency Surgeon came to the conclusion that a change of climate to Europe was the only recourse to be adopted. G.M. was therefore despatched to England for 20 months sick leave. He had served in India for just five and a half years and for the last four and a half had suffered a downhill struggle to regain his health. He was never to return to India.

The twenty months sick leave passed and, though he was improved, yet he was not considered fit to return to India and was granted an extension of six months, at the end of which period he was still suffering from congestion of the liver, diarrhoea and general debility. So, in July 1864, his leave was extended by a second period of six months. But in August G.M. finally faced reality and gave up the struggle and on the 12th submitted to the Under Secretary of State for India his request to be allowed to retire from the Service on the half pay of his rank - Lieutenant.

Fifteen days later he was seen in London by the India Office Surgeon, Sir J R Martin, CB, who reported to the Under Secretary that G.M. was suffering from alternate attacks of ague and diarrhoea, a liver that was diseased and likely to remain so, and that he considered him permanently disqualified for military duty in a tropical climate. G.M. was therefore allowed to retire from 12th August 1864 with retired pay of four shillings a day. At 28 years he was still a young man but the medical profession of his day would probably have put little or no money on his attaining old age.

How G.M. spent his remaining 40 odd years of life I know not, but at the age of 55, in 1891, he married Mary McDonald, aged 37, and their marriage was blessed with a son and two daughters. He died at Dufftown, Banffshire, near to his place of birth, on 13th November 1906, aged 70, from cirrhosis of the liver and gastritis, no doubt in greater part brought about by the afflictions he contracted on the battlefields of Delhi fifty years before.

That George Mitchell was determined to be a soldier there can, I think, be little doubt. Had his health not failed we might well be reading of the exploits of Major General George Mitchell instead

of a forgotten Lieutenant. He could have left India several years earlier than he eventually did, but he stuck it out for as long as he could, a casualty of the Mutiny - and India's unremitting climate to which so many, before and after him, succumbed.

Today his uniform jacket of the 2nd Regiment Bengal European Fusiliers may be seen at the National Army Museum in London (Accession Number 44958-61); its preservation by George Mitchell for the forty odd years before his death bears testimony to the pride he had in his Regiment and his short but active service in India during the Mutiny.

Finally there is the Canadian connection, where we found G. M. in 1853. The Informant to the Registrar of his death was A. Mitchell, his brother, whose place of residence is recorded as Montreal, Canada.

INDIAN CAVALRY 1857 - 1861

C J Parrett

Continuing the series, herewith the fact sheets for 11th and 12th Bengal Irregular Cavalry.

(Editor's note:

For the benefit of more recently joined members, Cliff Parrett started this series in 1989 (Volume 6, No. 1) with the aim of following the evolution of Indian cavalry regiments during the turmoil of the Indian Mutiny and its aftermath by producing for each appropriate unit a summary of Mutiny medal claims, and a brief history from the outbreak of the Mutiny in May 1857 to the reorganisation of May 1861.]

Abbreviations used are:

For Ranks:

Abbreviation	Ranks
Rsal	Ressaldar
Nrsal	Naib-Ressaldar
Rsai	Ressaidar
NDoc	Native doctor
NCom	Native Commandant
WM	Woordie Major
BO	British officer

NO	Native officer
BOR	British other rank
NOR	Native other rank

Medal Clasps

Abbreviation	Awarded for
D	Delhi
F	1st Defence of Lucknow
S	2nd Defence of Lucknow
R	Relief of Lucknow
L	Lucknow
C	Central India
M	No clasp
K	Defence of Lucknow (not known whether 1st or 2nd)
SL)	Multiple clasp
RL)	ditto
DR)	ditto

Others:

Ress - Ressala (or troop)

11TH BENGAL IRREGULAR CAVALRY

IOL L/Mil/5 references; none traced.

COMMENTS ON THE HISTORY OF THE REGIMENT 1857-63

There is no evidence of the issue of Mutiny medals to this regiment. Suspected of being disloyal, the main body of the regiment was disarmed at Berhampore on 3rd August and its horses were taken away. There were detachments stationed at Madarigunj and Jalpaigore, which mutinied and rode off into the surrounding districts. Some of them, pursued by a force under Commissioner George Yule, fled across the Nepalese border; other remnants were reported with the rebel forces in the Etawah district of Oude, which were defeated by Forbes in December 1858. Captain A.G. Nedham (74 Bengal NI), 2nd i/c of the 11th Bengal IC, was M.I.D. for his service at Jalpaigore. But

neither Nedham nor any other officer serving with the 11th Bengal IC claimed a medal on the roll of this regiment, which was officially disbanded in 1859 and never reconstituted.

12TH BENGAL IRREGULAR CAVALRY

12th Bengal Irregular Cavalry								IOL L/Mil/5 references
Names on Roll	Ranks	Clasps						77(63V): summary roll of 5 BOs (named) and 69 natives (medal/clasp details analysed). 86(60V) subheading 'Natives': roll of one ressaldar. 98(217):nominal roll of 59 NOs/NCOs who served with 12BglIC under Barrow during 1st Relief of Lucknow (no details of medals).
		S	SL	R	RL	M		
Watson F.	Capt					1		Not with 12BglIC during First Relief and service with regt. not established. Served 1858 against Jugdespore mutineers.
Johnson W.I.	Lieut	1						Commanded loyal remnant 12BglIC during 1st Rel.of Lucknow and Outram's defence of Alambagh. Invalided Jan.1858 and thus not entitled to Lucknow clasp (as incorrectly shown on roll).
Havelock C.W.	Lieut		1					Nephew of General Havelock and briefly his orderly officer at Lucknow.Extensive service with 12BglIC during Mutiny. Killed in action at Munnihar 11.4.185
Warren C.H.L.	Lieut	1						Served with 12BglIC until KIA at Lucknow during 1st Relief 26.9.57. Incorrectly shown as entitled to Lucknow clasp.
Stone E.G.	Lieut					1		Service not traced, but almost certainly not with 12BglIC remnant during Mutiny. Roll is unclear but subsequent notatio points to a no-clasp medal.
Mahomed Bux Khan	Rsal		1					OBI (1st);IOM(1st); transferre to the Regt of Oude Police.
Moonuwur Khan	Rsal		1					OBI(1st);IOM(1st); transferred to 9th Bengal Cavy (Hodson's Horse), becoming R.Major 1877.
Meer Futteh Alli	Rsal					1		IOM(3rd); not on nominal roll and so did not go with Johnson to Lucknow. Service after Goruckpore not traced.
Abdool Azeez Khan	Rsal					1		Claimed medal on L/Mil/5/86. Not on nominal roll, so did no serve with Johnson's Irregular
Nubee Bux Khan	NRsal		1					IOM(3rd) for gallantry with Havelock's column between Cawnpore and Lucknow Sept 1857
Meer Unwar Alli	Jmdr		1					
Meer Mahmood Khan	Jmdr	1						KIA 26.9.57 at Bailie Guard
All other ranks	63	3	31	1	27	1		The only official record of medals and clasps claimed by this regiment is the summary roll. Claims by NOs are deduced from the nominal roll and other sources.
Total known claims	75	6	36	1	27	5		

COMMENTS ON THE HISTORY OF THE REGIMENT 1857-61

Whilst the main body of the regiment mutinied at Segowlee on 23rd July 1857, murdering several Europeans including Major J.G. Holmes, Commanding, 84 men from a 127-strong detachment of Afghans and Patiala Mussalmans at Goruckpore under Lieutenant Warren remained loyal and dispersed their mutinous comrades. Outram sent Lts. Johnson and Havelock down from Benares in early July to bring this loyal remnant up to Cawnpore, where Havelock's 1st Relief Column, desperately short of cavalry, was preparing to advance on Lucknow. Presumably because he was better able to trust them, Johnson took only the 40 available Afghans with him and marched rapidly to Cawnpore - participating en route in the destruction of a rebel force by Major Vincent Eyre at Koondun Puttee on 11th September. This small body of horse, known as 'Johnson's Irregulars', was 59-strong when it crossed the Ganges with Havelock's Relief Force on 19th September, having

been supplemented by some loyal 3rd Oude Irregular Cavalry sowars. It was the only native cavalry to serve in the 1st Relief - and it undoubtedly served well, not only on the way into Lucknow but also within the Residency compound and in Outram's subsequent defence of the Allambagh perimeter. Johnson was invalided in January but his Irregulars, joined by the remaining loyal remnant from Goruckpore, went on to serve in the final capture of Lucknow and in mopping-up operations in Oude attached to the Azimgarh Field Force. But the loyal service of 'Johnson's Irregulars' was not enough to save the 12th Bengal Irregular Cavalry, even though its name is honoured on the pedestal of Havelock's monument in Trafalgar Square. Unfortunately the main body of the regiment played an active part in the rebel army, including service under the Maulvi of Faizabad, and survivors were recorded with rebel forces defeated in Etawah in December 1858 and at Gooma in January 1859. The regiment was disbanded in 1859 and never reconstituted. © CJP 1991

THE LAST OF THE MOUNTED INFANTRY

Brigadier J P Randle OBE MC

(late The Baluch Regiment IA and The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment)

In May 1942 the remnants of 7th Bn The (10th) Baluch Regiment, a war-raised battalion in the famous 17th Indian Division, ended its long and arduous retreat from Burma by reaching Imphal just as the monsoon broke. Of the original thirteen officers and 800 men who had arrived in Rangoon in January, four months earlier, four officers (plus three reinforcements) and 250 men survived, a large number of who had malaria or various types of enteritis. Those we left behind were battle casualties, not sick. The Battalion was then operationally deployed to Ledo in the far North East of Assam for three dreary months before finally joining the rest of the Division in the Ranchi area in Eastern India in late September.

The Commanding Officer, Lt Col (later Brigadier) P L Lindsay, like all other COs in the Division, faced a formidable task in rebuilding his battalion in every aspect of its life - numbers, health, training, re-equipment and morale, though this was higher than might have been thought - we had at least marched out as a formed body of fighting men with our weapons and our discipline and reputation intact. This would have been a testing enough challenge had we simply continued our previous role of an ordinary infantry battalion, but we were ordered to begin training as a Reconnaissance Battalion, as part of newly constituted 17th Indian Light Division. Light in this context involved only two standard infantry brigades, a predominance of mountain artillery and three Divisional units - a support battalion (1st West Yorks) and two Reconnaissance Battalions 4th/12th Frontier Force Regiment and 7th/10th Baluch Regiment). The tactical concept for the formation of two Reconnaissance Battalions was that, in any advance back into Burma, reconnaissance by a mobile unit would be essential - a sound enough idea, if it had been thought through with regard to the terrain in which we would have to fight and the efficacy of our communications. With the wisdom of hindsight it was a questionable decision. The establishment originally laid down four rifle companies, two mounted on ponies and two in Jeeps (this was later changed to two in Jeeps and one on ponies) plus a small support company. It was envisaged that Battalion HQ and the Support Weapons would have to be capable of being deployed either on a pony or a Jeep basis.

Mounted Infantry was not a new tactical concept in the British Army and had been extensively used in a number of later Victorian campaigns, particularly in Egypt/Sudan and in South Africa. Surprisingly enough, however, none of the tactical doctrine appeared to have survived and the battalion virtually had to start from scratch. On top of all the normal infantry skills of weapon handling, jungle tactics, the retraining of section commanders and all the normal specialists such as signallers and mortar men, we had two formidable tasks - teaching half the battalion to ride and to look after the 728 ponies and 137 mules on our establishment, and the other half to drive and maintain Jeeps and the battalion 2nd line transport.

The horse training in the event was not as difficult as we had imagined. Unlike an average British battalion, with a high proportion of soldiers brought up in an urban and industrial society, the bulk of our men - Punjabi Mussulmen, Pathans from the more settled Frontier areas of Kohat and Mardan, and Dogra Brahmins were basically countrymen accustomed to the care of domestic animals, including horses - so in some ways the training of a large number of Jeep drivers presented a more difficult task. While some officers could already ride, others could not - and had to go through the same basic horsemanship as their men. To assist us, a number of officers, VCOs and senior NCOs from Indian cavalry regiments, many of whom had only recently transferred from horse to armour, were drafted in - as were a number of MT instructors.

In the absence of any tactical doctrine we had to work out such important matters as how many horses could be held and controlled by one horseholder when a section dismounted and deployed as normal infantry. How did Bn HQ change from a mounted deployment to an MT one? We also had to tackle the problem of learning about the fitting and maintenance of all our tack, of the supply of fodder, the shoeing of ponies and mules and how to care for wounded animals. One of the heart-warming features of our training was the rapport quickly established between our sepoys and their animals. Being countrymen this came easily, but it was good to see the pride and care lavished by them and the response of the ponies and mules. Fortunately we were given a generous veterinary establishment including an RAVC Officer Vet, supported by IAVC personnel and farriers.

Our actual mounts were a very heterogeneous collection of Indian ponies (tats) (some said Tonga ponies!) supplemented by Walers (from New South Wales) and ponies and mules from the Argentine.

We were given three months to get this under way in Ranchi before moving back to the operational area in Imphal and they proved to be very demanding months of very hard work, not however without moments of farce.

In Ranchi, not long after we had started our mounted infantry training, we were warned that Wavell, then C-in-C India, was coming to visit us at a certain hour. On the day Wavell committed the unforgivable sin of arriving fifteen minutes early (I discovered afterwards that he often did it on purpose, just to see how quick on their toes the unit was). I got the message and rushed to tell Pat. "My God, John! Get down as quickly as you can to C Company and get Denys (the Company Commander) to get them on parade." I duly did just that and as the great man arrived C Company, more like a horde of Tartar horsemen than a mounted Infantry company swept by. Wavell surveyed them quizzically with his one good eye - "Not much skill, but plenty of spirit!" was his laconic comment. I exchanged glances with Pat - all was well.

One thing we never cracked was quick and efficient communications, on which the whole success of any reconnaissance organisation depends. Infantry radio was in its infancy in the Far East - and

sets with any range depended on wet batteries and charging engines - the former never really effective when carried on a mule.

In January 1943 we moved back to the operational area in Imphal, though the rest of the Division was then some 130 miles to the south in the Chin Hills. The move itself from Ranchi in Eastern India was extremely complex and time-consuming, since it involved a broad gauge train journey, a switch to narrow gauge, then on to a paddle steamer on the Brahmaputra and finally by truck from Dimapur via Kohima to Imphal. Loading recalcitrant mules into a train or three tonners or in the hold of a ship is an art, requiring much patience - and a sense of humour. It was soon realised that the paddy fields of the Imphal plain, especially in the approaching monsoon, would not prove a sensible place to continue our training and so happily we went back into Assam, to a hill station at Shillong - a cool and pleasant place, where we achieved much. A second mounted company was formed.

Amongst other training we tried to get our animals accustomed to the tremendous noise of battle - and often, when our affiliated 25-pdr field regiment was firing, took our ponies and mules to the gun lines to get used to the noise.

Life had its lighter moments and we had a lot of fun with our horses and mules - battalion gymkhanas with mule races and pillow fighting on mules; we also regularly had tent-pegging contests with the Mountain gunners and even tried our hand at polo, with more enthusiasm than skill.

One of our great problems, living out in the open in a tropical climate and during the monsoon with over 700 animals, was hygiene. It is perhaps best illustrated by the reaction of the ADMS (the senior medical officer of the Division), a genial southern Irishman, who was always complaining about our hygiene. The ADMS's great joke was that if he didn't know where the Baluchis were on the Divisional front, he just scanned the horizon with his binoculars; wherever he saw a particularly large cloud of flies, that was where we would be! Finally, in November 1943, we left Shillong and by another long move, mostly by road, re-joined the Division, still in the Chin Hills facing south and southwest. At first the mountain scrub terrain was not deemed suitable for our mounted companies and the two Jeep companies, without their Jeeps, were deployed as normal infantry on the right flank of the Division. The two mounted companies remained 100 miles in rear near Imphal itself, to continue training. We did, however, on one occasion bring up a mounted company and deployed them operationally. It was not a success. The noise of guns firing is one thing - being on the receiving end of guns and mortar is another and sadly things did not go well and a number of animals were killed or maimed.

In the opening stages of the great Kohima/Imphal battle the battalion, less the two mounted companies back near Imphal, took part in the fighting retreat from the Chin Hills to Imphal with the rest of the 17th Indian Division. Shortly after arrival there I, as Adjutant, received a visit from an RIASC major who told me that he had an order to requisition our ponies and mules.

"What for, Major?"

"What do you think?"

"You tell me, Major."

"Well, for a start, with Imphal cut off, we are going to be pushed to feed your soldiers, let alone bring in hay and forage for your animals."

And sadly, so it was - our animals on which we had lavished such care and affection were in fact treated as meat on the hoof and our eighteen months of hard and dedicated training came to an end.

Looking back after 50 years and with subsequent experience in the latter part of the Burma campaign (in which my battalion took part with the 17th Indian Division in the mechanized/armoured capture of Meiktila and the thrust to Rangoon) and of several post-war campaigns, it is possible to see this imaginative concept in perspective. On balance the idea was flawed.

Tactically, enough thought had not been given to the terrain. The jungle/scrub area between Assam and Burma was better "recced" by infantry patrolling forward on foot; once we got on to the great plains of Central Burma, armoured reconnaissance vehicles with their speed, mobility and fire power, and above all communications, were far more efficient.

Administratively the battalion required too much non-effective (in battle terms) support, both in moving to and fro, and in maintaining itself in battle. Horses and ponies had outlived their battlefield credibility before the First World War, even though mules proved their worth in the supply field throughout WW2.

My battalion claimed and still claims to be the last mounted infantry to operate in battle - though I believe the Trucial Oman Scouts operated camel patrols in their area in the 50s (if David Shepherd's famous painting of the Buraimi Fort is anything to go by) and the Kenya Regiment did have a mounted section in the Mau Mau troubles in the 50s - but neither I believe, in action.

MR TAYLOR AND AN INTERRUPTED GAME OF CHESS

Tim Ash

With reference to my earlier article on John Taylor (Vol. 7 No3, pages 4-9), it is no wonder he faded away after 1865. He died of apoplexy at Hissar on 22 March 1865 and was buried the next day. Unfortunately the burial entry did not state his age.

STRENGTHS OF MILITARY FORCES IN INDIA, 1819

Cyril Walters

The following extract is taken from what appears to be an Encyclopaedia - Gazetteer published shortly after the Third Mahratta War in about 1819 or 1820. I have two parts of what must have been a larger volume and the only clue to its origin is the name of the printer, Strahan and Preston, Printers St. London.

BRITISH INDIA

A formidable ARMY is necessary for the protection of these extensive dominions and for maintaining that subordination which is essential to their internal improvement. The following statement of the total force employed in India was laid before Parliament on the 22nd of March 1819.

Regulars

- King's Troops, Cavalry 4,692
- King's troops, Infantry 17,858
    - Totals King's 22,550
- East India Company's European Artillery 4,583
- East India Company's European Infantry 3,120
    - Total, Company's Europeans 7,703
- Native cavalry 11,011
- Native infantry 132,815
- Native artillery 8,759 (including gun lascars attached to the European artillery)
    - Total native forces 152,585
    - Total Regulars 182,838

Irregulars

- Native cavalry 7,659
- Ditto infantry 17,082
    - Total irregulars 24,741
- Invalids and pensioners 5,875

GRAND TOTAL 213,454

In the late war, which was brought to so favourable a conclusion in 1818, the British forces actually in the field, during the campaign, amounted to 95,000 men and, as an average of four and a half followers are reckoned for each fighting man, the whole concourse was nearly half a million of people.

The Naval establishment of the Honourable East India Company is comparatively small. Swarms of Pirates infest the western coast of India, principally from the shores of Arabia and Persia, and the chief strength of the Company's marine is therefore at Bombay, where, in 1814, it consisted of 18 armed cruisers, besides a few boats and other small vessels employed for the protection of the trade and the inhabitants near the coast.

BOOK NOTE

'194 SQUADRON ROYAL AIR FORCE "THE FRIENDLY FIRM". Flt. Lt. Douglas Williams. 80pp paperback, ISBN 0 86303 326-1, published by Merlin Books Ltd, 40 East Street, Braunton, Devon EX33 2EA at £2.95 net (UK). Signed copies available from the author direct, Douglas Williams, 56 Mottingham Lane, Lee, London SE12 9AV at £3.25 inclusive of p & p - payable to Douglas Williams. Royalties are being made over to the RAF Benevolent Fund.

The book covers squadron life from October 1942, when the author joined the squadron, to June 1944 when he left; though it also includes a summary of operations from July 1944 until disbandment in February 1946.

The author and crew flew a Hudson bomber to India to join a Coastal Squadron in the Bay of Bengal, and were eventually asked to join 194 Squadron, a new unit being formed in the Punjab in October 1942. In May 1943 they converted to Dakotas and were called to the front line in February 1944 to help the beleaguered 14th Army. From then on the author's crew participated in the Battle of Arakan, General Wingate's air invasion of Burma, 'Operation Thursday', the siege of Imphal and Kohima, the air evacuation of casualties, and various supply operations.

With a Foreword by Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Grandy, GCB, KBE, DSO, and an appreciation of Air Supply by Brigadier 'Mad' Mike Calvert, DSO & Bar, former Commander of 77 (Chindit) Brigade.

LETTERS AND QUERIES

Dennis Francombe writes: Further to W M Thornton's enquiry about the Calcutta Naval Volunteers (Vol. 8 No 2, page 34) following are brief details of their many changes of title.

- Raised 1883 as Calcutta Naval Artillery Volunteers
- 1900 - Calcutta Port Defence Volunteers (see * below)
- 1917 - (Calcutta) Port Defence Group, Garrison Artillery
- 1920 - 1 (Calcutta) Port Defence Field Brigade
- 1926 - amalgamated with V Cossipore Field Brigade to form Bengal Artillery AFI
- *1902 No.1 (Calcutta) Fortress Coy, Royal Engineers, was formed from within the Calcutta Port Defence Volunteers and subsequently:
- 1917 - No 1 Electrical Coy
- 1920 - No 1 (Calcutta) Field Coy
- 1933 - No 1 (Calcutta) Fortress Coy