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BOLSHAYA IGRA

Mike Cunningham

Kim: *But what dost thou do?*
Mabub Ali: *I go North again upon the Great Game.*
What else?
- Kim by Rudyard Kipling

What else indeed? From the beginning to the end of the 19th Century "Bolshaya Igra" or "The Great Game" - the threat to the Indian sub-continent from Russia - occupied the thoughts of the Foreign Departments in St Petersburg, London and Calcutta.

THE FORWARD POLICY

There were several schools of thought. For the unadventurous, the southern bank of the Sutlej was forward enough to counter the Russians. The more adventurous saw the mountains separating Afghanistan and India as the obvious objective. For the truly strategic, Central Asia was the place to halt the Bear's advance. Each school regarded the others as wild or timid. What seemed prudent to the more mature was weakness to young tyros, anxious to win their spurs and fame, and possessed - as young men are - of a strategic grasp denied to their elders. In practice the emphasis changed with governments, the Tories tending to favour a more forward policy than the Liberals.

THE BRITISH PUSH BEYOND THE SUTLEJ AND THE INDUS

The British acquired control of Sind (1843) and the Punjab (1849), thus extending British influence to the natural frontier with Afghanistan and securing the North West Frontier. They had already clashed with Nepal (1814-16) and secured a northern frontier in the Himalayas. This was an early example of the forward policy school at work.

THE THREAT

Russia, like the other 19th Century powers, was expanding. There were five distinct directions:

(A) Western Europe
(B) The Ottoman Empire
(C) The Caucuses
(D) The Far East
(E) Central Asia

(A) and (B) had been halted by the division of Poland and the Crimean War respectively. (C) was conquered but the way ahead was barred by Persian territory and desert until the arrival

of the railway. (D)'s gains were recognised by the Treaty of Peking (1860) with China. In these circumstances the way to go was south into Central Asia (E).

The British feared that Russia aimed to find warm water ports or even to annex India. Russian expansion, an average of 50 sq. miles per day during the 19th Century, was so dramatic that the possibility could not be ignored. In 1943, the Japanese "March on Delhi" aimed to deny the Allies the Imphal Plain base area. Collateral damage to India might be caused by an invasion threat. But Japanese generals had a reputation for starting with limited objectives and then widening them, ignoring protestations from Home. 18th Century Russian generals had much the same reputation. In both cases the British authorities in India were well aware of this, and reacted accordingly.

RUSSIAN EXPANSION SOUTH

The Russians needed to control the Central Asian khanates. These states, ill-defined by modern standards, were important for their own wealth and well-established trade patterns. They also lay on or near the routes the Russians needed for passage south and logistic support. Russians set about pacification with a will:

- 1865 – Tashkent
- 1868 - Samarkand and Bokhara
- 1873 – Khiva
- 1875 - Kokand

INVASION ROUTES

Sea routes to India were ruled out by British naval supremacy, and the Hindu Kush and Pamirs were uninviting overland routes. Afghanistan was the door to India, and Herat its key. East from the Caspian Sea was judged too difficult by the Russians. The more accessible route was from the Russian forward base at Orensburg to the Aral Sea, onwards to Balkh in Northern Afghanistan via the River Oxus (Amu Darya), then west to Herat. The would-be invader then had a choice of routes. South to Kandahar-Quetta-Bolan Pass-Multan or east to Kabul-Khyber Pass-Peshawar-Attock. Then, the Indus remained to be crossed.

The situation was changed dramatically by the construction (1880-88) of the Transcaspian railway from Krasnovodsk, on the eastern Caspian shore, east to Merv (Mary), Bokhara, Tashkent and Andijan. This crossed difficult desert and reduced a hazardous journey from forty days to three. The Russians could move fresh troops and animals and associated stores across Central Asia. If invasion of India was intended, it would jump-off from a point hundreds of miles south of Orensburg. The southern extension of the railway was completed a few years later, putting Herat in immediate danger. The British countered with a road and rail improvement programme.

THE AFGHAN WARS

The British aimed to create a buffer state between Russian expansion and British interests. Afghanistan fitted that bill. The Afghans were prepared to cooperate provided it was in their interests. Cooperation also depended on the ability of the Afghan government to impose its

will. Afghans are notoriously clannish and much prefer central authority to be minimalist in nature. The central authorities took the opportunity to play the Russians and British off against one another, a potentially profitable activity.

There were three Afghan Wars. The First (1839-42) was started by an attempt to put a puppet Amir on the throne. It resulted in the murder of Burnes, the British Resident, followed by Macnaghten, the Viceroy's emissary, and the destruction of the grandly styled Army of the Indus, commanded by Elphinstone. It was a series of bitter fights, some still remembered in British pub names.

The Second (1878-81) was to counter Russian diplomatic penetration. Disraeli had decided on a forward policy (that phrase again). The British wanted a representative in Kabul but negotiations were fruitless. A Russian military mission to the Afghans to discuss invasion of India was well received. The British demanded its withdrawal and sent their own mission. The Russians withdrew, but the British mission was rebuffed. The British took military action which was successful, thanks to the dynamic General Roberts VC ("Bobs" as he became known to the British public). Britain became responsible for Afghanistan's foreign policy from then until 1921. A diplomatic mission was established in Kabul under Sir Louis Cavignari, but he was soon murdered by an Afghan mob. The British invaded again, ostensibly to support the Amir against dissidents. Kabul was reoccupied and the British made their own candidate Amir. This decision was contested and the British suffered a defeat at Maiwand in July 1880. However, order was eventually restored and the pro-British Amir, Abdul Rahman, ruled from 1880 to 1901.

The Army withdrew, but disputes arose from the close proximity of Russian forces to the ill-defined borders of Afghanistan. An Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission settled the border and the danger of war receded.

The Third Afghan War took place after the First World War and was an Anglo-Afghan affair.

THE POLITICALS

The Russians and British had much in common. They were young, brave, intelligent and adventurous. They had to be devious, circumspect, yet prepared to brazen it out if needs be. They were usually soldiers who had abandoned conventional soldiering in favour of diplomacy, espionage and reconnaissance.

Mabub Ali was a horse dealer. What better way to test the suitability of terrain for horse, wagons and artillery than to ride it? Their Russian counterparts did the same. The horse dealer could be expected to penetrate deep into Central Asia in search of livestock. His occupation accounted for the obvious racial differences and the halting use of the local tongue. Any devious behaviour was no more than might be expected from that shady trade. The horse dealer and "The Politicals" had much in common. Pottinger and Christie, probably the earliest British players of the Great Game, used that disguise as did their Russian counterparts.

THE PUNDITS

Although the Politicals gained knowledge of the terrain, the main effort was provided by "The Pundits" - Indians trained to survey using rudimentary equipment. They learnt to count their steps - a standardized pace - and record them, often using Tibetan rosary beads as an aid. The boiling point of water measured altitude. Information would be recorded surreptitiously and concealed in safe places, often religious artefacts. The Pundits often posed as pilgrims, which explained their journeys and afforded some protection. They needed that, for discovery meant death.

THE PAMIRS

With Afghanistan's northern border established, the Politicals turned their attention east to the passes and valleys of the Pamirs. The annexation of the Khanate of Kokand gave Russia domination of Central Asia. The Pamirs could no longer be regarded as remote. A preliminary reconnaissance had been attempted by Shaw and Hayward in 1868. In 1874 Lt Col T Gordon proved that the Pamirs could be crossed at certain times of the year. It could be done more easily from Russian to Indian territory, and the sound of Cossack hoof beats could be heard distantly in Simla.

This caused another flurry of exploration on both sides. The British were ever fearful of Russian invasion, and the Russians suspicious of British intentions in Central Asia. The principal areas of interest were the Baroghil and Ishkaman Passes, and Chitral. The former were covered by a British presence in Gilgit. The latter required a permanent presence on site. The subsequent joint Anglo-Russian agreement to extend Afghan territory eastwards to China created a narrow cordon sanitaire, and eased tension.

TIBET

The country, shrouded in mystery and thought to be fabulously wealthy, was also of interest to the Russians - a potentially lethal cocktail. It would have been better had the Tibetans been more open, exciting less interest. But that is hindsight. Younghusband's 1904 expedition had been preceded by many years' work by the Pundits, whose surveying was phenomenal. It brought the British to Lhasa, and the Tibetans into contact with modern weapons.

GAME'S END

The Anglo-Russian Convention of 31 August 1907 agreed to:

- leave Tibet alone, and regard it as a Chinese sphere of influence
- maintain the status quo in Afghanistan, with British influence paramount
- recognise Russian paramountcy in Central Asia
- maintain Persian independence, but establish spheres of influence - the Russians in the north and the British in the south.

Thus Bolshaya Igra came to an end, or so it seemed. But that, O Best beloved, is another tale.

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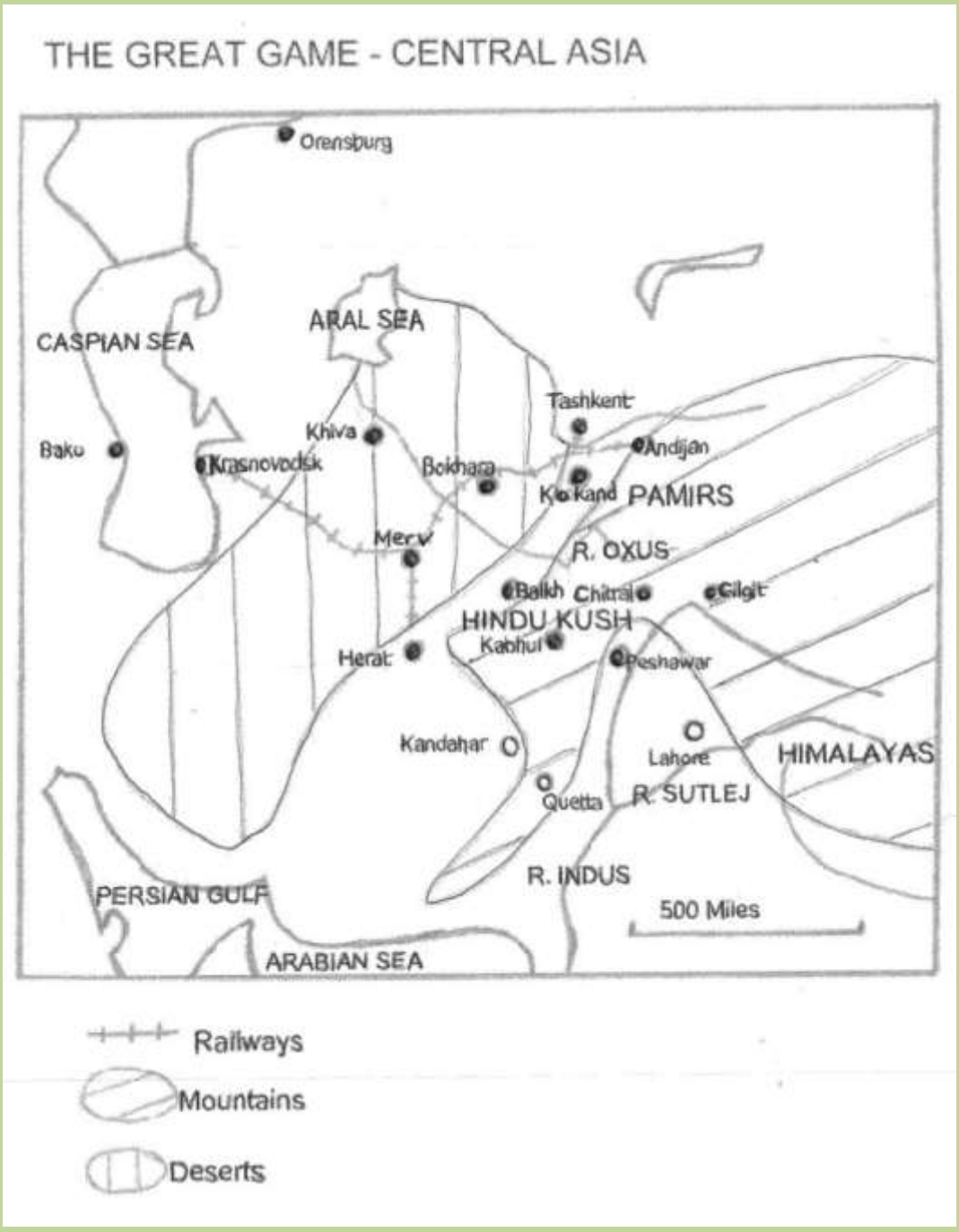


RAIL COMMUNICATIONS IN INDIA 1942-44 - ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE NORTH EAST

Tony Mains

Author's Note - Major Tony Mains, as he was then, was in charge of Security Intelligence for the Province of Assam from June 1942 to August 1943, located in Gauhati, and for the whole L of C east of the Brahmaputra from September 1943 to August 1944, as Security Staff Officer of XIV Army. Besides being an experienced Security Officer, he was a railway enthusiast with an intimate knowledge of Indian Railways.

EAST VERSUS WEST

Military planning for the defence of India was based on the holding of the passes between Afghanistan and India, from tribal incursions, attacks from Afghanistan and a possible confrontation with Russia. There had been three wars with Afghanistan and innumerable expeditions to contain the tribesmen. The northern land frontier was discounted as Kashmir was subject to India, who also controlled Nepalese foreign relations.

There had been over the years a number of small scale expeditions against the tribesmen of the N.E. Frontier, but none larger than a Brigade. External aggression was ruled out by the terrain; a perimeter of high trackless mountains forming the frontier with Tibet, China and Burma.

The move to the North West culminated in the Kitchener reorganisation in the early years of the twentieth century so that, in 1939, Northern Command and Baluchistan District comprised fifteen Brigades or Brigade Areas against the Presidency and Assam District with one only, the Eastern Bengal Brigade Area. There were only two military stations in the east - Calcutta and Shillong. So sparse was the military coverage that to contain the terrorist activity starting in 1930, an emergency garrison had to be deployed in temporary stations such as Chittagong, Comilla, Dacca and Saidpur.

COMMUNICATIONS

THE NORTH WEST

India's mobilisation plans largely discounted movement by road as there was no network and many of the long distance roads were primitive - untarred, with major rivers crossed by bridges of boats replaced by manual ferries during the monsoon. The best roads, however, were found in the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province with excellent roads linking frontier garrisons with each other and with rail heads.

The major obstacle of the River Indus was crossed by three bridges in the north - Attock, Kalabagh and Mari Indus, together with the Empress Bridge at Sukkur leading to Quetta. The various railheads were Dargai, covering the Malakand and the Chitral road; Landi Kotal the Khyber; Kohat and its narrow gauge extension to Thal, the Kurram and Quetta; and Chaman the Bolan Pass. The garrisons in Waziristan were maintained by narrow gauge lines which had contact with the broad gauge by the Mari Indus Bridge. It was an open secret that

the railway stores to extend the lines, in the event of war, to Jellalabad and Kandahar were held at Peshawar and Chaman respectively.

The heavily irrigated and cultivated area of the "five rivers" of the Punjab could sustain a viable network of railway lines, but not so the arid mountainous NWFP and Baluchistan - thus all lines in these two provinces, except the mainline to Peshawar, but together with the lateral down the east bank of the Indus, the Sind Sagar Doaba line, were classified as "strategic" constructed by the Government of India and whose annual working losses were charged to the Defence Budget.

THE NORTH EAST

ROADS AND RIVERS

There were no mobilisation plans for the north east, so communications were tailored to the traffic. Roads, with the exception of the Grand Trunk Road from Calcutta to Delhi and in the coal field area of West Bengal, were virtually non-existent. This was due to the largely unbridged Ganges, Brahmaputra and Hooghly rivers together with the Padma, the wide estuary of the combined Ganges and Brahmaputra. There was also the Sunderbands, the Ganges delta lying between the Hooghly and the Padma - a vast area of creeks and swamps. Road communication between Howrah, the station for Delhi, Bombay and Madras, and Calcutta proper was by a bridge of boats over the Hooghly, which was opened periodically for river traffic. A permanent bridge, however, was nearing completion.

There were only three through roads in Assam - two tarred and one, the Assam Trunk Road, Gauhati to Dibrugarh, mostly gravel. The two tarred roads Gauhati to Shillong and continuing down to Sylhet, and from Manipur Road Station to Imphal were narrow "hill roads" on which traffic could move in one direction only in convoys controlled by gates. The Imphal road was merely a feeder to the railway with no road connection onward to the rest of the Province. Neither Assam nor Eastern Bengal had any road communication with the rest of India.

Steamer services for passengers and goods run by two British companies plied on the major rivers. It was possible to sail from Calcutta to Dibrugarh, via the Hooghly, Ganges and Brahmaputra, but on the latter, low water in the summer and monsoon spates could cause disruption. Thus the maintenance of any military force would depend on the railways.

The possibility of an invasion from Burma had been discounted partly as it was a British possession and also because of the lack of roads and the mountainous nature of the country on the Indo-Burma border, but there were three possible routes-

- from the Arakan directed on Chittagong
- over the mountains to Imphal and thence to Manipur Road or Silchar
- from northern Burma via the Hukaung track to upper Assam

RAILWAYS

As far east as Calcutta (Howrah) was a network of broad gauge lines, much of double track, extending to the Punjab, Delhi, Bombay and Madras, but only three connections to the east -

two were broad gauge double track over the Hooghly bridges in the Calcutta area, originally built to serve the Calcutta Docks - the Howrah docks were mainly designed for the export of coal by coal steamer. The final connection was of metre gauge in north Bengal which allowed the through running from Lucknow to Assam.

The railways, all metre gauge, serving the Assam railheads of Manipur Road, Silchar and Chittagong, were the Eastern Bengal's metre gauge branch on the north bank of the Brahmaputra terminating at the Pandu wagon ferry and connecting with the Assam Bengal Railway's branch from the wagon ferry to the main line at Lumding Junction; there was s second wagon ferry at Teestamukh Ghat connecting with a line to Dacca and Chittagong. The main line of the Assam Bengal was constructed to bring the tea of north Assam to Chittagong for export and thus avoid the tedious journey by river steamer to Calcutta. This single line had the operating disadvantage of the "hill section"; the crossing of the mountain range between the Assam and Surma Valleys. In the 120 miles between Lumding and Badarpur Junctions, the line had to ascend from sea level to 6000 ft. and down again, involving a ruling gradient of 1 in 37 together with innumerable tunnels, bridges and sharp curves.

Even in normal times there was no comparison between the broad gauge strategic lines of the North West with the mainly metre gauge single lines of the North East with their low carrying capacity; but as will be seen the times were anything but normal.

THE INDIAN RAILWAYS

THE POSITION IN 1939

The Indian Railways were seriously deficient in equipment as much of the locomotive stock had been built before the Great War. An attempt had been made to remedy this when money was plentiful in the twenties, but arguments as to the type of locomotive most suitable for Indian track and climatic conditions delayed the placing of orders until the slump of the thirties caused a cessation. It is emphasised that India did not build locomotives, but ordered from the various UK manufacturers.

The outbreak of war caused a cessation of the coastal shipping trade - until now coal had been railed only the short distance from the Bengal and Bihar fields to Howrah, from whence it was shipped around India's coastline; now it would have to be moved by rail the length and breadth of the country. Even so the railways were able to cope with relatively minor closures of branch lines and cancellation of passenger services; a number of Railway Operating and Construction Companies of the Indian Engineers were raised and sent to the Middle East.

1942 - THE DISASTROUS YEAR

These halcyon days continued until spring 1942 when an unprecedented series of disasters swept the country - these were caused by enemy action, by the disaffected within India, and finally by the weather.

The first calamity was in the west, notably in Upper Sind, where a fanatical Muslim sect, the Hurs, went on the rampage destroying railway property, culminating in the derailment of the Karachi Mail and the shooting up of the survivors. Later in the year the Indus burst its banks

causing serious flooding in Upper Sind and southern Baluchistan - Quetta was cut off for nearly three months and the main line Lahore to Karachi was also breached. While these calamities were minor compared to happenings in eastern India, they tied up resources which could have been better applied elsewhere.

The loss of Burma and the possible invasion of India by the Japanese threw the Assam Bengal Railway and parts of the metre gauge section of the Eastern Bengal into utter chaos by the volume of traffic to be moved; this on single lines with long sections and primitive signalling giving a very low traffic density. A number of "train paths" also had to be allotted to civilian traffic - to complicate matters traffic did not move in a steady flow; the two mail trains moved at a faster rate and stopped only at the principal stations so in addition to passing trains going in the opposite direction, they had also to overtake others, much reducing the already low density.

Troops and stores were flooding in and the remnants of Burma Army, together with 21,000 Chinese troops and a vast number of civilian refugees, were having to be moved out. The author, one of a party of officers from HQ Burma Army, was given refitting leave and ordered to return to HQ 4 Corps in Assam on conclusion. His party left Manipur Road Station by the daily passenger on the morning of Day 1 and did not arrive at the Pandu Ferry until, the evening of the following day - 18 hours for 162 miles or approximately $8^1/_2$ mph; the train actually arriving 36 hours late. The only vacant accommodation was in a four wheeled parcel van.

The weather now took a hand - the exceptionally heavy early monsoon rains in the Assam Valley washed out long sections of the Eastern Bengal's north bank line. This was a major problem - previous monsoon floods had on occasion destroyed several of the river bridges, for which the railway administration were prepared and could speedily effect temporary repairs. Now the swift flowing rivers on reaching the flat plain had truly run amok, bursting out of their channels. Most of the bridges remained intact but the flood water breached the railway embankment and washed it away in a number of places, often over a distance of a mile or more. It took about six weeks to rebuild, during which time the troops in the Assam Valley were maintained by steamer or by rail over the Hill Section from East Bengal. The Port of Chittagong could not be used by ocean going vessels as the Japanese had command of the Bay of Bengal. To complicate matters the Imphal road also was cut by a landslide taking several days to repair.

I found on my return from leave that the metre gauge portion of the Assam Mail was not running because of the breaches and I was advised to go "south about" by the Surma Mail. This involved the broad gauge Surma Mail from Calcutta to Goalundo Ghat, an eight hours sail on a steamer to Chandpur, metre gauge Surma Mail to Badarpur Junction followed by all station passenger trains over the Hill Section and onward to Gauhati. The journey by the direct route would have taken 24 hours with one change of train. As it was, it took nearly double that time with four changes.

Things were beginning to improve when came the biggest blow of all - the "Quit India" campaign or the "'42 Rebellion" as we on the spot described it. The Government of India intended to forestall a massive civil disobedience campaign by an equally massive round up of Congress leaders, both national and local. This took place on 8 August without incident, but on the 11th all hell broke loose. Serious rioting took place in nearly every major city with attacks on government and railway property; in Delhi alone three signal boxes were wrecked

and burnt. The trouble spread to the countryside with attacks on railway property, but except in the UP and Bihar, order was restored fairly quickly. In these two provinces there was a mass uprising which cut three of the four broad gauge lines going west out of Calcutta. Only the mainly single line to Madras remained in operation - the metre gauge line north of the Ganges from Lucknow to Assam was also cut. The insurgents wrecked stations, destroyed signalling equipment, and damaged culverts - and even in one instance dropped a 40 ft bridge span. Order and through running was not completely restored for some six weeks.

Assam was spared serious rioting but a more insidious form of sabotage started in the autumn - the malicious wrecking of trains by tampering with the track. Special measures were taken, including the raising of a special police force to patrol the line, but the loss of locomotives and rolling stock, both in critically short supply, was exceptionally serious. The railway authorities were faced with a dilemma - should they halt the traffic for several days while they recovered the locomotive, often from the bottom of a high embankment, or tip everything off the line and resume traffic.

MORALE, PILFERING AND CORRUPTION

We had mastered the threat of train wrecking by the summer of 1943 and considerable work had been done to improve the railway system by improvements to marshalling yards and wagon ferries and, most important of all, new block posts to break up the long single line sections. In spite of this, traffic movement and density remained unacceptably low, the main reason being the low morale of the staff.

MORALE

Civilian morale in eastern India reached a low in the winter 1942-43 aggravated by the Bengal Famine; most lower class Indians no longer believed in the ability of the Government to protect them from man-made or natural disasters. This naturally rubbed off on the railwaymen.

A job on the railways pre-war was much sought after and, indeed, railway service had almost become a caste as sons expected to follow their fathers into the service; this produced high morale and esprit d'corps. Morale, especially on the Bengal and Assam Railway (an amalgamation of the Eastern Bengal with the Assam Bengal) had reached a very low level by the winter of 1943-44. The Anglo Indian staff continued to work reasonably well but the Indian railwayman's heart was not in his job. He could not be wholly blamed for this as he was no longer in a safe well paid job with reasonable hours; instead he was expected to work long hours, often in dangerous circumstances and, as a result of inflation and the Bengal Famine, his pay had become utterly inadequate to keep him and his family. All this he blamed on the War so he was not prepared to make any further sacrifices for the war effort. A number of railway employees left the service to find a better life elsewhere in India.

The first attempt to deal with the crisis was to invite the Indian staff to enlist in the "Defence of India Regiment". Those doing so would receive free Army rations and uniforms, but would remain under railway rather than military discipline; they, however, could be dealt with as deserters if they left their posts. The scheme had considerable success but there were snags - a Stationmaster of a large station, as a senior railway employee, could usually hold his own in an argument with a senior Army officer but was at a disadvantage when uniformed as

a subaltern. The menial staff wore their uniforms when going about their usual and often dirty tasks; the sight of a man in a filthy shirt worn outside equally filthy shorts, but with a military sidecap and "D of I" shoulder titles did little to enhance the reputation of the Indian Army amongst British and American servicemen.

The Americans concerned about the supply of their airfields in north east Assam suggested that their Army Transportation Corps took over the operation of the section from Parbatipur Junction to Dibrugarh and Ledo, together with the Amingaon-Pandu wagon ferry. The civilian staff would remain to deal with civilian traffic and crew ordinary trains but would be subject to American orders; as far as possible the Americans would crew special troop and military goods trains. The most revolutionary idea was the posting of an American "dispatcher" to every station and block post to oversee the work of the Indian staff. The proposal created a furore as the average American serviceman's attitude to Indians was by no means always correct - the scheme was adopted, however, and was a great success.

The general transport situation had begun to improve by 1944 as the Americans, realising the parlous condition of the railways in eastern India, produced in late 1943 a few 2-8-2 metre gauge locomotives from American and Canadian builders. The improved situation in the Middle East allowed the repatriation of many of the Indian Railway Operating and Construction Companies; this allowed a number of key routes to be improved and extra services run.

PILFERING AND CORRUPTION

While these activities were the least of the difficulties faced by the transportation agencies, they were a great nuisance and contributed to a waste of manpower and resources. These were in fact matters for the civil police or the Special Investigation Branch of the Military Police, but the civil police had no organisation to deal with it and anyway were corrupt in the lower ranks themselves, and Military Police cover up to 1944 was extremely meagre. The only organisation available was the Field Security Service who by that time had some twenty sections on the L of C alone giving complete cover from Dibrugarh to Chittagong. They were not supposed to get involved in this type of work, but as there was no one else to do it their participation was inevitable.

PILFERING

While the actual losses were probably minor when compared with France and north west Europe, there was a considerable waste of manpower as every wagon load had to have a military escort or it would be pilfered, particularly on transhipment from broad to metre gauge, or the wagon would just disappear.

Some of the pilfering was only a nuisance and sometimes black humour surfaced. It was reported that a locomotive had blown up in Pandu Yard, killing the crew, and all work had come to a halt as it was suspected that bombs were hidden in the coal. A Field Security investigation found, first, that with the exception of the cab roof blown off and a dent in the footplate, the engine was quite undamaged.; second, that the dead crew's bodies were found at some distance from the explosion, together with pieces of wood; and finally, a wagon nearby had been broken into. This wagon contained blasting powder and it was obvious that

the engine crew had stolen a case thinking it to contain tinned food and had opened it on the footplate.

14th Army HQ moved from Barrackpore to Comilla in the autumn of 1943, by which time there were no lights in any passenger coaches east of the Brahmaputra as all the bulbs had been pilfered. The stealing of bulbs and, to a lesser degree, fans was started by British soldiers, but was aggravated by the railway administration who issued a Press Note saying that they could no longer guarantee lights in carriages - this was an incentive for the Indian staff to remove any which were left. The HQ party, with whom I travelled, arrived by steamer at Chandpur after dark and the train for the overnight journey to Comilla naturally had no lights. I visited all the Upper Class (lying down accommodation) carriages warning the occupants to shut and bolt the window shutters against thieves. Many of the occupants were newly arrived in India and I was told in no uncertain terms that nothing would induce them to do so on a hot and sticky night. The next morning when the train stopped short of Comilla, a number of officers and WO s were to be seen endeavouring to borrow clothing to replace their stolen shirts and slacks.

CORRUPTION

This was endemic in India as it was, and is, in the East, but while in India at that time those at the top were honest, it did not have a great impact. However, the changed climate during the war, when much was in short supply, altered this. Corruption together with pilfering, as has been mentioned, led to a great waste of manpower and resources.

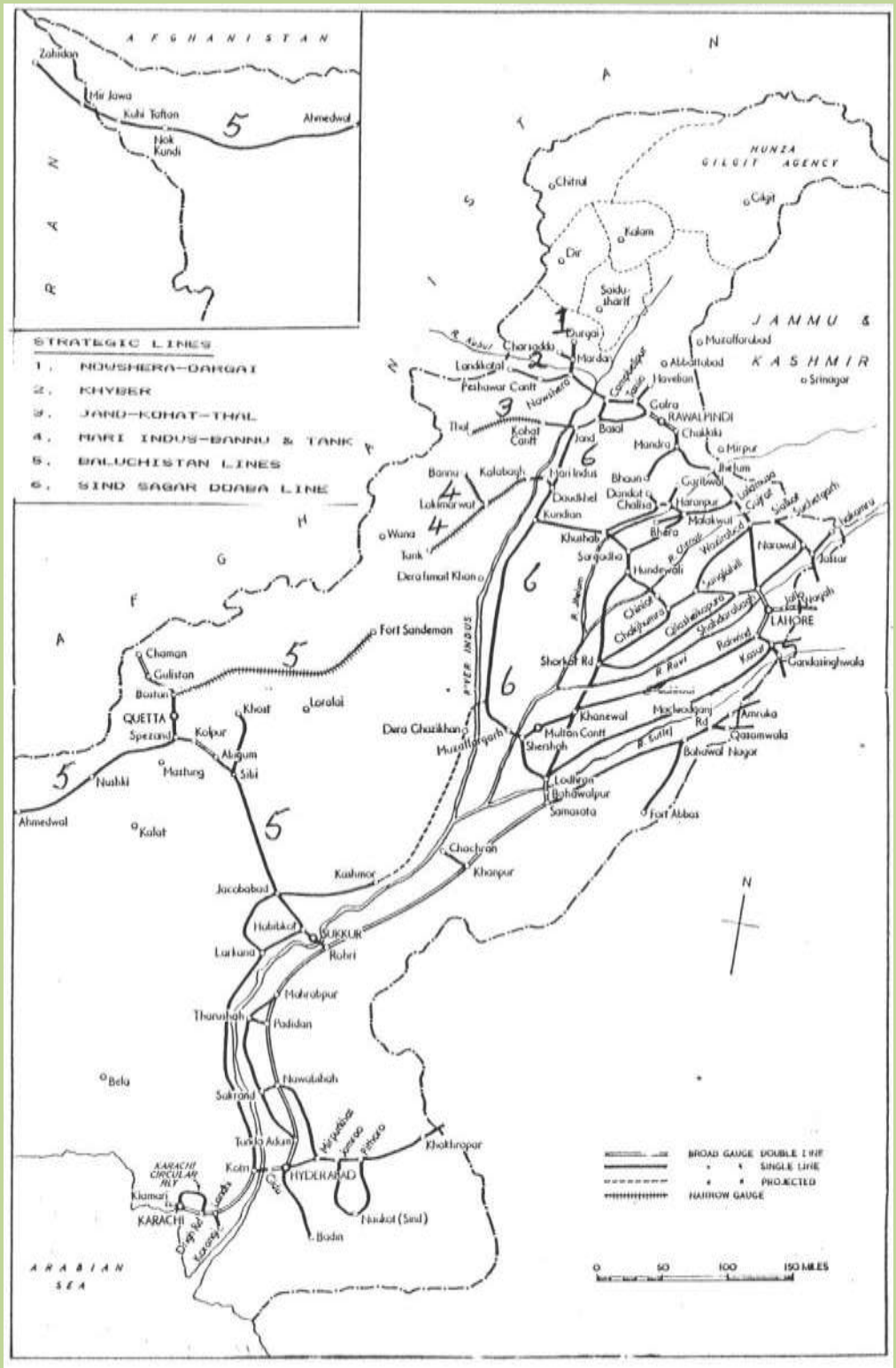
My RAF Security colleague in HQ 14 Army came to me one day in a state of excitement as it appeared that a complete wagon load of Spitfire spares had gone missing between Calcutta and Chittagong - he was inclined to attribute it to covert enemy action. They had sent no escort, but had merely locked and sealed the wagon before booking with the RTO in Calcutta. I told him that no Station or Yard Master on the B&A Railway would send on his wagon when he could get Rs 100 from a private trader to give his priority. We sent out the Field Security from each end and sure enough the wagon was found in a Yard only some fifty miles from its starting point, and there it would probably have remained until the end of time. It was lucky it had not reached a transhipment point as without an escort it might have been extensively looted.

The British clerks in the RTO's office at Sealdah Station (Calcutta) ran a flourishing racket in conjunction with the railway's reservation babus over the allocation of I & II class berths on the Assam and Burma Mails, and I have no doubt that the same happened elsewhere. This led to a great waste of space.

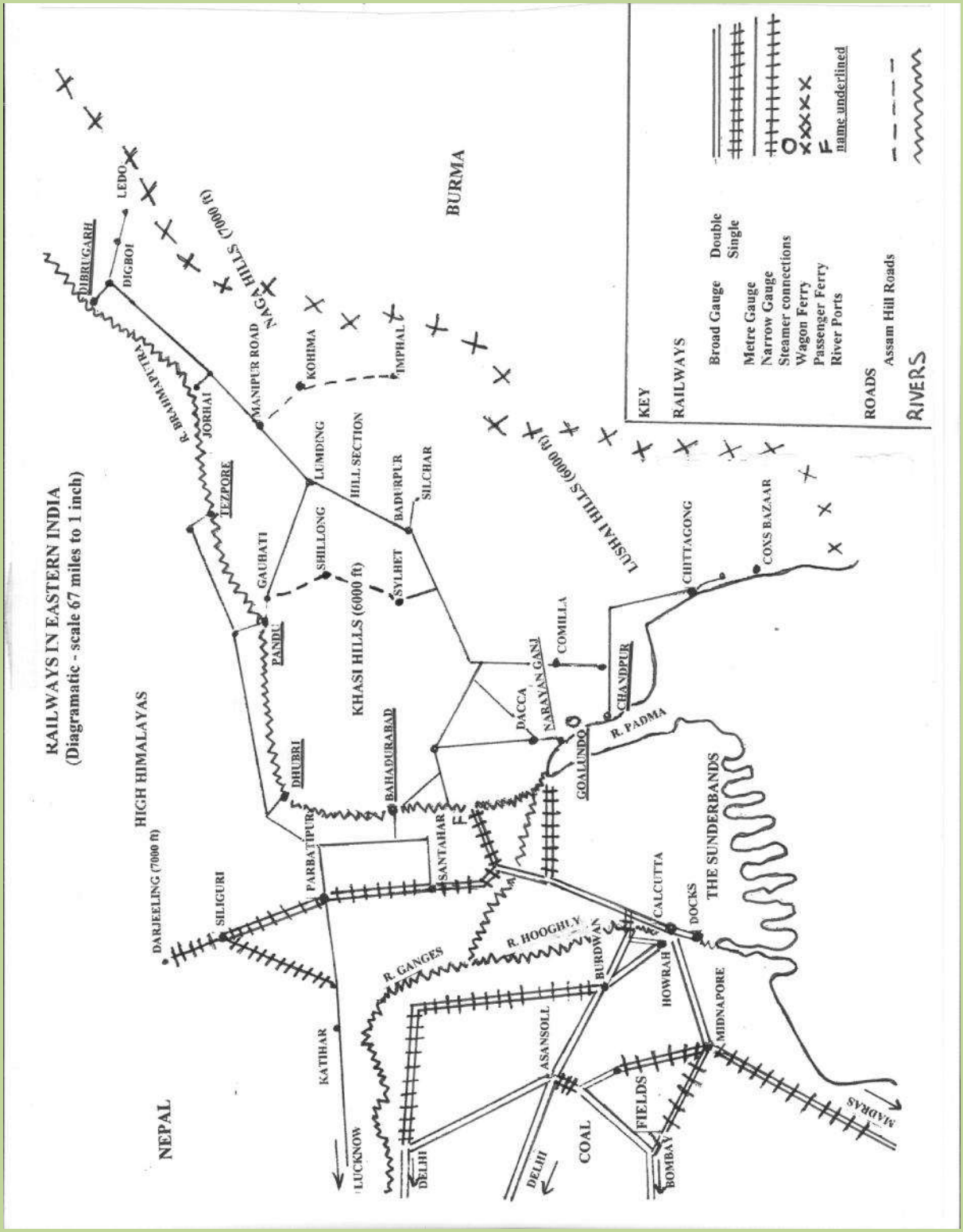
CONCLUSION

Whatever their various failings it must be conceded that all personnel of the Indian Railways did a magnificent job in very difficult circumstances. The courage of the Anglo Indian staff was beyond praise - as an example, the action of the Conductor of the wrecked Karachi Mail in getting away under fire to summon aid. I was present at a sabotage derailment in Assam where, in going down the embankment, the locomotive had rolled over the driver - he was not a pretty sight, but at this time we never had a refusal to take out a train at night. These men were all members of the appropriate railway unit of the Auxiliary Force (India) and it is sad

to think that they were disbanded at Independence without a word of appreciation from the British Government. Their regimental badges, however, are on display in the Indian Army Memorial Room at RMA Sandhurst



RAILWAYS IN THE NORTH WEST


RAILWAYS IN EASTERN INDIA
(Diagramatic - scale 67 miles to 1 inch)
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RAILWAYS
Broad Gauge
Double
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Narrow Gauge
Steamer connections
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IMPHAL
BURMA
LUMDING
HILL SECTION
SHILLONG
KHASI HILLS (6000 ft)
BADARPUR
SILCHAR
SYLHET
LUSHAI HILLS (6000 ft)
BAHADURABAD
DACCA
NARAYANGANJ
COMILLA
CHANDPUR
CHITTAGONG
CONS BAZAAR
GOALUNDO
R. PADMA
THE SUNDERBANDS
R. GANGES
R. HOOGHLY
BURDWAN
CALCUTTA
DOCKS
HOWRAH
MIDNAPORE
ASANSOLL
COAL
FIELDS
BOMBAY
MADRAS

THE PLACE OF SLAUGHTER - THE AMBELA CAMPAIGN OF 1863

Tim Wilsey

Barely three hours north of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, lies the Ambela Pass, an alternative route from the bustling town of Mardan to the relative peace of the Swat valley. Few people use the road today and fewer still are aware of the dramatic events which took place there between October and December 1863. The Ambela Campaign was not a minor frontier skirmish. In the forty-two expeditions against tribes in the North West Frontier between 1857 and 1890 the British suffered barely 2,000 casualties. In the Ambela campaign alone they lost almost 1,000.

Few battlefields can have changed so little. The pass itself is still strewn with large boulders. The heights on either side are still rugged and covered in thick and sometimes impenetrable scrub. The key positions are still easily identifiable. Perhaps the main difference is that the vegetation has been largely cleared from the floor of the valley.

By 1863 the British had largely re-established their authority throughout the subcontinent after the 1857 Mutiny. However one branch of the Yousufzai Pathans had not been quelled. A Wahabi Islamic sect had been formed in the area in 1824 to fight Sikh rule. Mubarik Shah, the son of the founder, then declared Jihad (Holy War) against the British. He was reinforced in 1857 by fugitives from the 55th Native Infantry, which had mutinied at Mardan before being routed by John Nicholson. Fortunately for the British Mubarik's appeal, even among the Yousufzai, was relatively limited. His habit of preying upon camel caravans in the Peshawar, Mardan and Attock areas further alienated the local population. In 1863 the British decided on a final expedition against him and his 'Hindustani fanatics'.

The plan was simple. A column would be sent quickly through the Ambela and Chamla Passes to get behind the rebels and to force them towards a separate British force waiting for them by the Indus. Thereafter the rebels' stronghold at Malka just 20 miles east of Ambela village would be destroyed. The task was given to two brigades (6,000 men and 19 guns). Although by no means an excessive force these were battle-hardened men many of whom had served with distinction during the Mutiny. The Gurkhas, the Corps of Guides and the Mountain Artillery would prove to be of particular value. The British force contained some eminent personalities. Its Commander was Brigadier General Sir Neville Chamberlain who had fought in the First Afghan War, the Sikh Wars and the Mutiny. Captain Probyn commanded Probyn's Horse (which still exists in the Pakistan Army), Colonel Reynell Taylor was the brilliant Political Officer and among the more junior officers were both Younghusband and Sandeman.

The force moved into the mouth of the Ambela Pass on the 20th October but things immediately started to go wrong. Firstly, the transport of the artillery and baggage (except for the few elephants) proved woefully inadequate in the rocky floor of the Pass. By the first evening a halt had to be called for 48 hours until the baggage and artillery arrived. Not only was all surprise lost (thereby making the original plan unworkable) but it gave time for the rebels to win over the loyalties of the other Yousufzai sub-groups. The language and understated style of the British military in those days camouflages the fact that this was a fiasco caused by bad planning and poor intelligence. By the 29th October the 6,000 British troops were facing 15,000 adequately armed rebels in unfamiliar country and with unreliable and long lines of supply. Chamberlain made the best of a bad job and decided to go onto the

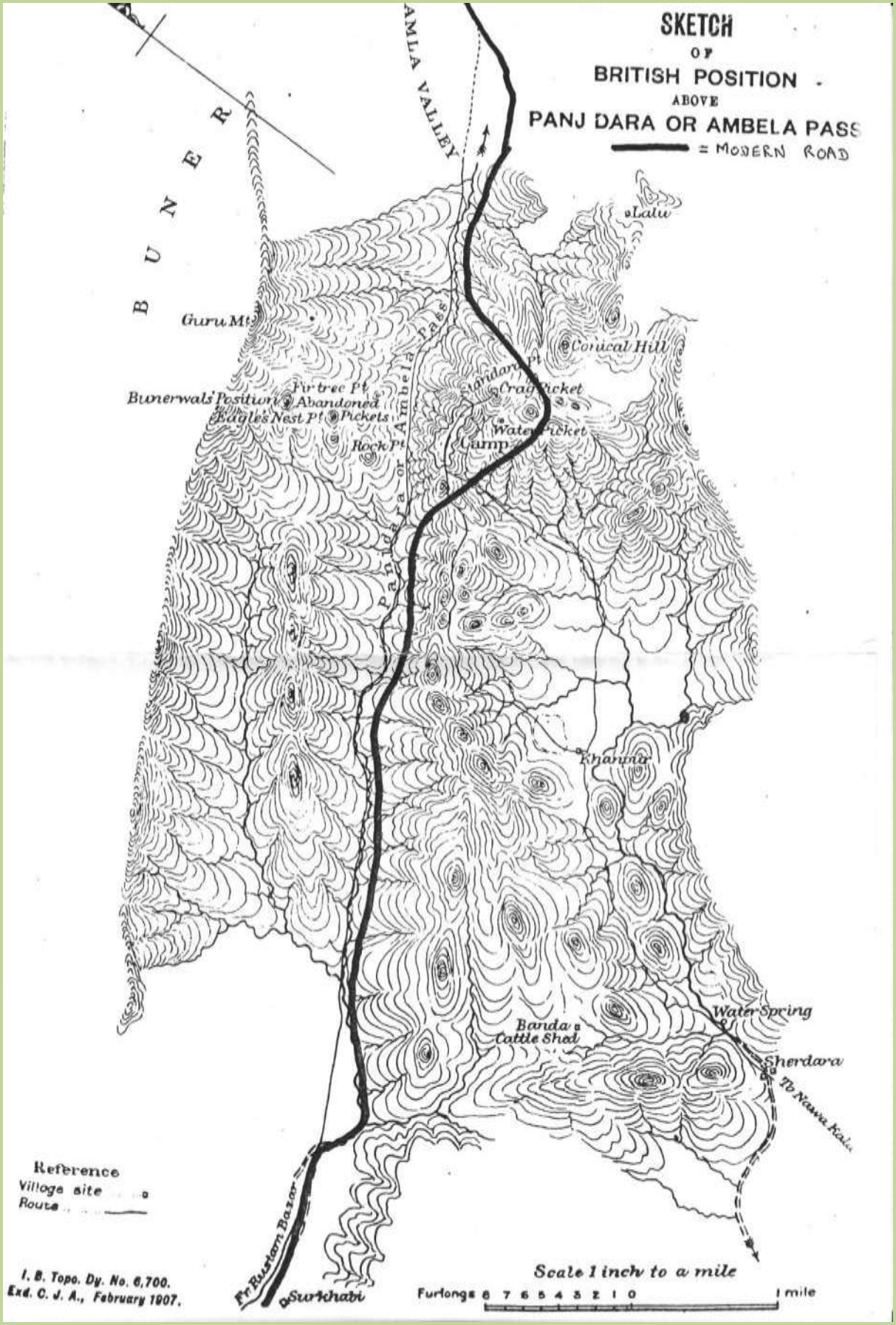
defensive and create two strong positions, one on each side of the valley: the Eagle's Nest on the west and Crag Picket on the east. He placed his camp on the east side of the Pass under the protective rifles of his troops on Crag Picket. Possibly it was pride which prevented him from either withdrawing or calling urgently for reinforcements. However he calculated that the Yousufzai morale would crack after a few days.

Although there was to be some fighting around the Eagle's Nest, Crag Picket became the key to the whole campaign. When one visits it today and discovers it to be somewhat smaller than the average living-room, it is difficult to believe that several hundred men on each side died there in vicious hand-to-hand fighting. Twice the British lost control of it and exposed the camp below to rifle fire from above. Counter attacks were launched up the slope and, given the difficulty of climbing to the top even today, it is extraordinary that men were able to do so carrying their heavy rifles and ammunition pouches. There was reckless courage on both sides. Two VC s were won but there were also occasions, largely ignored by the regimental histories, when positions were abandoned in dubious circumstances.

After some three weeks of stalemate Chamberlain could hardly conceal the gravity of the situation from his superiors any longer. He explained his predicament and asked for reinforcements. This was easier said than done since there were only three British regiments in the area between Lahore and Ambela. But Chamberlain was lucky. His immediate superior, General Sir Hugh Rose, sent the three regiments and assembled an impressive array of transport animals, 4200 camels and 2100 mules at Nowshera. By now Chamberlain had been badly wounded personally leading one of the counter-attacks on Crag Picket. Rose therefore sent Major General Garvock to replace him with strict orders to take no offensive action until he, Rose, had personally arrived to take up command. He also sent young Frederick Roberts VC, the future Field Marshal, to report.

If personal glory was Rose's intention he was to be sorely disappointed by Garvock. Once the three new British battalions had arrived Garvock realised that to delay taking action would be foolish. The rebels had also suffered heavily in the fighting around Crag Picket (losing on average double the casualties of the British) and loyalties were beginning to waver. Garvock therefore ordered the breakout from their defensive positions on the 15th December and thereafter victory followed quickly. The Conical Hill (the last position commanding the road to Ambela itself) was taken after another desperate fight. Ambela village was taken by the British on the 16th and an agreement reached with local tribesmen that the latter would destroy the rebel stronghold at Malka. This was (partially) done on the 22nd December and the Ambela Field Force withdrew to Hasan Abdul on the 23rd making this one of the very few wars in history which has finished before Christmas!

The British losses in the campaign were 238 killed and 670 wounded. The rebels probably lost 3000 men. Now Crag Picket betrays little of its violent past except for some of the stone breastworks, which have survived. Local Pathan tribesmen renamed it *katlgar* or 'the place of slaughter'. Local people today have little knowledge of the events of the Campaign other than a general pride in their resistance to British rule; and the detail of Ambela is confused with the later battles in the Malakand area in 1895 and 1897. As for the British, the memorials still survive. The most moving of these are the well-preserved mass graves in the old cemetery at Mardan. However perhaps the most remarkable element of Ambela was the courage and unity of purpose of the small force, which included Punjabis, Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Pathans, indeed almost all the 'martial races of India', facing an almost impossible predicament against a gallant and highly motivated enemy fighting on home territory.


SKETCH
OF
BRITISH POSITION
ABOVE
PANJ DARA OR AMBELA PASS
= MODERN ROAD
BUNER
AMLA VALLEY
Lalu
Guru Mt.
Conical Hill
Pandra or Ambela Pass
Bunerwals Position
Fir tree Pt.
Abandoned Pickets
Eagles Nest Pt.
Rock Pt.
Water Picket
Camp
Khanna
Water Spring
Banda
Cattle Shed
Sherdara
To Nawa Kalai
Fr. Rustam Bazar
Surkhabi
Reference
Village site
Route
I. B. Topo. Dy. No. 6,700.
Exd. C. J. A., February 1907.
Scale 1 inch to a mile
Furlongs 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0
1 mile

"SEPOYS IN THE TRENCHES - The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-15". Gordon Corrigan. Spellmount Publishers. 274 pages, maps, photographs. ISBN 1 86227 054 6. £24.95

Four days after Britain declared war on Germany in 1914, two infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade of the Indian Army were ordered to mobilise. Indian soldiers began to arrive in Europe in September, still in their tropical uniforms (winter clothing did not start to arrive until December 1914, but not in sufficient quantity) and were thrown straight into the first battle of Ypres in October. They subsequently fought in the second battle of Ypres, at Neuve Chapelle and at Loos. Eventually, as the problem of replacing the dead and wounded became insurmountable, and as other trained reserves began to come on stream, both from Britain and Canada, the two infantry divisions were redeployed to the Middle East in November 1915.

This thoroughly researched and well written book tells the story of the Sepoys of those two infantry divisions during those fourteen months (there are also some fascinating references to the ingenuity of the Sappers and Miners, with their inventions of the Bangalore Torpedo and the Battye bomb). Thrown into First Ypres without having time to train on the, to them, newly issued Lee Enfield Mark III; broken up into battalions, half battalions and even companies under command of, and flanked by, people whom they did not know and with whom only their officers could communicate; subjected for the first time to shelling and, of course, later gas, all served to disorientate and confuse.

Movements during the battles are recounted in great detail and this reviewer found himself constantly referring to the maps to make sense of it all. The appalling losses amongst the British officers (the equivalent of 12 battalions' worth killed and a further 23 battalions' worth wounded), and the difficulties of replacing them with new officers who did not necessarily know their Indian soldier well, are vividly portrayed. But what really hits home (although we should all be familiar with such statistics from other accounts of the First World War) is the waste of so many Indian lives, total casualties amounting to considerably more than the strength of the Indian Corps on arrival in France. It is, of course, now well appreciated that there were many blunders in the First World War (as there have been in others) but let us hope that we never hear again the phrase "at all costs" when setting objectives. There are too many examples in this book.

The author does much to allay the charge that the Indian soldiers behaved in a cowardly fashion during their early days on the Western Front. There were undoubtedly some examples of indiscipline, particularly as officer casualties mounted, but the accuracy and objectivity of the account of Private Frank Richards DCM MM, Royal Welsh Fusiliers, in his "*Old Soldiers Never Die*", is seriously challenged. As the author concludes - "In the visitors' book at the Indian Memorial at Neuve Chapelle an anonymous hand has written: 'One dead for every kilometre home'. Perhaps that poignant line is the most fitting epitaph to the contribution of the Indian Army on the Western Front."

One tiny point and hardly worth making. Given the date of publication, footnote and research references to India Office Library (IOL) should have been changed to Oriental and India Office Collections (OIOC).

As the title shows, this book does not tell the whole story of the Indian Army on the Western Front. Gordon Corrigan is apparently writing a separate book on the Indian Cavalry which may appear in about two years' time. If it is as good as "Sepoys", then "Sowars" will be eagerly awaited. ANM

LETTERS AND QUERIES

Rana Chhina writes:

With reference to Peter Ducker's article "Early awards of the IDSM 1907-8" (Vol. 16, No 4, pp173-181), I have a few comments to offer on some of the points raised.

The IDSM had its origins in the decision taken in 1893 by the Secretary of State for India to rigidly enforce the statutes of the (Indian) Order of Merit.[1] Following this, a number of cases of gallantry performed by Indian soldiers and recommended by the Commander-in-Chief could not be adequately recognised since there was no appropriate award available for the Government of India to grant. As an outcome of the discussions to resolve the issue, the Civil Division of the Order of Merit was instituted in 1902.[2] However, this fell a long way short of addressing the requirement for an award to meet the peculiar circumstances of the Indian Army, where frontier skirmishes were a part of life, and acts of gallantry were often performed even when large bodies of troops were not engaged in active operations in the field.

The person who initiated and pursued the case for instituting the IDSM was none other than Lord Kitchener, then C-in-C in India.[3] The draft Royal Warrant instituting the medal was put up on 18 May 1907. Approval was received from H.M. the King and the Secretary of State for India on 22 June 1907 and 25 June 1907 respectively. The Government of India in the Military Department had undertaken to publish the first awards to coincide with the King's Birthday Honours list. As such, there was hardly any time available to prepare the list of first recipients. This task was literally carried out overnight, and details of deserving individuals were gathered both telephonically and by wire. A few individuals, whose names were not forwarded in the first instance owing to the prevailing confusion, were later awarded the medal, and their names published in the Gazette of India of 1 January 1908. The recommendations in both these Gazettes naturally dealt with services performed antecedent to the date of institution of the medal. The cut-off date for consideration of services was laid down as 1 January 1900. These instructions appear to have been followed by the recommending authorities. Indeed, they were enforced by the Army Department who turned down at least one case (Subedar Ajnab Ali Khan, Lakhimpur Military Police Battalion) on the grounds that his last recorded field service was before 1900 (Mishmi 1899-1900). Some of the awards to VCOs were, in fact, granted in lieu of the OBI (Subedar Arjan Rai, Naga Hills Battalion, Military Police), but even in his case, qualifying active service post-1900 was a considered requirement. In this regard, it is important to bear in mind that there were countless instances of minor operations or skirmishes which were recorded on the individual soldier's sheet roll but never appeared in the 'War Services' supplement of the Indian Army List, which reflected only major campaigns specified for mention. Many of the initial medals were awarded for operations in the Mahsud Blockade 1901, Tibet 1903-4 and skirmishes in Baluchistan and on the North-West Frontier, as has been rightly pointed out in the article.

Institution of the IDSM gave the C-in-C in India a more or less free hand to deal with deserving cases within the Indian Army without having recourse to seeking sanction from the 'Home' authorities, who often were not entirely familiar with the ground realities prevailing in India.[4] As such, the award did not in reality evolve from an award for recognising long and distinguished service into an award granted purely for rewarding gallantry during WWI. Many of the initial awards were based on citations for a specific act of gallantry, and subsequently a number of Great War medals, particularly to civilians attached to forces in the field, were awarded for acts which did not necessarily constitute gallantry in action. Regrettably the bulk of the early citations have proved untraceable so far, leading to an undue reliance on secondary sources for providing details of the actions for which the awards were made.

There are a few minor errors in the list of recipients published in the article. These are as follows:

- 1750 Havildar Kuku Thapa, 1-8 Gurkhas is listed among the very first recipients whose awards were notified in GGO 586/1907. In fact, he was gazetted in GGO 1/1908, and received his medal for conspicuous gallantry on 6 July 1904 during the assault on Gyantse Jong in Tibet.
- Subedar Mewa Thapa, 1-8 Gurkhas - name is incorrectly spelt as Mewa Thapur.
- The number of awards notified in GGO 1/1908 should be amended to read ten, instead of nine (see Havildar Kuku Thapa, above)
- In the list of awardees notified in GGO 527/1908 Khwaja Muhammad Khan is listed twice, once as a Ressaidar, Guides Cavalry, and again as a Subedar, 20th Punjabis. In fact, only the latter entry was published in the original gazette. This, however, appears to be an error, since the officer is shown as a Ressaidar in the Guides Cavalry in the Indian Army List of 1908 as well as subsequent years, and there was no officer by that name serving in the 20th Punjabis in 1908. No amendment to this error appears to have been published in any subsequent gazette.
- The name of Risaldar Major Sardar Janmeja Singh, 21st PAVO Cavalry that appeared in GGO 527/1908 has been omitted from the list. However, Janmeja Singh's award was later cancelled,[5] and he was admitted to the 2nd Class of the Order of British India instead.[6]

Referring to Cliff Parrett's useful analysis of IOM and IDSM awards,[7] there are two errors in his summary of Edward VII IDSMs awarded. The total number listed in ADN No 526/1907 is 48, and not 49 as indicated therein. Cliff subsequently confirmed to me that he had double-counted one award. Secondly, the cancellation of Janmeja Singh's award was not taken into account, thereby leading to an incorrect total of 66 instead of 65 awards for 1908. His figures for 1909 (10) and 1910 (16) are correct. However, the exact change over date from Edward VII obverse to that of George V has still not been satisfactorily established. Cliff's assumption in this regard, based upon an empirical deduction, was that the four awards made in ADN 933, 18 November 1910, were the first to carry the new monarch's effigy. An OMRS member from Iceland confirmed that he had in his collection one of the four medals falling into the 'questionable' category (1979 Naik Murad Khan, 18th Tiwana Lancers) and that this medal had the obverse of George V.[8] While this supports the contention that the Edward VII obverse was not used on IDSMs issued after June 1910, official records indicate that the actual change over took place at a much later date, with effect from awards made in ADN No. 1016 dated 12 December 1911.[9] On this basis, Murad Khan's George V medal

was probably one of the many official replacement medals that were issued as a result of loss - more frequently suffered by cavalry medallists.

1. India Office Library and Records (IOLR) L/Mil/7/5356. Military Collection 117. File No 14.
2. Government of India Home Department Notification No 1324 - Public, dated 3 May 1902.
3. National Archives of India (NAI) Army Department 'A' Proceedings - March 1907, Nos. 744-50
4. ibid
5. GGO 623, dated 21 July 1908
6. GGO 622, dated 21 July 1908
7. C J Parrett. "A further analysis of IOM and IDSM awards from secondary sources". Journal of the Orders and Medals Research Society (JOMRS) Summer 1986, Vol. 25, No. 2
8. JOMRS Winter 1986 Vol. 25, No. 4
9. NAI Army Department. 'B' Proceedings, April 1913, Nos. 3100-3124

Ron Rosner writes:

I am presently writing a book on Americans and the Raj 1600-1900. Two wholly American military personalities figure in my narrative:

John Parker Boyd (1764-1830). Following an early career as a junior officer in the US Army immediately following the Revolution, Boyd travelled to India in 1788 where he became a mercenary soldier. He served in the army of the Nizam of Hyderabad (mentions in Lord Wellesley's first despatch), but then, and most notably, as commander of the Peshwa's regular infantry at the battle of Kardla in 1795. His career in India ended in October 1797 when Daulat Rao Scindia who, with the Peshwa, was planning a coup against the Peshwa's Prime Minister Nana Fadnavis (to whom Boyd was considered to be loyal) ordered him to sell his personal troops to Scindia's mafia type enforcer, the Neapolitan Filose, and leave the country (various volumes of the "Poona Residency Correspondence" published in the 1930s). He returned to America in 1798 and the following year wrote a letter to General Henry Knox detailing his Indian service, including the fact that he had been required to sell his troops for 35,000 rupees. (The Knox Papers, Morgan Library, New York). In 1808 he was commissioned as Colonel of the newly raised 4th U.S. Infantry and took part in the battle of Tippecanoe against American Indians. Promoted Brigadier General on the outbreak of war with England in 1812, he lost the battle of Chrysler's Farm in 1813 and was the subject of much contemporary criticism. In his will, written in Boston in 1816, he left a quarter of his estate to his "natural" daughter Frances, whom he had by Housina, a "Mahometan lady", some 19 years earlier in India.

The second character is the noted Union Brevet Major General Emory Upton (1839-81) who visited India on an official mission during 1875-6 to study the organisation of the British Indian Army and the possible application of Raj methods to the American Indian wars. Although approving of British administration in India he found little to admire in the Indian Army - particularly the failure to recognise changes in military arms, equipment and tactics resulting from the American Civil War.

I have found much, especially on Boyd, in various British libraries but would appreciate any pointers to specific references to Boyd during his time in India (1788-1797), especially unpublished sources such as letters and personal accounts.

With regard to Upton I am looking for British military reports or comments on his time in India. His own book "The Armies of Asia and Europe" is in both the British Library and National Army Museum library but I feel his visit must have been reported back to the War Office. He is mentioned most usually with regard to dress - for instance, he refused to wear a sun helmet in place of his feathered cocked hat, on occasions calling for full dress, in published accounts of the visit by the Prince of Wales who was in India at the same time.

Finally, I find it interesting that Boyd quoted rupees in his letter to Knox and am looking into the possibility that, due to the considerable trade between New England and India after the War for Independence, rupees were traded in Boston. It would be useful to put both a contemporary and current value on the 35,000 rupees Boyd received for his troops and in this regard I would be interested to hear if anyone knows of any work that has calculated the modern equivalent values of the various rupees used in the 18th and 19th centuries, and of sterling.

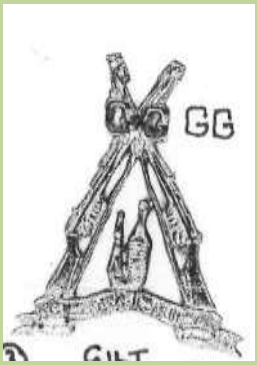
- Terry Morrison writes:

A fellow collector and I are hoping to finalise research into the pre 1947 police forces of India - Raj, Indian States, Ceylon, Burma, Indian Ocean Islands - including Military Police, Armed and qausi units. We are interested in anything that members might be able to add on histories, insignia, source material and contacts. Our aim is to publish articles in various journals in the hope that we can stimulate interest in this little researched branch of India's services.

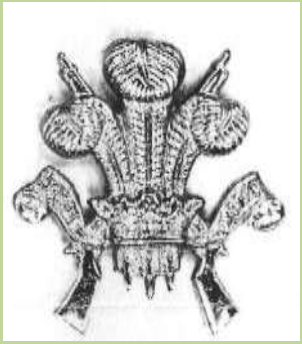
- Carl-Eric Granfelt seeks identification of the following badges. The Editor would also appreciate a copy of any reply to use in a future edition of DURBAR.

1. A.K.R.F.

2.



3.



4. ICH DIEN on scrolls

5. M.O.D.C.

Web site note - See Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 2000 for answers.

- Major Niaz Ali writes:

I intend writing a history of the Hazara Pioneers, raised at Quetta in 1904 by Lt Col, later Field Marshal, Sir Claude Jacob and disbanded, along with the other Pioneer Battalions of the Indian Army, in 1933. I have copies of Brigadier General N L S Bunbury's "*A Brief History of the 106th Hazara Pioneers*", an unpublished typescript produced in about 1946, and of General Mohammed Musa's "*Jawan to General - Recollections of a Pakistani Soldier*", who began his service in the Hazara Pioneers.

Does anyone know where the unit's digest of service was deposited on disbandment? Does anyone know of any descendants of Field Marshal Jacob, or any other location where his papers might be found? In a published history of the Bombay Pioneers it is stated that on disbandment a major portion of their silver, along with regimental photograph -albums, was deposited with the Junior United Services Club. Does anyone know what happened to Hazara Pioneers' silver and photos?

- Members may recall that we published an advertisement (Vol. 15, No 1, Spring 1998, pp37-8) for a 1955 reprint of J. Baillie Fraser's 1851 book "*Military Memoirs of Lieut. Col. James Skinner, C.B.*" being sold by St James's Church, Delhi to raise funds for the restoration of the church. Brian Ritchie, who brought the book to our attention, has written to say that 18 copies have been sold in the UK and a total of Rs.12,700 has been forwarded to the church.