

Indian Armoured Corps tanks on Singapore Island, 1942¹

Compiled by Ross Wood, Jacques Jost, and Barry Marriott

The only British tanks to be employed in the defence of Singapore Island belonged to the 100th Independent Light Tank Squadron (100th I.L.T. Sqn), Indian Armoured Corps, commanded at the onset by Major Jack 'Boy' Alford of the Indian Army.. This article discusses the 100th I.L.T. Sqn, its movement to Singapore, and subsequent employment on the Island covering the period from the 29th January to 15th February 1942.



LIEUTENANT JACK ALFORD, 1932

Following first commissioning and completion of the mandatory probationary period, Alford was posted to Sam Browne's Cavalry (12th Frontier Force) in March 1925.² He transferred to the 8th King George V's Own Light Cavalry in August 1937 motivated no doubt by the fact that at this time Sam Browne's was converting into the Training Regiment of the 2nd Cavalry Group, not the place for an officer preferring active service. Before long, Alford was offered an appointment, far away from the north-west frontier region, where his special language skill, the ability to understand and speak the Pashtu language (he had a higher

¹ See also: Jacques Jost, *Allied Tanks in the Malayan and Singapore Campaign 1942*, 'Durbar', Winter 1996, Vol.13, No.4, pp.143-153. The map of Singapore is from this article.

² The accompanying photo of Jack Alford, then a lieutenant with Sam Browne's Cavalry, was taken at Bolarum on 1 Jan 1932.

standard certificate) was of no practical use. However, it was a popular type of posting, and from September 1939 he became a 'Special Service Officer' attached to the 3rd Gwalior Lancers, an Indian States Forces regiment. The opportunity for getting into action came closer when he transferred to the 44th Cavalry, a newly formed armoured regiment raised at Risalpur in March 1941.³

Just one month later, in April 1941, Jack Alford, by now a major, was appointed commandant of another war-raised unit, the 100th Independent Light Tank Squadron, I.A.C. It was also formed at Risalpur, and was in effect the complete 'C' Squadron (Jats) of the 44th Cavalry.⁴ This Jat class squadron had been transferred in its entirety from the 8th King George V's Own Light Cavalry in order to provide the nucleus of the debutant 44th Cavalry. All ranks continued to wear the badges brought with them from the 8th Light Cavalry, and no badge or device specific to the 100th I.L.T. Sqn has been recorded.⁵

The 100th I.L.T. Sqn was equipped with British Mk IV-A and Mk VI-B 'India pattern' light tanks, and indications are, albeit not confirmed, that the unit moved by rail from Risalpur to Bombay (Mumbai) prior to embarking for Singapore.

Malaya Command

The initial request for tanks for Malaya Command was made, in July 1941, to the War Office with a request from Lieut.-General A.E. Percival, G.O.C. Malaya Command for old British and American tanks, unsuitable for service in the field, to protect aerodromes in Malaya Command. This was followed, in August 1941, by a further request from G.O.C. Malaya Command for two tank regiments as reinforcements: one for III Indian Corps in Northern Malaya, and one for Fortress Singapore.

In October 1941, the request was repeated for tanks for the protection of aerodromes (four troops), and for two tank regiments for the field force.⁶ In the event, it was decided to employ armoured cars for aerodrome defence and the request for the two tank regiments was turned down.

³ IA/220 Major Jack Alford: born 9 Jan 1904; 2nd Lieut. 31 Jan 1924; Sqn Officer, 12th Cavy, 30 Mar 1925; Qr.-Mr. 31 Oct 1925; Lieut. 30 Apr 1926; Captain 1 Jan 1933; adjutant 17 May 1934; to 8th KGV's Own Lt Cavy 31 Aug 1937; Special Service Officer, 3rd Gwalior Lancers I.S.F., 10 Sep 1939; Major 31 Jan 1941 (source: *Indian Army List*, various editions Oct 1926 to Apr 1943; Graduation List of Officers of the Indian Army).

⁴ Maj.-Gen. Gurcharn Singh Sandhu, PVSM, *The Indian Armour, History of the Indian Armoured Corps 1941-1971*, Vision Books, New Delhi 1987; p.31

⁵ Capt. Ashok Nath, *Izzat, Historical Records and Iconography of Indian Cavalry Regiments 1750-2007* (United Service Institute of India, New Delhi 2009), p.506

⁶ National Archives, War Office (WO) file WO 193/944 (AFVs and Tanks in Malaya): signal of 4 Oct 1941.

However, as early as 17th October 1941, Australia believed the War Office proposed to send light tanks from Middle East Command, possibly via India, to Malaya Command, and the Australian Government had decided to raise two Independent Light Tank Companies (trained personnel and personal equipment only) to man these light tanks in Malaya.⁷ This was also the understanding of Malaya Command, and it therefore requested Australia to provide details of the earliest date of arrival in Malaya of trained personnel.⁸

In the light of this situation, the Australian Army raised and trained the 1st and 2nd Independent Light Tank Squadrons, A.I.F., in total 400 men.⁹ However, events down the Malay Peninsula had moved too fast and they never made it to Singapore. Paragraph 3 of a Memorandum from the Australian Government to The Secretary for the Department of the Army, dated 15th January 1942, records:

As you are aware, however, the United Kingdom Government subsequently advised, in Cablegram No. 14 of 2nd Jan. 1942 (Australian Archives: A2671/1 Item 432/41) that owing to other arrangements having been decided upon, it would not now be necessary to avail themselves of the Commonwealth's (Australia's) offer of 400 personnel.¹⁰

At the outbreak of war with the Imperial Japanese Empire at 00.30hrs on 8th December 1941, the British Commonwealth defenders had no tanks on the Malayan peninsula or in Singapore. The 3rd Cavalry, Indian Armoured Corps, had been earmarked as divisional reconnaissance regiment of 8th Indian Division, but this was changed. It arrived in Penang on 28th November and was posted to the Lines of Communication Command of the 11th Indian Division.¹¹ Its allocation of Marmon Herrington armoured cars was still parked in Singapore, several hundred miles away.¹²

⁷ Australian Army Cipher Office Signal: from Army Melbourne to General Singapore M.I. Serial File No. 37/421/413.

⁸ Signal from C.-in-C. Far East: from General Singapore to Army Melbourne, 21 Oct 1941, originators No. 24811 M.I. Serial File No.37/421/413.

⁹ Agendum No. 432/41 of Australian Archives File: A5954/1.

¹⁰ Initiation of cablegram No. 14 of 2 Jan 1942 is confirmed in WO 193/944 XC 15532 p.1 pt 4, 1 Jan 1942, War Office to Middle East Command, Malaya Command, and India.

¹¹ Chris Kempton, *Loyalty & Honour, The Indian Army, September 1939-August 1945*, The Military Press, Milton Keynes 2003, Part III, p.13

¹² A total of 175 Marmon Herrington Mk III armoured cars were sent to Malaya and Singapore, some arriving well into January 1942. All appear to have been brand new. They were assembled in the South Africa plant of the Ford Motor Company. The chassis were produced by Ford in Canada and four-wheel drive transmissions in the U.S.A. The U.K. supplied the armament, and South Africa the armour. The Mk III was the major production version. It was very reliable, and was used extensively in North Africa by the 8th Army. Across the Middle East theatre, it was employed by British, New Zealand, Indian and South African forces, and even by German units when they could capture them.

Proposed movement of tanks to the Far East

On 20th December 1941, the C.-in-C. India sent a telegram to the G.O.C. Malaya Command in which he proposed to provide 'one Independent Light Tank Squadron with seventeen Mk IV and Mk VI B light tanks mixed with a quota of reserves.'¹³ He further proposed that the squadron should be attached to the 3rd Cavalry, IAC.

A message from the War Office, circulated to Middle East Command, Malaya Command, and India, sent on 1st Jan. 1942, gives the following detailed figures:

India will send a squadron with seventeen Mk IV and Mk VI [tanks] and reserves but no spares to Malaya, arriving third or fourth week in January. Middle East will send fifty Mk VI tanks: twenty-five manned by a complete squadron, and twenty-five for replacing the tanks sent from India. Middle East will also send 110 American M3 tanks manned by an armoured brigade HQ and two regiments.¹⁴

The same War Office file includes a message, sent from India to the War Office and to Malaya Command, repeating the same information, and stating that the twenty-five tanks from the Middle East to India will enable India to provide a squadron for Burma. This proposed movement was not realized.

Actual movement of tanks to Singapore

The 100th I.L.T. Sqn moved from Bombay to Singapore in two convoys, BM 10 (Bombay Malaya 10) and BM 11, the last reaching the docks at Singapore at dawn during a Japanese air raid on 29th January 1942.

The cargo for 100th I.L.T. Sqn, on H.M.T. (His Majesty's Transport) *Rohna* at Bombay, on 9th January 1942, included three motor cycles, seven 15-cwt trucks, one water tanker, and one car as cargo for 100th I.L.T. Sqn. As a member of Convoy BM10 (Bombay Malaya 10), H.M.T. *Rohna* reached Singapore safely on 25th January 1942.¹⁵

The cargo for 100th I.L.T. Sqn on H.M.T. *Jalakrishna* at Bombay, on 9th January 1942, included nine 3-ton trucks, one armoured carrier (probably Indian Wheeled Carrier), and ten tanks. As a member of Convoy BM10 (Bombay Malaya 10), it reached Singapore safely on 25th January 1942.¹⁶

¹³ WO 193/944

¹⁴ WO 193/944

¹⁵ WO 106/2558B, F.E. Emergency Reinforcements; also Admiralty Signal, App. 1 to East Indies No. 710/E.I. 03203, p.2

¹⁶ WO 106/2558B, Attachment 4; also Admiralty Signal, App. 1 to East Indies No. 710/E.I. 03203, p.2

The cargo for 100th I.L.T. Sqn on H.M.T. *Empress of Japan* at Bombay, 19th January 1942, included one 3-ton truck, one transporter and thirteen tanks. It also carried the bulk of the Squadron's personnel: three British officers, seven Viceroy's Commissioned Officers, 136 Indian other ranks and nine followers.¹⁷ This transport arrived in Singapore as part of Convoy BM11 on 28th Jan. 1942.¹⁸

H.M.T. *Duchess of Bedford*, with Convoy BM11, accommodated a small overflow of 100th I.L.T. Sqn personnel, including one British officer, one British warrant officer, one British other rank, and eleven followers.¹⁹

Convoy BM11 brought the majority of the 18th British Infantry Division to Singapore, for which purpose it comprised two giant American liners U.S.S. *Wakefield AP-21* and U.S.S. *West Point AP-23* (Captain Kelley, Commodore). Other ships included H.M.T. *Duchess of Bedford*, H.M.T. *Empress of Japan* and H.M.T. *Empire Star*, plus the escort. The *Empire Star* carried 2,000 tons of ammunition amongst its cargo, plus the escort.

The convoy arrived outside Singapore at night but had to wait in an exposed position until pilots could be found to bring it into Keppel Harbour at dawn. Unloading then continued all day during the Japanese air raids and well into the following night, although H.M.T. *Empire Star* was not unloaded then, but taken to the dangerous goods area. As well as the Indian tanks being unloaded, the 4th Battalion of The Suffolk Regiment disembarked from U.S.S. *Wakefield AP-21* quickly, and were taken by Australian A.S.C. drivers to D2 Camp at Milestone 10½ south of Tampines Road, where they were housed in tents. The rifle companies occupied the northern coast, but the Carrier Platoon remained with Battalion H.Q. at D2.

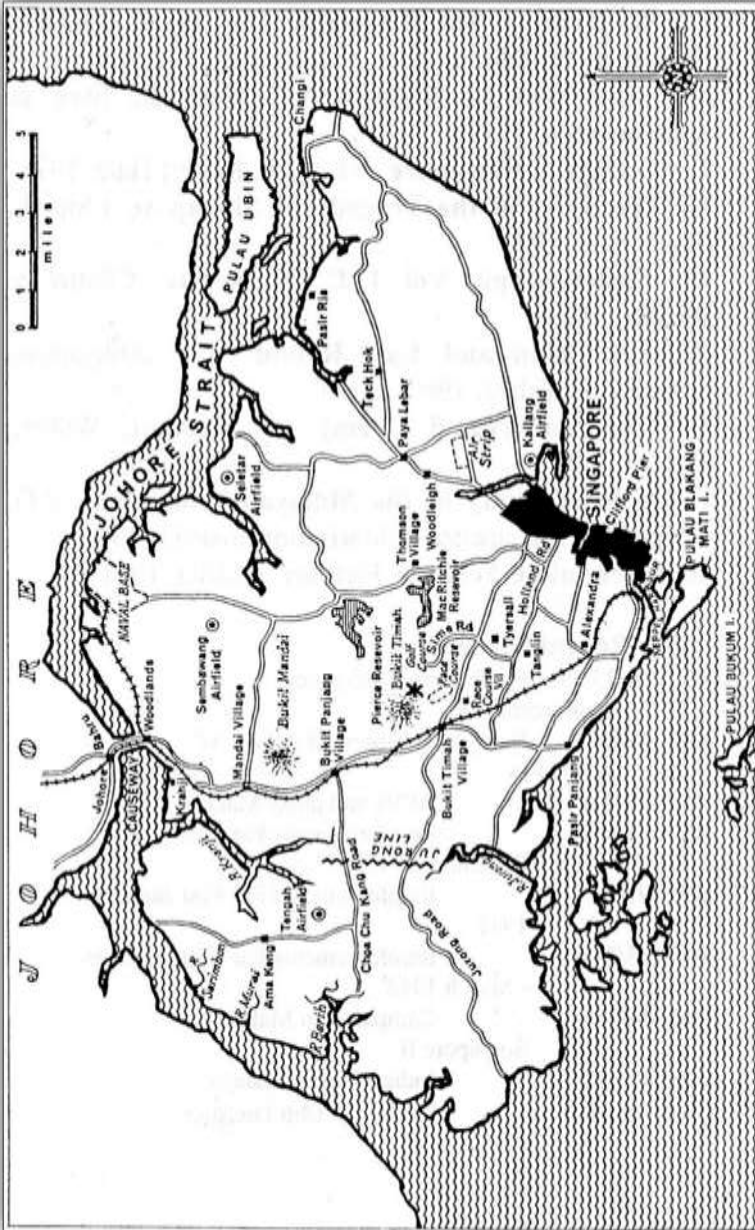
On 31st January 1942, in Singapore, the Carrier Platoon were issued with five Bren Gun Carriers, each armed with a single Bren LMG. The vehicles were obtained from Central Park in YCK Vehicle Park.²⁰ The author has been advised that the Suffolks asked for more Bren Gun Carriers, as they could see them in the vehicle park but were only issued with five; also that these other Bren Gun Carriers might still have been at the vehicle park when Singapore surrendered.

¹⁷ WO 193/893, p.2 of Signal XC 15532, 2251 Cipher 19/1, from Embarkation Commandant, Bombay, 19 Jan 1942, to G.O.C. Malaya Command. There is an evident typographical error in the War Office description of 100th I.L.T. Sqn personnel on board *Empress of Japan*. They are incorrectly recorded as '10th Battalion/7th Rajput Light Tank Squadron.' The 10th Battalion had long ago been absorbed into the 7th Rajput Regimental Centre and did not exist as an operational battalion during the WW2 period. Quite apart from this, no elements of the 7th Rajput Regiment served in Malaya or Singapore.

¹⁸ Admiralty Signal, App. 1 to East Indies No. 710/E.I. 03203, p.7

¹⁹ WO 193/893, F.E. Reinforcements, Jan 1942

²⁰ WO 172/90, War Diary, 4th Bn Suffolk Regiment, Malaya January-February 1942, pp. 15, 28; also firsthand accounts communicated to the author.



Map from „Spotlight on Singapore“ by D. Russel-Roberts, Times Press 1965

* Swiss Rifle Club Hill

Indian tanks on Singapore Island

As the two ships carrying the tanks arrived safely at Singapore, it is reasonable to assume that all twenty-three British-Indian Army pattern light tanks Mk IV A and Mk VI B arrived safely in Singapore by the dawn of 29th January 1942. This is supported by a retrospective dispatch submitted by Lieut.-General A.E. Percival, G.O.C. Malaya Command, to the Secretary of State for War on 25th April 1946:

In the same convoy arrived a light tank squadron from India, the only tanks ever to reach Malaya. The tanks, which were obsolescent, had been collected from training establishments etc. in India. On arrival several of them had to be taken into workshops for overhaul before they could take the field.²¹

All published accounts agree with the fact that the tanks reached Singapore in late January 1942, and messages recorded in the U.K. National Archives give these figures.

WO 193/944	20.12.1941	seventeen Mk IV and Mk VI B tanks, telegram C-in-C India to G.O.C. Malaya
WO 193/944	01.01.1942	seventeen Mk IV and Mk VI tanks, telegram War Office London to C-in-C Far East
WO 193/893	02.01.1942	seventeen tanks, forecast of reinforcements for Far East
WO 106/2558B	09.01.1942	ten tanks for Ordinance Depot on <i>Jalakrishna</i> , telegram Embarkation Commandant Bombay to G.O.C. Malaya
WO 193/893	19.01.1942	thirteen tanks on <i>Empress of Japan</i> , telegram Embarkation Commandant Bombay to G.O.C. Malaya

If the figures in the messages of the last two War Office files are correct, then by the morning of 29th January 1942, twenty-three light tanks Mk IV A and Mk VI B, which traveled in Convoys BM10 and BM11, had arrived safely in Singapore.

The number of twenty-three is probably exact, as twenty-five light tanks were to be dispatched from the Middle East to India as replacement for those sent from India to Singapore.²² If the squadron had the official 'war establishment' of eighteen tanks (five troops each with three tanks, plus three tanks for the squadron

²¹ Section XLI, Further Reinforcements, Para 407, 29 Jan 1942, 18th British Div. (Maj.-Gen M. Beckwith-Smith).

²² WO 193/944: telegrams 1 Jan 1942, C-in-C India and War Office London to G.O.C. Malaya.

H.Q.), the balance of five tanks is probably the reserve mentioned in the 20th December 1941 telegram.

As for any tanks arriving in Singapore from the Middle East, the first convoy from the Middle East destined for the Far East, Convoy JS1, had only reached Oosthaven in Southern Sumatra on 13th February 1942, and so never got to Singapore.

There is a firsthand sighting by a former member of the Singapore Volunteer Armoured Car Company and Carrier Platoon, who states: 'Knowing there were no tanks in Singapore, I was most surprised to see one of these Mk V1 B tiny tanks scuttling along Serangoon Road, Singapore, belching out volumes of black exhaust fumes and irregular staccato explosions from its engine. This must have been late January 1942.'

The signals and first hand sightings indicate that many of the Indian light tanks went straight into Malaya Command workshops along Serangoon Road for urgent repairs, supporting the belief that they were in a poor mechanical state. Many of these workshops were actually civilian garages commandeered by Malaya Command for vehicle maintenance work.

100th Independent Light Tank Squadron

The Squadron, which was posted to 11th Indian Division, was employed from 4th February 1942 on aerodrome defence at R.A.F. Sembawang airfield. A detachment of three light tanks was sent to R.A.F. Seletar airfield to reinforce 'B' Squadron of the 3rd Cavalry I.A.C., which itself had six tracked carriers (Bren Gun and/or Universal Carriers Mk 1). Both detachments came under command of the 18th Indian Division.²³

It was at this stage that 100th I.L.T. Sqn lost its Commanding Officer, Major Jack Alford. He was wounded during a Japanese air raid on Seletar Airfield on 4th February, and died of these wounds in a Singapore Military Hospital on 12th February 1942.

The published history of the 3rd Cavalry, covering the WW2 period, mentions that, on 1st February 1942, one of its officers, Lieutenant Peterson, was posted to the 100th I.L.T. Sqn.²⁴ There is no indication, following Major Alford's wounding, of who commanded the Squadron: Lieutenant Frederick Clive Wilmer, Lieutenant Peterson, or Risaldar Alakh Ram.

²³ National Archives, CAB 44/179, Campaign in Singapore and Malaya II.

²⁴ Brigadier H.W. Picken (Editor), *Nobody's Own: The History of the 3rd Light Cavalry and Its Predecessors, 1841 to 1945* (privately published, Eastbourne 1962); p.197

Singapore: 8th February to the morning of 11th February

On Sunday night, 8th February, the Imperial Japanese Army (I.J.A.) invaded Singapore Island, smashing into the remnants of the 22nd Australian Infantry Brigade in the mangrove swamps on the north-west corner of the island, overrunning the three Australian battalions in the dark and advancing on Tengah airfield.

With the Australian infantry and engineers withdrawing in savage fighting before the Japanese onslaught, the I.J.A. quickly expanded its front, attacking the Causeway area and moving inland with its 18th Infantry Division to the west and 5th Division fighting in the north.

By the afternoon of Tuesday 10th February 1942, the 18th I.J.A. Division quickly followed up the Malaya Command withdrawal from Balim, and made contact with the main body of the remnants of 2/29th Australian Infantry Battalion and the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders astride Choa Chu Kang Road.

Out of touch with his Brigade Headquarters, lacking artillery support, and in danger of encirclement, the Argyll's commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Stewart, on his own initiative, decided to place the 2/29th and Argylls in depth along the road, behind Sungei Peng Siang, and some way back from the position they had been holding.²⁵ Brigadier Paris, 12th Indian Brigade commander, however, left 4/19th Hyderabad in position Choa Chu Kang Road between Bukit Panjang village and Keat Hong. All three battalions formed 12th Indian Brigade.

During the afternoon, the acting commander of the 2/29th Battalion, Captain Bowring, requested anti-tank or artillery support in the event the Japanese used tanks, but Brigadier Paris refused Bowring's request, believing the Japanese had not landed tanks on Singapore at that time. At 16.00hrs on the afternoon of Tuesday 10th February 1942, Lieutenant-General Percival ordered the fuel dumps east of Bukit Timah to be blown up. Following the explosions, massive columns of thick black smoke covered the whole Bukit Timah area.

At around 19.00hrs that same evening, the 5th and 18th I.J.A. Divisions commenced simultaneous attacks that, by morning, would see them in and around Bukit Timah Village. The 18th I.J.A. Division attacked from the west along Jurong Road, and the 5th I.J.A. Division attacked along Choa Chu Kang Road, down Woodlands Road, and to the immediate east.

In the darkness, and in savage fighting, the Japanese, with a force of approximately fifty tanks and 2,000 infantry, advanced down Woodlands and Upper Bukit Timah Roads, overrunning the 4/19th Hyderabad, breaking the

²⁵ *Australia in the War of 1939-45, Army, Vol VI, The Japanese Thrust*, p.339; also, AWM 52 8/3/29, War Diary of 2/29th Battalion.

2/29th Battalion roadblock, and breaking the two 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders roadblocks, destroying all but one of their armoured cars, overrunning and scattering the composite battalion.

By around 02.00hrs on Wednesday, 11th February, the Japanese tanks were in Bukit Timah Village. Malaya Command's front had been ripped wide apart, and Singapore City was only four miles away, down the Bukit Timah-Dunearn Roads.

An Australian road block of three Marmon-Herrington artillery tractors, 300 yards south of Bukit Timah Village supported by three Australian 2-pdr anti-tanks guns, covered the block, and to the right, the H.Q. 22nd Australian Infantry Brigade, the remnants of 2/18th Battalion, 2/10th Field Company, two platoons of machine gunners from 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion, plus the anti-tank gunners from 15th and 16th Batteries, 4th Anti-Tank Regiment, held Wai Soon Gardens and Reformatory Road. Savage hand-to-hand fighting with the 18th I.J.A. Division followed, throwing the Japanese back by 06.00hrs with heavy casualties to both sides, but only to the left of the Bukit Timah Road.

As the exploding ammunition dumps burned and blazed, covering the whole Bukit Timah area with thick heavy, black choking smoke, a very large gap now lay in the Malaya Command Singapore Island defensive perimeter between the Mac Ritchie Reservoir in the east and Bukit Timah Village in the west.

With the rapid advance down the trunk road by the Japanese, with the exception of the withdrawing remnants of The 2/29th along the Pipe-line, the withdrawing remnants of the 2/26th to the east of the Pipe-line and to the north of the Swiss Hill, plus the scattered remnants of the 2nd Argylls from the Dairy Farm to the Golf Course, nothing defended the area Mac Ritchie Reservoir in the east to Swiss Hill in the west. Across this whole area, there was no Malaya Command organized defence, only scattered groups of desperate men falling back, to reform, hopefully to find their mates, and then fight again.

With the I.J.A.'s 5th Infantry Division now in Bukit Timah Village, it deployed its 21st Brigade in and around the village, while its 9th Brigade moved up Bukit Timah Hill to the east and on to Swiss Hill.

From Swiss Hill it was just four miles to Singapore City, and as the sun rose that morning over the Island through the thick clouds of black smoke, troops of the 5th Japanese Infantry Division were at that time climbing both Bukit Timah Hill and the Swiss Hill. The way to Singapore across the Golf Course lay wide open.

Hill 7815, known as Swiss (Rifle Club) Hill, 11th February 1942²⁶ & ²⁷

The 2/4th Australian Casualty Clearing Station (C.C.S.) occupied the Swiss Club from 6th February until a hurried withdrawal on the night of 10-11th February.²⁸ The area was also occupied for a short while by 2/9th and 2/10th Australian Field Ambulance Units on 10-11th February 1942. During the night, the 2/4th C.C.S. had, with authority, left the Swiss Hill, shortly followed by 2/9th and 2/10th Field Ambulances.

The broad tactical background to the ensuing action at Swiss Hill on 11th February is provided by a few lines from Lieut.-General A.E. Percival's dispatch.²⁹

By 07:00hrs it had become clear that a dangerous gap existed between the Mac Ritchie Reservoir and the Racecourse which was not held by any of our troops. As a temporary measure, I ordered a composite unit from the Reinforcement Camp to move up immediately and take up a position at the west end of the Golf Course. Later a troop of our light tanks pushed further west as far as Swiss Rifle Club Hill.

To cover the gap between the Mac Ritchie Reservoir and the Golf Course was a composite unit designated Massy Force.³⁰ This composite unit, commanded by Brigadier T.H. Massey-Beresford, was only of brigade size but included units of all arms.³¹

1st Bn Cambridgeshire Regiment, from 55th Brigade
 4th Bn Suffolk Regiment, from 54th Brigade
 5th Bn 11th Sikhs, from Southern Area
 Detachment 3rd Cavalry I.A.C.
 Detachment 100th Independent Light Tank Sqn
 342nd Field Battery R.A.

²⁶ Map 'Johore & Singapore,' 1:25,000 3L/12/3 Singapore North Map Hind 610 Sheet 3L/12/3, 1st edition. This 1945 map was prepared for S.E.A.C. based on aerial photography and original 1942 details. It confirms Hill No. 7815 as The Swiss Rifle Club Hill.

²⁷ The primary reference sources are: WO 172/145, Diary of Events, HQ 55th Infy Bde, 29 Jan to 15 Feb 1942; WO CAB 106/70, History of 18th British Division; WO 172/90, War Diary 4th Bn Suffolk Regiment, Malaya Jan-Feb 1942.

²⁸ Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Hamilton, E.D., R.A.A.M.C, *Soldier Surgeon in Malaya*, pp.163-186. The author was C.O., 2/4th Australian C.C.S.

²⁹ Section LII: 'Events of 11th February 1942,' Para 526.

³⁰ Massey Force was occasionally referred to, in descriptions of this action, as HQ 55th Brigade.

³¹ Maj.-Gen. S. Woodburn Kirby, CB, CMG, CIE, OBE, MC, *History of the Second World War: The War Against Japan, Volume 1, The Loss of Singapore* (H.M.S.O., London 1957) p.395 (f/n). There is only this one brief reference to the Squadron in this substantial volume.

The time that each of the individual units arrived under the thick green jungle canopy of the southeast corner of the Mac Ritchie Reservoir is not known. However, Brigadier Massy-Beresford indicates that he arrived at his R.V. at the junction of Thompson and Braddle Roads, and set up H.Q. in the woods above Hill 105, at 10:00hrs. The first troops to arrive were two companies of 1st Cambridgeshire Regiment, who were deployed to the western end of Peirce Reservoir.³²

By this stage of the campaign, of the original thirty Marmon-Herrington Mk III armoured cars issued to the 3rd Cavalry, only eight were left, and these were formed into an armoured troop. Eight Indian-pattern wheeled carriers, drawn from Singapore stores, were added to this armoured troop. The mobile element of 3rd Cavalry was 'B' Squadron, equipped with two ex-R.A.F. armoured trucks for troop transport, and six tracked carriers. 'B' Squadron of 3rd Cavalry, together with the troop of three light tanks of 100th I.L.T. Sqn arrived at their R.V. (crossroads Lornie, Adam and Thompson Roads) from their earlier posting at Seletar airport (see page 110 above).

Coming into the R.V. sometime after the 1st Cambridgeshires, the three light tanks (and possibly the tracked carriers of B Squadron) were quickly dispatched westwards across country to hold the lower slopes of Swiss Rifle Club Hill, in compliance with Lieut.-General Percival's orders. Brigadier Massy-Beresford wrote in the 55th Brigade diary:

I therefore sent three medium tanks (just arrived) to seize the hill in question and hold it until the Suffolks arrived... As a result of these delays, the three tanks which had met opposition but held on to the lower slopes of the Rifle Club Hill for several hours, eventually withdrew, while the Suffolks never got within a mile of their objective.³³

With the three light tanks, or very soon afterwards, went the six tracked carriers of 'B' Squadron 3rd Cavalry. Unfortunately, the primary objective of denying the slopes to the enemy was not achieved. Unbeknown to Malaya Command, the 9th I.J.A. Infantry Brigade had moved up to the summit of Swiss Hill from Bukit Timah, getting there first.

There is no record of whether it was Lieut. Peterson, Lieut. Wilmer, or Risaldar Alakh Ram in command of the three 100th I.L.T. Sqn tanks. Furthermore, the type of tank employed, whether Mk IV A or Mk IV B, or both, has not been established.

The country from the south-east corner of the Mac Ritchie Reservoir is very

³² WO 172/145: Diary of Events, HQ 55th Infy Bde, 29 Jan to 15 Feb 1942; also WO CAB 106/70

³³ WO 172/145: Diary of Events, HQ 55th Infy Bde, 29 Jan to 15 Feb 1942.

flat leading west to the Golf Course. The Golf Course itself is very flat and open. The country then has a slight drop to the Racecourse, which again is very flat and open. From there the tanks would have encountered a small non-perennial creek, which these days is a concrete storm water drain, before the sharp rise up the lower slopes of Swiss Rifle Club Hill. There were, and still are, quite a number of trees on these lower slopes, with thick secondary rain forest on the western side of the hill. There were very few buildings between the Mac Ritchie Reservoir and the old Racecourse.

When the tanks reached the lower slopes of Swiss Hill, they engaged elements of The 5th I.J.A. Infantry Division until the arrival of 4 Platoon (The Carrier Platoon) and Advanced Battalion H.Q. of 4th Battalion Suffolk Regiment that afternoon. The 4th Suffolks found one tank out of order and two tanks engaging the enemy.

It is evident that the tanks held the lower slopes for a considerable time, well into the afternoon. One source indicates that reinforcement failed to join them, and that they withdrew. Other sources indicate that 4th Suffolks did join the Indian tanks on the lower slopes of Swiss Rifle Club Hill that afternoon.

From the War Diaries and firsthand accounts, it can be determined that three Indian light tanks moved quickly from the Mac Ritchie Reservoir, across the Golf course, down the slopes to the old Racecourse, crossed the small creek and moved onto the lower slopes of Swiss Hill where they engaged enemy troops of the 9th IJA Infantry Brigade (5th Division). The three little tanks held the lower slopes against the Japanese attackers.

Late that afternoon, five Bren Gun Carriers (possibly Universal Carriers Mk 1) of No. 4 Platoon (Carrier Platoon) and Advanced Battalion HQ of 4th Suffolks reached the Racecourse, where they spotted the three Indian tanks up the Swiss Hill fighting the Japanese. One of the tanks was out of order, but the two remaining tanks were heavily engaging the Japanese infantry.

Advancing from the Racecourse over the creek, the Carrier Platoon drove their carriers to the base of Swiss Hill, dismounted and advanced on foot up the hill to support the two tanks. Getting to the summit involved a sharp steep climb. Near to the top, they reached an open area the size of a football field, where they were heavily engaged by the Japanese who were consolidating on the heights and in considerable strength. Fire was coming from the heights as well as the buildings of the Swiss Club. The Suffolks engaged the enemy, but they were taking casualties and darkness was approaching, so they withdrew to their carriers and moved back to the Racecourse, which had by then been established as the Malaya Command perimeter. The two remaining tanks were brought within this perimeter.³⁴

³⁴ WO CAB 106/70. Accounts of the Suffolk Regiment's presence at Swiss Hill are found in two other sources: Colonel Nicholson's *History of the Suffolk Regiment 1928-1947, 4th and 5th Battalions*; WO 172/90, War Diary 4th Bn Suffolk Regiment, Malaya Jan-Feb

Soon afterwards, the remainder of the battalion arrived to form their part of the Malaya Command perimeter. The members of Massy Force took their place with the 4th Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment of ‘Tomforce’ on their left.³⁵

Following the surrender of Singapore, the Swiss Club secretary was allowed by the Japanese to make the first visit to the Swiss Club in March 1942. He found in the Club area a number of graves of British and Japanese soldiers that testified to the violent battle that must have raged on the property. The buildings were still standing intact, but the whole area far into the jungle was virtually covered with an excess mass of destroyed materials, carriages, cases refrigerators, kitchen utensils, furniture, heaps of medical supplies, all mixed up.³⁶

The holding of the lower slopes of the Swiss Hill, virtually all afternoon, by the crews of the three little Indian tanks prevented the 9th I.J.A. Brigade from storming down the hill, gaining the Racecourse and getting behind the forming Malaya Command perimeter.

That night, 11-12th February 1942, the carriers and two of the Indian light tanks of the small mobile force were within the 55th Brigade H.Q. (Massy Force) position.³⁷

In the late afternoon and early evening of 11th February, as the members of 4th Norfolks moved across the open ground of the Racecourse, they could only have been 400 yards from the light tanks and the 4th Suffolks at the other, north-west, side of the Racecourse. Later that night the left flank of 4th Suffolks joined the right flank of 4th Norfolks, whose left flank joined the 2nd Gordons, who had been sent up Bukit Timah Road from Singapore. Their right flank joined the Australians. The Malaya Command line to the south and east of Bukit Timah - Swiss Hill - Golf Course - Mac Ritchie Reservoir was secure for the night 11-12th February.

During the next two days, Thursday and Friday, Massy Force was engaged in heavy fighting from the base of the Swiss Hill east to the Golf Course, sustaining heavy casualties against ever increasing pressure from Japanese tanks, mortars and infantry, now supported by medium artillery - some reports indicating 6-inch guns. All this time, the defenders were under continual air attack.

The cemetery near Bukit Brown, Saturday 14th February 1942

The final reference to the 100th Independent Light Tank Squadron on Singapore has been found within the War Diary of the 4th Battalion, the Suffolk

1942.

³⁵ WO 172/90, p.16

³⁶ Hans Schweizer-Iten, *One Hundred Years of the Swiss Club and the Swiss Community of Singapore, 1871-1971*, Hans Burckhardt's paper, p.160

³⁷ WO 172/145: Diary of Events, H.Q. 55th Infy Bde, 29 Jan 1942 – 15 Feb 1942.

Regiment.³⁸ On 14th February, elements of the Regiment, including the carriers, some of the mortar platoon, and a few of the first reinforcements who were brought up by Captain Wysock-Grundall, were centred in the small village of Bukit Brown.³⁹ With them were one light tank of 100th I.L.T. Sqn and two carriers. These two Bren Gun Carriers, possibly belonged to 'B' Squadron of 3rd Cavalry, being the last of their tracked carriers. But the Suffolks believed they were from the 100th I.L.T Sqn.

As heavy shelling raged around the Golf Course during the day, what remained of the Suffolk's Carrier Platoon brought up ammunition, food and water and evacuated casualties.

During the evening of 14th February 1942, supported by mortar and artillery bombardment, the Japanese launched a heavy attack against the village of Bukit Brown, and at around 18.00hrs seven Japanese tanks burst into the village and two more were on the western edge of the cemetery.

The Japanese tanks were engaged by anti-tank rifles and grenades, particularly by The Carrier Platoon and during this heavy fighting the Platoon Commander Lieut. (T/Captain) Wise was wounded. Japanese infantry supported by snipers and machine gun fire pushed into the village to join their tanks. A British supply column, with rations, had just reached the village and much was lost, together with a number of prisoners, as the Japanese overran the village. The Japanese infantry, with tank support, stormed the Suffolks' position in the cemetery, overrunning and scattering the defenders.

This is the last reference that has been found concerning the three light tanks of 100th Independent Light Tank Squadron and the tracked carriers of 'B' Squadron, 3rd Cavalry Regiment, which had earlier left Seletar to join Massy Force.

At this location, point 6021166, Corporal C. Goldsmith of the Carrier Platoon, 4th Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, distinguished himself in the fighting with an anti-tank rifle and grenades. He then reorganized the remainder of the Platoon and led them from the village to a point further back. For his action that night Corporal Goldsmith was awarded the Military Medal.

It is known, from a firsthand account, that on the march to Changi as P.O.W.s, possibly on 17th February 1942, as they passed D3 near Changi, one of the Suffolks saw a burnt out two-man tank, the tank too badly burnt to see in what camouflage it had been painted. The burnt bodies of its two Indian crewmen were hanging out of the tank.

Apart from the vehicle that was out of action on Swiss Hill, only one unauthenticated fact has been established regarding the fate of the 100th I.L.T Sqn's light tanks. There is a reference to a British officer of the Indian Armoured Corps,

³⁸ WO 172/90

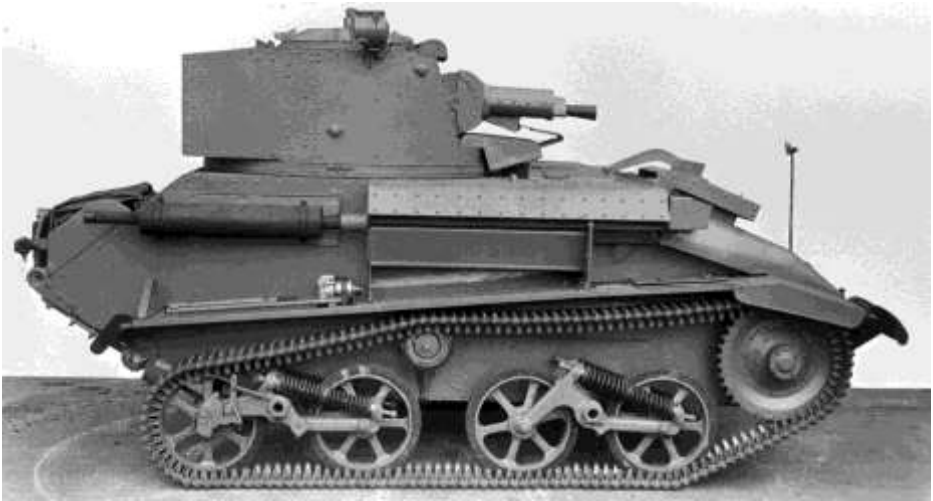
³⁹ This village had the numerical reference 814144.

upon the British reoccupation of Singapore in 1945, finding a Vickers Light Tank Mk VI in a Japanese captured-vehicle 'museum' on Singapore Island.

Regarding the personnel, there is a casualty register in the Delhi archives that has yet to be examined. At this stage, only two members of the 100th I.L.T. Sqn, both officers, have been identified from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) registers:

IA/220 Major Jack Alford, died 12th February 1942 (Kranji Cemetery)
 3586/I.O. Risaldar Alakh Ram of Hassanah, Rohtak, died 28th February 1942
 (Kranji Memorial)

The CWGC register for the Singapore Memorial includes eight personnel of the 8th K.G.V.'s Own Light Cavalry, I.A.C., and it would be interesting to know whether these casualties were actually serving with the 100th I.L.T. Sqn, as their own unit was definitely not present. Eighty-eight 3rd Cavalry personnel are commemorated on the Memorial, and a number of these casualties were undoubtedly suffered on the Malayan peninsula.



VICKERS LIGHT TANK MK VI B INDIA PATTERN⁴⁰

The turret of the Indian pattern Mk VI B tank varied from the British pattern in three ways: there was no cupola on the former; it carried only one smoke

⁴⁰ This photograph is reproduced here by kind permission of The Tank Museum, Bovington.

discharger, or none at all; the searchlight was in a different location. As far as can be determined, and with only a very few exceptions in 1937, radios were not fitted to MK VI B (I) tanks until 1941.

The MK IV A was armed with a single .303" Vickers MMG. The intention was to arm the MK VI B with a .303" Vickers MMG and a .5" Vickers HMG; however as of June 1941, none of the .5" Vickers HMG had reached India and tanks sent on overseas operations had a wooden bung placed in the vacant aperture. Whether, by January 1942, the .5" HMGs had reached India, and been fitted to the MK VI B (I) tanks of the 100th Independent Light Tank Squadron, has not been established.

Four Mutiny Veterans Early *Cartes de Visite* from the Studios of Bourne & Shepherd

Sean Weir

Around 1862, the recently formed Agra-based partnership of photographers Charles Shepherd and Arthur Robertson produced a series of images portraying officers and men from regiments of the British and Indian Armies. Several of these were of the highest quality, in both composition and detail, equivalent to the later images of John Burke.¹

Within two years the ‘Shepherd & Robertson’ studio had become ‘Howard, Bourne & Shepherd,’ relocating to Simla. It was listed in the Thacker’s Directories until 1868 after which the name contracted to ‘Bourne & Shepherd.’ Their photographic business spread rapidly throughout the sub-continent and remains to this day in Calcutta, one of the oldest in the world.

Although Samuel Bourne himself left India circa 1870/71, he had already become famous for his landscape photography, especially those from his trips to Kashmir.²

Once the original partnership of Shepherd and Robertson had been dissolved, formal regimental photography on any scale was abandoned but, in common with all studios at the time, a staple part of their business was the production of the ubiquitous portrait *carte-de-visite*.³ Their reputation attracted the ‘great and the good’ of the time, as well as less celebrated sitters. Many of the firm’s clients were from the military establishment, and this article includes a description of four of them, accompanied by their *cartes-de-visite*.

Major John Watson VC, CB

Watson is portrayed when commandant of the 13th Bengal Cavalry, the regiment he founded and which eventually bore his name. The image, accompanied by the caption ‘Sir John Watson’ written in a period hand, has been cut from its original album page. The later-format ‘Howard, Bourne and Shepherd’ imprint dates the *carte* to between 1865 and 1868.

Watson was one of the major figures of the Indian Army throughout the Victorian period, and his biography is well documented. At the time this photograph was taken, he had already accumulated the Punjab medal with two clasps (Mooltan and Goojerat, as Ensign, 1st European Fusiliers), India General Service medal with one clasp (Northwest Frontier, as Lieutenant, 3rd Punjab

¹ *Durbar*, Winter 2010, pp 168-182: ‘Brownlow’s Punjabis – an officer’s album.’

² Cambridge University: www.lib.cam.ac.uk, RCS Photographers Index.

³ The multi-image process was patented by Andre Disderi in Paris, in 1854 and was introduced into the UK in 1857, subsequently becoming a world-wide phenomenon.

Cavalry), the Indian Mutiny medal with three clasps (Delhi, Relief of Lucknow and Lucknow, as Lieutenant, 1st Punjab Cavalry), and the prestigious Victoria Cross (for gallantry at Lucknow in 1857). He had also been appointed, in 1863, to



the Military Division of the Order of the Bath as a Companion (C.B).

In the photograph, three of the medals can be seen clearly. Close scrutiny reveals that the V.C. is worn directly above the C.B. where it is largely obscured by the shoulder belt. Watson's V.C. citation, published in the *London Gazette* on 18th June 1858, reads:

“Lieut. Watson, on 14th November, with his own squadron, and that under Captain, then Lieut. Probyn, came upon a body of the rebel cavalry. The Rissaldar in command of them - a fine specimen of the Hindustani Mussalman - and backed up by some half-dozen equally brave men, rode out to the front. Lieut.

Watson singled out this fine-looking fellow and attacked him. The Rissaldar presented his pistol at Lieut. Watson's breast at a yard's distance and fired but most providentially without effect; the ball must have by accident previously fallen out. Lieut. Watson ran the man through with his sword and dismounted him; but the native officer, nothing daunted, drew his tulwar, and with his sowars renewed his attack upon Lieut. Watson, who bravely defended himself until his own men joined in the melee, and utterly routed the party. In this rencontre Lieut. Watson received a blow on the head from a tulwar, another on the left arm, which severed his chain gauntlet glove, a tulwar cut on his right arm, which fortunately only divided the sleeve of his jacket, but disabled the arm for some time; a bullet also passed through his coat, and he received a blow on his leg which lamed him for some days afterwards.”

In the spring of 1858, Watson was commissioned to raise a new regiment in the Punjab: the 4th Sikh Cavalry. His name was formally incorporated into the 1904 title: 13th Duke of Connaught's Lancers (Watson's Horse). In 1871, he was appointed Commandant, Central India Horse and Political Agent, Western Malwa. A photograph of him as Commandant is reproduced in the late Alan Harfield's

copiously illustrated work ‘Indian Army of the Empress.’⁴

His illustrious career continued; by 1891 he was a full general and was raised to G.C.B. in 1902. He passed away in 1919, aged 89. Sir John Watson’s medals were auctioned by Sotheby’s in May of last year, together with several of his manuscript diaries. Sotheby’s on-line description contains a fuller and fascinating biography.⁵ The Victoria Cross is now on display in the Lord Ashcroft Gallery at the Imperial War Museum.



Major Francis Dempster Hawkins

An earlier issue of *Durbar*⁶ featured the commandant of the 4th Punjab Cavalry, Colonel Godby. This particular *carte-de-visite* was taken when Hawkins was his second-in-command and, like Godby’s *carte*, it can be identified from the Cavagnari album in the National Army Museum collection.

Hawkins was born in 1837, the son of a captain in HM’s 89th Regiment, and died at the early age of thirty-three. Following his cadetship and admission to the HEIC’s service, he was appointed Ensign in December 1854.⁷ He was posted to the 61st Bengal NI, and was wounded when the regiment mutinied at Jullundur in June 1857.

In April 1858 he transferred to the 32nd Bengal NI, one of the few regiments that survived the Mutiny, although he probably did not serve

with it in the field. He was attached to the Hoshiarpore Levy in February 1858 and,

⁴ Alan Harfield, *The Indian Army of the Empress 1861-1903* (Spellmount, Tunbridge Wells 1990), p.48

⁵ www.sothebys.com

⁶ *Durbar*, Winter 2008, pp. 171-173: ‘Lieutenant C J Godby, 4th Punjab Cavalry’

⁷ India Office Records, shelf marks IOR/L/MIL/10/59/644 and 61/644.

in August the same year, was appointed a divisional adjutant in the Oudh Military Police.⁸ In this capacity, he commanded the 3rd Oudh Police Cavalry in a number of skirmishes with rebel bodies and was several times mentioned in despatches.⁹



Colonel Charles Vanbrugh Jenkins

Colonel Jenkins was a long serving officer and contemporary of Watson, if not quite so illustrious. He spent much of his early career in the 1st Bengal Light Cavalry, having been commissioned as cornet on 27th August 1839.

He took part in the 1842 Afghan campaign under General Pollock and was present at the forcing of the Khyber Pass, relief of Jellalabad, and all of the actions leading to the reoccupation of Cabul, including the cavalry charge in the Tezeen Valley (medal). This was followed by the Gwalior campaign of 1843-44, including the battle of Maharajpore (bronze star), the Sutlej campaign of 1846 and the 1848-49 campaign in the Punjab, including the major battles of Chillianwalla and, like Watson, Goojerat (medal

and two clasps).

His involvement with the Mutiny seems to have been more as bystander than participant. He was on leave when his regiment mutinied in June 1857, and, with his fellow surviving officers of his defunct regiment, transferred to the right wing

⁸ India Office Records, shelf mark IOR/L/MIL/10/67/644

⁹ Captain T.C. Anderson, *Ubique: War Services of All Officers of HM's Bengal Army, exhibiting the rank & various services of every officer in the Army* (Calcutta 1863), p.295.

of the 1st Bengal European Light Cavalry.

In the reorganisation of 1861, following the demise of the Honourable East India Company, a number of former light cavalry officers opted to join the British Army's newly created 19th Hussars. Jenkins was appointed Substantive Lieutenant-Colonel on 1st January 1862, and full Colonel five years later. Following its raising, the regiment moved to Meerut in the autumn of 1863. It remained there until 1867, when a new headquarters was established at Benares although three squadrons were also stationed at Cawnpore. One of Jenkins' fellow officers in the new regiment was another Mutiny VC, Captain and Brevet Major Hugh Henry Gough. Their continuance in India was cut short in 1870 due to Government economies, resulting in the immediate relocation of the regiment to the UK.¹⁰

The *carte-de-visite* shows Jenkins in Dismounted Review Order. The regimental busby bag and plume are both white. His medals, clearly visible here, are believed to have survived as a group and were auctioned some years ago by Dix, Noonan Webb. He eventually retired with the rank of Honorary Major-General on 11th July 1877.

An unidentified Rifle Volunteer

From the style of the 'Howard, Bourne & Shepherd' imprint, this appears to be the earliest of the four *cartes*, circa 1864.

The tunic is similar to some of the very first of the British volunteer movement. The helmet looks to be grey or beige with a pale pagri containing a dark stripe. His Mutiny medal appears to have two clasps. John Hart has provided the following regarding the sword:

The sword could be either an 1827 Pattern Rifles officer sword, or an 1854 Pattern Infantry officer model. With a black and white image and without being able to see the front of the hilt it's impossible to be sure. If... a Volunteer, then it would be a Rifles hilt, as the Volunteer formations were usually Rifle regiments. The leather scabbard with brass mounts was originally the 'undress' type for both Infantry and Rifles officers, but was found to be impractical for active service, being easily cracked and susceptible to damp and mould (especially in climates such as India). As a result, in 1866 all Infantry officers were authorised to carry the steel scabbard (which had previously been for 'dress' use only) in place of the leather one on all occasions. Confusingly, Rifles officers had been allowed to carry the steel scabbard for 'undress' use some years earlier, but retained the leather scabbard for parades and evening functions! This state of affairs was different again in India, where Infantry officers 'went their own way' early on and adopted brass scabbards (more resistant to corrosion), which in the British Army were confined only to senior officers (Majors, Lieutenant-Colonels and full Colonels).

¹⁰ *Military Modelling*, Sept 1993: 'Forgotten Regiments' (B. Marrion and D. Haggar).

Carman's details regarding Auxiliary Force India uniforms are sketchy but he



does list the inception date of each unit.¹¹ The Simla Rifles was raised in May 1861 as the 2nd Punjab or Simla Volunteer Rifle Corps. His uniform description relates to a photograph dated 1866 and is different from that illustrated, but could have changed by then.

Few other rifle volunteer corps from within the wider Simla region are named. Those that are include the Oudh VR¹² and the 1st Punjab VRC.¹³

Given the vagaries of rifle volunteer uniforms, the carte could still be from one of the above or, conversely, from a completely different unit. The writer would welcome any correspondence to *Durbar* that might help identify either the unit or the individual.

¹¹ W.Y. Carman, *Indian Army uniforms under the British from the 18th Century to 1947, Artillery, Engineers and Infantry*, Morgan Grampian Books, 1969

¹² Raised in 1865; Carman states that the later incarnation, 'Lucknow Rifles', bore the distinction 'Defence of Lucknow 1857.'

¹³ Raised in 1861; a reproduction of an *Illustrated London News* woodprint, dated 1861, depicts a different uniform.

**The Malabar Campaign of 1921 and 1922
also known as the Moplah Rebellion**

Part 2¹

Chris Kempton

Report by Captain P McEnroy, D.S.O., M.C. (continued)²

On my return to Calicut the internal security scheme was put into force, all supplies, transport, etc., were commandeered. The barracks soon assumed the appearance of an enormous motor transport depot owing to the numbers of motor cars and lorries surrendered. The barracks, an open one on rising ground, was put in a state of defence everyone lending a hand. The local defence force was mobilised under Captain Campbell³ and sent out as covering parties to the workmen repairing the line, which made rapid progress, and eventually effected a junction with the repair parties working from the Madras end on the 28th. My chief worry now was the situation of the Malappuram garrison.

On the morning that we raided Tirurangadi, a party under two officers (Lieutenants Duncan M.C. and Dundas) had been despatched to Malappuram 32 miles off. It was thought a small military garrison at that place might have the effect of keeping that area quite [sic] until we arrived, as we intended to proceed to Malappuram if the raid at Tirurangadi proved successful. The party moved to Malappuram by motor lorries and cars. As everything appeared normal at Tirurangadi after the arrests I wired Duncan to send the transports to me. This he did but the rebels intercepted it and burnt the lorries, threw the District Magistrate's car into the river and murdered the driver. Still more sad to relate a European Police Officer, Mr Reedman, who was trying to join the police travelled by the same car and was also murdered.

This detachment was now cut off from all communication; road bridges had been torn up and trees felled on the route. The party was too small to fight its way out and had to make arrangements to stand a siege. This Duncan did, wisely vacating the military barracks at Malappuram as it was too large for his small party to defend, and occupying the police station which he had put into a state of defence; but I am anticipating.

News reached me that a mobile column under the command of Colonel Humphreys⁴ was coming to our relief. Owing to the complete destruction of the bridges and the railway line I expected the advance to be slow and did not think that Duncan and Dundas could hold out until their arrival as the amount of rations and ammunition taken by the party was small. I decided to use the detachment at Calicut to relieve Malappuram and all the arrangements were made and bridging material etc., was collected. In the midst of this work I received a deputation from the local branch of the Khilafat Committee⁵ who informed me that if we

¹ Part I appeared in the previous edition of *Durbar* (Vol.28, No.2).

² This is the continuation of Capt. McEnroy's report (*vide*: Appendix II to Hitchcock, reproduced here verbatim).

³ The Nilgiri Malabar Bn. A.F.[I]

⁴ C.O., 1st Leinster Regt

⁵ The Khilafat movement, beginning in 1919, set out to preserve the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Sultan as the Caliph, successor to the Prophet Muhammad and spiritual leader

stopped all military operations they would use peaceful persuasion with the truculent Mapillas. I offered to lend them a car at the same time impressing upon them that I would accept no responsibility for their safety. They refused my offer but later a party of them did interview Ali Musaliar whose reception of them caused them to return hastily, sadder but wiser men.

I was now very short of officers as only three were available. Howes I left at Calicut and Captains Evans and McGonigal were to accompany me. I therefore selected from numerous volunteers Messrs. Daly, Woosnam, Howison, Meadows and Violett, members of the Local Officers Auxiliary Corps,⁶ to accompany the column.

The commandeered lorries and motor cars were used to transport 100 men of the detachment and we started on an eventful journey of 32 miles at 0700 hours on August 25th.

Bridging material etc., was carried as we had information that several bridges were down and numbers of trees had been felled to bar our progress. We reached Kondotti [18miles] without much trouble where I requested an interview with the Tangal [Mapilla priest]. He was not then available and we pushed on. Many blocks of fallen trees were encountered but we had brought the detachment tug-of-war rope with us.

Though the regiment has won renown at tug-of-war on many a field and on many occasions on the Olympic tan in military tournaments I question if ever a team put their backs into a heave with greater vim than the men of this detachment did to clear the way. Trees were whipped out of the road with a speed almost incredible. By nightfall we had reached the twenty-fourth milestone; as the road was still blocked ahead I decided to bivouac at Kondotti.

But to digress to the Tangal. After several hours hauling trees and repairing bridges a messenger arrived to inform me that the Tangal was at my service. It was several miles journey back but Mr Moody, who supplied the bridging material, had accompanied us on his motor bicycle and he took me back on his carrier. When we arrived at the meeting place not a soul was to be seen but in a few minutes we saw a seething mass of humanity approaching. For the moment we doubted the wisdom of our remaining for the crowd looked extremely angry. In a few minutes we were surrounded by the throng and the Tangal, in his Sunday best, rode up on his horse – a picturesque sight. He dismounted, saluted, then advanced and we shook hands. He promised to keep his flock in hand – a promise he kept with the natural oriental latitude. He also received a promise from me which did not allow of any oriental latitude.

To return to Kondotti. It had been a strenuous day and everyone looked forward to a meal, the first since leaving barracks. The officers found to their horror that their tuck basket had not been loaded on the lorry, but that hunger is a good sauce; even tea and bully were very welcome. We were astir very early in the morning to the shout of 'Come on you fellows get up and roll your blankets' – a sarcastic remark as we had no blankets.

We moved at the peep of dawn and were progressing well until held up by another broken bridge. The repair of the bridges without proper tools is a lengthy business but after a few hours hard work the bridge was sufficiently repaired to take three-ton lorries. More fallen trees barred our progress and at 10.00 hrs we had reached the twenty-sixth milestone.

of the Islamic world. By 1921 committees were widespread throughout Malabar.

⁶ Woosnam, Capt. Nilgri Malabar Bn. The others are not shown in I.A Lists and so must have been NCO's or OR's. Meadows was commissioned in the Bn. in late 1922

About half a mile further on, when the head of the column had passed through the jungle and entered a 'paddy flat,' the column was fired on from all sides at close range. The men were off the lorries like a rocket and at their work in magnificent style.

The rear of the column, which was still in the jungle, was immediately assaulted by hundreds of Mapillas, several of whom reached the bayonets before their fanatical rush was stopped. It must be understood that the fanatical rushes came from both sides of the road and our men were fighting back to back. I doubt if ever a mad rush was met with greater calmness and determination. The assault had no sooner finished than a similar one started on the head of the column. This was beaten off with ease as there was a clear field of fire. At the same time a fusillade was opened from a river bed on the left flank. This was well dealt with by the Lewis guns with an accurate and well directed fire. There was now a lull in the battle, and the column was closed up clear of the jungle. There was continuous sniping from various directions but in this branch they were soon forced to play second fiddle. Sergeant Montague, at a range of 400 yards with only the head showing, registered a bull first shot – an encouraging effort. The men had settled down to work in earnest and right well they did it. The young soldiers in their baptism of fire vied with their hardened comrades of the Great War.

The Mapillas now showed little desire to attack, so I decided to attack them or rather to bait them. The leading platoon was pushed forward to attack two houses on the roadside where many Mapillas had been seen. As the platoon arrived near the houses hundreds of Mapillas charged them but were stopped by the fire of well posted Lewis guns. They now refused to be baited and I carried out a reconnaissance with a view to dislodging them. During this Sergeant Montague was badly wounded and Mr Lancaster, Indian Police was mortally wounded by snipers. Whilst they were being carried to the Medical Officer [Captain Sullivan M.C. R.A.M.C.], my small party was assaulted. In order to cover the wounded, we decided to stand our ground and met the assault, but we were not strong enough and they got right up to us.

Private Ryan undoubtedly saved my life by bayoneting a man who was just about to cut me from behind whilst I was busily engaged in front. I ordered all to fall back and most of us got into the 'paddy fields' and ran for it. Lieutenant McGonigal, who was with us, kept too near the road and masked the fire of the Lewis gun. He was at this time doing deadly execution with his revolver. The Mapillas were getting too close to him and the party, so Daly, at the head of the column, ordered the guns to fire.

They did excellent work, but unfortunately the hard road did not allow the bipod to be firmly fixed and it slipped, with the result that McGonigal had his leg broken by the fire of this gun which, I fear, will destroy his promising military career. Several dashed forward and picked him up whilst the Lewis guns and rifle fire stopped the rush.

During this withdrawal, we passed wounded Mapillas on the roadway, one of whom jumped up and slashed Private Tornay with his sword, killing him instantaneously.

The trench mortar was brought up and fire opened on these houses. The fire at first trial was not accurate, chiefly due to long range, and the mortar was moved up closer. The first shot was fairly close; the second went clean through the roof, but to our amazement and indignation proved a dud. However, several other well placed shots made the Mapillas realize that we still had a few cards up our sleeves and caused the faint-hearted to clear out.

I now only had Captain Evans and myself standing up, so I asked Daly to take a party forward and clear the houses, which he did in gallant style. Whilst Daly was setting fire to

one of the houses, Private Cahill spotted a sniper in a tree taking aim at Daly and with a standing shot brought him down – a great and timely effort.

We now pushed on and found the road still further blocked by trees, but the prowess of the men at the tug-of-war rope was not lessened by their five hours scrap, and we eventually reached Malappuram about 17.30 hours where we received a warm welcome from our beleaguered comrades and learned they had killed the fatted calf [a borrowed one] to celebrate our expected arrival, as they had heard the battle raging.

We found the garrison very cheery and not at all worried about the ration question as Mr Austin, the Sub-Collector, had arranged an ample supply of food and refreshments. The garrison, though small, had fulfilled its mission by keeping Malappuram quiet.

The wounded were taken to hospital where they received every attention but, despite all medical efforts, Mr Lancaster passed away at 23.30 hours. We had a good nights rest and the following day buried our dead – Mr Lancaster, Privates Kennedy and Tornay- with full military honours, using ball ammunition instead of blank, in the military cemetery at Malappuram, where a suitable memorial has been erected by their comrades.

Early on the morning of August 28th, the advance guard of the Bangalore mobile column arrived and took over the place. Having accomplished our object, we returned to Calicut, bringing with us our wounded and Duncan and his party. On our way back we discovered that the rebels had again destroyed the bridges which we had repaired, thus entailing a delay which caused me anxiety as I desired to get the wounded into hospital in daylight. To effect this, on reaching Kondotti, where the Tangal was keeping his promise, the column was divided into fast and slow; the fast, with wounded and escort, were sent ahead and reached Calicut shortly after dark. The state of the roads makes motoring at any time unpleasant but to wounded men it must have been almost unbearable. One can only add that their whole journey was borne with the fortitude typical of the British soldier. At Calicut they received every care and attention from Colonel O'Neill, I.M.S., and his staff.

On return to Calicut, I found that many cares had been removed from my shoulders as communication had been established, and Colonel Humphreys had paid Calicut a visit. It was a great relief to me.

I received orders from him to send two platoons to co-operate in the second Tirurangadi attack, where they remained until the rebels surrendered in the mosque, finally escorting these prisoners to goal at Tirur. Amongst these prisoners was Ali Musaliar, the self-styled King of Malabar. Later these platoons rounded up rebel gangs in the vicinity before returning to Calicut.

On September 24th I received orders and dispatched two platoons under Duncan and Howes to establish and hold a post at Nilambur. The party embarked at Feroke in four flat bottomed boats, each propelled by four boatmen with poles, and proceeded up the river to Mambad. Thence they marched to Nimbur. The post was established in the new hospital buildings and the platoons settled down to normal work. One platoon went out in the district, and the other garrisoned the post on alternate days. These platoons were isolated for eighteen days and eventually they were relieved by one company of the 3/70th Burmese Rifles, just as their rations were about finished. On relief, the party returned to Malappuram and thence to Tirur. These two platoons were ordered to establish a post at Kottakkal, on the main convoy route from railhead to Malappuram. Their task was to keep the road clear of rebel gangs and right well they did their job. During their stay [about ten weeks] they caused about 6,000 rebels to surrender. They were finally relieved on December 15th and

returned to Calicut. In the meantime the Calicut – Wynad road was giving trouble and a motor patrol under myself was established on this route until such times as troops could be dispatched to the area. A big drive eastwards was about to commence. It was not very exciting work as the Mapillas in this area were fairly peaceful, but it was desirable to keep them so as they were likely to be influenced by the rebels of the interior if they were not watched. The patrol had the desired effect and I handed the task over to the Southern Provinces Mounted Rifles after about ten days. The latter were all volunteers from the tea planting districts who desired to show that they were prepared to protect their own interests by keeping the route open for the export of their tea and the procuring of provisions for themselves and their coolies.

From the first few days of the rebellion, Captain Bailey with the other two platoons of ‘B’ Company had been guarding the Gudalur Ghat road. His task was a very unenviable one, as, throughout the months he sat on the road, no Mapillas appeared; but his party was no sooner withdrawn than the Mapillas appeared and scattered the police who had relieved him – a sufficient testimony to the respect the Mapillas had for the British soldier.

Early in January all our detachments were withdrawn, and we proceeded to Madras to prepare for the visit of our Colonel-in-Chief, where ‘A’ and ‘D’ Companies taught the non co-operative elements a lesson in peaceful persuasion; but that is another story.⁷

P. McENROY, Captain⁸

Command and staff

Lt Col. TE Humphreys *CMG DSO*, Commanding Officer, 1st Bn The Prince of Wales’s Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians); Military Commander Malabar (from 31 August)⁹

Mr FB Evans *CSI ICS*, Special Civil Officer

Major GRC Wyatt *DSO*, 106th Hazara Pioneers, General Staff Officer

Captain DGS Urmston, 81st Pioneers, Intelligence Officer

Major BG Peel *DSO*, 81st Pioneers, D.A.Q.M.G [from 8 October]

Major SHP Smith, Supply & Transport Corps

Captain EC Hunt, Supply & Transport Corps

Lieut. AJW Bavin *OBE*, Supply & Transport Corps

Major TTH Robinson *DSO*, RAMC, Principal Medical Officer

Captain RA Hepple *MC*, RAMC, (to October)

Captain GD Gripper, RAMC, (from October)

Lieut. TCH Shaw, RGA, Signals Officer

⁷ This refers to the visit of HRH The Prince of Wales. The Battalion was inspected on 16th January and also dealt with strikes & riots during the Prince’s visit.

⁸ Capt. McEnroy transferred to the Ox. & Bucks L.I on disbandment of the Leinsters and retired on 2nd June 1923 on retired pay with the rank of Captain

⁹ Lt Col. Humphreys remained as Military Commander until the end of Martial Law. He is noted as calling a conference at Manasseri as late as 30th January 1922. As C.O he must, however, have gone to Madras for the visit by the P.O.W and the inspection on 16th January.

Lt Col. FW Radcliffe *CMG CIE CBE*, to 17 Oct., then Lt Col. C Saunders, Commanding Officers 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment
 Capt. P MacEnroy *DSO MC*, 1st Bn The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment [Royal Canadians]. Officer Commanding at Calicut
 Bvt Lt Col. JTH Lane *OBE, MC*, then Major GR Mainwaring *DSO*, Commanding Officer/Officer Commanding 1st Bn 39th Royal Garhwal Rifles
 Actg Lt Col. BE Morgan *DSO*, then A/Lt. Col. A. Burd, Commanding Officers 3rd Bn 70th [Kachin] Rifles
 Actg Lt Col. DHR Giffard, Commanding Officer 2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles
 Lt Col. ACB Mackinnon, Commanding Officer 2nd Bn 9th Gurkha Rifles

Order of Battle

One sqn The Queen's Bays (2nd Dragoon Gds), 21 Aug - 8 Sep 1921
 Southern Provinces Mounted Rifles AF[I] (detachment), November 1921
 Two secs. 10th British Pack Bty. RGA
 HQ & one coy 1st Bn The Suffolk Regiment, 13 Sep 1921 - 4 Jan 1922
 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment, 28 Aug - 19 Nov 1921
 Six platoons 1st Bn The Prince of Wales's Leinster Regiment (Royal Canadians), August 1921 to early January 1922
 One coy The Nilgiri Malabar Battalion AF[I], from August 1921
 One coy The South Indian Railway Battalion AF[I], from August 1921
 1st Bn 39th Royal Garhwal Rifles, first week of November 1921 to 5 Jun 1922
 3rd Bn 70th (Kachin) Rifles, 13 Oct 1921 to end January 1922 ¹⁰
 Two coys. 83rd Wallajahabad Light Infantry, August to December 1921
 2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles, 16 Oct 1921 - 21 Jan 1922
 2nd Bn 9th Gurkha Rifles, first week November 1921 to 18 Feb 1922

Three platoons 64th Pioneers
 One section Armoured Car Coy.
 9th Field Coy, 2nd Queen Victoria's Own Sappers & Miners (less one platoon)

2nd Motor Wireless Section, 'B' Corps Signals
 20th Draught Mule Coy (½ Coy)
 One Ford Van section, 15 MT Coy IASC
 The Malabar Special Police Battalion (raised 30th September 1921)

¹⁰ Subsequently, in 1922, re-designated 3rd Bn./70th Burma Rifles [Kachin] but referred to commonly, from 1919, as 3rd Bn./70 Burma Rifles.

Awards and medals

Order of the British Empire

London Gazette, 2nd June 1923 Supplement p.3952

The King has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Medal of the Military Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire to the under-mentioned for services rendered in connection with military operations in Malabar, 1921-1922:

For Gallantry

5718784 Private Frederick Chant, 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment

5718234 Sergeant William George Hand *MM*, 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regt

5718907 Private Thomas Miller, 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment

5719290 Private Frederick Henry Troke, 2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment

Asst. Surgeon 3rd Class George David Rodriques, Indian Medical Department

For Meritorious Service

Company Quartermaster-Sergeant John Christie, 1st Bn Lancashire Fusiliers (formerly 1st Bn Leinster Regiment)

Staff Sergeant H.A. Joy, Indian Ordnance Department

The O.B.E for Gallantry was instituted in December 1922. In 1937 it was renamed the Empire Gallantry Medal, and in September 1940 was superceded by the George Cross. All five of those named above survived to become George Cross holders. The awarding of the O.B.E. for Gallantry is unusual insofar as it was, at the time, a new and relatively obscure honour. The award of the D.C.M or M.M, at least in the case of the first four, might be considered more appropriate. The *London Gazette* entry gives no clue as to the actions for which the awards were made but it is almost certain that Rodriques' action was not at the same place as the others. The four Dorsets won their awards for gallantry during a brisk action on 24th September 1921, when a column of Dorsets was ambushed just outside the village of Nilambur. It is unlikely that an Assistant Surgeon of the I.M.D would have been with such a column. Rodriques was stationed at the Military Hospital, Calicut, and as the award was 'for gallantry' and thus for active service, the most likely answer is that he accompanied the Malappuram relief force and was involved in the action at Pukkottur on 26th August, though this is unsubstantiated and no firm evidence to this effect has been found.

D.S.O., M.C., D.C.M. and M.M.

London Gazette, 2nd June 1923 Supplement pp.3952-53

The King has been graciously pleased to approve the under-mentioned rewards for

distinguished service rendered in connection with military operations in Malabar 1921-1922:

Bar to Distinguished Service Order

Capt. Patrick McEnroy *DSO MC*, Oxf.& Bucks. L.I (formerly Leins. Regt.)

Distinguished Service Order

Capt. Alan Wilson Duncan, 2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles I.A.

Military Cross

Lieut. William Benjamin Whitaker, 2nd Bn 70th Burma Rifles I.A.¹¹

*Distinguished Conduct Medal*¹²

7177145 Pte J Cahill *MM*, 2nd Bn Manch. Regt (formerly 1st Bn Leins. R.)

7178031 Pte G Ryan, 1st Bn Leinster Regt [E]

London Gazette, 2nd June 1923 Supplement p.3953

The King has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Military Medal to the under-mentioned for bravery in connection with military operations in Malabar 1921-22

2nd Bn The Dorsetshire Regiment

5719280 Pte. Alexander, G [Jersey]

5718697 Pte Churchill, L [Poole]

5719133 Cpl Collins, R [Brixton]

5718387 Sjt Fairman, H [Semley]

5719354 Pte Trueman, C [Shanklin]

Indian Order of Merit 2nd Class

G.G.O. 1134 of 30th June 1922

Jemadar Po Daing. 3rd Bn 70th (Kachin) Rifles (Posthumous)

For conspicuous gallantry on 27th October 1921 near Edavannu, Malabar. During an attack on a stone building occupied by rebels, he set a fine example to his men and was killed in hand-to-hand fighting after having disposed of several of the enemy.

3669 Rifleman Tha Htu, 3rd Bn 70th (Kachin) Rifles

For conspicuous gallantry on 27th October 1921 in action near Edavannu, Malabar. During an attack on a stone building, this rifleman behaved in a most gallant and courageous manner. Though badly cut in two places, he only stopped to be bandaged and then carried on as though untouched, although blood was flowing from his arm. His conduct was most praiseworthy.

48 Naik Dasrath Chand Thakur. 2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles

For conspicuous gallantry on 20th October 1921. This non-commissioned officer on two occasions distinguished himself by his conduct while in action on the Feroke Manjeri Road; he showed great dash and gallantry. He rushed at a party of the enemy killing several and bayoneting two others. At Pandikkad on 14th

¹¹ Unless the officer had been seconded, the *Gazette* is in error as it was the 3rd Bn not the 2nd Bn.

¹² Both these recipients are mentioned by Captain McEnroy.

November, he gave orders coolly and collectedly in critical circumstances.

2353 Lance Naik Telbir Rana. 2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles

For conspicuous gallantry on 20th October 1921, when in action on the Feroke Manjeri Road, Malabar. This non-commissioned officer behaved in a most gallant manner during the action; although wounded, during the advance, he continued to lead his section, and on reaching the crest of the hill on which the enemy were posted, he shot five of them, and killed two others with his kukri. He was then wounded a second time.

Indian Distinguished Service Medal

GGO 1134 of 30th June 1922 (other than the two second award bars)

1st Bn 39th Garhwal Rifles

3536 Naik Man Singh Rawat *IDSM* - second award bar GGO 1606/1922

3186 L/Naik Deb Sing Bisht

3rd Bn 70th (Kachin) Rifles

13 Havildar Hkumja Naw

8641 Rifleman Bampa Kive Shin (attached from 4th Bn 70th Burma Rifles)

2nd Bn 8th Gurkha Rifles

Subadar Malla Bahadur Subadar Ram Singh Rana

1350 Rifleman Dalbahadur Bura 2572 Rifleman Manbir Thapa

2343 Rifleman Bahadur Gharti

2nd Bn 9th Gurkha Rifles

3557 Havildar Tekbahadur Khattri *IDSM* – second award bar GGO 1449/1922

2764 Havildar Birbahadur Sahi

India General Service Medal 1908 – 1935

Clasp 'Malabar 1921-22'

Awarded to all participants in the campaign for service between 20 Aug 1921 and 25 Feb 1922. Despite the significant number of casualties, the clasp was authorised with great reluctance by the government and only after Royal intervention.

Sources

A History of the Malabar Rebellion 1921, R.H Hitchcock (Govt. Press, Madras 1925); *The 9th Gurkha Rifles Vol.1 1817-1936*, F.S Poyinder (Butler & Tanner 1937); Report by General Lord Rawlinson, C-in-C India, on operations in Malabar, 20 Aug 1921- 25 Feb 1922 (G.S. Simla 1922 – India Office Records, shelf mark L/MIL/17/12/33); *Army Quarterly 1924*: article by Lt Col. A.C.B. Mackinnon, C.O 2nd Bn 9th Gurkha Rifles; *The London Gazette*; Indian Army Lists.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express his gratitude to: The Keep Military Museum, Dorchester for their help in clarifying some points regarding the 2nd Bn The

Dorsetshire Regt (the Museum website has a most useful summary of the campaign); and to the Leinster Regiment Association (Nick Weekes) for help with sourcing the reference to the second-award bar to Captain McEnroy's D.S.O.

The VCO: Origin and Development

Compiled by Rana Chhina and Tony McClenaghan

A recent query regarding the usage of the term Viceroy's Commissioned Officer, or VCO, led to some impromptu scuttling about and much delving into sundry books and papers by a number of members¹ to try and pinpoint the precise date on which the term entered the official lexicon of the Indian Army. We believe we have now identified the genesis of the term, albeit only in a handwritten annotation rather than a specific Gazette of India reference, but the journey has been fascinating and we feel it is worth sharing this combined note on our efforts in the hope that other members of the Society will be able to fill in the gaps or complete the picture.

Farwell² suggested, though perhaps with a lack of precision in his wording, that the term may have emerged in the aftermath of the Mutiny of 1857 – “Indian officers, called ‘native’ officers before the Mutiny, afterwards were renamed Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs), indicating that their commissions came from the Viceroy rather than the British sovereign.” He is the only source discovered so far suggesting a date as early as this and the consensus now is that the introduction of the term was much later, but the central question is how much later? Mason³ referred to VCOs but did not say when the term was introduced. Menezes⁴, although referring to VCOs in a 1923 context, then went on to say ‘The designation VCO is used for easier understanding, even though it was formally only introduced in the early 1930s’. The Willcox Committee report of 1945⁵ gives an excellent synopsis on the genesis and development of the VCO contained within an extremely concise organizational history of the Indian Army, though we suggest that even its date of 1935 for the introduction of the term must now be treated with some caution given some earlier references that have been traced.

The Esher Committee, established in 1919 to report on the administration and organisation of the Army in India and the position of the C-in-C in his dual capacity as head of the Army and Member of the Executive Council, was “largely responsible for improving the terms of service of the Indian ranks of the Army in

¹ Brian Stevens, Elizabeth Talbot-Rice and the two compilers.

² Byron Farwell, *Armies of the Raj – From the Great Indian Mutiny to Independence: 1858-1947* (Penguin Group, London 1989), p.28

³ Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour – An account of the Indian Army, its officers and men* (Jonathan Cape Ltd., London 1974), p.455

⁴ Lieut.-General S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity & Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth to the Twenty-First Century* (New Delhi 1993), p.307

⁵ *Reorganisation of the Army and Air Forces in India: Report of a Committee set up by the C-in-C in India, Vol 1 – Text.* (Government of India Press, New Delhi 1945), paras 47-50.

India... The Indian soldier and the Indian officer with the Viceroy's commission are now fed, clothed, housed... on an adequate standard."⁶ The original publication date of this source (1924) suggests, while not actually using the term VCO, that the notion of an Indian officer holding the Viceroy's commission was current in the early 1920s. This analysis is further supported by reference to the 'Indianization of the Indian Army Committee' (Shea Committee) of 1922⁷ which noted: "There should be no... Viceroy's Commissioned Officers, and the existing Viceroy's Commissioned Officers should be raised to the status of King's Commissioned Officers."⁸ No action was taken, however, and yet the question of abolishing the Viceroy's commission was increasingly discussed and debated in the legislature, as well as in the press, over the next twenty years or so. A committee, under the chairmanship of Major-General H.R. Briggs, DSO, was established by the C-in-C India in July 1945 to consider the matter. The recommendations of the 1945 Willcox committee were passed to General Briggs, but it is from Willcox that we draw our narrative. In its preamble to the question of abolition of the VCO's rank, the Willcox report sought to clarify the origin and nature of this unique rank, about which widespread misunderstanding and ignorance existed. For brevity, the following account illustrates the evolution of the rank from the perspective of an infantry battalion, but developments in other arms were similar and parallel:

The Indian Army has a commissioned rank intermediate between King's or Indian commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers. As already stated, there are at present about 33,600 Viceroy's commissioned officers, of whom a considerable number occupy appointments which in other armies are held by commissioned officers, and would be so in the Indian Army, if there were only one form of commission.

Origin of the Rank

When Indian troops were first employed by the East India Company, they were for the most part officered by those Indians, frequently of standing and authority, who had raised or recruited them. One or two European officers, holding the Company's commission, were attached to units more for supervision and liaison than for command. During the latter half of the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth century, the number of European officers was progressively increased and they took over more and more the actual command of units and sub-units. Thus,

⁶ Anon, *The Army in India and its Evolution* (Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta 1924), p.36

⁷ Under the chairmanship of Lieutenant-General (later General) Sir John Shea, GCB, KCMG, DSO, then serving as Chief of Staff to the C-in-C India.

⁸ Mrs Hemalatha, MA, M.Phil, 'History of Growth and Reforms of British Military Administration in India (1848-1949)' in *Language in India*, Vol. 8 (9 Sep 2008), p.52

in the Bengal Army, the 'native commandant' was abolished in 1787 and the 'native adjutant' in 1796, in which year the eight-company battalions of infantry⁹ had twenty-two European and twenty 'native officers' – as they were then called. The 'native officers' thus sank from real commanders of troops to mere assistants. It was in order to give them some object of aspiration that the rank of subedar-major was created in the Bengal Army in 1817. Side by side, however, with these 'regular' units, units on the old model, called 'irregulars' and having only three European officers, were raised in the later acquired territories in Northern India. The Gurkha and Punjab units, for example, were irregular.

After the [1857 revolt], in 1863, the whole Army was converted to the 'irregular' organization, with six Queen's commissioned European officers per battalion: the commanding officer, the second-in-command, the adjutant, the commanders of the two wings (four companies each) and a sixth. Thus the companies, as well as the smaller units, were commanded by 'native officers'; and the 1879 Commission, while asking for a seventh European officer as a reserve for battle casualties, insisted on the importance of doing nothing to reduce the responsibilities of the native officers. They recommended a proportion of direct vacancies for cadets of good family, and the establishment of a training school for these and for non-commissioned officers selected for promotion. The responsibilities of the 'native officer' were somewhat reduced in 1900 by the substitution of four 'double-companies,' each under a British officer, for two four-company wings. There were now fifteen European and sixteen 'native officers' in a battalion, namely the eight subedar company commanders and the jemadars second-in-command under them.

The final step came during the [Great War] with the reduction of the double companies to single companies, whereby no command was left to the Indian officer above a platoon. Extra Indian officers were added to the battalion to hold certain assistant staff appointments, such as jemadar adjutant and jemadar quartermaster while the subedar-major, who had hitherto been merely the senior of the subedars commanding companies, was made a kind of staff officer to the commanding officer. When subsequently the number of platoons in a company was reduced from four to three, the subedars rendered surplus became staff officers to the company commanders. Meanwhile the conferment of the King's commission on Indians from 1918 onwards had changed the whole relative position of the so-called 'Indian officers' and rendered the existence of this intermediate rank, which was due to the circumstance that Indians had not hitherto been able to hold the King's commission, in strict logic an anachronism. In practice, owing to the small number of Indians commissioned initially and the fact that the recruitment and structure of the Indian Army were still based on the old order of things, there could be no question of immediately abolishing the 'Indian officer' who in 1935, by way of distinction, came to be known as the 'Viceroy's commissioned officer.' Nevertheless, it was

⁹ Actually Willcox was wrong on this point. As is clear from the Minutes of Council dated 30 May 1796 and the corresponding G.O.C.C. dated 2 Jun 1796 which authorized this re-organisation, a Native Infantry regiment consisted of two battalions, each of ten, not eight, companies, with ten subedars and ten jemadars per battalion.

from the outset recognized in principle that the Viceroy's commissioned officers should disappear as soon as sufficient Indian commissioned officers were available to replace them. In recognition of this principle, the Indianization Committee of 1922 recommended that in units being Indianised the Viceroy's commissioned officers should be progressively replaced by Indian commissioned officers or Indian warrant officers.

The Warrant Officer appointment was not popular with the rank and file who saw the status as being nowhere near that of a VCO. During WW2 the Warrant Officer disappeared but the VCO remained part of the establishment until Independence, since when they have become known as Junior Commissioned Officers, although Jemadars are now known as Naib-Subedars.

And that was where our researches took us until a number of recent finds in the British Library's 'Asia, Pacific & Africa Collection' served to fill in some of the gaps.

The question of Indianisation of the Indian Army's Officer Corps based on the earlier formation of the Imperial Cadet Corps was most clearly described in Dr Chandar S. Sundaram's excellent article in *Durbar*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer 2010, pp.53-62 and it is not the purpose of this note to re-visit the main points of that argument. Nevertheless, among the various papers on Indianisation are references to the officers we would now refer to as VCOs that are worth airing.

In July 1914 the then Military Secretary to the India Office, General Sir E.G. Barrow GCB, noted with regard to the discussion on commissions:

It has clearly brought out the distinction between the old type of Native officer as now chiefly represented in the Indian Army and the aspirant for Military honours as represented by the Imperial Cadet Corps. The former can in a large measure be provided for by improving his status and by raising his pay and pension.¹⁰

This opinion was echoed by General Sir O'Moore Creagh VC, GCB, GCSI, recently retired Commander-in-Chief India in a note to the India Office:

Into this scheme [Indian Army Commissions] the present native officer class would not come. They are as a rule too old and not sufficiently well educated nor, with a few exceptions among those who have been given direct Indian commissions do they aspire to do so... I only mention them so that they may not be lost sight of. They are quite easy to deal with... their position both as regards pay, pension and dignity has been getting worse... it will have to be dealt with.¹¹

In February 1917, Commander Wedgwood tabled a question in the House of Commons asking the Secretary of State for India whether commissions in the new

¹⁰ L/MIL/7/19006, Collection 430/1, folio 267

¹¹ Ibid., folios 235-254 dated 8 Feb 1915

Indian Home Defence Force would be granted to Natives of India. The Viceroy was asked to supply an answer and replied:

Indians will be eligible for commissions under the Indian Army Act in the Indian units of the new Indian Defence Force as soon as they are fully qualified for the same.¹²

This led to some interesting correspondence within the India Office, and between there and the Viceroy, seeking clarification. H.V. Cox¹³ noted:

The Viceroy distinctly says the officers will be under the Indian Army Act. The definitions in that Act as regards officers are as follows:

Section 7

(1) 'British Officer' means a person holding a commission in HM's Land Forces.

(2) 'Native Officer' means a person commissioned, gazetted, or in pay as an officer holding a native rank in His Majesty's Land Forces.

It is under (2) that all Indian Officers are gazetted to commissioned rank in the Indian Army. Their commissions are actually signed by the Secretary to the Government of India Army Department. The new Indian units for defence are to be entirely Indian. It is evident that the Viceroy means the commissions in the Indian portion of the new force to be under (2) above. But it is probable that it is intended that some, at all events, of the Indians who will become officers in the new force will be of rank other and above that usually known as 'a native rank' e.g. Subedar or Jemadar – if so, it would seem the definition of the Act would need amendment.¹⁴

A telegram was sent to the Viceroy from the Secretary of State, though under the name of Sir T. Holderness,¹⁵ asking for the full details of the scheme to be forwarded by mail. It went on:

I understand your meaning to be that Indians will be eligible for Commissions coming within the definition in the Indian Army Act of Native Officer, namely, one holding a native rank, and that they will as such be subject to that Act. Will it be possible, consistently with this definition and with making them subject to Indian Army Act, to give them Commissions in Indian units carrying British titles such as

¹² L/MIL/7/19008, Collection 430/3, Viceroy, Army Department, telegram No. 2430 dated 17 Feb 1917: 'Appointment of Indians to Viceroy's Commissions in the new Home Defence Force.'

¹³ General Sir Herbert Vaughan Cox GCB, KCMG, CSI, then serving as Military Secretary to the India Office

¹⁴ L/MIL/7/19008, Collection 430/3, 21 Feb 1917

¹⁵ Sir Thomas William Holderness GCB, KCSI, then serving as Permanent Under Secretary of State for India at the India Office

Lieutenant or Captain? Or is this not intended?¹⁶

The Viceroy replied on 27th February (telegram No. 2929):

Your interpretation of our 2430 dated 17th February is correct. The conferring of British titles such as Lieutenant or Captain was not intended. Such a step would not be feasible under Indian Army Act without special legislation which we do not propose to initiate at present.

Against this correspondence Sir Thomas Holderness has annotated: ‘These will not be King’s Commissions, but Viceroy’s.’

At this point we began to feel we had identified the genesis of the term, if not the actual authority, but the more we looked into the papers the more we found references to confound and confuse. Just a few weeks after his telegram number 2929, in a telegram dated 8th March 1917 the Viceroy outlined four classes whose claims to commissions he considered deserving of consideration:

Class A

Indian youths of birth, character and education who would be eligible to attain to highest military rank.

Class B

Indian soldiers who have entered army through ranks in hope of becoming officers, but who would require special education and training to qualify them for British commissions.

Class C

Exceptional Indian officers of the categories referred to in your telegram 3440 of 5 February, some of whom are partly qualified for British commissions and who have established claims thereto by distinguished service in the field.

Class D

Indian officers of type now serving in our regiments who have rendered good and gallant service, but whose defective education and age unfit them (sic) for the higher responsibility which would devolve on them if they were granted British commissions. Class D would not be eligible for combatant British commissions except in the few individuals coming under Class C. We regard it as important, however, that they should have no cause to think that they were being slighted or their lives ignored. [*] We therefore recommend in each Indian unit one or two officers should receive, while serving, honorary commissions as Captain or Lieutenant which are now only conferred on them after retirement. Such rank would confer no power of command but would add to their dignity and would carry with it

¹⁶ Telegram 390 from Secretary of State to Viceroy, Army dated 22 Feb 1917 (L/MIL/7/19008, Collection 430/3). In a handwritten note to Cox, Holderness noted: ‘I want to make it clear that the Indian Army Act gives no powers of granting Commissions. The character of the Commission held by an officer determines whether he comes as a ‘Native Officer’ under the provisions of that Act that apply to Native Officers.’

small advantages in the way of pay and pension.¹⁷

It would seem, therefore, that the definitions of Classes A, B and C were of British-type commissions as sought under Indianisation proposals. Class D, on the other hand, referred not to the introduction of the term VCO, but to the granting to some, but not all, VCOs, of an honorary but limited commission while still serving.¹⁸ H. V. Cox noted:

I look upon the concession proposed here as very important, and feel sure that, while it will give immense satisfaction among Indian officers now serving, it will create no real difficulties in our Indian regiments.¹⁹

Within a year the whole question of designation had been raised again when the Government of India sent a Despatch to London (No. 46 dated 7th June 1918, paragraph 3) in which it pointed out that the last session of the Imperial Legislative Assembly had passed a bill making certain amendments to the Indian Army Act, among which was one substituting the word 'Indian' for 'Native' wherever it occurred in the Act.²⁰ The term 'Native Indian Forces' had appeared in the heading to Act V of 1869 – the Indian Articles of War – and, because of that, the term 'Native' was similarly used in the commission form for Indian officers no less than seven times. The 1918 Despatch pointed out that Act V of 1869 was repealed by the Indian Army Act, which had itself subsequently been amended so as to eliminate the word 'Native.'

We draw attention also to the language of Section 65 (1) of the Government of India Act, 1915, as compared with the wording of Section 73 of the Government of India Act of 1833 (since repealed). There is therefore no longer any legal authority for the expression "Native Indian Land Forces" and consequently it seems necessary that the form of commission issued to officers in that category should no longer contain the word "Native" and that the commission should be amended as in the attached draft.²¹

With some minor amendments, substituting George for Edward as the King's name, and removing the word 'Gentleman' after the officer's name (apparently Edward VII ordered its removal from all commissioning documents in 1907),

¹⁷ L/MIL/7/19006, Collection 430/1. In a subsequent telegram, designed for secrecy should the former have leaked, the Viceroy added [*]: 'from motives of political expediency.'

¹⁸ This was actually carried into effect in July 1918, *vide* Viceroy, Army Department telegram 9315 dated 13 Jul 1918 (L/Mil/19006, Collection 430/1)

¹⁹ Handwritten note dated 15 Mar 1917 (L/Mil/19006, Collection 430/1)

²⁰ The term 'Native' was eliminated from the designations of all Infantry regiments in the Bengal, Madras and Bombay Armies in 1885 under the authority of a Government General Order in the Military Dept, though the exact authority has not been traced.

²¹ L/MIL/7/19008, Collection 430/3

London approved the new commission form which had been based on that used for the Imperial Cadet Corps in 1904. The text of the new form is shown on the opposite page.

George, R and I

George, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India, etc.

To Our Trusty and well-beloved

Greeting,

We, reposing especial trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage and good conduct, do by these presents constitute and appoint you to be an officer in Our Indian Land Forces from the You are, therefore, carefully and diligently to discharge your duty as such in the rank of or in such higher rank as We may from time to time hereafter be pleased to promote or appoint you to, of which notification will be made in the London Gazette; exercising authority over all Indian officers, soldiers and other persons belonging to our Indian Forces who are subject to Indian Military law²²; and you are at all times to train and well discipline in arms both the inferior Indian officers and men serving under you, and use your best endeavours to keep them in good order and discipline. And We do hereby command all Indian officers, soldiers and other persons subject to Indian Military law belonging to the said Indian Forces to obey you as their superior officer, and you to observe and follow such orders and directions as from time to time you shall receive from Us, or any your superior officer, according to the rules and discipline of war in the pursuance of the trust hereby reposed in you.

Given at Our Court, at Saint James's, the ... day of in the year of Our reign.

By His Majesty's Command

*Indian Land Forces*²³

To summarize: 'Native' officers were to be granted commissions in the new Indian Home Defence Force but a handwritten annotation by Sir Thomas Holderness in February 1917 refers to these as Viceroy's commissions, not King's commissions. The remaining correspondence we have traced within the same series of papers refers to the early attempts at bestowing King's commissions on Indians, including some honorary commissions on VCOs, and this is reflected in the fact that there is no reference to 'Viceroy' in the subsequent 1918 commissioning form in which 'Native' is replaced by 'Indian'²⁴ and, indeed, the

²² These underlined words are additions to the earlier Imperial Cadet Corps form.

²³ L/MIL/7/19027, Collection 430/21 (1918): 'Form of Commission to be granted to officers appointed to the Indian Land Forces. Omission of the word "NATIVE."'

²⁴ The term King's Commissioned Indian Officer or KCIO was originally applied to those

commission is clearly given by and in the name of the King. The Esher Committee of 1919 (which included General Sir Herbert Cox who was involved in the 1917 correspondence) mentions 'Viceroy's commissions.' The Shea Committee of 1922 refers specifically to VCOs. The term VCO is listed in the index to *Indian Army Regulations 1925* but closer study reveals a reference to 'Sandhurst commissions' and their badges of rank, so it would seem to be a misleading entry in the index. The Willcox Committee of 1945 refers to 1935 as the year in which the 'Indian officer' became the 'Viceroy's commissioned officer' but the accuracy of this is clearly challenged by the Shea Committee references. The actual authority for the introduction of the term VCO still eludes us. Did one ever exist or was the term VCO brought into informal use following the introduction of the King's Commissioned Indian Officer and Indian Commissioned Officer? Over time did this conversational use come to be accepted as the collective term used to describe subedars and jemadars? Does any member know of a published authority for the term? Answers, please, to the Editor.

from Indore Cadet School. The designation was subsequently adopted for those who passed through the RMC Sandhurst. These officers were officially treated on a par with their British counterparts. Subsequent creation of the IMA led to the introduction of a new class known to officialdom as the Indian Commissioned Officer or ICO.

The Thapa family of Almora

Sushil Talwar

Subedar-Major Bhim Sing Thapa, IOM 2nd Bn 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles

MC [Military Cross]: *LG* [*London Gazette*] 13 May 1918, p.5696, for Egypt, *GI* [*Gazette of India*] 1178 of 3 Jun 1918.¹

IOM [Indian Order of Merit]: *GI* 9 Jul 1915, Not. 646, for France (Neuve Chapelle).

MiD [mentioned in despatches]: *LG* 18 Jun 1915, p.6013, for France; *LG* 22 Sep 1916, for France; *LG* 15 Jan 1918, p.938, for Egypt; *LG* 21 Jan 1919, for Egypt.

Order of the White Eagle 5th Class with Swords (Serbia): *LG* 15 Feb 1917, p.1607, and *GI* 534 of 13 Apr 1917.

Date of birth: 23 Mar 1880

Enrolled 1 Jun 1896; Jemadar 1 Jun 1914; Subedar 24 Nov 1914; Subr-Major 26 Sep 1915; 2-Lieut. 7 Oct 1919 (*LG* 23 Jan 1920, p.1066); Lieut. 7 Oct 1920.

Indian Army List [IAL] Oct 1914: Jemadar 1st Bn 3rd QAO Gurkha Rifles

IAL Jan 1915: Jemadar 1st Bn 3rd QAO Gurkha Rifles, att'd 2nd Bn 8th G.R.

IAL Jul 1917: Subedar-Major, 1st Bn 3rd QAO Gurkha Rifles

IAL Jan 1919: Subedar-Major, 1st Bn 3rd QAO Gurkha Rifles

IAL Apr 1921: Lieutenant, Unattached List IA, att'd 2nd Bn 3rd QAO G.R.

IAL Jul 1922: Lieutenant, 2nd Bn 3rd G.R., on leave in India to 1 Sept 1922

IAL Oct 1926: not listed

ISF Jul 1929: Commandant, 1st Jaipur Infantry, Indian States Forces

IAL Annual 1931 (Honours & Awards): Hon. Captain, MC, IOM, (retd.)

War Services per IAL Jan 1924

N-W Frontier of India, Waziristan 1901-02, medal with three clasps. The War of 1914-21. Operations in France and Belgium 13 Oct 1914 to 10 Nov 1915. Operations with Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 17 Nov 1915 to 20 May 1918. Wounded. Despatches, *LG.*, 18 Jun 1915, 22 Sep 1916, 15 Jan 1918 and 21 Jan 1919. IOM, MC. Serbian Order of White Eagle, 5th Class with Swords.

War services per Bhim Sing Thapa's personal 'Certificate of Service'

France from 12 Oct 1914 to 10 Nov 1915 including: Festubert 23 Nov 1914 and 20 Dec 1914, Neuve Chapelle 10-15 Mar 1915, Rue de Bois 9-16 May 1915, Loos: 25-30 Sept 1915; Sinai 11 Nov 1915 - 6 Jun 1916; Palestine 7 Jun 1917 to 9 Apr 1918 including Brown Hill 12 Nov 1917¹ El Mesmiyah 13 Nov 1917, The Pass

¹ The MC index gives the *LG* page incorrectly as 5695. The decoration was forwarded to the India Office on 6 Dec 1920.

19-20 Nov 1917, El Jib 23 Nov 1917, Budrus [-] Dec 1917, Kibbiah [-] Dec 1917, Abud 7 Mar 1918, Wadi Ballut 12 Mar 1918, El Kefir 9 Apr 1918, wounded. [Some dates differ from those in the Army List]

MC citation (London Gazette):

For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He led his platoon in an attack through intense machine gun and rifle fire. After the capture of the enemy's position seeing that a gap had occurred between the right of the battalion and the next unit, he filled the gap on his own initiative. He took command of that portion of the line, the British officer having been killed, and consolidated the position under very heavy shell and machine gun fire. He set a magnificent example of courage and determination.

MC citation (Gazette of India):

Subedar Major Bhim Singh Thapa I.O.M. 3rd QAO Gurkha Rifles. Conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on the 12th November 1917. During an attack he led his platoon with great skill and gallantry through intense machine gun and rifle fire. After the capture of the position, seeing that a gap had occurred between that right of the Battalion and the next Unit, he, on his own initiative filled up the gap and assuming command of that portion of the line (The British Officer having been killed) consolidated his position under heavy shall and Machine gun fire.

IOM citation: For gallantry whilst serving with the Indian Army Corps in France.²

Indian Corps in France, by Lieut.-Col. J.W.B. Merewether and The Rt. Hon. Sir Frederick Smith, page 226:

Subedar Bhim Sing Thapa performed repeated acts of pluck, especially distinguishing himself by his coolness in leading his men.

In March 1925, Lieut. Bhim Sing Thapa, MC, IOM, retired from the Army to take up a new appointment as Commandant of Infantry, Jaipur Indian State Forces. He had joined the 3rd Gurkhas in 1896 and saw service with the 1st Battalion in Waziristan in 1901 and with the 2nd Battalion in France, Sinai, and Palestine, where he was severely wounded. He became Subedar-Major, was four times mentioned in despatches, and won the MC and IOM. In addition, he was awarded a King's Commission and a Jagir. Lieut. Bhim Sing's father and grandfather were Subedars in the 1/3rd and the fourth generation, Lieut. Bhim Sing's son (Mahiman Thapa) followed him as a Jemadar in the 2nd Battalion.³

Bhim Sing Thapa's family has an interesting history. In 1814, his grandfather Jai Singh Thapa was a Subedar in the Nepal army. When the war broke out between the British forces and Nepal he fought against the British forces in Lohaghat and Almora, United Provinces. On 26th April 1815, the British columns under command of Colonels Gardner (of Gardner's Horse, now 2nd Lancers) and Nicholls defeated the Nepal army, after which Jai Singh and

² The date of gallant deed for which the IOM was awarded was 10-12 March 1915.

³ *The Regimental History of the 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles, from April 1815 to 1927*, Major-General N.G. Woodyatt CB CIE, page 299

his troops surrendered. Shortly afterwards the valour shown by Jai Singh and his troops in battle was recognised. In August 1815, a battalion designated The Kumaon Battalion (later 3rd QAO Gurkha Rifles, now 3rd Gorkha Rifles) was raised at Hawalbagh, of which Jai Singh and some of his troops formed the nucleus. Hawalbagh is situated eleven kilometres from Almora, on the banks of the Kosi River and now houses the Govind Ballabh Pant Research Station for Hill Agriculture. Jai Singh, who was granted a direct commission as Subedar in the British Indian army, retired in 1850 and was awarded a pension of Rs 40/- per month. He settled at Dehra Dun and died there. In 1855, his son Jivan Singh Thapa enrolled in the 3rd Gurkha Rifles and served up to 1890, having seen field service in Afghanistan 1878-80 and Burma 1885-87. Upon retirement, he settled at Kirigaon, a hamlet adjacent to Ancholi village near Pithoragarh en route to the Thalkedar Firing Ranges. It is believed that he settled there because of its proximity to the outposts occupied by his Battalion at Lohaghat and Pithoragarh between 1839 and 1890.

Bhim Sing Thapa was born in Kirigaon and educated in the Battalion school of 3rd Gurkha Rifles. In 1896, Bhim Sing followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, and enrolled in 3rd Gurkha Rifles, with whom he was first blooded in Waziristan in 1901-02. Promoted Jemadar on 1st June 1914, he proceeded with the draft sent by the 1st Bn 3rd Gurkha Rifles to the regiment's 2nd Battalion in France.

During the Great War Bhim Sing served in France, Egypt and Palestine (see services above), and at El Kefr he was wounded in the thigh by a machinegun burst from a retreating German whom he then shot dead. He became the Subedar-Major of the Battalion and fought in all engagements in which it was assigned. The end of the Great War saw him bestowed with an unusually high number of awards. He was four times mentioned in despatches, and received the Indian Order of Merit 2nd Class, the Military Cross, and the Serbian Order of the White Eagle. On 7th October 1919, for his distinguished services in the field, he was granted a King's Commission and was additionally awarded a Jagir. This was the first occasion when Indians were granted King's Commission, and on the occasion Bhim Sing was one of the only nine Indians bestowed with this honour. It is possibly a record that a soldier received nine honours and awards for WWI. He was the Quartermaster of his Battalion when he retired from the army on 17th March 1925 and settled at Almora. The British officers of his Battalion made a special request to the Army H.Q. to allow Bhim Sing to continue service with the Battalion for as long as he desired; the request was granted, however, on 18th March 1925, Bhim Sing was appointed Commandant of 1st Jaipur Infantry, Indian State Forces. When first raised, on 1st December 1923, the regiment was only one Company in strength, and under Bhim Sing's command it was gradually brought up to establishment strength. At

the end of 1936, as an Indian State Forces Lieutenant-Colonel, Bhim Sing Thapa retired and handed over command to Lieutenant-Colonel R.D.T. French, M.C., I.A. (retd.). The Jaipur Durbar sanctioned a special pension for him; he thus drew two pensions, one from the Government of India, the other from Jaipur.

Bhim Sing had four sons, all of whom served in the army. The oldest, Mahiman Sing Thapa, later Subedar-Major and Honorary Captain, *Sardar Bahadur*, O.B.I., served with 2nd Bn 3rd Gurkha Rifles for eighteen years. He enrolled directly as a Jemadar on 9th June 1923, and was promoted Subedar on 5th December 1928. On 5th March 1941, he was promoted Subedar-Major and transferred to the newly formed 4th Battalion which was raised on the same day. He remained with the 4th Battalion for the rest of his service with the Regiment. In January 1945, Mahiman Sing was appointed to the Order of British India 2nd Class. The exact dates of his promotion to the Order's 1st Class, and the grant of his commission as Honorary Captain, are not available. After leaving the Battalion in January 1947, he was appointed Indian A.D.C. to Lieutenant-General D.D. Gracey, G.O.C.-in-C. Western Command, (later C.-in-C. Pakistan Army). A few months later in 1947, at a rather young age, Mahiman Sing died while still in service. Had he lived, with his superior education and war service he would certainly have attained a high rank in the army of independent India. There is a splendid photograph of him in the regimental history.⁴

⁴ *Regimental History of QAO 3rd Gurkha Rifles Vol. II (1927-1947)*, Brigadier C.N. Barclay, p.225



LIEUT.-COLONEL BHIM SINGH THAPA, 1ST BN JAIPUR INFANTRY I.S.F. (CENTRE)

Puran Sing Thapa was Bhim Singh's second son, who, after finishing his education at the Allahabad University, joined the 2nd Course at the Indian Military Academy (I.M.A.) where he was awarded a Blue in hockey and commissioned into the 1st Jaipur Infantry, Indian States Forces. During World War II, he served with his Battalion in Italy as a part of 8th Indian Division (a.k.a. The River Crossing Division) where Puran Sing's company was the first to cross the River Po. In 1945, for his gallant services, he was awarded the Military Cross. After independence, he was a part of the Indian Military Training Team, Nepal. He retired in 1957 and settled at Dehra Dun. Puran Sing had two sons, both of whom studied at Rashtriya Indian Military College (the erstwhile Prince of Wales's Own Royal Indian Military College, Dehra Dun) and served in the army. In addition, one of his granddaughters served with the Army Education Corps and one grandson is presently a serving officer in the army.

Bhim Sing's third son, Padam Sing Thapa, a law graduate from Agra College, received an emergency commission in 4th Bn 5th Mahratta Light Infantry in 1942.

He saw action in Assam, Burma, Malaya, and Java; was mentioned in despatches in 1943 and wounded at Shangshak on 26th March 1944. On 8 Jul. 1944, Padam Sing was instrumental in capturing a strongly held Japanese position on the heights at Khunbi-Naga, which dominated the Palel airfield, a feat for which he was awarded an immediate Military Cross. After independence, he commanded 3rd Bn 5th Gorkha Rifles (F.F.), and in 1949, during his command, Padam Sing led his Battalion Group in one of the five columns during Operation Polo for the liberation of Hyderabad. He later commanded the 1st Battalion, and thereafter the 58th Gorkha Training Centre, retiring in 1960. After retirement, he joined the Central Reserve Police Force (C.R.P.F.), a paramilitary force, as a Commandant and rose to the rank of Deputy Inspector General, finally retiring in 1971. Padam Sing's elder son, educated at St. Xavier's School, Jaipur, joined the National Defence Academy, but later opted for the Indian Police Service from where he retired in the rank of Additional Director General of Police, Tamil Nadu cadre.

Hariome Singh Thapa was Bhim Singh's youngest son. Hariome was studying at the Allahabad University, when he joined the I.M.A. and received a commission in 4th Bn 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles on 27th January 1943. He saw field service during the Arakan campaigns until March 1945. Later that year, he was transferred to the 2nd Bn 17th Dogra Regiment and took part in their campaigns on the North-West Frontier until independence in 1947. After independence, he was transferred to 2nd Bn 3rd Gurkha Rifles which he commanded from 1961 to 1964, a posting that fulfilled his ambition to serve and command the Battalion with whom his family had an unbroken record of service since 1815. He subsequently did a stint with the U.N. missions in Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. Hariome retired in 1973, later took re-employment with the army, and finally retired in 1978, settling at Almora. His son, Jayant Thapa, who was educated at Sherwood College, Naini Tal, joined the IMA and received a commission in 2nd Bn 3rd Gorkha Rifles, through a parental claim to the Battalion as a fifth generation officer. In 1978, Jayant was awarded the Shaurya Chakra for gallantry. In later years of service, he received two Commendation Cards. He has since retired and lives in Almora.

This Thapa family of Almora holds a unique distinction, where a father and two of his sons were all recipients of the Military Cross. Furthermore, Puran and Padam Sing are the only Indian brothers to have received the Military Cross.

War Substantive Captain & Temporary Major Puran Singh Thapa, 1st Battalion, Jaipur Infantry, Indian States Forces

MC: *LG* 13 Dec 1945, p.45/6076, for Italy, *GI* 57-H of 28 Apr 1946

Date of birth: 1 Nov 1909

Commissioned: 1 Sep 1932, Jaipur Infantry, I.S.F.

2nd Lieutenant: 1 Jan 1942, Emergency Commission, Indian Land Forces

Service nbr.: IEC-9246

War Substantive Lieutenant: 9 Feb 1943

Lieut.-Col: 1 Apr 1951 (substantive 2 Jul 1951) - Regular Commission, I.A.

Service no. IC-5638 (new number allocated)

At independence in 1947, Jaipur State remained with India. During 1949, Major Puran Singh Thapa commanded a battalion of the Kutch State Forces. During this year, the Government of India had taken over all military forces of the erstwhile princely states. On 1st April 1951, selected elements of the States Forces were amalgamated with the Indian Army, and the balance, including the 1st Bn Jaipur Infantry, were disbanded. At this stage in his career, Puran Singh Thapa transferred to The Rajputana Rifles, Indian Army, with a Permanent Regular Commission as Lieutenant-Colonel (adjusted retrospectively to 20th September 1950). He was transferred to the Regular Reserve of Officers on 1st November 1957.

IAL Jun 1956: Lieut.-Colonel, MC, Rajputana Rifles, Acting Adjutant & Quartermaster-General, J&K State Forces, HQ of a Corps

IAL June 1957: Lieut.-Colonel, MC, The Rajputana Rifles, commanding Boys Battalion (N.)

IAL Annual 1960: Lieut.-Colonel, MC, Regular Reserve Officer (Class 'X')

IAL Annual/1961: Lieut.-Colonel, MC, Regular Reserve Officer (Class 'X')

MC Citation: 21st May 1945

(Periodical Award, precise period not cited)

21st Infantry Brigade, 8th Indian Division, 5th Corps

1st Bn Jaipur Infantry, Indian States Forces

IEC-9346 WS/Captain (T/Major) Puran Singh Thapa
village - Narsingh Bari; district - Almora (U.P.)

Map references: Italy 1:25,000, sheet 88-II NE; and Italy 1:50,000 sheet 76-I

Prior to the attack over the River Senio, T/Major Puran Singh Thapa, commanding 'C' Company, was holding a position east of the River.

On night 5/6 Apr 1945, at 04.30 hrs, a party of twenty enemy carried out a determined raid on a house at 359397 with the intention of destroying the house and capturing a prisoner. T/Major Puran Singh Thapa, on receipt of information from a listening post that an attack was about to take place, personally went to the house and ordered his men to withhold their fire until the enemy was within fifteen yards.

The ruse was successful, the commander of the enemy raiding party and two enemy were killed, four were wounded and the remainder retreated in disorder. During the raid, T/Major Puran Singh Thapa visited each section in turn, in spite of intense Spandau and grenade fire.

On the morning of 20 Apr 1945, during the final stage of the advance from the west of

Ferrara to the banks of the River Po, 'C' Company's advance was held up by heavy and accurate Spandau fire from the western bank of the canal at 106907. T/Major Puran Singh Thapa was ordered to eliminate the enemy position, at all costs, in order to maintain the momentum of the day of the advance. He successfully fulfilled the task by personally leading one of his Platoons against accurate and heavy Spandau fire.

On the night 24 Apr 1945, T/Major Puran Singh Thapa was ordered personally recce a crossing at 102882 and attack across the canal to eliminate all enemy Spandau posts on the east bank. The recce was successfully accomplished under accurate and heavy Spandau fire, and the canal successfully crossed. By 08.30 hrs, the Company was firmly established on the south banks of the River Po, having killed many enemy and captured forty POWs.

T/Major Puran Singh Thapa's personal example of indifference to danger on these three occasions under heavy fire was an inspiration to his men.

The Grenadiers, A Tradition of Valour, A Historical Record Of The Grenadiers, by Colonel R.D. Palsokar, MC, p.280

7th Grenadiers: The Government of India assumed overall control over the Indian State Forces from 1st April 1950 [sic], after entering into agreements with the various heads of the former princely states. The terms and conditions of service of the State Forces, as also the standard of training and organisation, differed widely from one unit to another. Consequently, such State Force units were merged together as had some semblance in matters of organisation and equipment. It was against this background that the State Forces units of Kutch, Baria, Rajpipla, Lunavada, and Idar's Sir Pratap Infantry were merged on 1st April 1949 at Bhuj (Kutch) into a battalion, which was called Kutch State Force (K.S.F.) unit. The selection of the men was done through a regimental board, which was set up in May 1949. Of the 420 men who volunteered, 110 were selected for absorption in the Kutch State Force Battalion. The raising was completed on 1st September 1949. Lieutenant-Colonel A.M. Kadkol took over command of the Battalion in September 1949 from Lieutenant-Colonel Puran Singh Thapa, MC.

War Substantive Lieut. & Acting Captain Padamsing Thapa, a.k.a. Padam Singh Thapa and Pudlo Thapa, 4th Bn 5th Mahratta Light Infantry

MC: LG 16 Nov 1944, page 44/5257, for Burma

Commissioned: 20 Sep 1936

Service nbr.: IEC-20

Service nbr. post 1947: IC-1990

IAL Sep 1951: Captain & Actg Lieut.-Colonel, MC, 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force), Comdr 1st Battalion.

IAL Dec 1954: Captain, MC, 3rd Gorkha Rifles, commanding a battalion.

IAL Jun 1957: Major & Actg Lieut.-Colonel, MC, 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force), Commandant

IAL Annual 1960: not listed

MC Citation: 8th July 1944

49th Indian Infantry Brigade. 23rd Indian Division. 33rd Indian Corps.

4th Bn 5th Mahratta Light Infantry.

IEC-20 WS/Lieutenant (T/Captain) Padamsing Thapa.

class - Hindu (Gurkha); village - Narsingh Bari; district - Almora, U.P.

During an attack on Palel on 8 Jul 1944, Captain Padamsing Thapa was in charge of the Company detailed to press home the attack. He carried out a night approach over a most difficult country and reached the assembly position, some 400 yards below his objective, at the appointed time. At the time due for him to attack, owing to weather conditions, he was unable to obtain any help from the artillery, which was to have supported him. The enemy was building a number of terraces, at the sites of Naga houses burnt down by our own bombing. The sides of these terraces were exceedingly steep, while any path was covered by LMG's. From these positions, the enemy brought heavy fire to bear on the advancing troops and showered down grenades.

Our own troops were unable to employ grenades in reply as, owing to the nature of the ground, these rolled back down the hill.

Captain Padamsing Thapa personally went forward, under heavy fire from LMG's and grenades, to his forward sections so as to get a true picture of the situation, and, realising that to advance directly at the objective would result in heavy casualties, he collected all the 2" mortars and rifle grenadiers. Captain Padamsing Thapa then accompanied his two forward platoons on to the objective in the final assault, which carried the position at the point of the bayonet.

It was in great measure due to this officer's personal example of indifference to danger, his high standard of leadership, and the manner in which he encouraged his men, that the enemy position was successfully taken.

Valour Enshrined, A History of the Maratha Light Infantry 1768-1947, Lieutenant-Colonel M.G. Abhyankar

Page 442:

4th Battalion: More officers and men came in during the first week of April. Major Thapa and Lieutenants Ghayal, Pyara Lal and Verma rejoined at this time. Two men of 'C' Company who had also escaped from Japanese custody reported that Subedar Sadu Jagdale and Jemadar Shankar Dhumal were prisoners. Major Thapa's wound having gone septic, he was evacuated to Shillong. Lieutenant Khurray was the only officer who remained untraced. He was reported to have been wounded and was missing, believed killed. Subedar Sadu Jagdale, second-in-command of 'C' Company, was probably the last to arrive, having escaped from Japanese custody. The Battalion was now more or less complete. Earlier it was feared that the bulk of the unit had been lost.

Page 461:

On 7th July, the Battalion was ordered to drive the Japanese out of Khunbi village, located on the ridge north of the Mahratta positions. It was a difficult task as the enemy was secure in the hill top positions and the climb up hill was so steep that the grenades

thrown by our men rolled down on them again. No air or artillery support was available and the objective was shrouded by mist and rain. The task was assigned to Major Pudlo [sic] Thapa's 'C' Company. Major Thapa massed his two-inch mortars and LMGs on a flank. Under the cover of their fire directed by his Company havildar-major, Major Thapa led his Company in an assault with Tommy-guns and bayonets, driving away the Japanese from their entrenched positions. Twenty-three Japanese dead bodies including those of two officers were counted in the field. A very fine Japanese sword was also captured on the spot. It now adorns the Officer's Mess as a war trophy. Speaking of this attack, the official history of the 23rd Division says, 'This was just another small company battle, it may seem. However, that was so often the case in the Burma campaign. One of the main reasons why the Japanese lost the battle for India is that infantry – both British and India – proved better than the enemy in skill and courage in these countless small engagements, where the hazards of war were no less present than in fighting on a large scale.' For their spirited leadership and gallant conduct during this action, Major P.S. Thapa and Subedar Sadu Jagdale were awarded the Military Cross.

First Five Gurkha Rifles (FF), An Illustrated History, by Major-General Ian Cardozo, A.V.S.M., S.M.

Pages 96-97

Prelude to Independence

The first officer to report to the unit, however, was Major Padam Singh Thapa, MC, who took over as 2-i-c and Quartermaster. A physical check of all arms and ammunition was essential and Major Thapa, working overtime, successfully carried this out.

Pages 122-123

Jammu & Kashmir 1947-48

After the capture of Kargil, General Thimayya was persuaded to let the CO continue in command. Finally, around the second week of March when the CO was at Baltal, he was ordered to move to Delhi without any further delay and was ordered by General Thimayya to catch the next plane to Delhi from Jammu. The CO could not go back to Kargil and arrived at Delhi in warm clothing and Gilgit boots and looked quite a sight in the dress in the corridors of south block. Colonel Pathania was relieved by Lieutenant Colonel PS Thapa, MC who flew to Leh and travelled to Kargil with Second Lieutenant GS Rawat who had accompanied Brigadier Atal to Leh.

The above article is an abbreviated extract from Sushil Talwar's forthcoming book recording all awards of the Military Cross granted to Indian, Nepalese and Eurasian personnel of the Indian Army and Burma Army from 1915 to 1947. It is evident that the final publication will provide a great deal of information on recipients of the Military Cross and their gallant deeds. The group photograph of the 1st Jaipur Infantry I.S.F. was kindly provided by Tony McClenaghan, and is taken from the Indian State Forces Annual for 1937.

BOOK REVIEW

Barry Renfrew, Margaret Renfrew, Bill Cranston, *British Colonial Badges – Military Insignia of the Land Forces of the Colonies, Protectorates and Dependencies*; Terrier Press, Amersham, 2011; 239 pages, case-bound, ISBN 978-0-9563175-1-3; Terrier Press, 15 Hollow Way Lane, Amersham, Bucks HP6 6JP, U.K. terrier.press@btinternet.com £45, international £50. Both prices include postage and packaging.

This is a well researched and beautifully produced book that covers the many badges and insignia of the land forces of the British colonies, mandates and protectorates. Given the number of books already dealing with India, this book deliberately avoids the sub-continent as well as the Dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Canada and, on the face of it, that might limit its interest to members of the Society. But dig deeper into the book and there are a number of references that contain something of an Indian interest. Beyond that there is a wealth of information and many outstanding photographs, that cover from the well known to the lesser known units of the former Empire.

The book is divided into seven chapters: The West Indies, Americas and South Atlantic; Africa; Asia; The Indian Ocean; The South Pacific; The Middle East; The Mediterranean. Some of the chapters start with a description of the early years of British involvement before describing briefly the history of the various regiments by territory or region. This is then followed by individual photographs of an extremely high standard, well spaced out and each numbered, linking to an index that appears at the end of each chapter. Interspersed among the badges are photographs of some of the units or soldiers.

For those solely interested in the sub-continent there is, for example, within the Africa chapter reference to the twenty Indians from Madras who formed a small but short-lived engineering unit of the Royal West Africa Frontier Force. For the first two years of The Central Africa Rifles (later to become 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles) the troops were drawn solely from volunteers from the Indian Army. The Uganda Rifles (later 4th (Uganda) Battalion, The King's African Rifles) mutinied in 1897 sparking a two year war that was ended by Indian Army troops. The regiment was rebuilt with a core of Sikh troops and 5th (Uganda) Battalion, The King's African Rifles, was later formed from this 1st Battalion (Sikh) Uganda Rifles.

As we reflected in reviewing Barry's book *Forgotten Regiments – Regular and Volunteer Units of the British Far East* in 2009 (*Durbar*, Vol. 27, No.1, Spring 2010), many Indians were recruited to fill positions in Far East units, either directly from India or from those domiciled in the countries throughout

the Far East. In this book we see the badge, button, shoulder title and belt plate of 1st Perak Sikhs, later to become The Malay States Guides with a further thirteen of that unit's badges illustrated. The Hong Kong Regiment is shown, as is the badge of the RIASC worn by the Hong Kong Mule Corps. Thirteen pages of badge photographs cover Burma, both pre and post the 1937 split with India. Chapter 4, The Indian Ocean, deals with Ceylon and Mauritius with material that will surely be of interest to some members while Chapter 6, The Middle East, contains some Indian interest with reference to the Aden Troop, raised in the late 1850s and which came under the control of the Indian Army.

This book will primarily be of interest to badge collectors and in that regard must become an invaluable addition to the library, but there is also something for everyone with a passing interest in the history of the military units of the former British Colonial period. Highly recommended. (Tony McClenaghan)

CORRESPONDENCE

Alan Simcock, Machine Gun Corps History Project, has written... asking whether any IMHS members can confirm the total number, and titles, of MG Corps companies formed within the Auxiliary Force (India) in 1920. Thirteen have been positively identified in an article in the *JSAHR* (Vol.LXI, No.247, Autumn 1983), and they are also listed in Chris Kempton's compendium *Register of Titles of the HEIC and Indian Armies 1666-1947*:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| No. 1 (Coorg & Mysore) Coy MGC | No. 2 (Karachi) Coy MGC |
| No. 3 (Ahmadabad) Coy MGC | No. 4 (Delhi) Coy MGC |
| No. 5 (Agra) Coy MGC | No. 6 (Bareilly) Coy MGC |
| No. 7 (Lucknow) Coy MGC | No. 8 (Bombay) Coy MGC |
| No. 9 (Cossipore) Coy MGC | No. 10 (Cossipore) Coy MGC |
| No. 11 (Allahabad) Coy MGC | No. 12 (Cawnpore) Coy MGC |
| No. 13 (Yercaud) Coy MGC | |

The 'No. 59 Light Motor Coy MG Corps, AFI,' recorded in the April 1921 IA List, does not augment the tally, as it was the short-lived preliminary title of 'No. 3 (Ahmadabad Coy) MGC.' Furthermore, the AFI's MGC companies have no evident link to the MG detachments that, prior to 1920, formed part of the establishment of a number of AFI units (see following correspondence).

Chris Kempton has written... suggesting that the 'Unidentified MG Group in India' (*Durbar*, Summer 2011, p.91) might be volunteers. Prior to 1920 and the formation of the AFI companies of the MG Corps, twenty-five of the

IDF/AFI units included MG detachments – twelve with only one detachment and thirteen with two. This could account for the different uniforms and dearth of WW1 medal ribbons. Furthermore, some of the ORs have the look of volunteers rather than regular ‘squaddies.’ Possibly the officer at the centre and the WOII are the regular adjutant, with an attached senior instructor plus one sergeant-instructor MG, leaving two detachments each of one subaltern, two NCOs and ten privates with two guns. The one surplus private could possibly be the clerk. The jemadar is difficult to explain. He might be visiting from the Indian Depot of the MGC Training Centre at Mhow. It would have been somewhat avant-garde for an Indian officer to be training European personnel, and the MGC establishment in India would presumably have been able to supply a qualified British instructor. So, for the time being, his presence remains an enigma.

Brigadier John Randle has written... ‘I was very interested in the reference to Colonel ‘Boomer’ Barrett, D.S.O., in the article on the 49th Bengal in the Summer 2011 issue of *Durbar*, as he played a very important part in my life. He was certainly a legendary Baluchi in India. After retiring from the Indian Army in 1924, he stayed on for some years as the Secretary of the Quetta Club, before finally settling in Hertfordshire where he became a friend of my father. It was his stories of India and the Baluchis that inspired my wish to join the Indian Army and, when, early in WW2 I did so, he was able to use his influence with a Baluchi Colonel at GHQ India to get me into the Regiment. He was still going strong in the ’50s and certainly gave me an excellent lunch at his London Club, the ‘In and Out’ in Piccadilly, the day after he had attended the still annual ‘Boxer’ Dinner in London. Stories of him are legion and legendary - many of them probably apocryphal. One, which I believe to be true, concerns the beard which he always had when I knew him. Apparently he had suffered a bullet wound to his chin during some Frontier skirmish, which was very disfiguring, and he had therefore obtained permission to grow a beard. As I understand it, beards and extensive side-whiskers were permitted in the Indian Army in Victorian days but by Edwardian times, officers’ facial hair was limited to a moustache. On some military occasion in the early 1900s, Edward VII observed the bearded Boomer and announced that he would not tolerate bearded officers in his Army. Whereupon Boomer went straight off, shaved off his beard and reappeared. The King was so appalled at the sight of the disfigured jaw that he immediately granted Boomer the right to regrow his beard. One minor point: Boomer does not feature in the photograph on page 94.’
