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### THE LIFE OF AN INDIAN ARMY OFFICER – A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

Major General Chand. N. Das

#### MY FIRST YEAR OF SERVICE WITH A BRITISH REGIMENT IN INDIA (1933)

A Commission in the Indian Army has always been considered a great honour. I was lucky to be selected for training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Life at Sandhurst was very hard, particularly the first nine weeks on the "Square" when the cadets were put through physical training, drill and equitation in the mornings, and classes on military subjects in the afternoons. Discipline was strict and no slackness was accepted.

After passing out of the College, in 1933, I was posted to the Unattached List Indian Army (ULIA) and attached to the 2nd Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers, stationed at Ferozepur. On my return to India I had written to the Adjutant of the Battalion informing him of the date and time of my arrival by train. I was received at the railway station by a non-commissioned officer of the Regiment, in the early hours of a cold November morning. There was an animal transport (A.T.) cart for the baggage. I had several items of kit which included the regulation steel trunk, large enough for the uniforms and long enough to keep a sword, a hat box - so essential in those days to carry several items of headdress, camp kit (which included a camp bed, camp chair, camp table, a canvas wash basin with stand and canvas bucket, a canvas bath, a couple of ground sheets, a petromax and lantern), a couple of suitcases, an attaché case, a box containing crockery etc., for morning and afternoon tea, and an inevitably massive bed roll which contained everything that would not fit into any of the boxes. The kit was carried in the AT cart and we took a horse carriage (tonga) to the Single Officers' Quarters. To begin with even the pony did not seem keen to start the day so early in the morning but the tonga driver managed to coax him to move. We went along the Mall to the other end of the road where the newly constructed quarters came into sight through the morning mist. The quarters, each with two rooms, an attached bathroom and a small baggage room, were clean and tidy with essential furniture. A wood/coal burning tin water boiler known as a "human" had already been arranged.

There was also a bearer with a chit from the Quartermaster recommending him for employment. Obviously someone had seen to all the essential requirements. One did not employ a servant without reference to chits or certificates from his previous employers.

#### INTRODUCTION TO THE REGIMENT

After the formalities of reporting to the Adjutant's Office I was interviewed by the Commanding Officer, Lt Col Slingsby, a big, fierce looking man - at least, so he seemed - but he put me at ease straightaway and spoke very gently. He stressed hard work and asked me always to be punctual and to stay out of debt. Lastly he mentioned that should I get into any trouble I was to bring it to his notice at once. I was posted to 'C' Company, commanded by Captain Lutyens - a relation of the great Edwin Lutyens who had built New Delhi.

Captain Lutyens introduced me to the other Company officers, Company Sergeant Major Hawkins and the other senior non-commissioned officers of the Company. Each had a long chat with me, telling me something about himself and trying to find out something about me. I was the proud commander of a platoon with some thirty Fusiliers who took their time sizing me up before accepting me. All of them were very pleasant and they, in the course of time, helped me in learning my duties and the daily routine which, in those days, consisted mainly of physical training, with road walks and runs or games as variations. There was a lot of drill and weapon training, which included 45 revolver, rifle, bayonet, light machine gun (Lewis gun in those days) and grenade. The main emphasis was on checking faults and attaining a high standard of professional efficiency. After the morning parades a couple of hours were spent in the Company office studying training programmes and aides for the next day's training, as well as Regulation manuals. There was also discussion regarding training methods with other Company officers and, of course, attending to Company orderly room ritual - "hat and belt off, quick march, halt"; charge read out by the Company Commander and the evidence usually given by a non-commissioned officer, punishment awarded and "march out" by the Company Commander; "about turn, quick march, halt and fall out"; all that almost in one breath! In the process I learnt a lot about King's Regulations. After lunch one usually rested until games.

The British troops' barracks were spacious and had most of the amenities, including electric lights and fans. The fans were a peculiar contraption with long fringes attached to wooden poles which were moved to and fro by a machine located at the end of the barrack room. Kit had to be laid out exactly according to orders and there were rigid rules and a lot of 'spit and polish'. There were 'fatigues' and other punishments for those who did not keep up to the required standard. I was, however, astonished at one particular characteristic of the British troops - in any work or fatigue duty they all mucked in together and shared the pleasure of grousing and even cursing, and then subconsciously felt it was a good life.

The British troops had Indian servants to do most of their work, like cleaning barracks, bathrooms, equipment and boots. They could even get a barber (nappy) with his portable kit who came and shaved them whilst they lay in bed, often before Reveille!

#### SENIOR SUBALTERN

After joining the Regiment I was advised by my colleagues to seek an 'interview' with the Senior Subaltern, Lieutenant Woods, a strict disciplinarian with 17 years' service to his credit.

He first told me that the name Fusilier came from an improved type of musket which was used only by special units and officers, and which was known by its French name - the Fusil or fusee. He then gave me a brief history of the Regiment, saying that it was among the six British regiments which fought at Minden in 1759 (later on I had to look up the Regimental history to find out where Minden was) and that it was at that time known as Kingsley Regiment. In this famous battle the order to the British infantry to "Advance at the sound of the drum" was mistakenly given as "Advance by sound of drum". Accordingly, with Colours flying and drums beating the British advanced without waiting for support and won one of the greatest victories in history. He explained the significance of the Regiment's cap badge which contained a laurel wreath in memory of the part played at Minden, and was worn with a primrose hackle behind it.

He also narrated to me General Wolfe's order issued in 1755 when he commanded the Regiment. It showed the treatment which was to be expected by any man who might misbehave in the presence of the enemy:

"A soldier that quits his rank to lag is to be instantly put to death by the officer that commands that platoon or by the officer or sergeant in rear of that platoon; a soldier does not deserve to live who won't fight for his King and country".

In 1782 the Regiment was designated the Twentieth, or East Devonshire Regiment - hence the "XX" in their crest. But recruiting in Devonshire was a failure and before 1800 the Regiment marched north and at Preston began the long association with Lancashire. The Lancashire Fusiliers guarded the exiled Napoleon Bonaparte at St Helena and 12 grenadiers of the Regiment carried his coffin to the grave. In World War I the Lancashire Fusiliers won seventeen Victoria Crosses (18 counting one given to an attached Irish Guards officer), the largest number accorded to any regiment in that war. The storming of the beaches at Gallipoli by the 1st Battalion on 25th April 1915, gallantly led by the officers, was the heroic day for the Lancashire Fusiliers when they won six Victoria Crosses before breakfast.

After the brief history of the Regiment the Senior Subaltern impressed upon me the "authority" he enjoyed over junior officers. He also gave me some sound advice on how to remain out of trouble, and on various aspects of service etiquette, all of which were a great help to me in my army life.

He asked me to visit the Saragarhi Memorial at the other end of the Mall. It is a memorial to one of the most heroic actions of the Indian Army in which 21 men of the 36th Sikh Regiment (now 4th Sikh) had, in 1897, put, up a most gallant resistance in which all of them died fighting - "last man, last round".

On my visit to the Memorial I found the following inscription engraved on the tablets of the building in English, Urdu, Gurumukhi and Hindi:

"The monument is erected to the Memory of the 36th Sikh Regiment of the Punjab Infantry, who fell in the heroic defence of Fort Saragarhi on September 12th, 1897, and, in the gallant sortie from Fort Gulistan on September 13th, 1897, a spontaneous testimony. The result of voluntary subscriptions collected through Pioneer News Paper, Allahabad, from the Anglo-Indian and Indian public to undying glory which these ever memorable feats of arms brought to the soldiers of the Khalsa and the army of British Empire".

No.165 Havildar Ishar Singh  
No.332 Naik Lal Singh  
No.546 L. Naik Chandar Singh  
No.1321 Sepoy Sudh Singh  
No.182 Sepoy Sahib Singh  
No.492 Sepoy Uttam Singh  
No.834 Sepoy Narain Singh  
No.814 Sepoy Germukh Singh  
No.871 Sepoy Jiwan Singh  
No.278 Sepoy Ram Singh  
No.358 Sepoy Hira Singh

No.687 Sepoy Dayan Singh  
No,791 Sepoy Bhola Singh  
No.760 Sepoy Jiwan Singh  
No.1733 Sepoy Gurmukh Singh  
No.163 Sepoy Ram Singh  
No.1257 Sepoy Bhagwan Singh  
No.1556 Sepoy Buta Singh  
No.1651 Sepoy Jiwan Singh  
No.1221 Sepoy Nand Singh  
No.1265 Sepoy Bhagwan Singh

NOTE; There are three memorials to this heroic deed of the 36th Sikh Regiment - one at Saragarhi, in Waziristan, where the men laid down their lives; the second at Kesri Bagh in Amritsar, one of the most revered places of the Sikhs; and the third at Ferozepur, as most of the soldiers who gave their lives belonged to this district.

(Readers will have noted a book review *Saragarhi Battalion : Ashes to Glory - History of the 4th Battalion the Sikh Regiment*, by Kanwaljit Singh and H S Ahluwalia, which appeared in Volume 5, No 2 of Durbar. Ed.)

Most of the junior officers avoided the Senior Subaltern as he would not tolerate any slackness from them. During the course of one year I had two more occasions to see him 'officially' - once I was called for a 'dressing down' after a guest night when I had caused quite an embarrassment all round, and the second time was when I called on him to bid farewell. I must say that in those days the Senior Subaltern in a British regiment was a unique institution. He usually had about 15 years' service to his credit, bristling with authority and smarting under his delayed promotion since, in the British army, promotion was to fill a vacancy on the establishment and not on time scale, as was the practise in the Indian Army.

Young officers were scared of him, not only because he was generally responsible for keeping them under control and out of mischief, but also because he could give them one of the "Imperial Raspberries" he was well known for, recommending to the Company Commander concerned, or the Adjutant, extra duties for the erring officer which were often quite unpleasant and certainly spoiled the weekend.

#### TRAINING

Training in the army could be divided into two categories - individual and collective. Individual training was mainly devoted to various cadres in addition to routine parades. Collective training was a period of hard work and intensive training, reaching a climax in the annual formation manoeuvres which meant long hours of roughing it out, often not even knowing why things had come to a grinding halt, and just waiting for the "officer call" and "No Parade" on the bugle.

I had arrived in the Regiment at a wrong time for the annual training cycle. Instead of beginning with the individual training, I had arrived just before the collective training and so had to take that first. It was quite an experience. First, I was quite new to the Regiment and, secondly, I had never before taken part in such training. It started with a company camp at Ferozeshah, the site of the First Sikh War (1845-46). There is a Memorial which is a prominent land mark in the area.

We started with section training. I'm not sure if I made a good start as a section commander for, without the help of the non-commissioned officer, I would surely have landed the section in the Sutej. After section training I was given a platoon to command and the platoon sergeant, an old hand, was a great help in my gaining confidence in myself. Every exercise was well set and brought out the importance of map reading, particularly in flat country, stressed the important points of each tactical operation, and laid the main emphasis on leadership and the tactical use of ground. Battalion training, however, seemed much slower in pace as there was much waiting between each phase of the operation, designed to bring out various mistakes and, if necessary, to repeat a particular section. When I discussed this with the Company Sergeant Major and the platoon sergeant I was told that in actual war the pace was often even slower still because things seldom moved as planned, and there was always some "unforeseen" delay caused by enemy action. They maintained that the training pace was often far too quick and unrealistic.

As a part of my training I had to do a number of training cadres run by the company for potential and actual junior NCOs, and by the Adjutant for senior NCOs. All the cadres were well planned, organised and conducted. I learnt a lot about the individual training of the soldiers, and of its planning. It was hard work, covering almost the whole day with the instructors sparing no efforts to ensure a high standard. The Company Sergeant Major always appeared to be around to chase anyone lagging behind. These cadres also helped me to mix with the British other ranks and to know them and their interests, which appeared quite restricted. We became, however, good friends and they helped me particularly with routine duties as well as when I was Orderly Officer of the Day.

Ceremonies were often a bore - all the extra cleaning up, standing on rehearsal parade for hours - at least, so it seemed - awaiting the arrival of a senior officer or General. All this was, however, taken in good humour. There was, and likely still is, a humorous side to everything which the army can appreciate and enjoy better than most.

There was, however, one duty - being sent out in "aid to the civil power" -which everyone, officers and men, dreaded. I was told that this was among the most distasteful duties of all, especially to the officers who could be wrong if they used force or ordered firing, and equally wrong if they did not take timely action. All ranks had to exhibit exemplary patience while being a target of abuse, often supplemented by bottles, stones and bricks. I often wonder what I would have done under the circumstances if firing had to be opened on unarmed people, as was the case at Jallianwala Bagh. Luckily the unit was not called out during the period that I was with them.

#### DINING IN

Soon after joining the Regiment I was 'dined in'. It was indeed a great occasion with the band playing and all the officers of the Regiment present to honour the youngest officer. I had made sure I was extra smartly turned out and, though I had timed the distance from the officers' quarters to the Mess, in my excitement I had arrived much too early. I waited away from the Mess gate until the bugler played the Mess Call. I was received by the Senior Subaltern at the entrance to the Mess hall and conducted to the ante-room where I was formally introduced to the Commanding Officer. After a short time with him I was conducted to each of the senior officers in turn. As I did not drink - I have not started yet - I was duly filled with a number of 'fresh limes' - the month of November in Ferozepur can be quite cold -till dinner was announced. I was the guest of honour and the Commanding Officer led me to

my seat on his right. It was a sumptuous seven course dinner; with the soup was offered sherry, which I declined; with fish it was white wine, which I again declined; with the main course it was red wine or whisky, which I again declined. All went well during the dinner and then the table was cleared for the 'Toast to the King'. Port, sherry and whisky in decanters was passed in that order but when I declined to take any of them the Colonel, who appeared quite surprised, asked, "Well young man, don't you take any of these poisons?" I meekly said, "No, Sir", and one could have heard a pin drop in the silence until I was given some water to drink the 'Toast to the King'. Soon afterwards everyone returned to their gay mood and the episode appeared to be forgotten. After dinner we listened to the band for some time and back in the ante-room, some young officers even sang some bawdy choruses to the amusement of all. I then approached the Commanding Officer for permission to leave and the Senior Subaltern conducted me from the Mess hall.

Next day I was 'summoned' by the Senior Subaltern to explain my conduct at the dinner table and before I could say anything was given a 'dressing down'. I apologised for the embarrassment but mentioned that King's Regulations did allow that the 'Toast to the King' could be drunk in water. He told me that if only I had mentioned this to him he would have arranged everything properly and there would have been no embarrassment to anybody. I was then allowed to leave with the remark, "Forget it". Some officers, particularly the younger lot, did not seem very happy with the 'Toast' episode but I think Lieutenant Woods sorted that out and the atmosphere soon returned to normal again.

#### GAMES AND SPORTS

Before the 1857 Revolt forms of recreation were restricted to the unenergetic kind and little attempt was made to induce soldiers to use their off-duty period constructively. But later there were almost unlimited opportunities for sports which were held to be an important part of a soldier's training and were encouraged in the Station. In the Regiment there was a choice of hockey or football, of which the latter was the most popular. I was not up to their general standard and, though I occasionally played in Company matches, I was really only good enough for my platoon. At times I felt it was more of a courtesy because they did have better players in the platoon to play in my position. On holidays even cricket was played. Though I did not come up to their standards I felt they did appreciate that I made an effort to play all the games in the Regiment. In addition, for Sergeants, Warrant Officers and officers there was tennis, squash, golf, polo, hunting, etc.

I played a lot of tennis in the Ferozepur Club. To start with I played only with the tennis "marker" because everyone else appeared to have his own group. It was a blessing in disguise as playing with the marker helped me to improve my game. Occasionally I was asked by some of the officers of the Regiment to make a four when no other player was available but soon, with the improvements in my tennis and a keen interest in games, I was invited to make a regular four and often played singles against some of the best players, finally winning a couple of 'hot weather' tournaments! Because of my improved tennis I was invited to other clubs in the Station, particularly the Ordnance Club, which had some nice people and good players. I was not, however, expected to go there too often.

#### SOCIAL LIFE

Social life for an Indian officer in the British Regiment was, to say the least, very restricted, not only until the 'ice was broken', but also until one could establish some standing in social

and living standards, sportsmanship, smartness on and off parade, and "correct behaviour" . Sometimes this 'popularity' was gained through drinking but in this I was a misfit - I did not and still do not drink. I could have claimed membership of the Total Abstinence Association, India, and a number of medals! I had, therefore, to concentrate my efforts on my professional skill, sportsmanship and correct etiquette. Though some British officers and their families were good to me, I cannot say that I achieved a general acceptance. For some I was a convenient 'stand by', but in fairness to the British officers of the Regiment I must admit that I was treated well by most of them. I was invited to some homes and was looked after in clubs and at social or Station functions, even though I was ULIA. I think by and large all ULIA officers were treated alike - as "second class Commissioned Officers" and unfortunately this had to be accepted. The only other alternative was to have a confrontation and, perhaps, bring out the differences more sharply at the risk of creating more unpleasantness and an unhappy atmosphere for everyone.

The British women, or the "memsahibs" as they were called, did not mix with an Indian - he was invariably considered an inferior - unless he had established some sort of 'honourable' reputation. Whether or not one got invited to the dinner, lunch or tennis party depended on the status one had acquired. The women generally confined themselves to their homes and gardens, which they maintained well, or moved from card to tennis parties. The younger lot usually mixed with young British officers approved by their parents and most of the eligible ones acquired their "beau" before the "fishing fleet" came out from England. Quite a number went out riding, mainly because a cavalry unit was stationed at Ferozepur.

When I joined the unit the winter festivities were in full swing. There were a number of dances and other social entertainments, with the Christmas season and the New Year eve dances being the culminating features. Christmas cards were exchanged between officers and other messes. Presents of fruit, dried fruits and cakes were given by the Indian staff, contractors and shop keepers to the British officers and their families. All of this was followed by a pagal Gymkhana and flower shows during the Spring, but after this it became a comparatively dull season. As the hot weather arrived so the Station social life came to a virtual standstill, with the families starting to move to the hills and their husbands trying to adjust their leaves to join them.

I do not know what made me buy a car, and a sports model at that, so soon in my army career. My father had a big car and whenever he came some junior officers appeared quite impressed. Maybe I wanted to "show off", or convince others of our standard of living and social status. However, I found the car most convenient to run about in, even up to Lahore, a distance of about 50 miles, to see my relatives and college friends during a week-end, provided I was allowed to do so. In the initial stages the car did not appear to be particularly welcome; I was told a horse would have been better, and there was some sniggering too, but it very soon wore off and most of those who had been loudest in their sniggering proved happy to take a lift to Lahore, or often accompanied me for a shikar in the country where previously they would either have had to go on a cycle or hire a tonga.

On one of my trips to Lahore I hit a bullock cart. No damage was done to the cart but I damaged my car radiator and fan. The bullock cart driver drove away and I sat there with my ego deflated until a lorry came along and towed the car to a workshop. This led to a setback in my social life as I had to revert to my cycle for almost a fortnight.

There were a number of Indian officers in other units of the Indian Army stationed in Ferozepur; Captain Rajinder Sinhji, Second Lancers (later General and Commander-in-Chief, Indian Army), Lieutenant Ayub Khan with the 14 Punjab Training Centre (later Field Marshal and President of Pakistan), and Captain Gore of the IMS. In addition there were the Deputy Commissioner, the Superintendent of Police, and the Civil Surgeon. We met often and made up for the lack of social life for the Indian officers in the Station.

The first time I was invited to a dance at the Ordnance Club, which was primarily for Warrant Officers, I consulted the Senior Subaltern before accepting it. There were a number of officers, mostly young Subalterns, not only from the Regiment but also from other units in the Station, attending the dance. The building was well lit and decorated. The main hall had a floor laid on springs which swayed like gentle waves. There was a lot of drinking, much more than dancing, and it appeared that the main effort was to see who could get the guests under the table. I felt a bit out of place and left about midnight with the permission of the host.

With a commission in the Army one was accepted in the best of Indian families and enjoyed the highest trust, without any reservations. An officer's actions were always considered honourable as any lapse could lead to a charge of 'conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman'. His words and actions were accepted in good faith - even a bank always honoured a cheque if it happened to be issued without sufficient funds in the account, although an officer was honour bound not to issue a cheque unless there were sufficient funds to cover it. The best of shops, restaurants and cinemas honoured the signature of an officer. I cannot remember ever carrying much cash on me because of the social standing, prestige and trust which my position as an officer enjoyed. No doubt there were some lapses by some officers but they were quickly sorted out and the honour retrieved.

Life for British soldiers in India, though not always unpleasant, was generally devoid of all social contact for two main reasons, both at extreme odds with each other. First, there was their feeling of superiority and secondly, the general impression they seemed to have created that no Indian woman was safe in their company. This resulted in isolation and boredom, which was their chief enemy. Since the multitude of barrack-room servants, coupled with the generally oppressive climate, particularly during the summer in the plains, contributed towards idleness, added to the fact that the majority of the soldiers spent most of their time off duty in barracks, it was not surprising that drunkenness was a major problem. Spirits were cheap and plentiful. On Fridays, when the men got their weekly pay, they spent most of it on drink in the canteen, or repaying debts accumulated during the week. Some went to the local cinema showing English films during the weekend. As already mentioned above, apart from football other forms of recreation were limited to the most unenergetic kind and little attempt was made to induce the soldiers to use their off-duty periods constructively.

Venereal disease among British troops was not just an inconvenience but a positive problem. The medical and regimental officers were often talking to their men about taking necessary precautions and, although certain bazaars and houses were "out of bounds" to the troops, there were a number of places and parks for convenient rendezvous. Even during collective training mobile rendezvous were organised by enterprising pimps who followed the units from camp to camp.

The summer temperatures in Ferozepur reached 120 deg.F in the shade. The families of the British officers and other ranks, and half the Battalion, moved to Dakhshai, a hill station on the way to Simla. The rifle companies changed over after two months and my company move

fell in the second half. As the move was by rail I got permission to drive my car up to Dakhshai. Training in the hill station was comparatively light due to restricted parade grounds, and games were restricted due to a limited number of playing fields. Emphasis was on long route marches or cross-country walks. Dakhshai was a quiet station by any standards but it soon turned into a world of parties and dances. The separated "memsahibs", or the 'grass widows' as these wives were called, often looked after the single officers in a most welcome way, and social life was filled with trips to Simla, Solan and Kasauli, with social gatherings in the Station, and with invitations to tea or dinner by the officers and their families. Some young officers indulged in harmless flirtations which were soon forgotten.

#### PREJUDICES

Talking to British officers, and to senior warrant and non-commissioned officers, I got the impression that most of them had pre-conceived ideas about India and Indians, understandably based on the attitude of the British people and the policies of the British Government. Though stress was laid on the fighting qualities of the Indian soldiers - as British and Indian soldiers were liable to fight side by side - the differences in customs, character, dress, language, colour and religion of soldiers and civilians of each class and caste were highlighted, and communal differences were emphasised. Attitudes towards religious matters, particularly on the part of young officers, were quite baffling. Discussion on such matters was prohibited in the officers' messes but when it was discussed in Single Officers' quarters it revealed a complete lack of knowledge. I had read the Bible but they had not read any of the Indian religious books like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Granth Saheb or Quran, nor were they keen to do so. I was expected to attend not only Church Parade but also church when I was Orderly Officer of the Day, yet I was not expected to go to a temple. Indians were expected to celebrate Christmas but not their own festivals. There appeared to be serious reservations in the minds of some regarding mixing with Indians. Sometimes Indians were not allowed to travel in the same railway compartment if fellow British travellers objected. Indians, even Kings Commissioned Officers, were not eligible for membership of most clubs, they being reserved exclusively for the British.

In this connection I reproduce a note by Brigadier General F H Maynard CB, DSO, MC a pre-Independence Colonel of the Rajputana Rifles, the Regiment I later joined, which is self-explanatory. The note was prepared by Brigadier Maynard in London in 1975 when I met him there and describes how he got Digvijai Singhji, His Highness the Jam Saheb of Nawanagar, a commissioned officer in the 5th Battalion, the Rajputana Rifles (Napier's), into the Peshawar Club in the face of opposition by the Civil members of the Club.

'When the Regiment moved to Peshawar all officers applied for membership of the Club. All applications were accepted except that of Digvijai, which was refused because they said that Indians were not eligible for membership. We argued for some days with the Committee, of which I was a member and obviously supported Digvijai's application for membership, but the President and other members opposed the application. I then decided to force the matter to a general meeting. A date was fixed for the meeting and we all assembled at the Club.

General Birdwood, later Lord Birdwood and Commander-in-Chief India, had only just taken over Northern Command. He had heard of the controversial matter and decided to intervene. He came to Peshawar and asked for permission to address the meeting. This was agreed and he spoke somewhat as follows:

"I am not a member of your Club, but this question of membership for Indians who hold the King's Commission is most important and, for that reason, I have come here to address you. Before leaving England I had the usual interview with the King before taking up my appointment. He said to me, amongst other things, that he was astonished to know that Indians holding his Commission were not eligible for membership of many European clubs in India. 'I would remind you that an Indian holding my Commission is eligible for membership of any club in London, not only Service clubs like the Seniors, the Army, Navy, the Naval, Military etc., but are also eligible for membership of the most exclusive clubs in London.' I had promised the King to bring this matter to the notice of all clubs in his command. I am, therefore, asking all members to bear the remarks of King George V in mind when they come to voting on the question".

The President, Colonel Keen, Deputy Commissioner for the N.W.P. Province, then addressed the meeting. He said that a club was based on the principle of exclusiveness; that is, you elected members you wanted and excluded those you didn't want. He then opened the meeting to a general discussion. The civilian members argued against admitting an Indian to the Club, which was a purely British one. The military members stressed what the King had said. Angry exchanges took place. After further arguments the President put the matter before the meeting that Digvijai should be elected a member of the Peshawar Club. The voting was close, but the motion was lost. We returned to the Mess in a state of fury at the insult to one of our officers and there was much talk of our resigning our membership in a body. No decision was reached but, as luck would have it, Colonel Keen went on leave and I succeeded to the Presidency of the Club. After a day or two I went to the Club office and got hold of a copy of the rules. In thumbing through the book I came across a rule by which the President had the power to invite an Indian gentleman to become a member of the Club. I immediately wrote to Digvijai as follows:

My dear Digvijai,

I am writing to invite you to become a member of the Peshawar Club if you accept that you will be ineligible to vote at a general meeting. This latter condition is a small matter anyway as, unless the matter before the meeting is very important, few members turn up.

Yours sincerely, F.H. Maynard

Digvijai replied as follows:

Dear Colonel,

It gives me much pleasure to accept your invitation to membership of the Peshawar Club.

Yours sincerely, Digvijai Sinhji

The storm was over.

## I JOIN THE 5TH BATTALION, THE RAJPUTANA RIFLES (NAPIERS) AT RAZMAK

About two months before I was due to finish my attachment to the Lancashire Fusiliers I was called by the Adjutant to his office to give my choice of the Indianised battalions I wanted to join and to complete some forms. Pritam Kripal (later Major General P.N. Kripal), who was with me in the Government College, Lahore, and had joined the 5th Battalion six months earlier was full of praise for the Battalion. As a result I had read "Napier's Rifles" by Rawlinson and learnt its traditions. Ayub Khan, later to be a Field Marshal and President of Pakistan, was Physical Training Officer with the 10/14 Punjab Regiment at Ferozepur and was keen to have me in his battalion, 1/14 Punjab Regiment. He even arranged a visit to the unit which, at that time, was stationed at Jamrud Fort, beyond Peshawar. I spent two days with the battalion where I felt the indifference of the British officers and noticed the strained relations between the officers. I felt unhappy about the general atmosphere and mentioned it to Ayub Khan when I returned to Ferozepur. He felt, however, that I should not attach too much importance to it.

I therefore gave my first choice as the 5th Battalion, Rajputana Rifles (Napiers), the Rajputana Rifles being the senior-most Rifle regiment in the Indian Army. My second choice was 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles and third choice was 1/14 Punjab Regiment, in deference to Ayub Khan.

About a month later I got a letter from General Headquarters, Simla, informing me that I was posted to 5th Battalion, Rajputana Rifles (Napiers). I immediately wrote a letter to the Adjutant expressing my pleasure at the honour of being posted to the Battalion and asked for any special instructions. A few days later I received a reply from him welcoming me and enclosing a note on Waziristan, where the Battalion was posted. He advised me to bring heavy woollen clothes, as Razmak was not only very cold, but also had snow in winter. He also mentioned that Qizilabash (Nawabzada Zulfiqar Ali Qizilabash), an officer of the Battalion, was posted as Station Staff Officer, Mari Indus, and suggested that I should try to contact him on my way to Razmak.

On termination of my attachment to the Lancashire Fusiliers I was dined out without any faux-pas on my part. I was sorry to leave the Regiment.

On the way to my new Battalion I tried to contact Qizilabash at Mari Indus but he was out of station. The train was running a little late and when I arrived at Bannu I reported to the Station Staff Officer for instructions to move to Razmak. He said that it was road opening day, but that the road convoy had already left Bannu - if I could get hold of a taxi I should be able to catch up with it. Unfortunately, the taxi was not in good condition and instead of catching up with the convoy I found myself falling further behind it. Fortunately I did not know the risk of travelling all by myself on the road to Razmak. Ignorance was bliss! When I arrived at Razmak the Retreat had already been sounded and all the gates to the camp were closed. The British unit at the main gate refused to open up to let me in, thinking it was a ruse by tribesmen to attack the camp, and so I was left standing outside the gate. After considerable shouting across the barbed wire fence to identify myself, two officers from the 5th, Major Pete Rees (later Major General T. W. Rees CB, CIE, DSO, MC), who happened to be Field Officer of the Week, and Bijji Kaul (later Lieutenant General B. M. Kaul PVSM), who had been with me in the Government College and at Royal Military College, Sandhurst, and had joined only a couple of days earlier, arrived at the gate to identify me. After my identity had been duly established the platoon at the main gate rushed out and took up

covering positions. The gate was then opened and I was allowed in. I don't think any other officer of any rank got such a reception, with the guard taking defensive position and a Field Officer in the reception committee. We waited until the covering troops had stood down and then I moved to the Battalion 'in style', escorted by the two officers. (It is, perhaps, of interest to note that the road was declared open on certain days when adequate protection had been provided en route and the weather conditions were good. A number of battalions, both British and Indian, were deployed for the protection of the eighty mile Bannu-Razmak road).

I was shown to my room and all the Indian officers (Pritam Kripal, Bijji Kaul, Negi and Afzal) gathered to give me a hearty welcome. In the Mess I was introduced to all the British officers - Lieutenant Colonel Ferguson, Majors Kenneth Guy, John West, Pongo Spence and Pete Rees, Captain Webb and Lieutenant Ted Kelly. I was happy to find everyone so friendly.

Next morning I reported to the Adjutant, Captain Webb. Before taking me to the Colonel he advised me to keep my mouth shut. I was puzzled as to why he should say this until I found the Colonel bristling with rage. He thumped the table and asked me why I was late in reaching Razmak the previous evening. He gave me a blistering ticking off and after the storm had abated I was marched out. Though it was a November morning I was sweating but Captain Webb smiled and asked me to sit down. He told me that this welcome was on the instructions of higher headquarters since I had, the previous evening, created quite a commotion. After a little time, when I had recovered from the shock, I was taken in again and Colonel Ferguson smiled and said that this should teach me a lesson never to arrive late in the Battalion. All was now forgiven and forgotten. This was how I started my life in the 5th.

I was posted to 'A' Company. Major Rees, the Company Commander, and Subedar Amir Ali, the Senior Subedar, soon took over my training in regimental traditions and customs, and in the Rifles' drill. The life in Razmak was what may be termed semi-operational.

Pete Rees was a man of great character, fearless, very energetic, a practical and dedicated soldier, and I shall never forget the trouble he took over my training. I still remember the first talk he had with me, of which the following is the gist:

- Know your regimental history, the traditions and customs of the Battalion.
- Study your profession thoroughly. In addition to official pamphlets and books read military histories and military journals.
- Develop qualities of leadership. You lead, not follow.
- Learn how to train your men, a subject often neglected by some officers. Look after their welfare; comfort and be fair to them.
- Study your "enemy" and his characteristics, strong points as well as weak ones. (He was particularly referring to the hostile Pathans we had to encounter on the Frontier).
- The Mess is your home. Always follow the Mess Rules. The Ante Room is a sacred place where pictures and other souvenirs of those who upheld the honour of the Battalion are kept.
- Last, but not least, be physically and mentally fit and alert to carry out any task given to you.

I feel that all these points are still relevant and beneficial.

He had set very high standards for himself and expected his officers to do the same. He would never ask me, or for that matter, anyone else, to do anything which he couldn't do

himself. Very often he could do it much better. He once raced me to the Conical picquet, held by the Battalion, and beat me to it though I was about fifteen years younger. One day he decided to march for 24 hours - he kept marching during the day to Alexander Ridge picquet, which was about five miles from Razmak and held by a company of the Battalion, and back again. At night he went round the perimeter wall. The first time he passed a camp post after Retreat had been sounded it stood to but after that he stopped them from doing so, explaining that he would be marching all through the night. During the six months that he was my Company Commander, before he left the Battalion to take up a staff appointment, he had instilled in me the points mentioned earlier, and which I carried all through my service with a deep sense of gratitude.

Major Kenneth Guy, the Second in Command, who was responsible for the training of all junior officers, chased us almost every day to ensure that we did some regular "homework", but it was Pete Rees who really put me on the right lines. Every afternoon for the first couple of weeks he went through with me the next day's training programme in detail, showing me how to look for faults and, more importantly, how to put them right.

Subedar Amir Ali, the senior Viceroy Commissioned Officer in the Company - his platoon had won the Northern Command championship the previous year - helped me in learning the platoon and company drill with the help of matchsticks and a table, and to study the procedure in the office and on the parade ground, as well as bayonet and weapons training. In weapon training every man was expected to be a marksman, good in snap shooting, and able to maintain a high standard of fire discipline. Those who were weak were given extra training after parade hours. As a junior officer I was also taught to handle and fire a machine gun in addition to the company weapons - revolver, rifle, Lewis gun and grenades. (I often wonder if my training on the machine gun was responsible for my posting to the Machine Gun Battalion during World War II). Both Pete Rees and Amir Ali were very keen on rapid fire and snap shooting and laid great stress on them. The main emphasis in training was on physical fitness, with road walks and runs in the mornings, and always two games in the afternoons, I also had to learn anti-gas measures and gas mask drill, an aftermath of World War I. All those who had been in that war were full of horror of a gas attack. One of the traditions of the Rifle Regiment was to be able to move unseen and unheard at night over long distances. This training was generally confined to the unit lines and parade ground and put into practise only when we moved out on a column.

The Battalion was holding a picquet, known as Conical Picquet, across the nullah. My Company Commander took me there the day before the Company was due to take over the duty. I moved with my men and stayed with them for two days to understand the routine and duties of a picquet. The stay there seemed quite monotonous but the task proved more strenuous than I had imagined. After that I always appreciated the monotony of such duties and made some provisions to relieve it. I lived with the men, ate with them, and even carried out sentry duties by day and night. At night each bush appeared to move and to be coming closer. For me the biggest problem was the latrine, about fifty yards away from the picquet; one had to run to it and the picquet seemed to stand too far away during the outings. It reminded me of a saying by an old soldier - "Everything can wait for 24 hours except the morning s. . . ". Sometime later I was due to be posted to the Alexander Ridge picquet and had spent a couple of days there as "understudy", but had to miss the duty as I was detailed to attend a Physical Training course in Kasauli.

Animal care and management was of great importance as the infantry battalions had not moved into the mechanised age at this time. The Battalion had a number of horses - one each for the CO, Second-in-Command, Company Commanders - and a certain number of mules, particularly for the use of the Machine Gun Company and for fetching rations. The horses were used for reconnaissance duties, for the supervision of the dispersed training of the sub-units by the CO and Company Commanders, and for recreation within certain limits out of parade hours. Unless the horses for the Second-in-Command, Adjutant and QM were being used by the officers concerned, a couple of horsed orderlies accompanied the CO and MG Company Commander whenever they went out for a reconnaissance, but very often the orderlies accompanied them on foot and suitable picquets were provided by a rifle company. Many a horse in the Station would gallop back riderless to its stable and a shame-faced rider would come back into camp, like walking wounded, to be told by the guard at the camp entrance that the horse had already arrived! This did not deter officers from enjoying a ride. The mules, unless handled with care by trained personnel, could sometimes be a bit of a problem when they started behaving in their peculiar way. All officers had to learn correctly how to handle, saddle and load the mules.

Just two days before Meeanee Day, 17 February (the Battalion Day), there were activities in connection with the proposed celebrations. Rum was issued and arrangements made to issue extra rations for the day. Permission was obtained from Station Headquarters to have late "lights out" to permit "sing song" by men until midnight. On Meeanee Day the Viceroy Commissioned Officers, as the Junior Commissioned Officers were then called, were invited to the Officers' Mess where they were entertained with drinks and eats. The men had a 'bada Khana' and there was a Regimental Guest Night in the Officers' Mess which lasted well into the early hours of the morning. I had read the account of the Meeanee Battle in our Battalion history at least three times to be sure I had all the details correct, and even discussed it with Subedar Amir Ali.

I referred earlier to Digvijai Sinhji, the late His Highness the Jam Sahib of Nawanagar, and of the problems of securing his membership of the Peshawar Club. Captain Digvijai Sinhji, known to everyone as Digbi Sahib, was held in great esteem by everyone and, even after his departure from the Regiment a couple of years earlier to ascend the throne of Nawanagar on the death of the great Ranji, he was still talked about with great respect and affection. He had presented to the Battalion a set of silver drums and bugles and a table centre piece for the Officers' Mess which occupied a place of honour in the Mess, I was naturally very keen to meet him and had a wonderful opportunity when, in 1935, I went to England on seven weeks leave - rather unusual for a newly joined officer. I had booked my passage by "Victoria", a Lloyd Triestine boat, as that would give me one month in Europe. Soon after I embarked, the Jam Sahib, who was also travelling on the same boat, surprised me by calling to me; "Young man, you must be with the Napiers". I was wearing the Regimental tie. He asked me about the Battalion and enquired about the officers, the VCOs and the men he had served with. I was amazed at his memory. He narrated names and incidents, some of which I had never previously heard. He called me every morning and told me new things about the Battalion and I used to stay with him until lunchtime when he returned to his special suite. I learnt a lot about the Battalion and its traditions from him. After that trip to Europe I did not have another opportunity to see him until after our Independence.

My trip to Europe had been arranged in a great hurry and I almost missed the boat. I was informed in March that I could proceed on leave in May. I decided to go to Europe and spend part of my leave in London on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Coronation of King

George V. I was given permission to go abroad and was informed that my leave would start from the date of my embarkation at Bombay, and finish the day I landed in India, provided I did not exceed the period of two months. Pete Rees had suggested that I should try to attend the King's Levee, and had given me his full dress jacket and white headdress which he had used while he was Military Secretary to the Governor of Burma. My request to attend the Levee arrived too late but I was given a seat in one of the stands in Hyde Park from where I watched the whole procession of the various contingents from the British Empire. It was a very impressive parade and the Indian Army contingents looked the most colourful and got a great ovation. Weeks before and after the parade were filled with fun and gaiety, with thousands of visitors from all over the world. When I returned from leave, I was asked to give a talk on the Silver Jubilee celebrations in London to all the officers of the Battalion.

When I joined the Battalion the Fakir of Ipi, a man of extraordinary resources and influence in the North West Frontier, was quite active and both the army and the Pathans saw a great deal of action in both minor and major operations. The soldiering on the Frontier had probably reached its highest standard of professional skill. The army was being equipped with armoured cars, and motorised transport for moving its supplies. Aircraft were available for reconnaissance work and a support role was being developed. There were differences between Political Officers, who often seemed to identify themselves with the tribal inhabitants, and the army officers who were expected to make war "peacefully".

The 'prescribed area', I was told, created considerable resentment among the army officers. This was an agreed area outside of which the troops could not shoot until shot at. It was often delineated after a great deal of argument between the Political and army officers. Inside the area the troops could not shoot at any party of less than ten men, unless they were armed and off the path. These paths were often impossible to discern at a distance and the Pathan clothes made concealment of weapons quite simple. Troops were advised not to be taken prisoner by the Pathans since they always killed and then mutilated any soldiers who fell into their hands. The Pathan character is most difficult to understand. It touches the height of valour and self-sacrifice; it plumbs the depths of treachery and villainy.

I got to know one of the Khassadars (Tribal Guide) who used to come out with the company whenever we moved out. He was a very friendly person and often had tea with me in my room. One day he invited me and a number of other officers from various units to a picnic. The place was quite close to the camp and, with the permission of my Company Commander who, I believe, had had a talk with the Khassadar, I was allowed to go. It was a nice spot and the food preparations, including a 'Camel Korma', were lavish. His only regret was that he could not provide feminine company as it was contrary to his people's customs.

I remember a 'trap' which was set to involve our troops. Every day a pretty tribal girl used to go past our gate picquets with her goats and sheep. I was afraid this might cause an incident and I spoke to my friend the Khassadar. He was already fully aware of it and said that her father was a difficult person who sat on the other side of the nullah ready to shoot anyone who approached her. I warned all the picquets. I presume that after some time her father realised he could not create an incident to demand any compensation.

Two operations on the Frontier were significant and still linger in my mind, even though the Battalion was not directly involved with either. The first was the Mohammed Operations of 1934-35 which culminated in one of the most ferocious night attacks on a position known as 'Kila Hari'. This was defended by a rifle company of 3rd Battalion, 2nd Punjab Regiment

(now 3 Punjab). The Battalion, which I had the honour to command after my return from the Central Mediterranean Force in 1946, supported by a machine gun platoon of 4 Gurkha Rifles, repulsed a series of attacks in which the tribes suffered heavy casualties. The defenders suffered only two killed and seven wounded. It was a day of glory for the Battalion.<sup>1</sup>

The second operation, which may be referred to as the "Mollie Ellis Affair", took place at least a decade before I joined my Battalion, but was still talked about as a most extraordinary incident. Some tribesmen entered a bungalow in the Kohat Cantonment occupied by Major Ellis, his wife and their seventeen year old daughter. The Major happened to be away on duty when the tribesmen murdered his wife and abducted his daughter. The Chief Commissioner of Peshawar managed to retrieve the girl with the help of some tribal chiefs, a nursing sister and a Risaldar from one of the units located there. There were several versions, each different from the others, some gruesome and some erotic. There were several incidents of shooting or kidnapping on the Frontier but this was the most talked about.

Razmak Camp was established as a result of the Government's decision in 1921-22 to pursue the 'Forward Policy'. Soon several roads had been built in Waziristan, mainly with the help of the various tribes since the roads served the interests of both sides; the British for quick movement, and the tribesmen because they gained a lot of money through contracts and the ability to sell their meagre produce more quickly. This reduced the incentive to raid and plunder and had a pacifying effect on them. There were, however, a few exceptions. Both Mahsuds and Wazirs were enlisted as Khassadars under their own headmen and were responsible for the protection of the road. The Brigade at Razmak had seven infantry battalions, a pack artillery brigade, two sapper companies and ancillary troops. It had to supply a striking force of four battalions, the remaining three taking over the defence of the camp. There was also an air landing strip.

Razmak was a pleasant Station, guarded by a perimeter wall and belts of barbed wire covered by Lewis and machine guns. The unarmed limits of the camp had grown until they were a mile or more from the perimeter. There were a few stone buildings in the camp and most of the units were in stone and mud huts. Social amenities were limited. There existed a cinema in a tin shed, where mostly old Indian pictures were shown. I well remember the picture "Chandi Das" which was being shown when I joined the Battalion. Colonel Ferguson had enquired if I had anything to do with it and after that he always called me Chandi Das, perhaps because I always signed my name with a flourishing 'N'. Life was generally pleasant at Razmak and most of the games - hockey, football, squash, tennis, and even golf, were provided. There were a number of sports grounds and a reasonably good athletic ground. Occasionally rugger was also played and, although I was told that cricket and polo were played, I never saw them.

A Frontier Column was usually a battalion or a brigade group for the purpose of training, reconnaissance, a show of force, or a punitive mission. The column moved in a valley when the road was not safe for tactical reasons and a brigade column could be three to four miles

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<sup>1</sup> Was this the Mohmand Force which earned the IGS 1908 with clasp North West Frontier 1935 (12 January-3 November 1935)? 3/2 Punjab Regiment formed a part of the Nowshera Brigade at that time, but I'm not aware that 4 Gurkhas were involved - Ed.

long. An advance guard invariably moved ahead of the main body providing reconnaissance parties and picquets on dominating features on both sides of the route to protect the main body from sniping attacks or ambushes. The flank and forward party or picquet on the move was identified by the forward man on each flank wearing an orange coloured screen on his back. This allowed, the supporting arms - artillery and machine guns - to fire forward and beyond the troops and on the flanks without risk to the men. Usually the picquets from the advance guard were in position well before the main body reached the area, but in case of a delay the main body halted until an 'OK' signal was given by flag, at which point the column resumed its advance. As all the rifle companies from the advance guard were gradually utilised, so another unit would take over advance guard duties. When the tail end of the column had passed the first picquet posted by the advance guard, and was getting beyond effective rifle fire from the picquet site, so the picquet was withdrawn by the rear guard under well laid down fire support. The men moved at the double and, after reporting to the Rear Guard Commander, joined the main body. All the sub units in the column were kept in the picture by field signals regarding the position of the picquets.

The movement of men taking up positions or withdrawing from a picquet was a 'precise drill' and the Battalion took great pride in executing it with agility. The first time I was sent with a picquet I was surprised by the speed, the drill and the use of ground by the men without any words of command. Each man and section seemed to know exactly what to do and how to move to the positions. They moved like lightning when the picquet was withdrawn by the Rear Guard Commander. Night camp sites were always established on slightly high ground away from streams, both to help in security and to avoid the danger of flash floods, with a perimeter wall about 3 feet high being established all around the camp with boulders and stones, which were plentiful in the area. The corner picquets were built slightly out of the general alignment so as to provide good field of fire for mutual support. Each unit had a drill for setting up the camp, with parties to collect the stones, build the wall and inner tracks, level the sleeping areas, and carry out general administrative work. The cookhouses prepared tea, evening meals and haversack rations for the next day's move. All cookhouses and perimeter walls were demolished before moving out to prevent their use by the tribals.

In spite of all these precautions and defensive measures nothing could prevent a Pathan from getting into position behind a boulder and taking a pot shot at the column or camp. During my stay with the Battalion there wasn't any serious hostile encounter which we couldn't cope with. As well as a chance shot inflicting a casualty it caused great harassment and loss of sleep in the camp. Deprived of sleep and rest after a day's move, the men could become the target of a Pathan attack the next day. This involved a great risk and all ranks had to be extra alert and this required considerable mental and physical fitness.

Whenever we went on a route march or column duty the Battalion moved at a fast pace. On return to the camp the Colonel always took the salute as we marched past at 140 paces a minute, but I know it was never less than 160 paces as everyone moved at an extra fast pace!

#### A NOTE ON WAZIRISTAN - LAND AND PEOPLE

Waziristan lies between Afghanistan and the Indus and is inhabited by some of the most war-like tribes. It was a frequent scene of operations.

The country is almost entirely composed of rocky hills and precipitous nullahs which form the only lines of communication. In the highest parts there were trees and near the rivers a

few patches of cultivation, but otherwise nothing grew except an occasional thorn bush. In winter much of it was covered in snow while in the summer temperatures were anything up to 130 deg.F. in the shade.

The local inhabitants lived under primitive conditions and had few peaceful occupations to choose from, so existed mainly on the proceeds of armed robberies. They supplemented this income by work on road building or road maintenance and each man brought his weapon on the job. They had an ingenious method of shovelling - one man guided the shovel while two others pulled on strings attached to it, thus enabling three to do the work of one quite comfortably.

The local children were brought up to steal and fight and the essential preliminary to manhood was to acquire a rifle. In most cases this necessitated knifing its previous owner, or watching for a chance to steal one at night from a soldier who was momentarily off his guard - not at all easy with good troops, but it did happen.

The women were as barbarous as the men and sex was said to take a prominent part in the torturing of prisoners and obscene mutilations of the dead. The punishment for wifely infidelity, if treated leniently, was to have the nose cut off, but I never saw an example of this. Nevertheless, quite a number of them had their faces covered, though whether this was to hide the noseless face or protect them from the cold wind I cannot say.

Family feuds were a part of normal life and it was not unusual to see two watch towers at opposite ends of the same village from which the opposing snipers kept permanent observations and recorded the score of victorious hits. In addition there were frequent skirmishes between neighbouring tribes and, living under these conditions, the men became adept at mountain warfare or did not live long. They had some horses and camels but they were so vulnerable that they were generally left at home when the men were fighting. The men could walk long distances in a day and run down a steep hill at great speed, with the result that when the troops had fought their way to the top of a hill there was no enemy in sight. The tribesmen generally adopted army tactics and at times pulled surprises on the troops. A certain number of them had served in the Militia or the regular Indian Army where they studied army methods and then returned home to teach them to others. Besides the rifles they stole or inherited, the tribesmen produced reasonably good rifles from their hidden factories in the hills. In addition, every man carried a knife and he used it with great skill and swiftness.

Maj Gen Chand N. Das

