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THE WAR WITH BABA SAHEB, THE CHIEF OF NARGUND, AND THE CAPTURE OF THAT TOWN
BY THE ENGLISH A.D. 1858

Tim Ash



The brave English, the great kings, took Nurgoond on earth;
The wicked chieftains were taken prisoners from their hearth;
The bad rebels were broken and fled in the midst of their mirth.
Have the English their equals? To their power must stoop even Lady earth!

Strife rose in the North; searching swords, daggers, and diverse arms
Throughout the Empire in towns, villages, and farms,
Besieging houses and creating alarms,
They came to Dharwar, with a great force collecting arms.

Many valiant Lords with one mind there came,
To overflowing with anger was filled their frame;
Gnashing their teeth they said, 'At which place must we aim?'
'We have misgivings about that Fort, Nurgoond is its name.'

The three verses above are the opening of a seventy one verse epic, from which this title is taken, written in the Kannada language soon after the events it recounts. It describes events in the Dharwar Collectorate of the Southern Maratha country of the Bombay Presidency, now part of Karnataka State.

Nargund was a small State dating back to the 16th century. The Brahmin Chief was Bhaskar Rao Baba Saheb, aged 52, whose family had been granted their continued rights by the East India Company subsequent to the Maratha Wars when the territory became a part of the Bombay Presidency.

Baba Saheb had been unable to produce a son to succeed him and under Lord Dalhousie's policy of lapse he had been denied the ancient Hindu custom of adopting a son to continue his line of succession. Baba Saheb knew full well that on his decease his lands would be taken by the Company and his family left to accept whatever pension the Government cared

to grant. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was not well disposed towards the Government of the Company.

However, he made no act of open hostility until the unsettled state of the country during the Indian Mutiny afforded him the opportunity, with disastrous results as will be seen. Rumours of his disaffection were well known to the authorities at Dharwar and efforts were made to placate him and other disaffected chiefs. In May 1858 it was deemed necessary to request Baba Saheb to send in to Dharwar his guns and warlike stores on the pretext that should they fall into the hands of malcontents, together with his formidable hill fort at Nargund, it would pose a considerable threat not only to his own security but that of the Southern Maratha country. Eventually Baba Saheb, reluctantly and in an attempt to divert suspicions from his disloyalty, agreed to send his armaments in to Dharwar which he did with the exception of three large cannon which he pleaded as too heavy to pass the roads in the rainy weather. Despite his lack of armament Baba Saheb continued his efforts to suborn other local Chiefs and began gathering his Shetsundees (local irregular militiamen) at Nargund. His main ally was one Bheem Rao of Mundargi, some forty miles to the south-east, close to the border with the Nizam of Hyderabad's territory. Bheem Rao had also been under surveillance of the Government and suspected of disloyalty.

It was Bheem Rao's precipitous action in attacking the Treasury at Dambal nearby, which he found empty that brought matters to a head. Bheem Rao and his followers, though pursued by the police, escaped into the Nizam's territory where he seized the Fort of Koppal, a place with which he had family connections. It was here that the Bellary Field Force from the Madras Presidency found him on 1st June. The Fort was attacked and taken and Bheem Rao and his senior accomplices were killed in the fighting.

Meanwhile in the Southern Maratha country, when the news of the attack at Dambal was reported to the authorities, the Political Agent, Mr C J Manson, lost no time in leaving Kolhapur for Dharwar in the hope that his personal influence would deter Baba Saheb from joining in insurrection. On 28 May Manson arrived at Ramdurg where the Chief informed him that Baba Saheb was fully disaffected and had been collecting his forces. He advised Manson to keep well away from Nargund and make no attempt to visit Baba Saheb. Manson and his small escort of the Southern Maratha Irregular Horse left Ramdurg the following afternoon, 29 May, to continue on to Dharwar. By evening they had reached the small village of Soorebund where Manson decided to put up for the night in the Kulweshur Temple.

Baba Saheb in Nargund had meanwhile received intelligence of Manson's arrival at Ramdurg. Having convinced himself that Manson's arrival portended his own imminent arrest he determined on proceeding to Ramdurg with the intention of forestalling Manson by capturing him and forcing the Chief of Ramdurg to join with him in rebellion. Gathering together a party of some 550 men he set off for Ramdurg.

However, whilst on the road, Baba Saheb heard that Manson had left Ramdurg and was encamped at Soorebund and he therefore proceeded towards that place. He arrived at midnight, surrounded and attacked Manson's party in and around the Kulweshur and Marootee Temples. Manson and his escort were killed in the attack, his body was stripped and mutilated and his head removed before attempts were made to burn the body.

Baba Saheb returned in triumph to Nargund the following morning, 30 May, bearing Manson's severed head which was placed at one of the gateways to the town. The die was

cast - he was now a rebel with the blood of a Government official and his escort of Sowars on his hands!

They returned to Nurgoond. And going in procession they
showed
The head of their foe. Crowds of children and women cheering
on followed.
Then it was fixed upon the gate. The warriors assembled and
bellowed,
'The foe has been caught!' So that with it the sides of the
Hill echoed.

The next day Baba placed watchmen round the town,
Fortified the Gate, prepared for war, and went down
To his warriors, gave them betel leaf, and said, 'Frown
at my foes, saw them, make them sawdust, and uphold my crown.'

Hearing this the warriors fell to the ground,
Beat the soil, and with a loud sound
Said, 'Father, take courage! Do not doubt; we feel bound
To defend you! Our enemies will soon be cut up and ground!'

[v. 18-20]

Retribution was swift. Lieutenant Colonel George Malcolm, with his Maratha Irregular Horse, had arrived at Gudduck, near to Dambal, in response to Bheem Rao's attack, when he was ordered by telegraph to proceed immediately to Nargund. His little force comprising two companies of H.M.'s 74th, one company of 28th Native Infantry with one nine-pounder gun and one howitzer, and 150 sabres of the Southern Maratha Irregular Horse, pitched their tents near the village of Oomergul about four and a half miles from Nargund. On the morning of 1 June at about 7 a.m., Malcolm with 150 of the Maratha Irregular Horse proceeded towards Nargund.

"We got up within 500 yards of the Petah walls. The enemy drew up outside the walls about 600 strong, mostly foot. I retired the Horse by alternative Troops, and went back to camp arriving at 9 a.m."

At half past ten the enemy were detected approaching the camp about a mile distant. Malcolm's force immediately got under arms, advanced and stood, thus drawing the enemy. They faltered, turned and began to retire towards Nargund. From then on it was but a matter of time.

"The enemy completely spread over the plain and the Sowars followed up and sabred them to within 500 yards of the Petah - those whom we pursued towards the water course may have been about 800, but there were more joining from the rear and I would compute them at not less than one thousand, while our Cavalry force was not more than 150 sabres. Their loss was not less than sixty killed besides wounded, but knots of footmen armed with sword and matchlock fighting to the last, prevented our getting up to the main body which made good a very hurried retreat into the Petah."

As lions attack cattle and sheep, eager to eat,
The soldiers did not tire to cut, to stab and to beat
Those beggars who had no food, but were full of conceit;
They became now to the demons and fowls delicious meat.

Some were hiding behind trees, trembling;

Other fled in disguise, dissembling.
Stumbled, fell, and with blades of grass in their mouths were
heard mumbling.
'O Englishmen, our Lords, do not kill us! We are already
Like corpses tumbling.'

When Baba saw his force shattered and broken,
He was confounded, and is said to have thus spoken -

'Perhaps my dull warriors did not well direct their guns and
balls.
Alas! they have deceived me! They showed courage only as long
as they were within my walls,
These wily hypocrites! They betrayed me; that galls
My soul! They themselves are lost; to me they were false.'

[v. 39-41-42]

This phase of the battle lasted until about 1 p.m. when the Infantry and guns came up.

"The artillery practice was excellent, the round shot was directed chiefly against the Chief's Palace, and the neighbouring [Venkateshar] Temple, strong buildings commanding the Petah, and the former protected by its position from the Fort guns. Our shell burst among the crowds flying to the Fort, and there, with the round shot and heavy rifle fire seemed either to have driven the enemy out or to have put down all opposition."

At 5 p.m. the assault was made and by half past Baba Saheb's palace, and the Venkateshar Temple were in possession of Malcolm's force; and by 6 p.m. the whole town was his.

At not finding Baba they gnashed their teeth and researched the
whole place,
But nowhere could they discover and recognise his face.
'Where can he be?' They exclaimed and began to gaze
At the Fort. Hither now was directed their chase.

[v.39]

The lofty Fort was perched some 600 feet or more above the town.

"The whole of the Petah was commanded from our position and the Fort guns could not be depressed to bear on us. The enemy fired from the Fort, but his fire did not damage us as we had good cover, and it ceased almost entirely before dark. No doubt a shot from the rifle of Private Thomas Hopkins, H.M. 74th, which killed a man in the embrasures two hundred yards over our head did much to keep the enemy quiet."

As it was not practicable to take the Fort that day it was not until the following morning, 2 June, that Malcolm made his advance up the hill.

"We started about 8 a.m., with two companies of H.M. 74th under command of Captain Davies and the Company of the 28th N.I., under Lieutenant Heisch, Russalder (sic) Sew Pursand Sing with a few dismounted Sowars leading. It took us about half an hour to wind up the hill to the first Gate. Sowar Shaikh Abdoola of the Southern Maratha Horse, climbed over the wall and unbarred the first iron plated

Gate and we entered. We passed on to the second. The Guard Rooms were deserted, the arms and accoutrements were hanging on the wall. The same Sowar opened the second Gate in a similar way, the third and fourth were open, and we entered the Fort. A few persons armed and disarmed fled down the precipitous rocks on our approach but there was no show of opposition. It was a matter of congratulation and thankfulness that such a Stronghold had fallen into our hands without the loss of one life. The casualties in the capture of the Petah and Fort were one Highlander severely wounded and two Gunners and four horses severely scorched in an explosion."

But Baba Saheb had not been found, for in truth he had fled the previous day with but a handful of his supporters.

However, the Commissioner of Police at Belgaum, Mr F H Souter (later Sir Frank Souter, Commissioner of Police Bombay), had moved with alacrity to block the path of those attempting to escape from Nargund into the Belgaum Collectorate. By dint of hard horse riding and good intelligence Baba Saheb was traced to the village of Tergal on the north bank of the Malprabha River, 18 miles north west of Nargund. Here Souter arrested him and his three remaining companions hiding in a clump of bushes on the river bank some distance from Tergal on the evening of 3 June.

Bhaskar Rao Baba Saheb was brought to Belgaum and confined in the Fort. He was tried on 11 June with Rebellion and Waging War against the British Government in three instances, one being the murder of Mr Manson. He pleaded guilty and was found the same, and sentenced to be hanged the next day.

While hanging him the rope broke;
He fell to the ground and addressing his judges thus spoke;
'You are my refuge; spare my life; put the cloak
Of mercy over me; humbly I will bear your yoke.'

It was of no avail that he suppliantly prayed and knelt.
At his words the hearts of our Lords did not melt.
They smiled, great was the anguish he felt;
But he was a murderer with whom they justly dealt.

[v.58-59]

So ended a sad tale - a short war of fifteen days duration. Baba Saheb's mother and wife, unable to bear the ignominy of his defeat at Nargund, were found drowned in the Malprabha River on 3 June before his final disgrace of being hanged for his crimes.

It is ironic that had Baba Saheb stayed his hand until November all his problems would have been solved for, under the Act for the Better Government of India 1858, all the Native Rulers were confirmed in their rights and Lord Dalhousie's policy of lapse was just a bad memory. Baba Saheb had been considered to be the most intelligent of the Southern Maratha Chiefs. He was no soldier, that is clear, rather he was a scholar with a library of Sanskrit books reputed to number between 3 and 4 thousand; unfortunately for posterity they were destroyed in the attack on Nargund. Neither had he the financial resources to fund an army; he relied on local people and in the hour of battle they had deserted him.

Now has gone the powder smell;
On the ground lie ball and shell,
Tired of flying through the air.

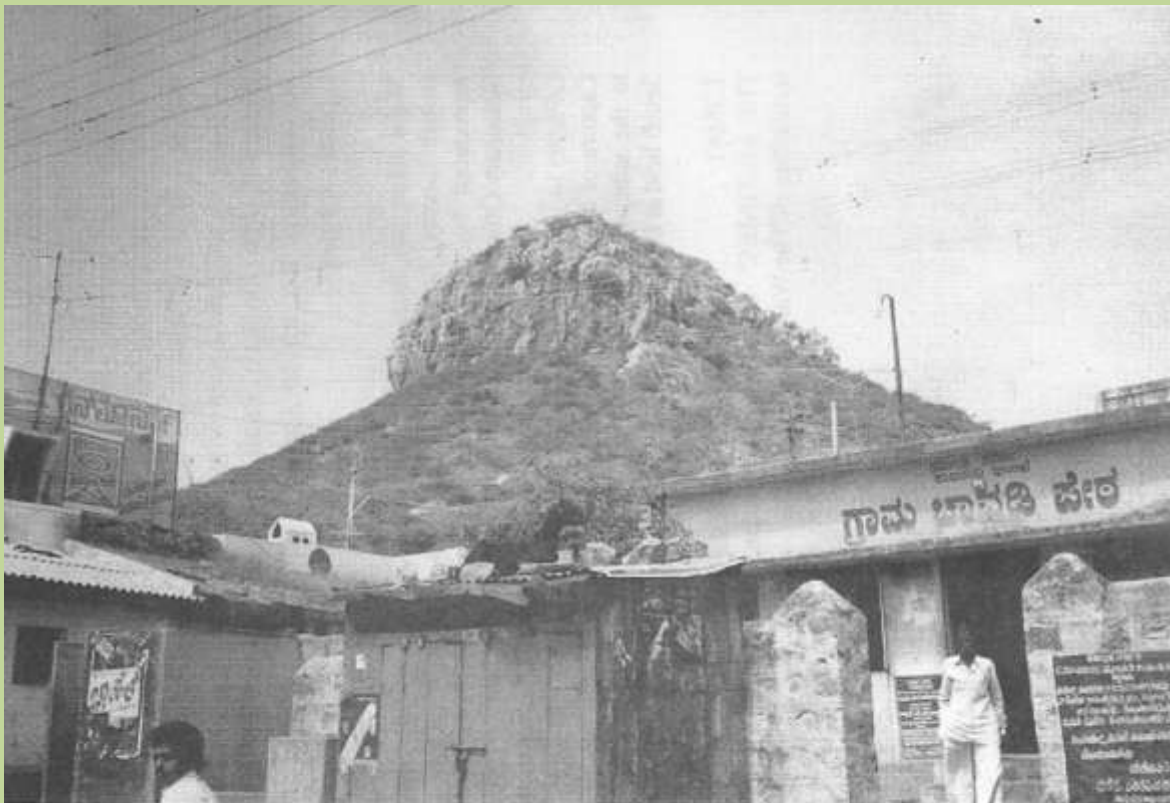
People dwell contented there.
[v.71]

Such was Nargund in 1858. Having had my interest thoroughly aroused by documentary research I decided that on my visit to India in Autumn 1996 I would visit the towns and villages mentioned in the text. It was a most interesting and rewarding experience. The illustrations are a small selection of the many photographs I took. This area of Karnataka is very rural, the main employment being agriculture. English speakers are few but the people I met were very friendly and helpful - the crippled man who led me round the town of Nargund, and the two small boys aged 11 and 8 who accompanied me up to the fort and led the way are typical examples.

Major references from the Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London, Crown Copyright material of which is reproduced by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

L/PS/5/534 - Despatch of Lieutenant Colonel Malcolm. Capture of Nargund 1-2 June 1858; and other documents relating to the subject, including the Trial Papers of Bhaskar Rao Baba Saheb held at Belgaum 11 June 1858.

T.35681 - "*WESTERN INDIA BEFORE AND DURING THE MUTINIES*". G Le G Jacob, London, 1871, for the English translation of *The War with Baba Saheb*.



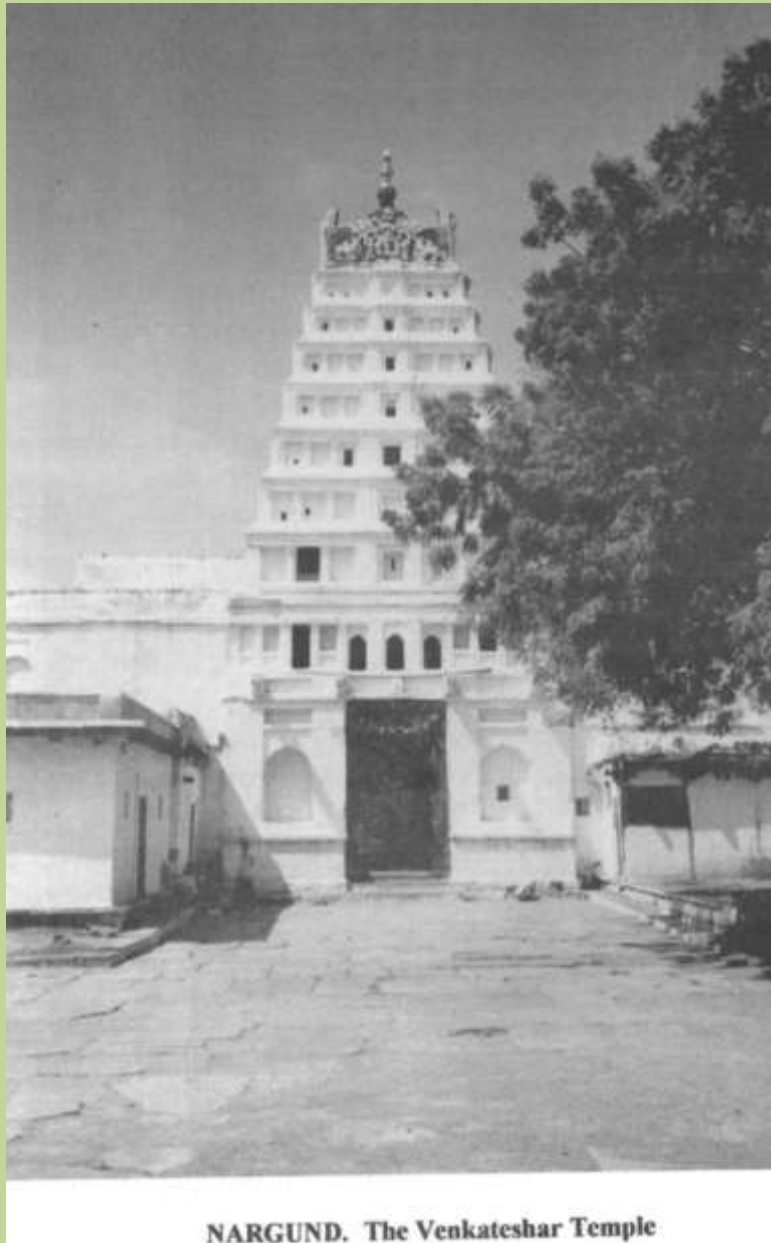
NARGUND. The hill fort as seen from a street in the town.



NARGUND. The ruins of the hill fort - hardly one stone stands upon another. The wall at centre encloses a water tank; steps through a passageway lead to water level.



SOOREBUND. Facing the Victory Pillar is a building on the site of the Kulweshur Temple where Manson was murdered. Inside there is a sanctum to Shiva which may have been a part of the original Temple.



AN ACCOUNT OF HOLKAR'S ARMY IN 1804

Anthony S Bennell

There are relatively few authenticated descriptions of the forces that enabled Jaswant Rao Holkar to destroy the Peshwaship in 1802 and subsequently, after his withdrawal from Pune, to threaten the overthrow of the Maratha policy of Richard Wellesley. The narrative which here follows, taken from the Richard Wellesley papers in the British Library, was forwarded to the Fort William Secretariat in Calcutta by Harry Close, the Resident with Peshwa Baji Rao in July 1804.

Narrative of John Ditmore taken down at Pune 15 July 1804

"My father was a German and I was born at Bombay. About nine years ago I visited this place [Pune] for the benefit of my health. I settled here and occasionally returned to Bombay on business...

Sinde's army at that time lay in this neighbourhood. I became acquainted with Captain Honore and was employed by him in educating his children. Sometime after Sinde's army marched to the northward and Captain Honore having proceeded with his company I attended him. After a tedious warfare with Jaswant Rao Holkar, Captain Honore returned to Pune in the year 1802, along with the troops commanded by Captain Dawes and Sadasher Bhau. In the action which subsequently took place, Sinde's troops were unsuccessful. Captain Honore was obliged to return hastily to the northward, leaving me and his family behind at Pune. The family afterwards experienced some distress but having been removed to Bombay by the assistance of a friend, I separated from them and attached myself to Major Armstrong, who commanded a corps in Holkar's service.

Holkar with his army now retired from Pune to the northward, and on their arrival at Mehesur a difference as I heard arose between Jaswant Rao Holkar and the Major and there being no hope of an accommodation, the Major quitted the camp, taking the direction of Kotah. It was my intention to have followed him, but [on] a report which afterwards proved false that he had been captured and ill-treated, I resolved to remain with the army.

At this time the principal brigade of infantry in the army was commanded by Colonel Vickers - it consisted of five battalions with 36 guns. The corps which had been under Major Armstrong consisted of four battalions and 29 guns. A third brigade of four battalions with 30 guns was under Mukkun Sing and a fifth of two battalions with 30 guns was commanded by Colonel Dodd but this corps had separated from us at the [Serindua?] Ghat, and exclusive of the above ordnance, there was a heavy park of about sixteen pieces.

Moving from Mehesur we arrived at Dhar, where we were joined by Colonel Dodd and his brigade. From Dhar we moved to Udaipur.

On this march Colonel Dodd had a violent dispute with Hurnaut Sing and in consequence was made a prisoner and was put in [the] charge of Mukkun Sing. From Udaipur we proceeded nearly in the direction of Chittoor and as Colonel Vickers with his brigade had marched by a different route, he was ordered to join with all expedition. By the time he joined we [were] halted at a position nearly an equal distance from the two places just mentioned.

Here Holkar's infantry, having been far in arrears, became mutinous from need of subsistence. On the preceding day, Jaswant Rao Holkar had marched with his cavalry in a northern direction, and halted at the distance of six or seven kos. As the infantry became daily more turbulent, Hurnaut Sing showed an intention to follow Jaswant Rao Holkar directing the other corps at the same time to accompany him. The troops perceiving that he was going off became more urgent for their pay and stopped his elephant, the sentry at his tent firing at him at the same time, while others wounded him with a lance. Some of the native officers conceiving that he was in a dangerous way, managed to extricate him from the mutineers and convey him to Holkar's camp.

On the following day Jaswant Rao Holkar sent for Colonel Vickers, Major Dodd and a Major Ryan who served in Colonel Vickers' brigade and soon afterwards it was current in camp that Holkar had ordered these three officers to be beheaded. Not long after Jaswant Rao Holkar returned to the vicinity of the spot where the infantry lay, and gave orders for their arrears being immediately paid. The troops being now satisfied, he came into the encampment, conversed with the officers in a conciliatory manner and then retired to his own ground.

A few days afterwards, the whole of the infantry being paid off moved and joined Jaswant Rao Holkar, and on arrival at that ground I perceived the bodies of Vickers, Dodd and Ryan lying stripped in the public bazaar, close to which the troops passed as they moved to their lines. A few horsemen were stationed near the bodies, probably to prevent their being removed. The heads had been separated and as we advanced further we saw them exposed at the end of the bazaar, close to the butcher's shambles. It was observable that some papers were lying on each side of the body of Colonel Vickers. While we were on the march from Mehesur it was currently reported that Jaswant Rao Holkar had expressed his displeasure against Colonel Vickers, accusing him of having levied contributions on the march which he had applied to his own purposes instead of carrying them to the public account, and that Mr Vickers, on being so accused had denied the charge, presenting Jaswant Rao Holkar with a list of his property and telling him that he might dispose of it as he pleased.

After Colonel Vickers and the other officers were executed, it was mentioned generally in camp that Jaswant Rao Holkar was led to destroy them from having intercepted some letters addressed to Colonel Vickers by some individuals of the English army offering him five lakhs of rupees if he would separate and remain in the rear. This story apparently made some impression on the Patan troops in Holkar's army, but the Hindus in camp gave no credit to it, observing that had any letter of the sort been intercepted, it would have been shown about to establish the accusation.

The papers which I saw near Colonel Vickers' body had the appearance of having been torn from a rough letter book, as the writing appeared to be hasty and blotted. Some Patans who were near the bodies at the time, abused the Portuguese Christians as they passed, telling them that their fate was not far distant. A few days after this happened, the army marched to Ameerghar about 12 kos distant in a northern direction. Here Jaswant Rao Holkar arranged his infantry into three brigades placing them respectively under the command of Mukkun Sing, Tantia and a mussulman whose name I do not recollect.

From this position Jaswant Rao Holkar moved to Shahpura distant about 18 or 19 kos. The posts and districts in the neighbourhood he wrested from the hands of the Grasseahs [?] and placing them under the authority of the Udaipur Raja, marched to Adjmir, a distance of about 25 kos. From this position he moved to Jaipur and at the distance of 15 kos from that capital I separated from his camp, returning to Pune by the route of Ujjein and Burhanpur. His army had been previously distributed in three divisions, that under Tantia was at Shapura, Mukkun Sing's division was at Mundasore 40 kos from Ujjein. About fifty Portuguese who served Holkar as sergeants and gunners left his army shortly after the execution of the European officers and the only Christian officers remaining with Jaswant Rao Holkar were Jacob and Mune Luis, the former born at the Cape of Good Hope and the latter from Portugal.

When we lay at Mehesur, the infantry battalions were each about 200 or 250 strong, but when Jaswant Rao Holkar arranged the whole into three brigades of five battalions each, he recruited each battalion to 500 strong, by entertaining the fugitive sepoy from Perron's corps

..... Holkar's artillerymen are almost all Patans and are expert at the guns, from having been originally trained by Monsieur Dudrenegue and Monsieur Fluery. It is difficult to say what number of sepoys may now be with Holkar as he continued to entertain the fugitive aligoes daily when I left his camp."

This "interrogation report" can be found in the Richard Wellesley papers at Add Mss 13599 f 164. For background on the period the interested reader is referred in confidence to John Pemble "*Resources and Techniques in the Second Maratha War*". The Historical Journal vol. 19, no 2 (1976) pp. 375-404.

LAST SURVIVORS OF THE INDIAN MUTINY

John Tamplin

I refer to the interesting article by Peter Chapman (DURBAR Vol. 13, No 4, pages 157-159). This is a subject which has been picked over in the past in various journals. In *Bengal Past and Present* (Journal of the Calcutta Historical Society) of 1933 there are two mentions. Firstly in the issue of April-June, at pages 138-139, when on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the first Relief of the Lucknow Garrison on 25 September 1932, there were to be found 12 British survivors of the besieged Garrison. These were:

- Mrs Erina Shaw (who died at Southsea on 21 December 1933 aged 95). At the time of the siege she was the wife of Lieut. A Soppitt, 4th Oudh Infantry; she later married Major A Shaw.
- Mrs Margaret Quaid (died in Aldershot at the end of February 1933 aged 95); widow of a sergeant of the 32nd Regt killed in the Siege.
- The last of the combatant members of the Garrison was Colonel J Bonham CB, Bengal Artillery; died in Ireland on 18 May 1928 aged 93.

The remainder were children at the time of the Siege:

- R H Anderson, Bengal C.S. who was 2^{1/2} years old; grandfather was a Waterloo officer, and son of Capt R P Anderson.
- C G Palmer CIE; was a boy of 10 at the Martinere.
- F Lincoln, 'the well-known Lucknow barrister'; also at the Martinere.
- Brother W H Williams, 'now an inmate of the St Cross Hospital at Winchester'; also at the Martinere.
- The Revd. R A Edgell, 'who lives at Eastbourne'.
- Mrs Haynes of Cheltenham; a daughter of T H Kavanagh VC.
- Mrs Long of Cheltenham; sister of the above.
- Mrs Pryce of Bath; daughter of Major C E Bruere, 13th Bengal N.I. (her brother, Mr C E Bruere, another survivor, died at Southsea on 24 April 1930 aged 76).
- Mrs Alpin Thomson of Lymington; she was born in October after the arrival of the first relief force; daughter of Lieut. E P Lewin, Bengal Artillery.

The second reference in *Bengal Past and Present* is in the issue of October-December 1933 at page 146. This mentions again C G Palmer 'who earned his medal by acting as

ammunition carrier and errand boy to the battery commanded by his brother-in-law (Capt Ralph Ouseley, 48th Bengal N.I.)'. Mrs Blanche Long is mentioned again as she died at Gloucester on 27 September 1933 aged 76. 'Her younger sister, Mrs Kathleen Haynes, still lives'.

The second source of information on this subject is in the *Journal* of the Orders and Medals Research Society. Here there are four references - two in 1982, pages 196 and 225; these quote that Sgt A McKerrow, 90th L.I., at the Defence of Lucknow, died on 9 October 1927; and Major General Sir C R H Nicholl KCB, served in the Mutiny, died on 31 March 1928. The third reference is in 1983, page 113, stating that George Hill NZC (New Zealand Cross), died on 15 February 1930. The fourth reference is in 1992, page 19, when it is stated that Captain Edward Kitson, at the siege of Lucknow, died on 9 January 1939 aged 98 (see The Times, 10 January 1939). On the same page is the confirmation of C G Palmer CIE, born on 15 October 1847, died in British Columbia on 13 August 1940; his entry in *Who Was Who* again records he had the Mutiny Medal 'for duty on a battery as a boy'.

Finally mention must be made of an interesting article by our member Captain Tim Ash on the subject of pupils at the Martinere School. A medal roll is given of the Staff and pupils of La Martinere awarded the medal; these total 65. It can be remarked that in the names already given above, those of F Lincoln, W H Williams and C G Palmer do not appear on this Medal Roll. As Palmer was employed by his brother-in-law commanding a battery his name may be on another Roll, as indeed may be those of F Lincoln and W H Williams.

Be all this as it may, the last survivor seems to be C G Palmer who at the time was a boy of 10.

(Possibly so for Lucknow, but see the letter at page 35 below from Richard Muir with regard to a Cawnpore survivor who died nine years after Palmer Ed.)

(Footnote by Tim Ash - I don't think I can add anything to John Tamplin's note.....we both believed Palmer was a pupil of La Martinere but my later investigations failed to turn up his name as a pupil of the school. Nor could I trace a Mutiny Medal Roll for him. I suspect that, probably due to his young age, his medal claim was submitted by him at a much later date. I did not follow this up as the Roll would probably be buried somewhere in Military Correspondence and a search could be a lengthy process, though not impossible!)

SUCCESSION OF TITLES OF THE CALCUTTA LIGHT HORSE

Chris Kempton

- 1872 CALCUTTA VOLUNTEER LANCERS [GGO 881 22.8.1872]
- 1877 Suspended
- 1881 MTD COY, CALCUTTA VOLUNTEER RIFLE CORPS [16.9.1881]
- 1886 CALCUTTA MOUNTED RIFLES [14.9.1886]
- 1889 CALCUTTA LIGHT HORSE [GGO 145 15.2.1889]

The 'accepted' date of the title Calcutta Light Horse is 20.5.1887 and this has been used by all authorities since its first appearance in the Indian Army List of July 1921.

The Regimental History refers to 15.2.1889 and makes no reference to 1887 and it seemed that this anomaly was worthy of clarification.

The Indian Army List of April 1914 is the first which has any reference to origins but only refers to the 'Reorganisation of 14.9.1886'. Subsequent lists up to July 1921 refer to 'Reconstitution by GGO 437 of 1898'¹. From July 1921 up to 1947 the reference is 'present designation from 20.5.1887'.

GGOs for 1887 contain 10 Orders referring to Volunteer Force designations and two of these are dated 20.5.1887:

- No 373 'The Governor-General is pleased to sanction the formation of Gorakhpur or 'B' Troop of Ghazipur Light Horse into a separate corps under the designation 'Gorakhpur Light Horse'.
- No 374 'The Governor-General is pleased to sanction the 4th Administrative Bn North West Frontier Province Volunteers to be constituted of the Ghazipur Volunteer Rifle Corps and the Ghazipur and Gorakhpur Corps of Light Horse'.

There is no reference in these or any other of the 1887 Orders to the Calcutta Mounted Rifles, nor is there any mention of the unit in Bengal GOs for 1887.

Reference to GGOs for 1889, however, produces No 145 of 15 February quoted herewith:

GGO 145 of 15th Feb 1889

'With reference to clause 195 of Indian Army Circulars 1888 The Governor-General in Council is pleased to sanction the undermentioned Corps or portions of Volunteer Corps:

- 1 - Calcutta Mounted Rifles,
- 2 - Mounted Coys North Bengal Volunteer Rifle Corps,
- 3 - Sibsagar Mounted Infantry,
- 4 - Darrang Mounted Rifles,

being in future designated as follows:

- 1 - Calcutta Light Horse
- 2 - North Bengal Mounted Rifles
- 3 - Sibsagar Mounted Rifles
- 4 - Darrang Mounted Rifles.'

This would seem to present a 'fait accompli' and there is no doubt whatsoever that the effective date is 15.2.1889. Clause 195 of December 1888 is the initial re-classification and regulations specified to come into effect after 1 January 1889 and also covers a number of other units which were already designated Light Horse or Mounted Rifles.

Two questions I cannot answer. First, how the IA List attached the May 1887 date to the Calcutta L.H. in 1921 as there is no possible connection between the CLH and the Gorakhpur LH or the 4th Admin Bn NWFP Vols? Secondly, why the wrong date was allowed to stand for 26 years? Possibly the Regiment were happy to leave it so as it gave them slightly more

seniority as Light Horse, but I would have thought someone at Staff level would have picked it up at some point!

Note [1]. **GGO 437 of 22 April 1898:** 'H.E. The Governor-General sanctions the abolition of the Administrative Bn, Presidency Volunteers and the reconstitution of the various corps comprising the Bn. viz Calcutta Light Horse, Cossipore Artillery Volunteers, Calcutta Volunteer Rifles, East Bengal State Railway Volunteer Rifles'.



BOOK REVIEWS

● "*HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CAVALRY*". Lord Anglesey. London: Leo Cooper, 190 Shaftesbury Avenue, London

The importance to members of the Society of the recent volumes of Lord Anglesey's "History of the British Cavalry" will only be appreciated by those who have already seen them. That number, I dare say, will not be great. They are expensive books.

In January the eighth and final volume was published to a fanfare of cavalry trumpets at the Royal United Services Institute in Whitehall where the Duke of Kent presented Lord Anglesey with the RUSI's Chesney Gold Medal for this wonderful addition to our knowledge of military history.

The books are important to members of the Society for the detailed insight they throw on the role of the Indian cavalry, particularly in the 1914-18 War. Volume 5 (which deals with Egypt and Palestine) and Volume 6 (Mesopotamia) are, frankly, required reading for many of you. Other volumes deal with the Western Front and therefore the involvement of the Indian Cavalry Corps - which was extensive - before its withdrawal to Palestine in 1917 when a role in France clearly no longer existed for it.

The general reader will take enormous pleasure from these books simply because they are well written and wholly free of literals. The connoisseur of good books will enjoy them because their production, printing and publication is exceptional these days. The dust covers, for instance, are of the very best. The military historian will enjoy them for their accuracy.

But we in the Indian Military Historical Society will have a peculiar interest because of the attention with which Lord Anglesey writes of the Indian cavalry, the exploits of which are only dealt with in rare regimental histories, the current (second-hand) price of which sets the head reeling. There are also casual revelations which solve riddles.

All of you with a well-thumbed copy of Hayward's "*Indian Army Honours and Awards*" will have wondered about the unlikely names which appear among those awarded the Indian Meritorious Service Medal in the 26th, 27th and 28th Light Cavalry regiments. What (you must surely have asked yourselves) are Edward Richard Peacock, Richard Samuel Alderson and people called Gilbert, Brown and Inglis doing in the ranks of the Indian Army? Volume six reveals that cavalry commanders in Mesopotamia, forced to make up numbers in the ranks of the Indian cavalry regiments (not necessarily those three, incidentally) - and short of Indian reinforcements - filled the gaps with British cavalry soldiers! Unbelievable? True.

Lord Anglesey provides chapter and verse. I must say I have never seen an IMSM awarded to an Englishman. But if one was to surface then I would know how he came by it...and why.

While Lord Anglesey paints a broad picture, he is the William Powell Frith of military historians, determined to pack in as many fascinating and relevant details, footnotes, asides, references and cross-references as is necessary. You will be grateful for each and every one.

Leo Cooper, the well-known publisher and proprietor of Pen and Sword Books tells me he has copies of all save Volumes 1 and 2 of the eight volumes.

We live in an age when 'instant authors', often working to deadlines and selfishly passionate to see their names on the front covers of books whatever the content, churn out works of dubious reliability and recycled opinion. Thirty years has Lord Anglesey laboured. And he has laboured for posterity and in the interests of truth. It is our good fortune, for the signing of a cheque, to enjoy the spread he has prepared selflessly for us. Tuck in.

● "*THE FRONTIER ABLAZE - The North-West Frontier Rising 1897-98*". Michael Barthorp, 128 pages, illustrated black and white plus sixteen colour plates, maps - published by Windrow & Greene Ltd, 5 Gerrard Street, London W1V 7LJ. Deluxe edition £65, ordinary edition £35.

During the hundred years or so when Britain was responsible for the North West Frontier of India, few years went by without trouble from one or other of the Pathan tribes requiring military action. It was fortunate that the Pathan's fierce individualism usually prevented a general uprising over the whole Frontier.

The mass uprising dealt with in this book involved almost the whole Frontier, from Swat in the north to Tochi in the south, and included all the major tribes except the Mahsuds in South Waziristan. To contain it needed 64 British and Indian battalions, 23 more than the total strength of British infantry today, and earned the Battle Honour "Punjab Frontier" and three clasps to the India Medal 1895. The only comparable uprising was in 1919-21 at the time of the Third Afghan War, and this also merited a Battle Honour and three clasps to the Indian General Service Medal 1908.

Michael Barthorp is to be congratulated on a superb book, well produced with a plethora of illustrations, together with sixteen colour plates of British and Indian types, excellently drawn by Douglas N. Anderson. The first chapter deals in detail with the Pathans and the Frontier, including the methods of political control in use up to this time. The second deals with the British and Indian armies of the time - officers and men, organisation, arms and equipment; essential reading for those who do not know the period or the Frontier.

The story continues with a chapter or chapters on each of the operations in chronological order, starting with a relatively minor incident in Tochi, and continuing with operations in Swat, the Malakand, the Mohmand area and finally in the Khyber and Tirah - the famous action of the storming of the Heights of Dargai merits a separate chapter. The presence of Winston Churchill, as a War Correspondent with the Malakand Field Force, is mentioned. He was involved in a retreat of the 35th Sikhs and was nearly killed; the crisis was resolved by the bugler sounding the "Charge" on which the Sikhs turned about and repulsed the enemy. Who ordered it to be sounded has always been a mystery, but one story is that it was Churchill.

I have no real criticisms to make - I did find that the extraordinary detailed descriptions of the various actions meant that it was very difficult to take them all in when reading the book straight through - a pause between chapters gives a better understanding. VERY STRONGLY RECOMMENDED both for the illustrations and the text. AAM

LETTERS AND QUERIES

● A couple of items have caught my eye in the newspapers in recent weeks which I think are worth repeating. The first was an article in The Times of 4 February concerning the late Captain Birendra Nath Mazumdar RAMC. He had come to England in 1937 to study medicine at Cambridge and when war broke out joined the RAMC. He was posted to France and was captured while leading a convoy of ambulances. Over the next four years he was moved from camp to camp, including Colditz, after complaining about the lack of medical facilities with which to treat sick POWs. Moved to another camp from Colditz, he made an escape attempt only to be caught close to the Spanish border. He made several more escape attempts, finally reaching Switzerland where he was interned before being repatriated. His story had been told to the Imperial War Museum on the proviso that it was not made public until after his death. Dr Mazumdar died in Devon in December 1996 aged 82.

The other item, carried in several papers, announced a programme of events to be held in the UK throughout the year to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Indian and Pakistani independence. This will include the launching of an appeal fund to build a memorial in London to the many thousands of Indian Army soldiers who fought and died in the two world wars. Ed.

● Richard Muir writes:

It would be interesting to know when the last person who had personal experience of the Mutiny, not necessarily as a soldier or even as an adult, died.

My claimant for this honour would be my Great Great Aunt Catherine (Kitty) Angelo who died in 1949. Her father, my great great grandfather, was Lieutenant Frederick Angelo of the 16th BNI who was posted to Cawnpore as Deputy Superintendent of the Ganges Canal in May 1857. Fearing the worst he sent his pregnant wife Helena and their two young children down river on 28 May. They were among the last, if not the last, Europeans to leave Cawnpore before the siege. They arrived at Allahabad on 30 May where they were when the 6th Regiment mutinied. They eventually reached Calcutta on 1 July, long after Frederick Angelo had been massacred with the others in Cawnpore.

His posthumous son was born in Calcutta (Lady Canning stood as his godmother - in due course he also joined the Indian Army and was killed during the second Afghan war). The two young girls were my great grandmother (who died before I was born) and my Great Great Aunt Catherine (known in the family as Aunt Kitty). Kitty never married and died in Hove in 1949.

I should be very interested to hear if anybody who had personal experience of the Mutiny lived later than this.

(see John Tamplin's article about Lucknow survivors at pages 21-26 above. Ed.)

● In response to the request from non-member Robin Hodson about the service of Afridis (Vol. 13, No 4, page 172) Brigadier John Randle writes:

All the five independent Baluch Regiments (124th Baluchistan Infantry, 126th Baluchistan Infantry, 127th Baluch Light Infantry, 129th Baluchis and 130th Baluchis) which, on the 1922 reorganisation of the Indian Army, formed the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Battalions respectively of the 10th Baluch Regiment, enlisted trans-frontier Pathans - Afridis, Wazirs, Mahsuds, Mohmands and Orakzais. The best place to check this out would be the Indian Army Lists of that period where the class composition of Cavalry and Infantry regiments was shown beneath the regimental title.

I have detailed information about Afridis in 129th Baluchis, obtained from the History of that regiment during the 1914-18 War. In August 1914 the class composition of the Regiment was 2 Companies PMs, 3 Companies of Mahsuds, 1 Company of Mohmands and 2 Companies of Afridis. The Subadar Major (Mala Khan) was an Afridi and there were two Afridi Subadars and four Afridi Jemadars. The battalion, which served on the Western Front and in East Africa, won a number of decorations (including the first VC ever awarded to an Indian soldier), but though I have a full list of names and awards, I cannot identify whether they were PMs or Pathans, or of what tribe of Pathans. The VC was Private Khuda Dad Khan, a PM.

At some stage during or just after the 1914-18 War the enlistment of trans-frontier Pathan in the regular Indian Army (not of course into the Scouts) was closed.

129th Baluchis had Tel-el-Kebir as a battle honour and so that could be the answer to question 'c'.

(I mentioned in the last DURBAR that Lieutenant Colonel Poulson had provided photographs of Sepoy Bandari Ram VC, Baluch Regiment, c.1946, and Subadar Major Allah Baksh OBI, Regimental Training Centre, Karachi, c.1946. Space did not permit their inclusion in the last edition but I have now included them (Ed.)



Sepoy BANDARI RAM VC Baluch Regiment (c.1946)



Subadar Major ALLAH BAKSH OBI
Karachi Regimental Training Centre (c.1946)

● Shamus Wade writes:

Is there some learned member of our Society who can write an article on the Indian Pioneer Corps, which was around 180,000 strong in 1945? The Commonwealth Forces History Trust has various fragments of information. 1,568 names on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Rangoon Memorial plus a further 125 names from the Civil Pioneer Forces and 561 from the Indian States Civil Labour Units.

Besides the actual soldiers of the Indian Pioneer Corps (when did they acquire the combatant status shown by the rifle crossed with spade and hammer on their cap badge?) there were by 1945 about 413,000 civilian workers of two kinds, "regimented" (184,000) and

"unregimented" (229,000). The former were mostly recruited by the Indian Tea Association and consisted of tea estate labour commanded by their employers and with their own medical officers. They played a noble part in the retreat from Burma.

Confusingly, there were officers and NCOs of the Royal Pioneer Corps serving with the Indian Army in India. There were 31 companies of Indians from India in the Royal Pioneer Corps serving in Italy between 3 September 1943 and 7 May 1945. There were Nepalese Pioneers, a number of whom had taken part in Everest expeditions or came from families who had done so. And then there were Gaol Labour Battalions who turned up in Ceylon in 1944 and 1945.

Can anyone help?

- Jon Lee is seeking details of the 30 or so men of the Burma Frontier Force killed, wounded or captured by the Japanese at Toungoo on 21 March 1942.

- James Patrick seeks clarification of the initials G.O.F.F. - possibly an Oude connection.

- Mr J J Fallon, Hon. Public Relations Officer of the Gallipoli Association writes:

April 25 is the anniversary of the day in 1915 when British and Allied Forces landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula in an effort to capture the Dardanelles, defeat Turkey and open a supply route to Russia. Had we been successful there is no doubt that it would have had a significant influence on the length of the Great War and thus saved many who became casualties in the latter stages of the conflict.

However, we did not succeed and in fighting as severe as anything experienced in France and Flanders during the whole of the War, the Allies, in the eight months they were on the Peninsula, suffered an estimated 250,000 casualties, the vast majority of whom were British and from these Islands. With the exception of one Regular Army Division, the 29th, the British forces were composed of pre-war Territorials and initial volunteers for Kitchener's Army of 1914. The vast majority of men were thrust into battle with limited training in fighting a determined enemy in a hostile terrain. Fighting during the eight month's campaign was constant and heavy, an indication is the fact that thirty five Victoria Crosses were awarded.

The Gallipoli Association was founded to ensure that the memory of Gallipoli, the men who fought and died on its inhospitable shores and the many sacrifices they made are not forgotten. The Association is worldwide in membership but unfortunately time is taking its toll on the veterans of the campaign, for all are passed their individual century. The remainder of the membership consists of those who have a family connection with someone who served in the Gallipoli campaign or have a specific or general interest in the activities of the British Army on the Peninsula.

The Association welcomes new members and would be pleased to provide further information to anyone who has an interest in keeping alive the memory of the Gallipoli campaign of 1915.

