

OSPREY · MEN-AT-ARMS SERIES

# *30th Punjabis*

*Text by* JAMES LAWFORD

*Colour plates by* MICHAEL YOUENS



MEN-AT-ARMS SERIES  
EDITOR: PHILIP WARNER

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## Early Days 1857-1914



In August 1944, as always at that time of year, the black monsoon clouds had closed down over the jungle-clad Naga Hills, swamping everything in torrential rain and turning the steep and sinuous hill-tracks into a morass of quivering mud. Along these paths staggered the starving, tattered remnants of the Imperial Japanese Army which had so proudly marched on India but three months before. Upon the twin rocks of Imphal and Kohima the invasion had foundered: nothing now remained for the fever-ridden survivors but to seek sanctuary beyond the Chindwin where, perhaps, their pursuers might grant them respite and where they might find opportunity to recover a little of their strength. And while the Japanese withdrew on Burma, the 30th Punjabis, their final task completed, dug in on the rain-soaked ridges that overlooked the Lokchao River.

The Regiment numbered little more than 300; the stern fighting of the preceding weeks and the appalling weather had taken a heavy toll. Below the regimental position lay the road to Tamu, a slim scar winding round the hillside. As the soldiers watched the 11th East African Division in their 30 cwt Dodge trucks sweeping past to disappear into the grey blanket of cloud shrouding the road towards Tamu, no one in the 30th

Punjabis, or the 1st Battalion the 16th Punjab Regiment as it was then entitled, realized that the Regiment had fought its last great battle in the service of the British.

It was at the time of another great crisis that the Regiment had been raised. In May 1857 Indian regiments stationed in Meerut suddenly mutinied. Counter-measures were slow and ineffectual; in a few weeks almost the whole Bengal Army of the East India Company, 100,000 strong, had broken out into a murderous and bloody revolt. British regiments were few, many had been called away to the war in the Crimea; and the Indian regiments that remained loyal were inevitably suspect. These were desperate days for the British. The



**Brigadier C. P. Clarke.** He joined the Regiment in 1915 and, except for spells recruiting and at the Training Battalion, spent all his service with it until he relinquished command in 1941. Like many other British officers he centred his life round the Regiment, and indeed did not marry until after he had retired

mutinies had been accompanied by the massacre of all British men, women and children, near the scene of the outbreak. It was not only British rule that was threatened; the continued existence of every Briton in India seemed in the balance. The Indian soldier, the sepoy, whose loyalty in the past had been above question, on whose fighting ability the whole structure of British power in India had been built, had turned on his masters.

Fortunately, in North-West India in the Punjab there existed men such as John Lawrence, John Nicholson, Harry Lumsden - men whose courage and determination were to become a legend within the span of their own lives. The Punjab had been annexed less than ten years before, when, after the hardest wars Britain had fought in India, the power of the Sikhs who ruled it was finally broken. Beyond its borders lay the unruly kingdom of Afghanistan. An unusually large number of British regiments had been stationed in the newly conquered province to preserve law and order, and to secure the frontiers against the incursions of the Afghan and Pathan. In addition, the sepoys of the Bengal Army, perhaps because they had formerly greatly feared the Sikhs, had treated the conquered Punjabis with a disdain and an arrogance that had made them detested from Lahore to Rawalpindi. When the crisis came, the Governor of the Punjab, Lawrence, was able to act with energy and decision. All the Bengal Army regiments were disbanded, and where mutinies did occur the mutineers were speedily rounded up or driven out of the province. To replace the disbanded units, Lawrence made the bold decision to raise new regiments from the Punjab, and the Punjabis, both Sikh and Mohammedan, eager to avenge the insults and injuries they had suffered, flocked to enlist.

Amongst the many regiments raised at this time was the 22nd Regiment of Punjab Infantry, in due course to become, after one or two transmutations, the 30th Punjabis. It was merely one among the many which remained in the Indian Army order of battle after the Mutiny had been put down. Its history is representative of that of the great body of Indian infantry regiments of the line upon whose devotion to duty the strength of the Indian Army ultimately depended.

In June 1857 Mr George Ricketts, the Deputy

Commissioner of Ludhiana, received orders to raise a regiment. He resolved to call in any old soldiers, of whatever unit, who might be on furlough in his district. He wrote of the raising:

'A number of recruits had taken service from Ludhiana District and had just reached their homes 'on leave. I ordered them all into the station and there they were, as fine a lot of three year old (in service) soldiers as you could wish to see, all in their clean white clothes looking their best and wondering what they were wanted for. I kept them in two old barracks, fed them well, and when they had ceased coming in, I paraded them according to the number of their regiments, then according to the dates of their enlistment and then I selected them by age — so many for havildars, so many for ranks, leaving a few in each grade for promotion - and you never saw a lot of youngsters so happy, promoted to posts which in ordinary times they would have taken 12 to 14 years to attain. Practically they drilled themselves, they were always at it, even going to the bazaar. At any time they fell in and marched and worked as on parade.'

The Regiment had an authorized establishment of 800 men organized into ten companies consisting of a light company, a grenadier company and eight line companies. Among these, four were composed of Punjabi Mohammedans, four of Sikhs and two of Dogras. The men were armed with muskets and their early uniforms must have been a hotchpotch of those current in the Bengal Army at the time (see colour plate A).

The Regiment, in common with most of those newly raised, took no part in the great battles around Delhi and Lucknow. On 14 February 1858, however, it joined the Shahjahanpore Field Brigade and started to play a fully active role. By now the war had become largely a matter of hunting down fugitive bands of mutineers, a duty which the Regiment embraced with no little zeal. As a reward, it became a part of the permanent establishment of the Bengal Army. In 1859 its authorized establishment is shown as 1,000 men organized into ten companies and including one sergeant-major, two quartermaster-sergeants, two native doctors, ten subedars, ten jemadars, sixty havildars and twenty drummers.

The sergeant-major and quartermaster-sergeants

were British; the havildars were the Indian equivalent of sergeants in the British Army and wore similar badges of rank; although not specifically included in the establishment, there was also a junior grade of N.C.O., the 'naik', corresponding to the British Army corporal. The two commissioned ranks of 'jemadar' and 'subedar', however, were peculiar to the Indian Army and merit some explanation.

When the East India Company started raising Indian units in the mid-18th century, local magnates were often called on to recruit and train independent companies, which they, or their nominees, commanded with the title of 'subedar'. For a particular operation a number of companies might be grouped together under a British officer, generally either a captain or a subaltern. As the number of these independent companies increased, it became apparent that a larger permanent unit was needed, and the companies were formed into battalions under an Indian battalion commander. In addition a British captain and two subalterns, holding East India Company commissions, were superimposed on the Indian officer hierarchy; their main functions were to supervise training in peacetime and to command the battalion when it went on service; all British officers were automatically senior to all Indian.

This process of posting British officers permanently to Indian battalions, once started, gained considerable momentum until, by the time of the Mutiny, an Indian infantry battalion had virtually as many British officers as a British battalion in Her Majesty's Army. The existing organization of Indian officers, or 'Native' officers as they were originally called, remained, however, unaltered. This had unfortunate results. The command structure became hopelessly top-heavy, while the Native officers saw their responsibilities and status steadily eroded. Not unnaturally this caused considerable discontent, a discontent which may well have contributed materially to the decision, which so many took in 1857, to forsake their allegiance.

After British rule had been re-established, the number of British officers in Indian regiments was drastically reduced and, instead of adopting a slavish imitation of British Army organizations, a command structure was designed that took properly into account the special characteristics

of Indian regiments. In 1863 the number of British officers was reduced to six - the commanding officer, the adjutant, the quartermaster, two wing commanders and a wing officer. This seems a somewhat peculiar organization: the proportion of junior to senior officer appointments must have been far too low to preserve a properly balanced structure. It was probably adopted as a short-term measure to absorb a number of senior officers who might otherwise have become redundant. The establishment of British officers was successively increased to eight in 1868, to nine in 1882 and to thirteen in 1901.

In this final establishment the post of commanding officer, second-in-command, company commander, adjutant and quartermaster all became British. British N.C.O.s were phased out at an early date; to replace that important man, the quartermaster-sergeant, the appointment of quartermaster was filled by a normal combatant British officer, a significant departure from the practice in the British Army. The old idea of an Indian commandant, in some ways analogous to the master of the ship in the old Royal Navy, was retained but modified. The senior Indian rank was that of Subedar Major. In theory he was junior to all British officers, but he wore the badges of rank of a major and was personal adviser to the commanding officer on all administrative matters connected with the Regiment and particularly those relating to Indian customs. His position might appear to resemble that of a British Regimental Sergeant-Major, but in practice, with perhaps only five or six British officers actually present in a unit, he wielded considerably more power and, after the commanding officer, was probably the most important member of the Regiment. Below him in rank came the subedar, who initially commanded a company but gradually came to assume the position of second-in-command; he remained a fully trained officer, both tactically and administratively, and was capable of commanding a company in peace and war, not infrequently being called upon to do so. To complete the officer structure of the company were the jemadars; these came to be the platoon commanders, discharging all the responsibilities of subalterns in a British infantry battalion, except for one or two minor differences - for instance,

they were debarred from financial responsibilities and wore the badges of rank of second lieutenants.

Initially many of the subedars and jemadars were enlisted as such and frequently had seen service in the old Sikh Army. But with the passage of time it became customary to promote men who had previously served in the ranks, and direct commissioning became rare, although instances occurred as late as 1914. These Native officers or 'sirdars', as they were sometimes called, were men of considerable standing both in their regiments and in their villages. They wore swords and all the normal accoutrements of an officer; they were entitled to a salute from all other ranks and to be addressed as 'sahib'. They dedicated themselves



**The badge of the 30th Punjabis. In its original form, as can be seen on the colours, 'Punjab Native Infantry' was inscribed around the device within the wreath**

to their regiments, were complete masters of their trade and knew their men as a father his sons. They made the regiment what it was and, provided the right men were promoted, the commanding officer had little to cause him anxiety. The nearest equivalent to the Native officer was probably the centurion in the old Roman legion.

This welding together of British and Indian produced an organization which, fundamentally unaltered, withstood the passage of nearly ninety years, and the stresses and strains of two world wars. In the 19th century it had one further advantage almost certainly unpremeditated by its authors, it provided the Indian sepoy, on enlistment, with a better prospect of promotion than existed in almost any other army of that period.

But to return to the history of the 30th Punjabis. In 1861 the Regiment's title was changed from 'the 22nd Regiment of Punjab Infantry' to that of 'the 34th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry'; then before the year was out, it became 'the 30th Bengal Infantry'. The uniform at this time was still that of the old East India Company Army of pre-Mutiny days. The Sikhs must have

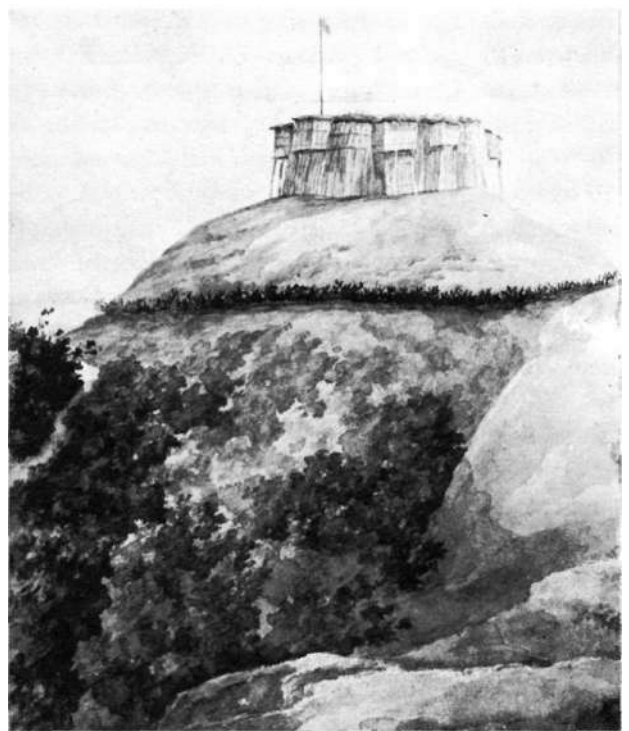
been allowed to wear safas, the long bands of cloth wound round the head to form a turban, but the other classes wore a version of the Kilmarnock cap. Changes, however, were on the way. Paradoxically, when the Indian Army was brought directly under the Crown, the old policy of producing imitation British Army uniforms was gradually abandoned, and on occasion it was the Indian Army that proved the innovator. The wise policy that had brought a specifically Indian organization to Indian regiments was followed in the matter of uniforms, and the Punjab Frontier Force units, for instance, which after the Mutiny had been incorporated in the new Queen's Army, did not even adopt the traditional red coat, but persisted in wearing their original, and highly irregular, khaki, using their own home-made dyes, occasionally with somewhat spectacular results.

In 1862 the regiments were authorized to wear plain native turbans, or safas. The 30th retained the red coat, but white trousers were on the way out except for hot weather wear, and blue serge trousers became standard. During the late 1860s trousers were discarded in favour of pantaloons and gaiters, and Punjabi shoes were permitted instead of boots. In the 1870s long puttees gradually took over from gaiters; it is not clear why the long puttee came to be regarded with so much favour; it was not particularly suitable for mountain warfare as it impeded the free play of the calf muscles and the binding just below the knee could cause varicose veins; in the 1914-18 war it was a potent source of 'trench feet'. Nevertheless the British Army, when the Boer War woke it up sharply to the advantages of khaki, adopted the long puttee along with khaki uniform. As regards organization, the light and grenadier companies were disbanded in 1864 and native infantry battalions were given an authorized strength of eight line companies, each consisting of one subedar, one jemadar, five havildars, five naiks, two drummers and seventy-five privates, the battalion totalling 712 all ranks. In 1862 the Regiment became the proud possessor of a brass band - the officers subscribed for the instruments out of their own pockets - and in 1865, under Lieutenant-Colonel Boisragon, it once again took the field, this time in Bhutan. Colonel Boisragon was to hold command for some twenty years; clearly in

those days there were some who believed in the virtues of continuity. Bhutan was a remote Himalayan kingdom. The Bhutanese did not lack courage, but rather the sinews of war: they constructed stockaded forts on hilltops from which they rained down arrows and stones upon intruders, weapons scarcely sophisticated enough to achieve much success in the latter half of the 19th century. The real enemy was sickness: fifty-four men died from fever, dysentery or scurvy, and seventeen had to be invalided out of the service.

But it was on another frontier that the Regiment was to see most of its service. Beyond the Khyber Pass lay Afghanistan, and beyond Afghanistan Central Asia across which the Russia of the Tsars was remorselessly driving southwards. No clear border existed between Afghanistan and India proper, and the Pushtu-speaking Pathan tribes that inhabited Afghanistan were kin to those who had filtered south and eastwards and now occupied the Himalayan foothills west and north of the River Indus. Even before Britain conquered the Punjab, suspicion of Russian intentions had been depriving British statesmen of their slumbers. In 1838 a disputed succession seemed to offer an opportunity to turn Afghanistan into a British puppet state. In the event, the attempt failed disastrously and a British army perished in the Himalayan snows. After the Mutiny Britain forswore further annexations. But although Afghan independence had to be respected, a hostile Afghan government which might embrace the Russian bear too warmly was something no British government dare tolerate. Afghanistan had to be kept friendly to Britain, if necessary at the cost of an occasional chastisement; after all, from time to time all friends fall out. In practice the policy worked well enough, but implicit in it was the need to maintain adequate forces near the undefined borders of that country. The real problem, therefore, was how to deal with the Pathan tribes that had spilled over into British India and lived on and across the frontier. The region was one of hill and mountain where roads were unknown and the tracks often suitable for little more than goats. The tribesmen were fiercely independent, giving allegiance to none but their tribal chiefs and quite prepared on occasion to challenge even their authority. Their land was poor and like many

highlanders they found it necessary to raid the plains to find means of subsistence. Almost from birth the Pathan learnt that the rest of the world was his prey, to be robbed or killed as occasion might warrant. Besides a fanatical loyalty to his family and to the Mohammedan religion, the only law he recognized was that of the vendetta or blood-feud. By this law an insult to the family had to be avenged, an eye being exacted for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. A blood-feud between two families, once begun, rarely ended before all the members of one family or the other had been exterminated. The law of the blood-feud did bring some form of order to an otherwise anarchic society. Courtesy was at a premium when an insult or an injury could bring consequences so deadly. But even so, in a touchy, hot-headed community, unfortunate incidents could happen and blood-feuds were by no means rare. Hence the Pathan's home was in every sense his castle; it was, in fact, frequently a tower constructed to withstand a siege. A Pathan out for a stroll took with him his rifle as automatically as the London businessman his umbrella.



**Bhutan 1865, the Bala stockade. Companies of the 30th took part in the assault on this medieval fortification. From a contemporary sketch by John Ruggles. (India Office Library)**





1878, the 12th Kelat-i-Ghilzai Regiment drilling in Multan. They are wearing full dress and gaiters, and carrying their rifles at the shoulder. From a contemporary sketch by Lieutenant Pulley for *Illustrated London News*. (*Illustrated London News*)

To deal with this problem the British had roughly two alternatives: they could fortify the line of the Indus in the style of the old Roman Empire, leaving the bulk of the Pathans to their own devices and hanging those that would inevitably come raiding across the frontier; alternatively they could delimit an agreed border with Afghanistan and firmly bring the tribes on the British side under control. The former alternative put British influence in Afghanistan at risk and surrendered the natural geographical borders of India to the tribes who might come under the influence of the sinister power of Russia; as to the latter, its cost was too great in peacetime and the resources required were not available in time of war. In consequence Britain adopted a typical compromise. The border tribes were largely left to themselves, and their chieftains were subsidized so long as they were of good behaviour; this had the advantage that they had the money to pay a fine if, as not infrequently happened, their behaviour left something to be desired. Bases and forts were, however, constructed at strategic points and if the conduct of a tribe became too outrageous, a punitive column would be sent in to chastise it and blow up some of its towers. Britain's policy in general, until she withdrew from the sub-continent, was to meddle as little as possible with the tribal areas, as they were called, so long as the peace of the settled areas or the security of the Frontier regions were not unduly threatened. Punitive action had inevitably to be taken from time to time, and the situation could become dangerous

if the ruling faction in Afghanistan was anti-British. The policy, however, preserved peace of a sort. The Pathan liked shooting, and shooting at the British was generally a less dangerous sport than starting a blood-feud with his neighbours. Thus occasional small wars broke out which formed excellent training exercises for the Army in India, and although the nightmare of a war with Afghanistan, simultaneous with a general rising of the Frontier tribes, might occasionally disturb the sleep of the political agents, in practice the tribes had too many conflicting interests and were far too disunited to join together to throw off an Imperial yoke which bore on them so lightly.

These Frontier wars were fought in a highly original and professional manner by both sides. The Pathans, who did not believe in making their national sport too dangerous, studied their opponents exceedingly carefully and avoided those that were skilled in Frontier fighting. In consequence the wars were remarkable for one possibly unique characteristic: if a regiment suffered heavy casualties in an action it hung its head in shame; heavy casualties marked a unit not as gallant but as inefficient. There was an element of sport about Frontier warfare, yet it was a deadly sport. The Pathans had an unpleasing habit of torturing and mutilating any adversary they might capture; for a British soldier to surrender was merely to exchange the possibility of a quick death for the certainty of a lingering one. But it was the wounded who were most affected. For a regiment to leave out a wounded man to fall into the hands of the Pathans and their somewhat imaginative wives was the ultimate disgrace.

Frontier wars were the bread-and-butter of soldiering to the 30th and many other regiments besides. The 30th began its apprenticeship in the Black Mountain expedition of 1868 and concluded its last operation in 1942. However, it was not until the Second Afghan War that the Regiment had a chance to show its mettle.

By 1880 the war had been in progress about a year. Negotiations for peace had been disrupted by a treacherous attack on the British Embassy in Kabul, and General Roberts had marched on Kandahar and occupied it by 13 October 1879. On arrival at the Frontier, the 30th joined the 2nd Khyber Division engaged at that time in



1878. Punjabi pioneers serving in the Khorum Valley. They are wearing khaki and long puttees. From the *Illustrated London News* of January 1879. (*Illustrated London News*)

establishing a direct line of communication between Peshawar and Kabul. After remaining on line of communication duties until December the Regiment moved up to Dakka, 12 miles north-west of Landi Kotal.

It was soon to see action. On occupying Kabul after the siege of Sherpur, General Roberts had seized the wife of Yakub Khan on the grounds that she had been inciting the Kabulis to revolt. The good lady was deported to India. Unfortunately her father, the Khan of Lalpur, was most incensed by such treatment of his daughter. He called his clansmen to arms and the Mohmands responded eagerly.

On 14 January 1880 some 5,000 Mohmands with twenty-five standards were observed from Dakka Fort encamped on a plateau overlooking the Kabul River and about five miles to the east of the Fort. Another body of about 3,000 were descried on the Gara Heights three miles to the south-east. It was decided to drive the tribesmen away. The main column was to advance on the plateau and cut the tribesmen off from their escape route across the Kabul River, while a subsidiary column under Colonel Boisragon was to capture the Gara Heights.

Colonel Boisragon's force comprised:

6th Dragoon Guards	94	144 sabres
17th Bengal Cavalry	50	}
'C' Battery Royal Horse		
Artillery		4 guns
25th Foot	110	}
8th Bengal Infantry	110	} 720 rifles
30th Punjab Infantry	500	}

At 11 a.m. on 15 January this force was drawn up on the plain immediately south-west of Dakka Fort facing the 3,000 Mohmands on the Gara Heights. The main force had marched six hours earlier and was assumed already to be in a position to cut off the enemy's retreat. The attack began with the guns of the Royal Horse Artillery opening fire on the advanced sangars (stone emplacements) of the tribesmen at a range of 1,000 yards, while the infantry made a feint as if to threaten the enemy's north flank nearest the river. The main infantry assault began at 1.55 p.m. in three echelons - 300 rifles forming the line of skirmishers with 200 in support and the remainder in reserve. The attack was carried through with great dash and by 2.30 p.m. the Gara Heights were gained with the loss of only one man killed and three wounded. By 5 p.m. Colonel Boisragon's force had crossed the Gara Pass, but unfortunately the main body had encountered unexpected difficulties in traversing the route selected for them and had failed to close the gap in time to cut off the enemy's retreat by raft and ferry across the Kabul River. The river was at this point unfordable and further action was delayed for a day pending the construction of rafts. This enabled the enemy to escape without further loss, but although in this respect the combined movement, as planned, had failed, it later became known that the defeat of the Mohmands on the Gara Heights had created panic in the tribe and the country was deserted for miles around. The number of Mohmands so brilliantly routed by Colonel Boisragon's column is confirmed in Volume III of *The Second Afghan War*, by Colonel H. B. Hanna, published in London, 1899-1910.

It was Colonel Boisragon's last action with the 30th. The extreme cold had affected his health, and on 4 March he was invalided home to England where he died in 1882.

In 1881 the 30th joined a punitive column operating against the Mahsuds, one of the toughest of the Pathan tribes, and penetrated to Razmak, a place which attained a certain renown in later years. The expedition was chiefly notable for the composition of the column which comprised about 4,000 fighting men, 4,000 followers to administer to their comfort, 3,000 mules and 3,000 camels. It must have been a fine spectacle on the line of march.

The tribes celebrated the *fin de siècle* with considerable gusto, even if they were actually ignorant of the event; at one time or another almost every tribe took up arms against the British. In 1895 the 30th assisted in the relief of Chitral and in 1897 became embroiled with the Afridis in the Tirah. The Tirah campaign was a major operation undertaken by two full infantry divisions. The campaign opened with an attack by the 2nd Division on the heights at Dargai which guarded the entrance to the Afridi homeland. Here the Afridis stood and fought, and only after a bitter battle were the heights carried by the Gordon Highlanders in a magnificent charge. This action convinced the Afridis that standing and fighting was a mistake, and they adopted tactics that were to dictate the pattern of warfare on the North-West Frontier until Britain withdrew from India in 1947. They no longer attempted to resist an advance frontally, but hung round the flanks and rear of columns, shooting at everything within range. In that mountainous country a column generally had only one route it could follow, normally up a valley. Once the route had become obvious, the Afridis would occupy every height that commanded it and snipe the column as it marched along. When they were attacked the tribesmen withdrew; when their attackers withdrew in their turn they followed them up. These were difficult tactics to counter, but gradually a drill was evolved



Afghan War, 1879. A photograph showing Sikhs escorting captured Afghans. The blouses and puttees are plainly khaki; the trousers are difficult to identify, but it would look as though they were dark blue serge. Punjabi shoes, not boots, are worn. (National Army Museum)

that altered little over the next fifty years. The column, generally at brigade strength, was inevitably confined by its transport to marching along a valley. In front, however, would be placed an advance guard, perhaps a company strong, deployed to cover the head of the column. As it moved forward, small bodies of men, generally amounting to about a platoon, would be sent up on either flank from the troops behind it to establish posts on any feature that commanded the line of advance. These small posts were known as piquets, and their function was to prevent the tribesmen sniping the long strings of animal transport trudging along the valley floor below. Thus the column progressed inside an envelope of piquets until at last, behind everything else, came the rearguard deployed across the valley in much the same fashion as the advance guard. As it came level with the flanking piquets, the rearguard commander would call them in to rejoin the column; meanwhile the advance guard as it moved forward would be sending up a steady stream of piquets to safeguard the route. The main body of the Brigade marched surrounded by an ever-changing ring of piquets and, it was hoped, in comparative security. These piquets, and the technique of piquetting, became one of the most characteristic features of warfare on the North-West Frontier.

After it returned from the Tirah, the Regiment was not to enjoy the delights of life in a cantonment for very long. In 1902 it went to China as



Afghan War, 1879. Bayonet and Kukri versus knife and sword when a baggage train was ambushed at Koruh. (Illustrated London News)

part of the force to relieve the foreign legations in Peking and help put down the Boxer rebellion. It arrived off Tientsin on 12 July 1902, but took no major part in the fighting, being mainly concerned with railway protection. It scored, however, a major success with its musketry, beating all comers in an international rifle meeting held in August 1902. The results aroused considerable interest in London. The *Globe* of 15 December 1902 commented: 'Those foreign critics who sought to disparage the efficiency of the Native Indian contingent in China must admit that the British [Indian] sepoy is a capable marksman, a good deal more capable than their own soldiers.' The Regiment also managed to acquire a splendid silver dragon as a centrepiece for the Officers' Mess.

In December 1907 the Regiment celebrated its fifty years' Jubilee at Jhelum. 'The Regiment looked a splendid sight in its full dress, all ranks wearing scarlet jackets with white piping and blue pantaloons with scarlet welts (except the British officers who wore blue overalls). The British officers also wore white helmets and white gloves with their ceremonial belts and swords.'

By now boots had been adopted for wear on all occasions and Punjabi shoes were no longer tolerated. Khaki drill blouses, pantaloons and long puttees were the normal service dress. Towards the turn of the century some Gurkha regiments had come to design and wear khaki shorts, and these came to be regarded with some favour as a wear for mountain warfare. It has been recorded that in 1904 the Colonel of a Gurkha regiment, with great daring, paraded his whole regiment in shorts at a review for his General. It was not, however, until the First World War that shorts received official recognition, and in 1916, when the 30th embarked for overseas service, they were still wearing khaki drill pantaloons, or knickerbockers, while khaki shorts were still a form of dress recognized only at regimental level. As regards arms, this was a period of rapid change. Rifled barrels were replacing smooth-bore, breech-loading replacing muzzle-loading. With breech-loading the old round ball propelled by a separately loaded charge was replaced by a shaped bullet integral with its cartridge and fed into the barrel from a magazine to speed up reloading. In 1865 the Regiment was armed with the Victoria carbine,



**Afghan War, 1880.**  
**Dacca fort.** From the  
*Illustrated London*  
*News.* (*Illustrated*  
*London News*)



**The interior of Dacca fort - from a contemporary photograph.** (National Army Museum)



Afridis, 1874. The long jezail with its curved stock was the standard weapon carried by the tribesmen. The skull-caps the men are wearing were reputedly capable of withstanding a sabre cut. (India Office Library)

and a year later buff cap pouches and ball bags were replaced by brown leather ones. In 1872 the Enfield rifle succeeded the Victoria carbine but was superseded by the Snider in 1875, although havildars for some reason kept the short Enfield. The Martini-Henry rifle was introduced about 1890 and then in 1905 came the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield rifle, and at the same time bandolier equipment was issued. In the same year a double-company organization was adopted and the Regiment was now largely armed, organized and dressed as it was to be in the great conflict about to break out.



Sepoys, probably pioneers, in field service marching order, 1901. Carrying the blanket rolled bandolier-fashion was very unusual. Although they carry magazine rifles, they only have the old-style pouches. The circular water-bottle of the time shows up clearly. (National Army Museum)

# The First World War



During the first years of the war, the 30th Punjabis remained in India. Although mobilized and warned for service overseas twice in 1914, the Regiment had become so riddled with malaria, thanks to a sojourn in some particularly unhealthy lines near Delhi, that on each occasion it was found to be unfit. A spell in the invigorating atmosphere of the North-West Frontier, however, served to restore it to health and in 1916 it was pronounced sound in wind and limb.

During the course of that year the rather curious system of grouping the companies in pairs as double companies was taken to a logical conclusion; the pairs were merged to form large single companies and the number of companies reduced from eight to four. The new companies contained four platoons, each of four sections; they were armed with the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield rifle but possessed neither automatic weapons nor hand grenades. Ammunition was carried in bandoliers. Equipment was based on the Christmas-tree principle, assorted haversacks, water-bottles, packs, blankets and so on being hung about the men by separate canvas straps whenever such were required.

At this time British officers filled the appointments of commanding officer, second-in-command, adjutant, and quartermaster in Regimental Headquarters; each company was commanded by a

British officer with, in theory, a British subaltern as his second-in-command; of the four platoons one was commanded by a subedar and the remaining three by jemadars. Indian officers, as the Native officers were now termed, also held the posts of subedar-major, jemadar-adjutant, and jemadar-quartermaster in Regimental Headquarters. At full strength the Regiment numbered about 900 Indian ranks.

In November 1916 came the long-awaited tidings. The 30th Punjabis were to proceed to German East Africa. The Regiment embarked at Karachi on 1 December, arriving at Dar es Salaam on the 11th. Before leaving India, it formed a Vickers machine-gun platoon under a British officer; the platoon consisted of two sections each armed with two Vickers machine-guns. Two spare guns were issued, and in East Africa, after a sufficient number of men had been trained in them, a third section was improvised. Before leaving India the Regiment had to detach a British officer and some fifty men, chosen from the sick and unfit, to set up a regimental depot which could look after its affairs in India and train its recruits.

When the Regiment arrived at Dar es Salaam, British forces had been fighting German-trained African soldiers known as 'askaris' for nearly two years. The German Commander, Von Lettow-Vorbeck, hopelessly isolated from the European theatre of war and with no hope of ultimate success, yet endeavoured to tie down as many British troops as he could, hoping thereby to distract valuable British military resources from other more important theatres of war. In this he was only partially successful. The Dominion of South Africa had been deputed to run the campaign in East Africa and General Smuts exercised supreme command. His troops consisted of some South African ex-commandos, a single British battalion largely composed of African white hunters, some Indian units and some from the King's African Rifles. Although these forces amounted to a formidable number of men, it is doubtful if many could have been usefully deployed elsewhere.

To achieve his object, it was obvious to the German Commander that ground was of little value compared with the importance of keeping

his field force intact. He therefore pursued guerrilla tactics, steadfastly avoiding a decisive battle and relying on the nature of the country to make up for his deficiencies in numbers. That part of East Africa was hilly, bush country, almost entirely lacking in roads or other forms of communication, and was well suited to his purpose. The tsetse fly made animal transport difficult to use, and the 30th found they had to rely on enormous columns of African porters for their essential supplies. This had its problems. With the porters strung out in single file along narrow paths, column lengths could become prodigious, and the head of the Regiment on occasion had almost reached the new camping ground before the rear had left the old. In action these African porters not unnaturally showed little enthusiasm for risking life and limb, and when the going became dangerous they were apt to deposit vital loads, such as ammunition, on the ground, the better to facilitate their search for more salubrious regions.

In the course of the campaign the Regiment fought three major engagements. At the Rufiji River it established an important bridgehead across a river line; at Tandamuthi Hill it was the victim of a rash endeavour to infiltrate a German position and suffered crippling casualties; finally at the heights of Narkadi it won a decisive success that helped to destroy the last remnants of Von Lettow-Vorbeck's field army.

From the numbers engaged, by Western Front standards, all three actions were mere skirmishes scarcely meriting a mention; but at the unit level



1916. British and Indian officers of the 30th photographed before embarking for German East Africa. Shorts have not yet been adopted for field wear. There seems a fine freedom over the colour of puttees. A pith helmet can be seen in the foreground, and not the unpopular Wolseley helmet

the fighting was often extremely fierce. The combat at the Rufiji River is a typical example of the sort of actions that were fought in that part of the world.

The Regiment, serving with the 1st East African Brigade, had been pressing the German forces steadily southwards. The askaris, however, skilfully avoiding all attempts to encircle them, had withdrawn across the Rufiji, blowing the bridge over the river as they went. When the Brigade came up to the river bank, the Brigadier-General decided that the enemy must be granted no respite and ordered the 30th to cross that night. In the hot clammy darkness the 30th Punjabis embarked in tiny Berthon assault boats which, fully loaded, could only carry three armed men and an oarsman. The river here was some 800 yards wide, and a herd of hippos wallowing in its waters resented their intrusion. The sepoy had to repulse their attacks with the bayonet. As a result of these difficulties, by dawn only one company and a machine-gun section had been established on the far bank. The advanced company lay up in the bush all day undetected, and the next night the rest of the Regiment successfully negotiated the crossing. But when dawn broke the Germans soon discovered that the river line had been breached and launched a series of determined assaults. The events of that day are best told in the words of one who was present.

#### *An Eyewitness Account of the Rufiji River Battle*

'At this time I held the appointment of Quartermaster. On the night of 6 January 1917 I crossed to the south bank of the river, together with the



1917. German East Africa. The Jammu and Kashmir Battery in action. The Battery supported the 30th on a number of occasions. (Imperial War Museum)

rearward echelons of the regiment. The position held was very restricted with a perimeter of about 250 yards, but only some 150 yards in depth, facing south. Early next day "D" Company (Sikhs) (Capt. W. B. K. Wilson) ran into heavy opposition whilst patrolling down the right bank of the river at about 0800 hours. I was ordered to take over "C" Company (Dogras) and advance with two platoons to occupy a position in a thick belt of Pampas grass some 800 to 1,000 yards south of our position (i.e. 90° to the right of "D" Company). Role, to protect right flank. Shortly afterwards 2nd Lt. Robinson (M.G.O.) arrived with a section of machine guns to join me. This was a great waste of fire power, as we were not even seriously engaged as yet. However, a German machine gunner up a tree was a bit of a menace, and Robinson, creeping up cleverly under cover, shot him out of it with a few sharp bursts.

'Meanwhile, we could hear and see "B" Company (P.M.s) (Capt. J. A. Pottinger) advancing on our left. They went straight into it without hesitating. I think if I had advanced simultaneously and done a left hook, we might have mopped up the German left flank. But my orders were to guard our right flank, and a 2nd Lt. - aged just 21 - must obey orders! About 1500 hours, "B" Company were retiring and one of their platoons was cut off and joined my command. I had sent several messages to Regimental Headquarters by runner asking for orders. I also knew that "A" Company (Sikhs) and the last reserve had been thrown in on the right of "D" Company. The battle was being fought in two parts: "D" and "A" Companies on the left, "B" and "C" Companies on the right, with a long gap in between. The situation was pretty grim.

'After a considerable delay I received orders to withdraw at once, with a rebuke for not having obeyed previous orders to do so! These had never reached me. By this time we were isolated and the enemy were fast closing in on both flanks. However, we managed to sneak away with Jemadar Lall Singh (a veteran of Loos etc. in France - afterwards Subedar Major) leading the first lay-back. At least we were not subject to aimed fire whilst in the long grass some eight foot

high, but on emerging from this belt we were faced with flat open sand for some 500 yards to the main bridge-head. Robinson had been hit in the leg and could not move, but his M.G.s had been got away safely. Jemadar Lall Singh formed another lay-back to a flank, and I held the foremost echelon, while the wounded were got away with great difficulty. Thereafter by two quick dashes we reached the main position, though casualties were heavy. Jemadar Allah Ditta, the commander of the P.M. Platoon who had joined us, fell dead at my feet as we reached the perimeter, and there were a good number of other casualties. It was 1700 hours by now, and I was about "all in" - no food and very little water all day. I reported to the CO. who was in a very distressed state - he looked at me and said - "My dear boy, I thought you were dead long ago." He gave me no orders, and I returned to the front line. I had lost my Dogras, so I joined Pottinger who was trying to sort out the chaos there. The companies had become inextricably mixed up in the confined space and it seemed that an enemy attack was imminent.

'The situation roughly was as follows - on the left "D" Company, where Capt. Wilson was lying in the bottom of the trench only half-conscious having been nearly drowned in the river. Major Thompson of "A" Company had been left out during the withdrawal at his own urgent request, believed mortally wounded. The company was scattered here and there on the perimeter. In the centre most of the P.M. Company and on the right the Dogras ("C") Company also intermixed. By this time I had been switched from O.C. "C" Company to Machine Gun Officer (being the only one qualified). John Pottinger was truly magnificent and by his own personality and stamina held the front line. He had lost his senior Subedar, Mohamed Khan, who was a Raja of the Ghakkar Tribe in his own right and an original direct commission, much highly regarded by all his men, and also the stalwart Jemadar Allah Ditta already mentioned. In fact he had only one Indian Officer left. Capt. Pottinger had assumed command of all the troops in the front line - he was here there and everywhere; standing on the parapet of the low sandy trench and cheering the troops on to

greater efforts; moving from one flank to the other, sometimes stopping to say his prayers in the bottom of the trench (he was a highly religious man, but this did not stop him hurling curses at the enemy, or even his own troops); then rising to cuff a windy recruit over the head - he had a high proportion of recruits in his own company; above all a stalwart and brave example to everyone. At one period I was trying to direct the fire of a section of machine guns from the front line, when a young sepoy, who must have dipped the muzzle of his rifle in the sand, took a pot shot from alongside me. There was a loud explosion, and the bolt blew back into the firer's face. I don't know if he survived, but I was knocked out by the blast for some time. When I recovered, the CO. sent for me and told me I must take over duties of Adjutant. This made four jobs!!! (i.e. Q.M. - O.C. "C" Company - M.G.O. and now Adjutant as well). 2nd Lt. Donald Powell, who had become Adjutant when we left India, very gallantly went forward during the day to ascertain the situation. He was hit in the leg and by this time had been evacuated across the river.

'At dusk the firing died down, there was a somewhat uneasy lull, and the river crossings re-commenced. The Brigadier was the first man over, and he brought with him (in driblets) a company of the 130th Baluchis. The Baluchis were a very war-hardened unit with a great fighting spirit. Their company took over the left of our line and we were able to re-organize. Capt. John Pottinger was called from the front line to be awarded a Bar to his M.C His only comment was - "Thank you, Sir, but you might have made it a D.S.O. this time"!!!

'That night Subedar Thakur Singh of "A" Company begged the Colonel to allow him to take out a patrol and search for Major Thompson his company commander. His mission was successful, and to everyone's joy, Thompson recovered from his severe wound to command the regiment later in the campaign.

'It was now midnight, and I found the only rations to come over were a few bags of dates, of which 2 bags had been saved for "A" Company who had now been re-organized and sent out to guard the right flank. I collected a couple of men



and set out to deliver these miserable goods following the telephone cable over some 1,000 yards of sandy hillocks. On arrival at the "A" Company position, I found Major Thompson's company officer sitting in an open patch of sand with his company gathered round him. When I enquired why he had not taken up any defensive position he replied, "It is useless to do so - the enemy are coming any minute - we shall all be killed. Can't you hear them coming?" (it was only the wind in the trees). After reasoning with him for a while, I decided the strain had unhinged him. On return to the main base, I reported to Col. Ward and told him his right flank was in jeopardy. His reaction was to order me to return to "A" Company and take over. Once more I slogged over that sandy waste, fortunately in moonlight, for the third time. I ordered Subedar Thakur Singh to take up some proper defensive positions and push forward standing patrols. And then just collapsed in the sand for the second time. It was about 2 a.m. and I had been on my feet for nineteen hours with little or no food. Next morning at 7 a.m. the sun was shining and all was quiet on the right flank. Only sporadic firing at the main position.'

In addition to the immediate awards the following were announced soon afterwards:

Lieutenant-Colonel A. Ward, D.S.O.

Major Thompson, D.S.O.

Second Lieutenant D. Powell, Croix de Guerre

Spasmodic fighting continued at the bridgehead for several days, then on 16 January the Germans withdrew.

This unvarnished account does not gloss over the occasional failure or paint soldiers as supermen impervious to normal human emotions; battle tests endurance to the limit and sometimes beyond, and it is misleading to ignore this characteristic.

In the action the 30th, although suffering heavily in the process, held off the attacks of a superior enemy, and by piercing their position forced the Germans to abandon the line of the river. In recognition of gallant services rendered, various members of the Regiment received immediate awards consisting of one bar to an M.C., one Indian Order of Merit (roughly equivalent to a

British Distinguished Conduct Medal) and five Indian Distinguished Service Medals (equivalent to the Military Medal). In addition two Distinguished Service Orders were awarded a little later.

Early in 1918 the Regiment returned to India, and it was serving there when the Armistice was declared in November. In January of that year, however, the 2nd Battalion the 30th Punjabis was raised and in May left for Palestine in time to join Allenby's army and take part in the battle of Megiddo. For the task, in addition to its machine-gun platoon it was equipped with one Lewis gun per platoon. Despite this honourable beginning, however, the 2nd Battalion was disbanded shortly after hostilities had ceased; but not before it had rendered some yeoman service in South Waziristan during the troubled days of 1919.

## *The Years Between the Wars, 1919-1939*



The war years left their mark both on organization and on uniform. After the Mutiny, as already mentioned, khaki crept in, initially as a hot weather dress; in a similar fashion, during the early part of the 20th century khaki drill shorts came gradually to be acceptable. These shorts, in some ways a reversion to the early dress of the old East India Company's armies, had much to recommend them: they were cool, cheap, easy to launder and left the limbs remarkably free; they were excellent for the hills of the North-West Frontier, and for the deserts of the Middle East where so many

regiments served during the war just ended. Ordnance indeed had been inspired to produce a peculiarly repellent form of semi-trouser, known as 'long' shorts. These were as curious as their name. They were shorts with turn-ups designed to be buttoned up by day to allow the winds of heaven to circulate freely, but to be turned down and folded into the top of the hosetop at night to foil the activities of malaria-bearing mosquitoes. After rain, or when the shorts were unpressed as was apt to happen on service, they made the sepoy resemble elderly gentlemen paddling by the seashore and, as such, were rejected by every right-minded Commanding Officer, among whom the C.O. of the 30th was to be numbered.

Khaki drill shorts, however, as originally designed, were universally approved. After the war a Commander-in-Chief, India, who nursed a prejudice against bare masculine knees, was sternly informed that the Indian Army had fought the last war in shorts and had no intention of discarding them now; he forsook a cause which was plainly hopeless. The victory of the shorts assumed all the more importance since the issue of full dress had been discontinued during the war, and was not likely to be revived. In the 30th, Review Order for other ranks now consisted of a khaki drill jacket, cut rather long with the bottom of the coat coming level with the thumb when the sepoy was at attention, khaki drill shorts, green hosetops, dark khaki puttees and black boots, as illustrated in colour plate *H2*. Officers, both British and Indian, wore the standard British Army khaki drill jacket and brown boots, but British officers differed from Indian in that they wore the light-coloured Fox's puttees while Indian officers wore the dark standard issue (see colour plate *G*). The hosetop perhaps requires some explanation. When puttees were worn with shorts, they were wound round the bare leg or over stockings. In a hot climate neither was particularly desirable. Some ingenious person solved this problem by inventing the hose-top. In essence the hosetop, as the name implies, was merely a stout green stocking that lacked a foot, so that it could be drawn on over the normal issue sock; it was worn with one end just above the top of the boot and the other folded down over the top of the puttee, the length of the fold being the width of a standard packet of ten cigarettes.



**Drill on the Vickers machine-gun. The machine-gunners are P.M.s. Their head-dresses are the short-service *safa*, of which one end was starched so that it stood up, and this was called the *shamla*; the other hung down over the neck**

For head-dress British officers were meant to wear Wolseley helmets on drill parades and similar occasions, but in practice the 30th preferred the pith helmet with the pugri edged in the regimental colours.

As regards arms and equipment, India tended to lag behind the United Kingdom. There were no native-based sources of supply, and the needs of the Army in India were generally met only after the requirements of the troops in Britain had been satisfied to the full. In addition it was not then contemplated that Indian troops would be employed again in a European theatre of war; the defence of the North-West Frontier was defined as their primary role, and for this, while the latest equipment might be desirable, it could scarcely be classed as essential. In consequence, Mills webbing equipment, issued to the home army in 1908, was not taken into use in India until 1920; Lewis guns at a scale of one to a platoon did not become standard until the closing stages of the war.

Organizationally, the Regiment comprised a headquarters wing consisting of four groups, a machine-gun group (two sections totalling four Vickers machine-guns), an administrative group, a signals group and a transport and followers group. The four rifle companies contained four rifle platoons, each of four sections, one of which was armed with a Lewis gun. Each section

consisted theoretically of a non-commissioned officer and about eight sepoys.

In 1922 the whole organization of the Indian Army underwent drastic change. In the 1880s a system for training recruits and reinforcing regiments on service had been evolved, known as the 'link regiment system'. Regiments were linked in pairs, the 30th being linked to the 31st. It was intended that one of the pair should always occupy a home station and be available to train recruits and organize reinforcements while the other was on service overseas. During the war the large number of regiments sent overseas caused the system to collapse almost from the first, and regiments proceeding to an overseas theatre had been compelled to set up their own depots from their own already overstrained resources. Not unnaturally the inadequate staffs, often of unfit men, left behind for this purpose proved quite unable to cope with the complex problems that resulted from the appalling casualty rates. The enormous number of men passing through the depots made proper documentation impossible, while the unfortunate depot commanders were nearly asphyxiated under the mountain of paper that piled up on their desks. By the end of the war, there were some 115 of these depots all operating independently of one another. The system had proved grossly inefficient; obviously, reform was urgently needed.

As soon as the aftermath of the war was over, the whole regimental organization was reviewed. As a result, it was decided to group regiments in fives or sixes with one of the group permanently located at a suitable home station; here it could train recruits for the other members in peacetime, and in war it could assume all the functions of a regimental depot. The regiments thus allied were given a common group number. The 30th joined the 31st, the 33rd, the 9th Bhopal Infantry and the 46th Punjabis, to form the 16th group. The 46th was designated the Training Battalion and took up permanent residence in Sialkot. Then late in 1922 Army Headquarters turned the groups into regiments and ordered the separate regiments of each group to become battalions of the group regiment. The 16th group duly became the 16th Regiment and, since most of its regiments came from the Punjab, added the name of the province

to the regimental title. The 30th became the 1st Battalion, the 16th Punjab Regiment. In passing, it may be of interest to note that the number of the regiment in the Indian Army has always been the important part of its nomenclature, the territorial or other addition being often no more than an attractive piece of ornamentation. Hence the 16th Punjab Regiment had no closer affinity with the 15th Punjab Regiment than it had with the 10th Baluchi Regiment or the 13th Frontier Force Rifles. It is true that for a brief period towards the end of the Second World War some staff officer at Delhi, who cannot really have understood the system, tried to drop the numbering for a brief while, but this period had no real significance.



The badge of the  
16th Punjab Regiment

After the reorganization, the usual committees sat and discussed the usual topics. In the end, the Regiment managed to agree on a common badge: it was based on a crescent moon encircling a Maltese cross to commemorate the service in Malta of the 2nd Battalion; in the centre of the cross was placed the regimental numeral surrounded by a Sikh quoit; the crown of the 30th was retained on top. Common types of buttons and shoulder titles were adopted, but battalions wore different coloured flashes under the titles. The flash of the 30th was red. The Training Battalion, the 46th, was redesignated the 10th Battalion, and soon lost all trace of its former identity: one company was allotted to each active battalion and this was staffed by officers and men seconded to it from the battalion to which it was affiliated.

Although this might seem to imply a high degree of integration, in fact the battalions continued to lead an almost entirely independent existence. In peacetime there was no interposting of officers or men, nor was a common promotion roll even contemplated. Members of the different battalions only met when they were seconded to

the Training Battalion at Sialkot, or attended a regimental function there, unless by some odd throw of the dice at Army Headquarters two battalions happened to serve together in the same brigade or division.

Inside the 1st/16th there were some relatively minor changes during the inter-war years. With the decision to introduce King's Commissioned Indian Officers into certain selected regiments, the term 'Indian Officer' for subedars and jemadars would have led to confusion. In consequence their generic title was altered to that of Viceroy's Commissioned Officer, generally shorted to V.C.O. The machine-gun group was elevated to the status of a company in 1929 by the addition of two more machine-gun sections; a rifle company was disbanded to make way for it and the fourth company became 'D' (Machine-gun) Company. In 1935 some inspiration at Army Headquarters led to this company being redesignated 'D' (S) Company, i.e. support company, without any other alteration in its composition.

By the 1930s the Lewis gun, at best a temperamental piece of equipment, had clearly outstayed its welcome. The British Army seemed unable to decide on a replacement and, possibly for the first time, the Indian Army resolved to 'go it alone' on a piece of equipment. In 1936 a light machine-gun, known as the Vickers Berthier, was issued to replace the Lewis gun; in appearance and handling it much resembled the Bren-gun that was to supersede it, but it was lighter and less robust. In December 1938, to conform to the new organization which the British Army had adopted some time before, certain changes were made. The modern infantry battalion was to consist of four rifle companies, a support company, including such elements as a 3-inch mortar platoon and a carrier platoon, and a headquarter company. Since the 1st/16th was still literally in the horse-and-buggy era, these refinements did not much apply. However, the Machine-gun Company was dissolved; two machine-gun sections were disbanded, and two returned to Battalion Headquarters, whence they had come, to form a machine-gun platoon; 'D' Company resumed the role of a rifle company. This did not lead to an alteration in strength as the new rifle companies had only three platoons, each of three sections.

For some reason this new organization made the Battalion much easier to handle in the field. It also suited its class composition which for the past twenty years had been 25 per cent Jat Sikhs, 25 per cent Dogra Rajputs and 50 per cent Punjabi Mohammedans (generally referred to as P.M.s), since each class could be allotted to a separate rifle company and complications over cooking and rations lessened. During this time there was a small change in dress. The long puttee wound to the knee had shown undesirable characteristics. During the early 1930s the Regiment introduced a cut-down version that was only tied round the ankle. This became standard wear for all but ceremonial occasions.

In April 1939, on the brink of the Second World War, the Battalion received new colours and the old 30th colour was laid to rest. It was a fine parade, made notable by the presence of almost as many pensioners as the present strength of the Battalion. They had little difficulty in recognizing what they saw. The organization of the Battalion differed little from that which they had known in German East Africa. It possessed no vehicles; it had seven chargers to mount the commanding officer, the adjutant, quartermaster and four company commanders, and thirty-two mules of which twenty-four carried the machine-guns and ammunition of the M.G. platoon; while eight each carried a Vickers Berthier and its ammunition; owing to shortages only eight of the twelve rifle platoons possessed Vickers Berthiers. For station



A Vickers machine-gun loaded on a mule. The mule leader is a Dogra

duties there were ten animal transport carts which required two mules apiece to draw them. These could furnish some entertainment. On one occasion the mules, having taken charge, were unable to agree which side of a tree they would go, with the result that the cart and the driver found themselves trying to climb the tree trunk. The carts were never taken out on training or service.

The 1920s were relatively peaceful: for a short period the Battalion had two companies in the Persian Gulf garrisoning such places as Bandar Abbas, Bushire, Muscat and Bahrain. Later it spent four pleasant years in the tranquil atmosphere of the state of Baroda. But in the 1930s, stimulated by the fiery Fakir of Ipi, the tribes inhabiting the barren hills of Waziristan, perhaps bored by twenty years of comparative quiet, suddenly sprang to arms and by 1937 a quiet war was flourishing in the regions between Razmak and the old Sikh stronghold of Bannu.

By now Frontier warfare had reached its technical peak. Most operations were carried out by columns of brigade strength which marched through the hills along stony tracks passable only by mules and camels. The brigade generally started early in the morning, aiming to reach its camping ground not much later than midday, as, after its arrival, much had to be done: the camp itself had to be laid out, camp piquets dispatched to near-by heights to protect it, and a stone wall, like some sort of medieval fortification, constructed round it; the rocky ground made entrenching on any scale impossible. The camp itself was not

unlike those laid out by the legions of ancient Rome. Two wide roads stretched right through it at right angles to each other and crossing in the centre; here brigade headquarters would take its ground. Each of the four battalions, the normal strength of a 'Frontier' brigade, would be allotted a quarter of the perimeter, probably about 300 yards. From this boundary each battalion was allowed an area extending only thirty yards in towards the centre of the camp, limiting the battalion camp to an area of 300 yards by 30. The first seven yards in from the perimeter wall constituted the fighting space; no store, equipment or any impediment to movement was allowed within it, nothing could be permitted that might hinder the free movement of the perimeter guards. A further seven yards in was reserved for the rifle companies' lines, generally about seven 160-pound tents. The remaining fifteen to sixteen yards in was allotted to the rest of the battalion; here would be the mule lines, the officers' mess, the quartermaster's store and the quarterguard, these two usually located close to a camp road, and the battalion office. On column, battalions carried flags to mark the location of battalion headquarters, and these were always flown from their quarterguards when in camp. These flags served something of the function of the old colours and some battalions were not above awarding themselves battle honours, such local distinctions as 'Biche Kashkai 1937' being sometimes to be seen beside the unit designation. The Battalion flag was a red '16' on a blue background.



The presentation of new Colours. The illustration shows British field officers in ceremonial dress. They are wearing khaki drill breeches, leather leggings and boots



A post on the perimeter. The upright headstones on the tops of the wall were to break up its outline and prevent the head of the sentry from being silhouetted. The post had been plentifully supplied with grenades

All the mules were lodged inside the perimeter and contributed powerfully to the hordes of flies which would come to haunt its confines; but the camels, smelly, dangerous beasts able to kick in any direction and capable of giving horrible bites which reputedly could lead to unmentionable diseases, were expelled to a separate camel serai outside its borders. There they lived with their Pathan camel-drivers under the protection of a reluctant body of sepoy who, for the period of twenty-four hours, had been awarded the unsought honour of guarding them.

Between 1937 and 1942 the 1st/16th took part in a number of Frontier operations which it would be impossible to describe in detail; perhaps the description of a single day in the life of a column may best serve to show what these campaigns entailed. The following description of a day based on the operations of the column that marched to the relief of Datta Khel fort in the summer of 1938 contains a number of incidents, not all of which happened within that particular twenty-four hours but which were typical of this sort of warfare.

In 1938 the tribesmen had been blockading, from the beginning of May, the lonely Frontier fort of Datta Khel situated in the Upper Tochi Valley not far from the Durand line, the un-delimited frontier with Afghanistan. The fort was garrisoned by a few platoons from that fine irregular corps, the Tochi Scouts. The Pathans knew better than to attack the fort, although they occasionally bombarded it using a home-made cannon, the shells from which, however, also home-made, fortunately seldom exploded. Never-

theless, with numbers of tribesmen lying up in the surrounding hills and sniping at any movement outside the ramparts of the fort, life was made difficult for the garrison, and Headquarters Waziristan District from its mountain eyrie in Razmak decreed that the fort must be relieved forthwith; to this end they assembled two brigades at Razani on the Bannu-Razmak road, the Razmak Brigade itself and the 3rd Jhelum Brigade comprising:

8th Mountain Battery

19th Mountain Battery

1st Battalion the 5th Mahratta Light Infantry

1st Battalion the 10th Baluch Regiment

1st Battalion the 16th Punjab Regiment

1st Battalion the 17th Dogra Regiment

At this time there were six British officers actually present with the Battalion: three majors, a captain, and two second lieutenants, one newly joined. The posts they held reveal much of how an Indian regiment functioned. One major commanded the Regiment (the Colonel was officiating as Brigade Commander), one commanded 'A' Company and the other 'C'. The captain was adjutant; a second lieutenant, the more experienced of the two, was quartermaster, while the other was a company officer in 'A' Company. 'B' and 'D' Companies were commanded by subedars.

Early in June the advance began. The aim on the first day was to reach Mami Rogha about five miles along the track to Datta Khel. The 3rd Jhelum Brigade was to lead the advance, and the 1st/16th to lead the 3rd Brigade. In the clear bracing sunlight of an early morning in June the Battalion started out. 'A' and 'C' Companies went first, to secure the hills overlooking the ravine through which the track ran. On the right, 'C' Company moved across the plain towards the hills beyond, its four platoons deployed; in front were four sections extended in line with perhaps ten paces between each pair of men. Echelonned behind them came the remaining twelve sections, extended in a similar fashion. Suddenly the whole plain seemed carpeted with long lines of khaki-clad figures moving steadily forward, the shamlas of the P.M.s bobbing in the dawn breeze. Up in front with the forward sections orange blobs could be descried, marking the most advanced men of the leading platoons. These were squares of cloth,

coloured orange one side, khaki the other; known as piquetting screens, their function was to show those manning the supporting weapons where it was safe to fire.

As the long lines approached the brown scrub-covered hills, the figures began to merge with the spiky green bushes through which they moved. On the left, 'A' Company, in a similar formation, kept pace with 'C'. As the long brigade column started to uncoil from the camp site in a flurry of orders and a jangle of mule harness, the guns of a mountain battery came into action on the right of the track. At one moment there were huddles of mules and men, at the next the mules were being led back at a canter and four little guns pointed menacingly up at the hills. While the gunners crouched by the guns ready for instant action, their officers behind swept the ground with their binoculars on the alert for the slightest sign of movement. Ahead a machine-gun section raced into action, vying with the mountain gunners in speed, their Vickers guns trained on the flanks of the advancing infantry.

Headquarters of the 1st/16th deployed near the gunners to watch the advance. The observers suddenly stiffened incredulously. There on the ridges fronting the valley tiny figures could be seen dancing about and waving their guns. The sight was too much for the gunners. The guns boomed out and white puffs of shrapnel appeared like fragments of cotton wool momentarily fluttering above the line of hills. The dancing figures disappeared, but the serious business of the day had begun. The abrupt crack of rifle shots shattered the still morning air; then a Vickers Berthier opened up with the *toc-toc-toc-toc-toc* of its five-round bursts, to be joined by the faster, higher-pitched bursts of the Vickers guns. The mountain guns threw a few shells at the distant crests more in hope than in expectation of finding a target. A heat shimmer began to crown the hills.

Then a roll of ground hid the forward lines of 'C' Company. On the left, 'A' Company advanced rapidly, challenged only by a few random shots; but on the right, battle had clearly been joined. 'C' Company, out of sight of their supporting weapons, were now on their own. Their company commander, Major Wilcock, was well versed in this type of fighting; only the year before he had been awarded the Military Cross for his part in



**Thal fort overlooking the Tochi River at the point where the Bannu-Razmak road crossed the river. It was normally garrisoned by a company. The watch-towers have been roofed in to keep the sun off the sentries. (Photographed by R. B. Holmes of Peshawar)**

the ambush at the Shahur Tangi. 'C' Company pressed on. To the watchers below the unseen battle appeared to be mounting in a furious crescendo. Firing from the Vickers Berthiers seemed almost continuous, their bursts punctuated by a heavy fusillade of rifle shots. Then below the summit of the hills the watchers could see a steel-tipped line forming. All at once it raced up the hillside with startling speed and disappeared over the crest. Then the crest itself began to blossom in orange squares, and in the centre and a little below, a white signal flag began to dip smartly in the dots and dashes of the Morse code. At Battalion Headquarters a signaller at the 'C' Company terminal began to spell out the message using the old phonetic alphabet. 'Ink, pip ack': 'C' Company was in position OK. Two men had been killed, the message continued, and five wounded; assistance was required to evacuate the wounded back to the track. It had been a gallant little affair for which a jemadar and a havildar were subsequently to be awarded I.D.S.M.s (Indian Distinguished Service Medals).

Meanwhile 'A' Company had secured the left-hand shoulder of the ravine. The long column shook itself into motion. Overhead an aged biplane, a Wapiti from the R.A.F. station at Miranshah, the station where T. E. Lawrence had once been a member of the clerical staff, had begun to cruise. The advance continued; other companies doubled out from the column to scale other heights farther down the track. The shooting swelled and died spasmodically. Overhead the aircraft made sudden swoops, its high-speed machine-

guns blaring out momentarily, before the pilot pulled out of his dive a few feet above the rocky summits to resume his circling above the head of the column. Each platoon carried a pair of white canvas groundstrips with which to signal to the aircraft; when holding a forward position, the strips were put down in the form of an X. The airman looking down on a pattern of X's displayed on the ground beneath could see exactly where the soldiers were deployed and where it was safe to strafe; at least that was the theory. An occasional forgetful platoon that omitted to pick up its groundstrips, once it had been bypassed, might have to face some rather unpleasant recriminations on its return to camp. Platoons that could see a target changed their X into a V with the apex pointing in the direction in which they wanted fire to be brought down. A platoon in urgent need of assistance put out its strips in a T with the head pointing towards the enemy. If a pilot saw a T, he gave it priority over all other calls for assistance. The pilot himself rarely saw a Pathan, but his fire brought joy to the piquets near by and froze the tribesmen behind their rocks.

The day drew on. Now a near-vertical sun shone out of a bright and brassy sky and the heat began to grow oppressive. Battalion Headquarters found a safe place off the route where all four companies were visible, and cast around for some shade, while the signal terminals checked their communications. The battle had moved deep into the hills and the British officers at Battalion Headquarters considered slaking their thirst from the cans of beer that the officers' mess mule carried for this purpose. Higher up the track from a shoulder of the hillside a little above it, a dancing shaft of light showed that Brigade Headquarters had also come to rest and was deploying its heliographs.

The firing by now had become sporadic, almost somnolent, and there were intervals when nothing broke the quiet. Along the track padded the long strings of camels bearing on their backs the baggage of the Brigade. Just ahead of them marched the colour parties closing up on the advance guard so as to mark out the new camp as soon as its site had been secured. The activities of the morning seemed to be forgotten as the column plodded on through the noonday heat. The colour parties turned a corner and the river bed they had



**Battalion Headquarters marked by the Battalion flag. The sepoy is wearing the final type of Mills webbing equipment with three cartridge pouches each side, instead of the five of the 1908 equipment**

been following widened out into a stony valley, terminating in a beflagged cemetery and a small, empty, straggling village. Remains of a former camp with partially dismantled walls came into view, nestling under a low ridge some 400 yards away. Even as the colour parties stepped into the valley, the orange piquetting screens appeared along its length. The staff captain of the Brigade marked out the boundaries of the camp and allotted battalions their sectors. The 1st/16th had a length of perimeter facing the ridge. The quartermaster and the company quartermaster havildars put out their little flags to mark sub-unit areas. They had to work fast as the main body of the Brigade was streaming into the valley, and their work had to be completed before the Battalion arrived; if they held up the building of the camp, the comments of the Colonel, let alone those of their comrades, were unlikely to be kind. Now the grumbling, rumbling camels were moving out to unit areas with the regimental followers marching with them. Down the ravine from which they had emerged everything seemed quiet, but along the ridge a fierce battle had ignited which soon extended right around the valley. The troops holding positions covering the camp were endeavouring to build stone emplacements, known as 'sangars', where piquets could be posted during the night to prevent the tribesmen concentrating for a night rush too close to the perimeter wall, and to make it more hazardous for them to snipe the camp. The tribesmen, fully aware of this, were happily engaged in sniping the sangar-builders. The building parties separated into groups, some





**A P.M. subedar in fighting order for the Frontier. The flag was waved by the last man off a piquet to signify that the piquet position was clear and supporting arms could safely fire on it**

trying to subdue the fire of the Pathans, others to find reasonable cover from which to build up the sangars. Soon the whole valley re-echoed to rifle shots, in many cases sounding more dangerous than they were, for the Pathans, confronted by a well-conducted manoeuvre executed by seasoned troops, hesitated to close the range.

Meanwhile the rifle companies of the 1st/16th had debouched into the valley and marched on to their camp site to start unloading the baggage. A pair of mountain guns dropped into action and started shelling trouble-spots. Machine-guns also appeared, and overhead a relief aircraft circled the camp area, occasionally diving like a hawk on some unseen target. The firing lost much of its ferocity. As the men poured in, tents started mushrooming with amazing rapidity, stores were unloaded and the tedious task of erecting the perimeter was begun. Then, after little more than two hours, the stony valley became transformed into a well-organized, smart-looking brigade camp, surrounded by a four-foot stone wall. An hour or so

before sunset the camp piquets started to climb the hills to their dangerous perches, and the covering troops thankfully withdrew within the perimeter.

At sunset, in accordance with the invariable rule, everyone stood-to at his alarm post fully armed. The inlying piquets, from whom the sentries for the night would be drawn, manned the perimeter wall. All not detailed for night duty, except the mule leaders whose first charge was their mules, were formed into bayonet parties whose task was to drive out any intruding Pathans by use of the bayonet alone; firing within the confines of the close-packed camp could not be tolerated. These parties, usually about a platoon in strength, took post at intervals behind the fighting space. Evening stand-to was always taken by the Commanding Officer. As the C.O., accompanied by the adjutant, the Subedar Major and the stick orderly, started to tour the Battalion's area, he could see a long row of riflemen manning the wall, with here and there a Vickers Berthier light machine-gun resting on the wall, generally in a cut-out wooden ration box with the edges of the box marking the boundaries of its arcs of fire. Deployed in angles of the wall were the machine-guns with little lights placed in front to indicate the line of fire after dark. They were trained, some to sweep the flanks of camp piquets, others the front of the perimeter wall. Behind them stretched the seven unobstructed yards of the fighting space; and behind the fighting space the first line of tents dotted here and there by rectangular clumps of bayonets where the reserves were mustered.

As the light faded, the 1st/16th perimeter remained quiet, but over on the right heavy firing broke out from the area of the cemetery. Vickers Berthiers replied, the bullets sounding a devil's tattoo among the stone graves. Then came the deep boom of the mountain guns firing at point-blank range. The firing became heavier, bullets hissing over the camp; then gradually it slackened off and died. A few sporadic shots, then silence. Quietly, as he went his rounds, the C.O. checked the dispositions of his companies, and when satisfied ordered them to stand down. When he had completed his inspection, only the occasional pair of sentries from the inlying piquets remained, peering over the stone wall into the gathering darkness.

At evening stand-to and for night duty the



1 Sepoy, service dress, 1857  
2 Sepoy, service dress, 1857  
3 Native Officer, full dress, 1857

- 1 Sepoy, 1865  
2 Sepoy, 1879  
3 Havildar, full dress, 1910



1



2



3

- 1 Subedar, Kelat-i-Ghilzai Regiment, 1879  
2 Indian Officer, full dress, 1900  
3 Drill Havildar, full dress, 1900



1



2



3

- 1 Havildar, service dress, 1900  
2 Sepoy, fighting order, 1910  
3 Sepoy, fighting order, 1910



1

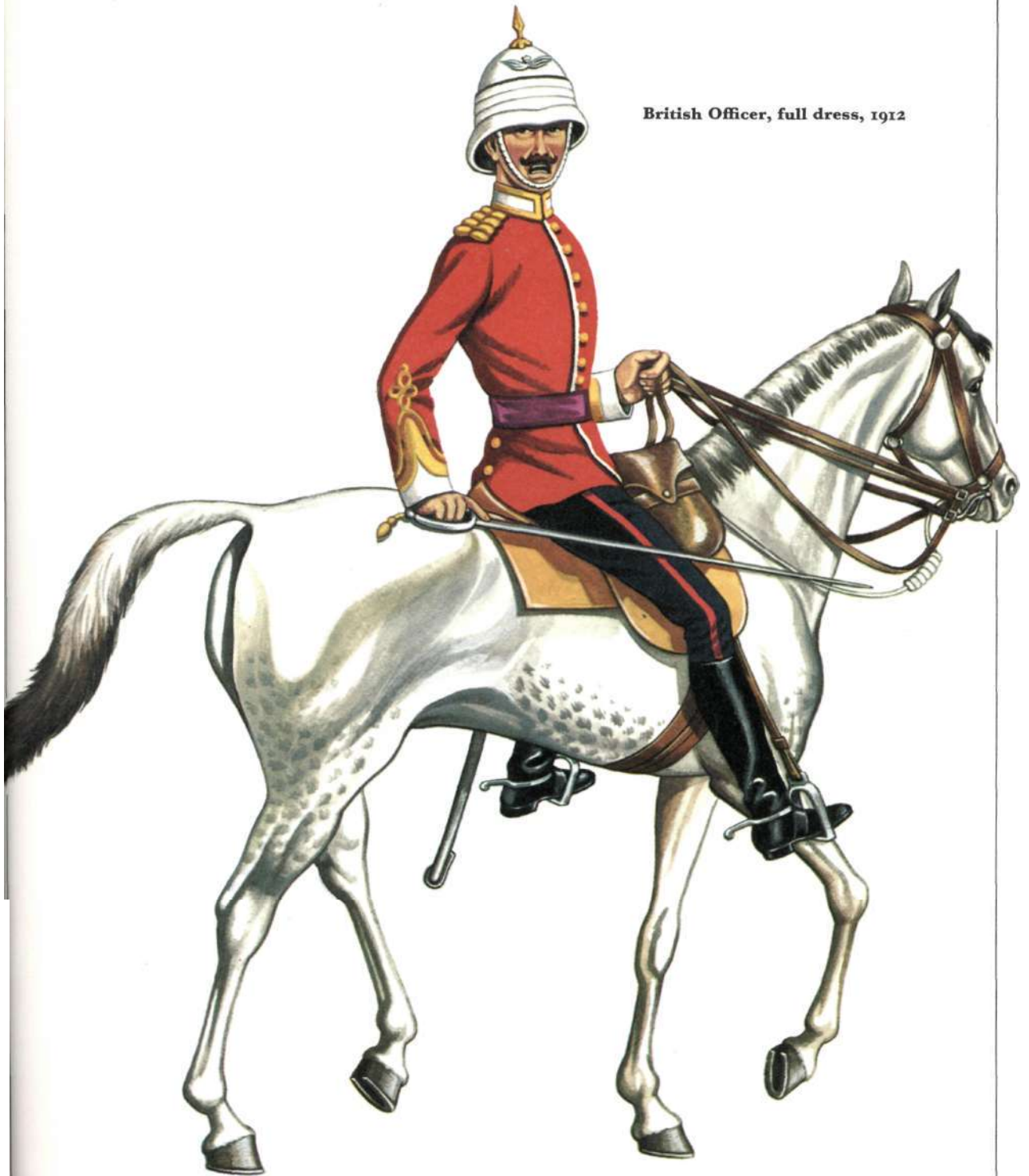


2



3

British Officer, full dress, 1912



- 1 Subedar-Major, full dress, 1923
- 2 Sepoy, full dress, 1926
- 3 Drummer, 1928



I



2



3



- 1 Indian Officer, fighting order, 1930
- 2 British Officer, drill order, 1931
- 3 Indian Officer, 1933







1



2



3

- 1 Subedar, 1940  
2 Naik, review order, 1942  
3 Sepoy, fighting order, 1943

Battalion adopted a simplified and slightly unorthodox form of dress. The men wore shirts over khaki pyjamas, and chaplis (the Indian sandal); socks and puttees were discarded. The British officers donned a mess dress consisting of a shirt, in cold weather a cardigan worn on top, dark grey flannel trousers and brown shoes. For equipment they had a Sam Browne belt and a pistol in a leather holster slung from a strap round the shoulder (see colour plate G2).

That evening after stand-down, the British officers, as usual, congregated in the mess tents to enjoy a well-earned glass of whisky. It was customary for a couple of officers to remain to act as host to any visitors, while the rest dispersed to the other regimental messes in search of drink and social diversion. About 9.30 the last wanderer had returned, singing quietly to himself, and the officers sat down to dine at a 'table' formed by a cleared stretch of earth with trenches on either side to perform the function of chairs. On this occasion just as the soup was about to appear - it was seldom worth drinking on column - a bugle sounded reveille high up in the hills. Immediately a volley crashed out from some fifty rifles. For ten minutes bullets hummed and whined over the camp; the trenches by the mess table were found to have certain advantages. Then, as suddenly as it began, the firing stopped. The damage was surprisingly light: two men wounded, neither seriously, and a mule hit.

When quiet had been restored and the interrupted meal resumed, there was considerable speculation about the bugler. Was he a time-expired Pathan from some Frontier Force regiment, or perhaps a South Waziristan Scout on leave? The South Waziristan Scouts were recruited from North Waziristan and served in the South. One on leave might feel he ought to join in any local diversion organized by his fellow villagers. The mystery was never solved, but after the final burst of firing the Pathans granted the Brigade a quiet night. A few days later Datta Khel was relieved. A Tochi Scout basking in the sun outside the fort was asked by Major Wilcock, a Pushtu-speaker, if he was pleased that he was no longer besieged. The Scout considered the matter carefully, then replied that, while it had of course been tiresome being confined to the fort, now that they

were relieved he supposed they would have to start 'gashting' (patrolling) again; he did not seem to fancy the prospect. This type of fighting, uncomplicated by journalists or television, while it made the men superbly fit and was wonderful training for war, was not without its perils. In 1940 the Battalion had the misfortune to have two British officers killed in North Waziristan, a heavy loss out of a complement of about ten.

The 1st/16th was in Jhelum when on a hot and steamy evening in early September 1939 the radio announced that Germany had invaded Poland. It was perhaps to be expected of those extraordinary days that after Neville Chamberlain had made his historic broadcast, clearly heard by the Battalion, the Indian Army was informed that its services were not likely to be required for this particular war.

## *The Second World War*



Although the Indian Army was told that it had no role to play in a European war, the Battalion was mobilized shortly after its outbreak. No new units were raised, however, and it remained rather awkwardly over strength. It was not until August 1940, eleven months after the declaration of war, that a new battalion, the 5th, was formed; it was a tragic delay, for which India was to pay dearly when the war swept up to her borders.

Meanwhile the Indian Army remained to all intents and purposes at peace. Army Headquarters renamed themselves General Headquarters and directed that on all crime sheets soldiers should be

stated as being on active service. Even this trivial gesture came to nothing. A learned judge of the High Court could, with some justice, find no evidence to show that the Indian Army was on active service and promptly ruled that it was not. G.H.Q., nervously aware that their former order might well be considered unconstitutional, hastily rescinded it.

In February 1940 the 3rd Jhelum Brigade returned to its Frontier haunts. The tribesmen from a region known as the Ahmedzai Salient were raiding up to the perimeter wire of Bannu itself, and on the heights overlooking the Gomatti Tangi, a pass barely five miles away, had erected their black banners; they appeared to be challenging the British to come on. G.H.Q. resolved to take the chance offered and mount a large-scale exercise with a live enemy. Three brigades were concentrated and everything was done in the correct manner. After a dawn bombardment the Jhelum Brigade launched a two-battalion attack on the heights with the 1st/16th on the left and the 1st/10th Baluchis on the right. After a vigorous engagement all objectives were captured. To give weight to the attack, 6-inch howitzers had been brought down from Razmak, and deployed outside Bannu. Bannu was a family station and the families took exception to being woken up at six o'clock in the morning by a heavy artillery bombardment, particularly as the blast from the howitzers shattered some of their windows. The Pathans also lodged an objection, as they thought heavy guns like 6-inch howitzers were out of place in a Frontier operation.

After the battle of the Gomatti Tangi the large-scale exercise continued, but the enemy declined to take any further part. Some three months of marching and road-building followed, then the Salient was handed over to the Frontier Constabulary. In May the 1st/16th truded up the Bannu-Razmak road to a two-battalion perimeter camp called Damdil, some ten miles from Razani. It was here, protecting the lines of communication between Razmak and Bannu, that it heard, coming over the B.B.C. short-wave transmitters, the heavy news of the fall of France.

Now it was clear that the Indian Army would have a role to play in the war, and at last orders for its expansion began to be issued. Slow to start,



**The Bannu-Razmak road. 'D' Company on the line of march, May 1940. (Photographed by R. B. Holmes of Peshawar)**

after 1940 the expansion of the Army was wildly accelerated. Until this time Indian King's Commissioned Officers could go only to a few selected regiments; one of the main problems in raising new regiments was that of providing British officers who knew something of military matters, could speak Urdu and had some knowledge of India. The problem was solved by a stroke of the pen. All regiments were opened to Indian officers, and henceforward the term 'British officer' was often widened to include Indian officers serving with the King's Commission. The first Indian officer to join the 1st/16th, Lieutenant Pritam Singh, arrived in 1941.

The supply of Sikh and Dogra recruits began to run dry; another brisk stroke of the pen and Jats were enlisted to fill Sikh vacancies, Gujars and Ahirs to fill Dogra vacancies. The complications of having Jat sepoy serving in a partially Sikh company under exclusively Sikh N.C.O.s were very considerable, just at a time when owing to the rapid expansion officers were least able to understand and cope with the type of problem likely to arise. The headlong expansion did considerable harm. The Indian sepoy, excellent as he proved himself to be, needed thorough training and sufficient time to become acclimatized to the military machine if he was to realize anything like his true potential. On paper, 1,600 men are twice the strength of 800, but in practice, as any field soldier knew, a good battalion was invaluable while two bad battalions were simply a liability doubled. At times it seemed that there were too many mathematicians at G.H.Q.

From 1940 until 1942 the Battalion remained

on the Frontier, nominally stationed at Kohat, but in practice spending much of its time on column. Ceaseless drafts to form new battalions or to reinforce those on service sapped its strength. Among others, it sent a complete company of well-trained soldiers to Malaya. They arrived in Singapore in good time to add to the numbers of men captured by the Japanese. At this time, the Battalion's main concession to the war was to change from brass shoulder titles to embroidered ones, although the opportunity was taken to start the training of specialists against the day that modern weapons should be received. Then in August 1942 the Battalion, the last old regular battalion still serving on the Frontier, once again marched to Datta Khel to help break what was fast becoming its traditional blockade. On its return to Kohat at the beginning of September, it was ordered to the eastern borders of India now threatened by the Japanese. Three hundred semi-trained recruits arrived to bring it up to strength; on 10 September the Band and Drums beat retreat for the last time, the last of the mess champagne was drunk, and on 15 September the Battalion entrained to be railed across the breadth of India to eastern Bengal.

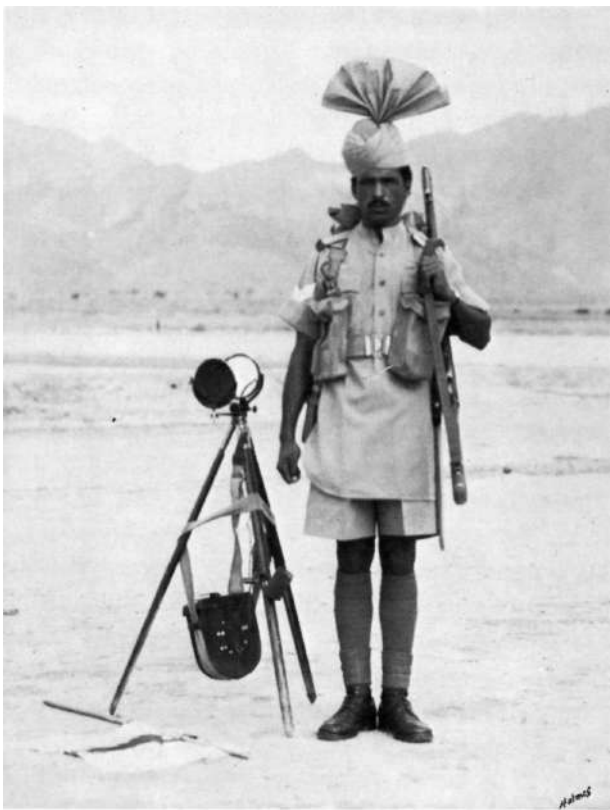
In February 1943 it joined the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade of the 23rd Indian Division at Tamu, just inside the border of Central Burma, and spent the following spring and summer engaged on long-range patrolling up to and across the Chindwin River which, by a form of mutual consent, had become the accepted border between the British and Japanese.

After its arrival in eastern Bengal, the Battalion had been issued with the new khaki drill battle dress; it was an unimaginative imitation of the serge battledress of the British Army. The blouse, lacking the give of serge, proved highly restricting and was soon discarded in favour of shirt sleeves, cardigans being worn when the weather was cold. The colour also was wrong as the light khaki drill did not blend with the green of the jungle. In July that year Ordnance issued green dye to tide units over until the new olive-green uniform became available in quantity; the many shades of green that resulted from the enthusiastic but unskilled efforts of the amateur dyers would have delighted the eye of a landscape gardener.

In November, as the Japanese started to secure jumping-off places for their coming spring offensive, the 1st/16th fought its first major engagement. The Japanese 33rd Division had begun to close in on the region round Tiddim in the Chin Hills some 160 miles south of Imphal. A single infantry brigade of the 17th Division was responsible for that sector of the front and it called urgently for help. The 1st/16th was sent to its assistance. The Battalion took up a position on a ridge some 8,000 feet high and almost twenty miles from Tiddim. Here, on a cold autumn night, the Japanese attacked. They assaulted the face of the position, but these attacks were held. They also climbed on to the ridge behind it and attacked from the rear. As the dawn broke, hordes of Japanese infantry came charging down on the thinly held trenches; they crashed through to Battalion Headquarters, but Lieutenant-Colonel Wilcock, now the commanding officer, improvised a line of signallers and orderlies and checked their advance. The Japanese called for artillery fire. Colonel Wilcock, sitting on his shooting-stick in the open, was killed almost immediately; the adjutant died beside him. The line was shattered and the Japanese poured on to the crest. A hastily organized counter-attack failed to dislodge them. Now the Battalion faced a difficult situation. The Japanese held the top of the ridge, the key to the position, in strength, and had overrun the area containing the reserve ammunition; 'B' and 'D' Companies were being closely pressed. The second-in-command, Major Newell, resolved to break contact and rejoin the main body of the Brigade in the neighbourhood of Tiddim. Jettisoning everything that could not be carried on the man, the Battalion struck out through virgin jungle. After two days threading their way across the steep slopes of the Chin Hills the tired men managed to rejoin the Brigade. The Japanese made no attempt to exploit their success.

The 1st/16th had suffered only some seventy casualties and had been manoeuvred rather than driven off its position; as a baptism of fire it had been a bitter experience and the loss of Colonel Wilcock, who knew every man in the Battalion and enjoyed their unquestioning trust, was a heavy blow; it was not to be forgotten or forgiven.

After two more months holding positions about



**A P.M. signaller wearing fighting order, 1942; he is standing by a heliograph. The large pouches at the front of the shirt were designed to contain two Bren magazines each. (Photographed by R. B. Holmes of Peshawar)**

Tiddim, the Battalion returned to its own brigade in the Imphal plateau. In the new year it carried out a month of intensive training, putting into practice all it had learned in the Chin Hills. When the crunch came in May 1944, and 4 Corps on the Imphal plain was surrounded, it was trained, fit and ready.

During the long-drawn-out battle that followed, it operated as often as not behind the enemy lines. As regards uniform and equipment at this time, the 1st/16th wore olive-green bush shirts and olive-green trousers tucked into the standard short gaiter and boots; the men wore the normal equipment but the heavy and clumsy pack was put aside and replaced by the haversack carried well up the back between the shoulders. The cardigan was rolled inside the gas cape, the lightweight waterproof cape that had a hundred uses besides protection against gas, the whole being fastened to the waistbelt by straps taken from the pack. In the haversack the men carried three days' light-

scale rations (these were later replaced by the American 'K' ration). The sepoys, of course, could not eat bully beef and were given tinned sardines or herrings instead. The waterbottle was slung on the right-hand side in the usual way, but two men per section carried chagals - porous canvas bags holding nearly a quart of water. Each man had Bren magazines in his basic pouches and 100 rounds of ammunition slung around his waist in canvas bandoliers. The total transport consisted of about eighty mules, each capable of shouldering 160 lb. None could be spared for small arms, and Brens and 2-inch mortars had to be carried by the men. Four 3-inch mortar detachments with seventy-two bombs per mortar accompanied the Battalion and required most of the mules for their transport. Although there were six trained mortar detachments available, it seemed of little value to have more mortars but fewer bombs. The few mules left over carried reserve small arms ammunition, entrenching tools and water. One mule was allotted to the doctor for his stores. For the first operation, the adjutant and his orderly carried a couple of bottles of rum in their basic pouches as a contribution to the Officers' Mess. By a singular coincidence both broke their bottles, ostensibly owing to falls, while marching along hill paths at night. Thereafter one mule was detailed for the Battalion office. On one side its load consisted of such mundane articles as message pads, pencils and so on, balanced on the other by liquid refreshment for the British officers. The system worked well; the mule was teetotal, and the morale of the British officers was maintained.

In early April the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to infiltrate across the lines of communication of the Japanese 15th Division and cut off a force that had captured the Litan saddle, an important feature on the approaches to Imphal. When the 1st Brigade was in position, the 37th, another brigade in the Division, was to attack the saddle frontally. Marching by night and lying up by day, it successfully accomplished the task and the Japanese were eliminated. But now came news that the headquarters of the 15th Division was at a village called Shongphel, only some eight map-miles away - it was more nearly twenty by jungle trails over the Naga Hills. Orders came to liquidate this headquarters. The 1st/16th were to flush

the Japanese out of the village, while other troops laid ambushes along the only possible paths for their retreat.

At 5 p.m. on 25 April the Battalion started out. It forded the Thoubal River and twelve hours later at 5 a.m. went into a hide a few miles short of Shongphel. Naga villagers interrogated by local guides - the village schoolmaster of Ukhrul rendered magnificent service both as guide and interpreter - talked gaily about 1,000-2,000 Japanese being quartered in Shongphel; the news was not passed on to the men, but Battalion Headquarters was a little silent and thoughtful that day. Next night the advance was resumed. About a mile short of Shongphel the track that the Battalion was following mounted a high ridge. Colonel Newell, assuming that the Japanese were certain to be holding the col where the track crossed this ridge, decided to turn off it well short of the crest. With the help of the splendid Naga guides the Battalion struck up the hillside through trackless jungle. Few who took part will ever forget the last three hours' climbing towards a skyline that for ever receded. However, as the darkness began to lighten, the never-ending ascent, incredibly, came to an end. The ground no longer rose, instead it fell sharply away. In the pale light of dawn a village could be seen through the trees in the valley below. After a little discussion and compass work, it was confidently identified as Shongphel.

Colonel Newell now ordered 'B' Company to dig in on the ridge to form a firm base in the event of trouble, while the rest of the Battalion led by 'C' Company pressed along it to the col. 'C' Company advanced with its leading platoon deployed with all automatic weapons forward. For a short time the advance was wary and slow; then the platoon encountered some Japanese digging in. The automatics roared into action and a blast of fire smote the surprised Japanese; they fled, with 'C' Company in hot pursuit. The slow walk forward suddenly became a run that carried 'C' Company right across the col and up the slope the far side. The Japanese disappeared down a track that appeared to lead to the village, leaving a medium machine-gun behind them, and Colonel Newell took the opportunity to stop the headlong rush forward and impose some form of control.



1942. A Dogra signaller with signalling flag. The illustration shows how the haversack and water-bottle were carried in fighting order

'C' Company was ordered to take up a position on the far side of the col. 'D' Company was then to establish itself half-way down the track to Shongphel, after which 'A' Company was to pass through and penetrate into the village itself. Tactical Battalion Headquarters, the small operational component restricted to a few signallers and intelligence men needed for the minute-to-minute control of the Battalion, was to move with 'D' Company.

At noon 'D' Company started descending the track and took up a defensive position on a spur half-way down it; there was no sign of the Japanese. 'A' Company passed through, and soon bursts of fire announced that it had encountered opposition. With great verve, however, it pressed on. Then, dramatically, heavy fire broke out on the ridge where 'C' Company had taken up its position. Some Japanese had climbed on to the ridge beyond the company and were trying to drive on down to the col. The Battalion had a gunner officer with it, but unfortunately it had

not proved possible to haul the guns within range; no assistance from outside could be expected. From 'C' Company came the news that their leading platoon was having difficulty in holding their hastily dug trenches. The situation began to look dangerous. If 'C' Company gave way, the 1st/16th would be irretrievably split. By now 'A' Company had entered the village itself, but the company commander had been wounded at its approaches. The news from 'C' Company became increasingly alarming. 'A' Company had accomplished their task and seized Shongphel; it appeared high time to concentrate the Battalion back on the ridge while 'C' Company still held out. This conclusion was reinforced when a Japanese light machine-gun opened up on 'D' Company. 'A' Company was called back and returned in excellent order, bringing with them a British 3-inch mortar and some Japanese discharger cups which they had captured in Shongphel; the sepoys had seen the back of the Japanese and were exultant.

As soon as 'A' Company was established across the col, 'D' Company retired through it and went on down the ridge to join 'B'. Now came the delicate task of extricating 'C' Company. The men thinned out to re-form within the 'A' Company defences. Then the 3-inch mortars with pinpoint accuracy dropped ten bombs by the forward weapons pits of 'C' Company and the last platoon of that company broke clear. The whole battalion now concentrated for the night on the position that 'B' Company had been constructing. All were alert for a night attack, but the hours of darkness passed quietly. Next day patrols pushed forward; they found no live Japanese, only a few corpses round the empty 'C' Company trenches beyond the col. That day the Battalion rested and in the evening Brigade Headquarters sent their congratulations together with the suggestion that Shongphel should be occupied. Some Japanese, withdrawing the previous night, had been ambushed, but other troops had been late into position and the jaws of the trap had failed to close. It was reported that headquarters of the Japanese Division had gone off the air. However that might be, one thing became clear: there were no Japanese in Shongphel.

On 30 April the Brigade was withdrawn into



**The band and drums in full dress, Kohat, 1942. This was their last parade with their instruments; they were not re-formed. (Photographed by R. B. Holmes of Peshawar)**

reserve at Wang Jing; it had not suffered many casualties and morale was extremely high. But a month of uncooked meals was beginning to tell, and lice had begun to appear on men's clothing; a change of raiment was somewhat overdue.

Early in May the Battalion embarked on its toughest action of the battle. For some time now, the troops surrounded on the Imphal plateau had been entirely dependent on air supply; the two airstrips, one at Imphal, the other at Palel, were vital to the British and their capture was therefore the chief objective of the Japanese.

Towards Palel the main Japanese thrust had been along the Tamu-Palel road, but at the heights of Shenam which commanded that route they had been blocked after bitter fighting. They were now infiltrating north of the road and their artillery had begun to shell the Palel airstrip from positions underneath a mountain about 5,200 feet high which had been code-named 'Ben Nevis'. On 11 May the Battalion took to the hills with the aim of capturing Ben Nevis and forcing the Japanese to withdraw their guns. On the 12th, while they were proceeding down the track from Maibi Khunou towards Khudei Khunou, the Brigadier was encountered standing by the side of the path; he told Colonel Newell that a patrol of the Patiala Infantry, a company strong, had run into some Japanese on the ridge near Khudei Khunou and that he had ordered the Patialas to drive them out. As in the clear sunlight of a perfect morning the Battalion drew near the village, there

came the sounds of heavy firing; a little farther on stretcher-bearers appeared carrying back Patiala casualties, always an enlivening spectacle before an engagement. The Battalion halted, while the Colonel walked forward to see the Patiala company commander. The latter reported he could not get on. The Japanese were entrenched on a crest overlooking the ridge which at this point was only about twenty yards wide with both sides falling away steeply into valleys some 500 feet below. They had heavy machine-guns covering the ridge approach and he thought they probably numbered a company. At this moment the Brigadier came up on the air; the 1st/16th were to attack the position and clear the Japanese out forthwith. A troop of a field battery, four guns, would give support; the gunners were limited to firing eighty shells, but, it was generously added, they were prepared to fire them any way that Colonel Newell wanted.

A straightforward attack down the ridge would certainly be costly and would most probably fail. The Colonel decided to send two companies down into the valley on a wide outflanking movement to come in on the Japanese from their flank and rear. While this move was in progress the gunners were to bombard the crest with a very slow rate of fire to be followed by a feint attack straight along it to keep the attention of the Japanese focused on the ridge. At about 3 p.m. 'A' and 'C' Companies started to descend into the valley; to avoid disclosing their movements from the inevitable noises of switched-on radio sets, they preserved wireless silence. The two companies disappeared into the jungle down the hillside and for three hours were neither heard nor seen. Then, as the daylight was going, a cascade of fire revealed that they had struck home. The roar of musketry, punctuated by the deep thud of grenades and the slow stutter of the Japanese heavy machine-guns, was moving unmistakably up the hill, to the jubilation of the watchers at Battalion Headquarters. Through the gathering darkness came the high-pitched 'Yah Ali' of the P.M.s followed by the deep baying 'Sat sri Akhal' of the Sikhs. The sound of battle reached the crest, then slowly faded and died. Over the radio came the voice of the 'C' Company commander. Khudei Khunou had been captured.



A 3-inch mortar detachment, 1941 (not the 1st/16th). The sepoy are wearing the long shorts with the flap buttoned up. Ordnance revived this regrettable form of dress in 1941, but it was soon overtaken by khaki drill battle dress. (Imperial War Museum)

The attack had achieved complete surprise, falling upon the Japanese from a route so difficult that they had scarcely bothered to guard against it. The Battalion rested next day and patrolled forward. Except for some corpses there was no trace of the Japanese. The advance was resumed. Ahead, black and menacing, loomed the mighty bulk of Ben Nevis; that night the Battalion halted above the little village of Phalbung, some two miles short of the mountain destined to be its next objective.

The slopes of Ben Nevis culminated in twin peaks about 400 yards apart. The ridge by Phalbung continued into the hillside about 500 yards below the right-hand peak. 'A' Company was pushed along the ridge just short of a knoll beyond which the ridge dipped into a shallow saddle before joining the slopes of the mountain itself. About 200 yards beyond the knoll the foremost bunker of the Jap position could be clearly discerned. Unusually for such skilled jungle fighters, although the bunker had been camouflaged with the branches of trees the camouflage had not been renewed, and the brown of the dead foliage stood out clearly against the green background. A good sign! Perhaps the Japanese were not from that redoubtable jungle division, the 33rd. For the next few days, although both sides



could see each other, neither opened fire: the 1st/16th had no desire to alert their enemy; the Japanese thought perhaps that their position had not been observed.

The Battalion was once again on its own. The nearest unit of the Brigade, the Patiala Infantry, was between two and three miles away. It had to patrol widely to guard against surprise, but now, hardened as it was in jungle tactics, this caused little difficulty. The main target, however, was Ben Nevis. For a week, patrols combed the slopes of the mountain. Gradually a picture of the Jap dispositions emerged; they had entrenched two localities, one by each peak. The hillside was not precipitous, but steep and covered in high jungle, with here and there patches of dense undergrowth.



**A red fighting cock on a yellow background was the emblem of the 23rd Indian Division. The emblem was worn in all forms of dress on both sleeves, two inches below the shoulder**

Thanks to the jungle the two Jap positions were not intersupporting; a daring patrol managed to penetrate between them and nearly reach the saddle between the two peaks. It was estimated that the Japanese amounted to about two infantry companies or a weak battalion.

Now Colonel Newell elaborated his plans. The attack would be supported by a complete regiment of artillery and a strike from the air. Even so, surprise would be vital. The Japanese obviously expected that an assault would come down the ridge from Phalbung, as this was far the easiest approach. Colonel Newell resolved not to use it, but to concentrate the Battalion in an assembly position in the valley and attack obliquely upwards. 'D' Company supported by 'A' would attack Left Peak; 'B' supported by 'D', Right Peak. Tactical Battalion Headquarters would be established on Knoll which afforded a limited view of the mountainside. The attack would be preceded by an air strike and artillery concentrations on both peaks. Brigade placed a company of Patiala

Infantry under command to make a firm base on the ridge and be available to exploit a success.

On the evening of 23 May the companies moved out to their assembly areas and bedded down for the night. The air strike had been timed to go in at eight o'clock next morning. The dawn broke overcast and wet. The peaks were veiled in cloud. The air strike was postponed until ten o'clock while everyone studied the clouds anxiously watching for the first sign of a break. Suddenly the skies began to clear and, punctually at ten, flights of Vengeance dive-bombers roared into view. One by one the aircraft peeled off to come screaming down on the peaks. As their 500-lb. bombs exploded, great clouds of dust momentarily obscured the view; then the summits reappeared, to show tall trees tumbling to the ground. As the last of the bombers completed its mission the flights re-formed and sped away. Now Hurricane fighter-bombers came sweeping in to drop their lighter bombs on the Japanese and to strafe their positions with cannon and machine-gun fire. But suddenly things started to go wrong. Targets for the Vengeances had been indicated by artillery smoke and the smoke had drifted. The Hurricanes strafed and bombed short. Three came straight for Knoll, their guns blazing. Battalion Headquarters hugged the ground, but it was utterly unprotected. Earth spouted as bullets and cannot-shot slammed into the crest. Men fell crashing down the hillside. From the valley below came the dull boom of exploding bombs. An impassioned plea to Brigade Headquarters resulted eventually in the aircraft being called off, but Battalion Headquarters had suffered severely; among others, Colonel Newell had been seriously wounded and the Intelligence officer, also hit, had disappeared somewhere down the hillside. The rifle companies had escaped more lightly; the bombs had fallen into clumps of bamboo and their effect had been smothered. Nevertheless, each company had suffered one or two casualties; when bombs meant to support an attack fall instead on the attackers, it does little to stimulate the enthusiasm of men already highly tensed at the prospect of imminent combat.

Now the guns opened up. They were firing at long range, about 9,000 yards; it had proved impossible to tow them any nearer; the changeable climatic conditions affected the flight of the

shells and many fell wide. As the second-in-command took over and ordered the rifle companies forward, the omens for the day were far from auspicious. 'D' Company, attacking Left Peak, soon ran into trouble; attack after attack was shattered by the withering fire of the Japanese from well-concealed positions. The number of casualties mounted, while progress seemed impossible.

On the right the men of 'B' Company led. Their line of advance brought them obliquely against the Japanese trenches; they skirted them skilfully and through dense jungle forced their way to the top. The Jap position had been constructed on the forward slope well below the summit, probably as a precaution against strikes from the air. Now 'B' Company attacked downhill on their rear. Unprepared for an assault from this direction, the Japs panicked and ran out towards Tengnoupal. At once 'B' and 'C' Companies dug in on Right Peak, pushing forward observation posts to give early warning of a counter-attack.

The situation now appeared to be that, while the attack on Left Peak had failed, Right Peak was firmly held. It was an invaluable characteristic of the operation that the regimental signallers never lost contact between headquarters and the rifle companies. Acting on the axiom of reinforcing success rather than failure, the second-in-command ordered the reserve company of Patialas forward to Right Peak, and accompanied them himself. He decided to use the Patiala company to attack Left Peak and called for an artillery concentration on that target. Although it had previously been registered, this was no easy task; shells ranged fractionally too far would spend themselves harmlessly in the valley beyond, while any short would pitch into 'D' Company just below the Japanese. Almost every shell had to be individually observed and observation itself was difficult. However, at about 4.30 p.m. the Patiala company commander, somewhat to his surprise, was told that the concentration had been fired and he left for Left Peak. The Patialas were highly trained and experienced soldiers. They took their time, nearly forty-five minutes, to cover 400 yards, but they also took Left Peak. Here again the main Japanese position had been dug below the crest. Now they were sandwiched with the Patialas above them and 'D'

and 'A' Companies beneath. The second-in-command went to Left Peak to organize the final phase. A patrol was sent down to establish physical contact with the companies below; then 'A' Company launched a last desperate assault. For a few moments the fire was intense and a heavy blast struck the Patiala company. It was only to cover the Japanese withdrawal. 'A' Company surged up to Left Peak and began to dig in beside the Patialas. 'D' Company, a third of its strength wounded or dead, remained where it was. By nightfall all objectives had been captured.

Next day patrols revealed that the Japanese were gone, and now plans were made to replace the somewhat *ad hoc* defences of the previous evening. Right Peak was clearly the key to the position. This was made a double-company locality and here Battalion Headquarters was sited. Left Peak was held by another company and the fourth held Knoll on the Phalbung ridge. The position resembled a right-angled triangle with Right Peak at the right angle. During the day 'D' Company marched in, and the Patialas, their task completed, returned to their parent battalion.

The view from Ben Nevis was superb. The curves of the Tamu road were exposed to view, almost as far as the Lokchao River. While Ben Nevis was in British hands, a major offensive by the Japanese on the Shenam Heights was virtually impossible. Clearly the Japs would regard its recapture as a high priority. The Battalion prepared to hold what it had won. Trees were cut down and the timber used to build head cover over weapon pits. The localities were surrounded with bamboo fences, and punjis, sharpened bamboo stakes about eighteen inches long, were driven in along their base. The fences were also booby-trapped; for this purpose Mills hand-grenades, with the firing-pin withdrawn, were placed in milk tins, and trip wires made from the strands of telephone cable were attached to the firing-levers. A fence was an excellent place for booby-traps: these dangerous little devices could backfire on their makers if their positions were not exactly recorded, but in a fence there was no danger of the wrong people being injured. No defence stores of any kind were available, of course; everything had to be improvised.

The Battalion enjoyed two days of tranquillity, presumably while the Japanese mustered their forces. It may seem strange that the British forces at Shenam could do nothing to pin down the troops on their front. The task of the 23rd Division at this time was essentially defensive. While Imphal was beleaguered, resources in fire-power had to be carefully husbanded. Of necessity, the main effort had to be directed to reopening the road to Kohima and re-establishing ground communications with India. The role of the 23rd Division was to hold the Palel airstrip and for this the possession of the Shenam Heights was vital. If the Japanese had to withdraw resources from before Shenam this suited the divisional plan, however much the 1st/16th might deplore it.

So the Battalion strengthened its defences and awaited the inevitable. On the third day it happened. During the late afternoon Japanese 105 and 155 mm. guns started to bombard the peaks. Against the heavy 155 mm. shells the head cover on the weapon pits offered little protection. Many shells struck the trees and burst in the air, their fragments scything down on what lay below. For some reason the brunt of the bombardment fell on Left Peak and here 'A' Company suffered severely. Then, in the small hours of the morning, screaming Japanese infantry came charging through the darkness. They were surprised by the strength of Right Peak and before the steady fire of the defenders found themselves unable to make any impression. At daybreak, baffled, they dug in about 100 yards below the Right Peak perimeter.

Next morning 'A' Company was moved from Left Peak to the comparative safety of Knoll. Knoll, under the shadow of Ben Nevis, was immune to shellfire from the far side of that mountain. For the next ten days a recurrent pattern set in. By day the Japanese sporadically shelled the mountain top; anything they could see moving, they sniped with 75 mm. field guns emplaced near by. By night their infantry attacked, normally after the moon was down. Only the night of the full moon was quiet. Night after night they were foiled by the fire from the perimeter, the pounding of the 25-pounders sited in the distant Sengmai Turel and the devastating accuracy of the 3-inch mortars. Two had been sited in Right Peak and one in each of the other localities to

cover ground which, owing to the steepness of the hillside, could not be reached by the guns. The mortars fired at a range of 100 yards, well inside their authorized minimum. Each night they re-registered their targets by the simple method of screwing their mortars upwards until the bombs descended on the forward trenches; their occupants considered that, since they were protected and the Japs in the open, the risk was worth taking.

As night after night they fired on their defensive targets, complaints came up from the gun lines that the gunners were getting no rest; the news was received without sympathy. On the mountain, after the first bombardment, all the mules had been evacuated. Water had to be carried up by hand from a spring 300 feet below. By day the men removed their boots for a couple of hours to prevent their feet becoming soft; there could be no question of taking them off at night. As time passed the men became lousy, and after more than a month on the American 'K' ration, during which no form of cooked meal had been eaten, their physical condition began to deteriorate. Slowly, from shellfire and sickness, the Battalion's strength drained away. A draft of ninety men joined on the mountain - what a place to join a unit, the adjutant reflected - but this soon dwindled away. Every night the trenches were manned, every night the attacks were repelled. The Japanese could not always retrieve their dead, and the sickly smell of decaying corpses was added to the other pleasures of the mountain resort.

As the strength of the Battalion ebbed away, it became apparent that the time would come when the trenches could not be properly manned, and that one night the Battalion would be overrun. The Divisional Commander had been watching the situation and now concluded that Ben Nevis was too exposed and the problems of supply too great to justify continuing to hold the mountain. The operation had fulfilled its purpose. For a fortnight it had diverted the main Japanese thrust away from the Palel road; now he resolved not to relieve the 1st/16th but to evacuate.

Ironically, while the orders for the evacuation were going out on 6 June, the Japanese launched their heaviest bombardment. By now they had pinpointed every inch of the position and they

proceeded to search it yard by yard. They had recognized the importance of Right Peak and directed almost the whole of their fire on it. Two miles away Brigade Headquarters, aghast, watched a flaming torrent of shells exploding on the mountain top. It seemed to them incredible that anyone could live underneath such a bombardment. Somehow the word got about that the Battalion had withdrawn. The order went to the guns in the Sengmai Turel to fire ten rounds gunfire into Right Peak. At this time all the gunner communications on Ben Nevis had been destroyed; the gunner signaller lay dead, with his officer lying mortally wounded across his body. But fortunately the brigade radio set was still in order, and the adjutant contrived a pungent conversation with the Brigade Major. He afterwards swore that a piece of molten metal whizzed between his lips and the mouthpiece of the radio.

Then, as always, with the coming of darkness the Japanese guns fell silent and it was possible to take stock. Right Peak was almost unrecognizable. Twisted tree-trunks lay strewn across the ground, and a great pit yawned where presumably a number of shells had fallen together. 'D' Company held the front face of the position and had been savagely mauled. Company Headquarters had been hit and the company commander wounded; the Japanese had blasted the forward bunkers with a 75 mm. field gun at a range of 500 yards and had blown away half the forward platoon. The sole surviving V.C.O. took over. Reinforcements were called for from Knoll; the battery commander, who had survived by a miracle, worked frantically to restore communications with the guns. By evening stand-to some sort of order had been imposed. Had the Japanese attacked immediately after the shelling, the Battalion must have been overrun, but they waited for nightfall, and that gave the 1st/16th a chance.

As the darkness deepened the Battalion waited grimly for the events of the night to unfold. It rather resembled the outer rind of a cheese from which the cheese itself had been removed: every man, batman, cook, orderly, clerk, was manning the outer trenches; inside there was nothing save the two mortar detachments and the brigade signal terminal. At ten the Japs came. Their leading ranks started to break through the bamboo

fence thirty yards away from the trenches, and for a few crucial moments the hard-trying men of 'D' Company wavered. Then came the order for rapid fire; the mortars opened up and far away in the Sengmai Turel a distant sound like the beating of a heavy drum told that the guns were once more in action. The line held; against so fierce a fire the Japanese had no hope. They returned to the attack again at two in the morning, but they had no stomach for a fight which they knew to be hopeless; they faded away as the first automatics opened up from the perimeter.

For the rest of the night the silence was intense. Then with the dawn came the rain. Fortune was favouring the 1st/16th. As the heavy clouds closed down, not a sound was to be heard from the Japanese lines. At nine o'clock a host of stretcher-bearers arrived from Brigade Headquarters. It was a ten-mile carry over rough hill-tracks to road-head; a badly wounded man had little hope. Then the mules came, were loaded up and were gone. The grey clouds hung around the mountain face and masked the Battalion as it quietly filtered away. By 2 p.m. Ben Nevis was clear. Not a shot had been fired. Except for 'A' Company remaining on Knoll to cover the withdrawal, the remainder of the Battalion marched back to the gun lines in the Sengmai Turel. That night the gunners, whose unstinting assistance had contributed so much to the successful defence, insisted on taking over the night guards to give the Battalion an uninterrupted sleep. It was a generous gesture and much appreciated, although it was probably several days before the reflex reactions after the past fortnight permitted unbroken slumber.

Next day 'A' Company re-joined. The company commander reported that during the night they had heard the Japanese firing on the trenches of Ben Nevis; they had called down fire to keep them amused, but towards morning a shout of triumph had indicated that the Japs had found the trenches empty.

The Battalion, sick, weary, lousy, was withdrawn into Corps reserve. All its clothing had to be destroyed; for six weeks the men had neither washed nor eaten cooked food, and the first taste of normal cooked meals on stomachs unused to any type of fat or grease was certain to provoke an upset. During the first week 150 men went sick.

But they *soon* recovered and spirits rose high. All felt that the reverse in the Chin Hills had now been avenged. During the fighting round Ben Nevis, the strength of the Battalion rarely exceeded 450, since all drivers, members of the carrier platoon, two mortar detachments and various duty men, had to be left at base. It suffered 153 casualties; apart from those inflicted during the initial assault, almost all the remainder could be attributed to shellfire.

For the next six weeks the 1st/16th occupied quiet sectors; then, in July with the Imphal-Kohima road open, the 23rd Division turned to the offensive. As it drove down towards Tamu the 1st Indian Infantry Brigade was once more ordered into the jungle to cut in behind the Japanese defences. The Battalion had a full part to play. The monsoon had broken and the rain was unceasing, making the jungle tracks mere rivers of mud. Steep slopes were almost impassable and casualties among the mules were many. But the Battalion took all its objectives; the Japanese, attacked in front and rear, were annihilated. Nevertheless, in these inhuman conditions sickness took a heavier toll than the enemy. By the time the Battalion took up its final position on the ridges by the Lokchao River, rifle companies were strong if they could muster forty men.

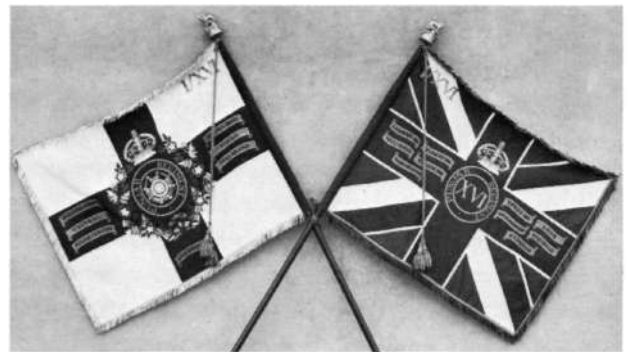
But the 23rd Division's task was over. It had been on the border continuously since May 1942 and now in August 1944, with the Japanese reeling back into Burma, it was to return to India as the reserve division to the 14th Army. During the fighting from November 1943 to August 1944 the Battalion suffered the following casualties:

King's Commissioned Officers - 15  
Viceroy's Commissioned Officers- 10  
Other ranks - 332

Out of an authorized establishment of thirteen K.C.O.s a total of fifteen casualties was high. It

arose not from any excessive need for the officers to lead, but from the deliberate policy of the Japanese to shoot primarily at the officers, and British officers tended to be conspicuous. During the fighting round Imphal, British officers blackened their faces and carried rifles, and this undoubtedly reduced the casualty rates. Out of the total casualty list, only eleven men were listed as missing; these were all lost at the action in the Chin Hills. Thereafter the Battalion had not a man missing or unaccounted for.

After the return to India, the Division was alerted for various landings from the sea, all of which were cancelled. In August 1945 it landed in Malaya. The operation was conducted without firing, not entirely to its dismay. After two short a stay in the lush pastures of that country, the 1st Brigade sailed for Java. Here the Battalion took part in various operations and lost some thirty-five men. On 18 November 1946 it sailed for Bombay, leaving with relief a task that had become increasingly distasteful. Then in 1947 the association of the 1st Battalion the 16th Punjab Regiment with the British Crown ceased and the Regiment was split between Pakistan and the new India. A British-Indian relationship which both sides had found singularly rewarding had come to an end and the 30th Punjabis, in its old form, was no more.



The Colours of the 1st Battalion, The 16th Punjab Regiment

# The Plates



## *A1 Sepoy, service dress, 1857*

The Army at the time of the Mutiny. White trousers were worn on full-dress occasions, grey overalls on service. This sepoy is in the 28th Bengal Infantry, and wears an early version of the Kilmarnock cap which, on service, was beginning to replace the clumsy shako. The uniform is modelled on those worn by the British Army during the Peninsular War, and based on prints by Akcrmann and the engravings 'A Bengal regiment on the line of march' by F. Layard.

## *A2 Sepoy, service dress, 1857*

A rear view of the figure depicted in *A1*. His service dress accoutrements include white cross-belts, rifle sling, a canvas knapsack painted black, and an ammunition box suspended below the knapsack. On top of the knapsack appears a 'lohar' of polished brass. The uniform is based on prints by Akermann and engravings by F. Layard.

## *A3 Native Officer, full dress, 1857*

This officer, again of the 28th Bengal Infantry, is in full dress and wears the shako. All facings and braid are of gold. Native officers, or 'sirdars' as they were sometimes called, were men of considerable standing both in their regiment and their villages. They wore swords and all the usual accoutrements of an officer of the period, and as such were entitled to a salute from all other ranks and were addressed as 'sahib'.

## *B1 Sepoy, 1865*

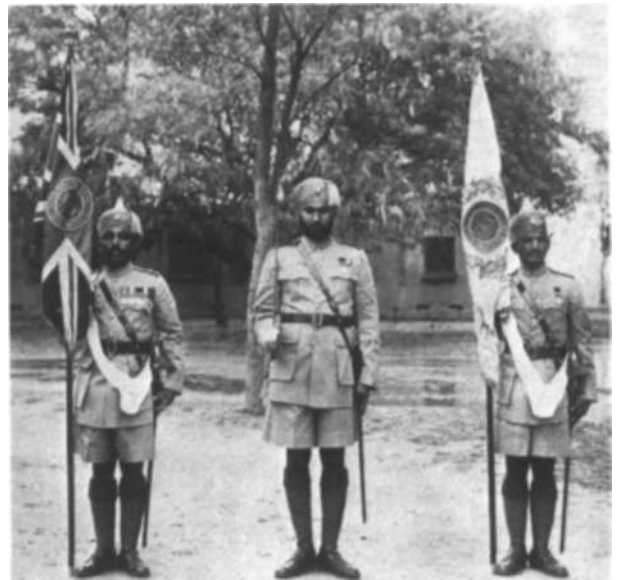
Little is known of the uniform worn by the 30th during the 1860s, except that it was red. This figure shows the first reforms after the Mutiny. The sepoy wears the plain native turban, or 'safa', with a red triangular patch or 'pug' above the forehead. The old red jacket has been replaced by the so-called zouave jacket with a broad stripe of the regimental facing down the front, and the sides of the jacket are a little cut away; it has virtually no collar. Blue serge trousers are standard issue and worn with brown Punjabi shoes. Buttons and belt buckle are all brass, and a brass '30 P' can be seen on the white shoulder strap.

## *B2 Sepoy, 1879*

The zouave jacket is still worn but trousers have been discarded, and in their place pantaloons are worn tucked into a pair of short gaiters over black shoes. Belt, cartridge pouches and straps are of brown leather.

## *B3 Havildar, full dress, 1910*

The rank of havildar was equivalent to that of sergeant in the British Army, and similar badges of rank were worn. This havildar is in the 31st Punjabis, the link battalion with the 30th. A



The original colours presented in 1876. They are shown on their last parade in 1939. This was the only drill occasion that the Battalion Havildar-Major drew his sword

similar style of zouave jacket to that of the 1870s is still worn, but it is now cut square. The trend towards gaiters has reached its final conclusion, and blue pantaloons are worn with much longer white gaiters. The 30th did in fact adopt blue puttees rather than gaiters for a time, but when grouped with the 31st in 1922, the final version of full dress showed that there had been a reversion to white gaiters.

*C1 Subedar, Kelat-i-Ghilzai Regiment, 1879*

Subedars were fully trained officers who initially commanded a company, but gradually came to assume the position of second-in-command.

After the Mutiny, the Government issued the sepoy with a uniform coat and trousers once every other year; the rest of his uniform he bought for himself. This gave commanding officers considerable opportunity to exercise their own discretion over uniform - a discretion they seldom failed to use. This subedar of the Kelat-i-Ghilzai Regiment wears boots and polished brass spurs as if he were a British field officer. By the beginning of the 20th century, however, this exuberance had subsided a little. The figure is based on a sketch by Lieutenant Pulley for the *Illustrated London News* of 1879, and Regimental photographs from an album compiled by the late Brigadier C. P. Clarke.



Regimental mufti. From left to right: a Sikh, a Dogra and a P.M. in off-duty walking-out dress

*C2 Indian Officer, full dress, 1900*

A Punjabi Mohammedan Indian officer of the 30th. He wears a blue and gold safa, the triangular crown, or 'kullah', of which is plain gold. The scarlet jacket has not altered, but the blue pantaloons are worn with blue puttees and black boots. The illustration is based on Regimental photographs from the collection of the late Brigadier G. P. Clarke.

*C3 Drill Havildar, full dress, 1900*

A Dogra drill havildar of the 30th. His safa is plain blue with white fringe to the 'pugri', while the rest of the uniform is almost identical with that of the officers, with the exception of the absence of all gold piping and braid. Based on Regimental photographs from the collection of the late Brigadier C. P. Clarke.

*D1 Havildar, service dress, 1900*

By the early 1900s khaki drill was the normal service dress. This figure shows a Sikh havildar in khaki drill safa, blouse, pantaloons and long puttees. His rank is indicated by dark blue sergeant's stripes on the upper arm. Hot weather kit was initially white drill, purchased locally; but following the example of the Punjab Frontier Force, many regiments dyed their white drill khaki as early as the 1860s, and the experience of service on the Frontier showed the wisdom of this move. By the 1880s khaki was almost universally worn on service. The illustration, based on a Regimental photograph, shows a rather curious compromise in equipment. The havildar is wearing the Slade Wallace equipment introduced in the 1880s (comprising leather belt, cartridge pouches, and vertical leather braces with a rolled greatcoat or blanket on the back). However, he wears only one canvas cross-strap, presumably to carry a water-bottle, but nothing for a haversack. He is also wearing a red sash - an unusual item of kit for service.

*D2 Sepoy, fighting order, 1910*

On service at the Frontier this sepoy in 'fighting order' wears the bandolier equipment issued with the arrival of the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield rifle in 1905. In order to carry the five-round clips of ammunition now standard for these bolt-action

magazine rifles, the shoulder bandolier replaced the old leather pouches. A rolled blanket or great-coat was often carried high up on the shoulders, sometimes with a leather strap across the chest to make the two vertical straps more rigid; this strap impeded the breathing and was soon discarded. Although the British Army started to adopt webbing equipment in 1908, versions of the Slade Wallace equipment were standard in India until 1920. Based on pictures by A. C. Lovett.

### *D3 Sepoy, fighting order, 1910*

A rear view of the figure in *D2*, showing the arrangement of the equipment carried on canvas straps. Varied equipment such as haversacks, water-bottles, packs, blankets, etc., were hung about the men by separate canvas straps whenever such were required. Based on pictures by A. C. Lovett.

### *E British Officer, full dress, 1912*

A mounted British officer of the 30th. The cork helmet with a spike had replaced the Elwood wicker topee in about 1880. In 1900 the Wolseley helmet had been introduced for service; however, it was unpopular, and by 1917 the Regiment had adopted its own pattern of pith helmet. The illustration is based on a painting from the Regimental records.

### *F1 Subedar-Major, full dress, 1923*

The Subedar-Major was the most senior Indian officer. His position could be considered similar to that of a British Regimental Sergeant-Major, although in practice, with perhaps only five or six British officers actually present in a unit, he was probably the most important member of the Regiment after the commanding officer, to whom he was personal adviser, particularly on matters relating to Indian customs. He wore the badges of rank of a major. This subedar-major is a Punjabi Mohammedan and wears the post-1922 full dress. This was never worn by the Regiment as a whole; its use was confined to selected persons on special occasions and to members of the band and drums. There has also been a reversion to the wearing of white gaiters in place of the blue puttees.

### *F2 Sepoy, full dress, 1926*

Again wearing the post-1922 full dress for special occasions, this Punjabi Mohammedan sepoy shows the last vestiges of the old zouave jacket in the white piping round the buttons of the blouse. From Regimental photographs.

### *F3 Drummer, 1928*

This Dogra is a side-drummer, and as such wears the special post-1922 full dress. The jacket and pantaloons are almost identical with those of the sepoy, with the addition of gold braid with a green bugle lanyard and tassle. The waist-belt is white instead of brown leather, and the drummer wears white gloves. From Regimental photographs.

### *G1 Indian Officer, fighting order, 1930*

This Sikh Indian officer is clad for the Frontier. The grey-backed shirt was introduced for colder weather in the 1920s, as, being of thick flannel, it was warmer than the thin khaki drill. It was found that the grey and khaki blended in well with the rocks of Waziristan. Khaki drill shorts are now universally approved and are worn with long puttees, green hosetops and brown boots. Officers, both British and Indian, wore the standard British Army brown boots, whereas other ranks wore black. Punjabi shoes were no longer tolerated. The hosetop requires some explanation. When long puttees were worn with shorts, they were wound round the bare leg or over stockings. The hosetop was merely a stout green stocking that lacked a foot, so that it could be worn over the normal issue sock with one end just above the top of the boot beneath the puttee, and the other folded down over the top. All equipment is of webbing.

### *G2 British Officer, drill order, 1931*

This officer is in drill order, except that he is carrying a pistol slung from a leather strap with loops for pistol ammunition. Although never specifically authorized, this method of carrying a pistol was widely practised when travelling on the Frontier. It was unusual to carry the pistol on the right-hand side unless the person concerned was left-handed.

Both British and Indian officers wore the standard British Army khaki drill jacket and



brown boots, but British officers differed from Indian in wearing the light-coloured Fox's puttees, while Indian officers wore the dark issue. Also, British officers wore a khaki drill shirt, collar and tie. The red flash of the 30th can be clearly seen under the shoulder titles of this figure, and of *G1* and *G3*. The illustration is based on a photograph of the Afridi campaign, 1931, in the possession of Colonel E. C. Spencer.

### *G3 Indian Officer, 1933*

This Indian officer wears a cardigan over his grey-backed shirt, as was normal cold-weather dress for all but ceremonial parades during the 1930s. Most cardigans were of the pullover type, but those worn by Sikhs buttoned down the front so that they could be put on without having to be pulled over the safa. He wears Sam Browne equipment identical with that of the British officer. During the early 1930s the Regiment introduced a cut-down version of the unpopular puttees, tied round the ankle only, and this became standard wear for all but ceremonial occasions.

### *H1 Subedar, 1940*

Dressed as an orderly officer of the day, this Punjabi Mohammedan subedar wears khaki drill pantaloons instead of shorts; this was normal after dark as an anti-malaria precaution. He is wearing the long ceremonial safa, the normal safa with a shamla standing up being only half its length. The safa itself is khaki drill with a gold kullah on top and gold fringe edged with red. From Regimental photographs taken in Kohat, 1942.

### *H2 Naik, review order, 1942*

As a junior grade of N.C.O., the rank of naik corresponded to the British Army corporal. This figure is in review order, and again wears the ceremonial safa. The badges on his upper arm are sergeant's stripes, while those on the lower part of his right arm are good conduct stripes. As an N.C.O., his boots are black leather instead of brown. From Regimental photographs taken in Kohat, 1942.



A British officer in mess dress, 1937. The jacket was scarlet with white facings, the waistcoat was white and the overalls dark blue with a thin red stripe. In hot weather a white monkey jacket which hooked at the neck, white overalls and a red sash were worn. (Photographed by R. B. Holmes of Peshawar)

### *H3 Sepoy, fighting order, 1943*

This Sikh sepoy is in fighting order for the Frontier. He is in shirt-sleeves with the khaki drill shirt worn outside his shorts as was customary in the Regiment. The buttons on this shirt are of brown bone. The short puttees have replaced the long, and are worn here with a pair of 'chaplis' or Indian sandals. These are of brown leather, have no heel but a leather thong in its place. His equipment is webbing, as that issued to the Regiment in 1941, and consists of large pouches suitable for carrying Bren magazines and a carrier for the water-bottle. The bayonet scabbard is covered in khaki drill cloth. From Regimental photographs taken in Kohat in 1942.