

The British Indian Army

The British Indian Army:
Virtue and Necessity

Edited by

Rob Johnson

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P U B L I S H I N G

The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity,
Edited by Rob Johnson

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-5396-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5396-5



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FOREWORD

In the famous Old College of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, one of the most beautiful historic interiors is that of the Indian Army Room, formerly the chapel of the Royal Military College. It houses a series of wonderful stained glass windows commemorating the campaigns and theatres of war in which Indian troops fought for the British Empire and Commonwealth. Established after the partition of the sub-continent and independence in 1947, the Room serves as a poignant reminder of the illustrious role played by the Indian Army in the two World Wars and in other conflicts. Memories of that army's – or, more accurately, of a succession of Indian Armies' – actions, whether on the North-West Frontier, Ypres, Mesopotamia or in Burma, have now faded. Fortunately, scholarly endeavour in this field has not. Interest in the Indian Army has seen a modest resurgence in recent years. One particular milestone was a joint conference held by the Imperial War Museum and King's College London in 2009. Building on the interest shown in this topic, not least by young researchers, the British Commission for Military History chose to hold its summer conference in 2012 on the Indian Army at Keble College, Oxford.

This book, edited by Dr Rob Johnson, an eminent researcher of the subject, is the direct result of a memorable weekend in Oxford and follow-up work. *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity* presents a series of fascinating vignettes into the development, garrison life and active duty of the various Indian Armies worldwide. While making no claims to represent the last word on the subject, the authors present a wide perspective of a colourful and heterogeneous military institution in peace and war, covering themes as extensive as mechanisation and martial races. I am sure that all those interested in the Indian Army will find in this work a treasure trove of fascinating and compelling scholarship. Moreover, it should generate further awareness and research. When we look back on the accomplishments of the British Army over the last two centuries and more, the long service and high sacrifice of the British-Indian Armies deserve to be far better recognised and remembered. The coming centenary commemorations of the First World War should provide a timely and necessary stimulus.

I would like to thank Professor Bill Philpott of King's College London and Dr Rob Johnson of The University of Oxford for setting up the conference, and to all speakers who took part. All present judged it a most successful event. On the basis of the quality of the papers presented in this volume, *The British Indian Army: Virtue and Necessity* deserves equal fortune.

Major-General (ret'd) Mungo Melvin,
President, British Commission for Military History

INTRODUCTION

ROB JOHNSON

This volume comes out of the British Commission for Military History conference of July 2012 on the Indian Armies in the British period held at The University of Oxford. The range of papers presented and the quality of the discussions revealed an important point, specifically, that the study of the Indian Army is alive and well, attracting new and high quality scholarship with the result that we are constantly deepening our understanding of the subject. Such is the breadth of new work that it has not been possible to include all the papers of the conference, nor indeed, of contemporary fellow authors who specialise in this subject. Many issues and debates that are extant do not feature here because of limits on the available space and critics will perhaps point out that there are significant omissions. Nevertheless, the purpose of this book, reflecting the aim of the conference, is to examine a selection of themes concerning the Indian Armies of the British period without claiming an exhaustive coverage.

In recent years, a handful of new edited books have appeared on the subject of the Indian Army. Daniel Marston and Chandar Sundaram edited a collection on the Indian Army that spanned the entire period between c.1800 and 2000 titled, *A Military History of India and South Asia* (Indiana University Press, 2008), and Kaushik Roy has edited *War in Society in Colonial India* (2nd edn., Oxford University Press India, 2010), as well as his own monograph *Brown Warriors of the Raj* (Manohar, 2008). Anirudh Deshpande published posthumously *The British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces, 1857-1939* (Oxford University Press, 2002), while Jos Gommans and Dirk Kolff edited their *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia: 1000-1800* (Oxford University Press India) in 2001, encompassing the very earliest part of the British colonial era.

The chapters of this book are drawn from across the entirety of the British period and emphasise both continuity and transformation. While there has been much academic research on the early colonial forces in India, particularly the Mutiny-Rebellion and the extent to which it was or was not a “nationalist struggle for liberation,” this volume shows the Indian Army changed profoundly after 1858 and again during the great

expansion in the First World War. Several of the chapters in this volume reveal that the most far reaching transformations occurred after the First World War and then during the course of the Second World War, so that a very modern army, navy and air force emerged from the chaos of decolonisation.

Although modernisation reflected British thinking, the army was recruited, managed and directed in a very distinctive way, with due attention to cultural considerations. The British needed the manpower India had to offer for border wars, for internal security and for overseas imperial operations, but it also had to maintain loyalty to the colonial order. Three chapters of this volume deal with expeditionary operations, internal security and performance in very direct ways. Aside from these macro-issues of change, there are also micro-historical chapters on the individual officer, by Stuart Sampson, and on a single unit history, by Ashok Nath.

Three chapters, by Gordon Corrigan, Kristian Coates-Ulrichsen and Ashok Nath, deal specifically with the First World War, and the changes it wrought to the thinking and fabric of the army. Dr Coates-Ulrichsen's chapter is derived in part from his volume on *The First World War in the Middle East* (Hurst, 2013) while Gordon Corrigan's chapter draws on his rich experience working on the Gurkhas over many years. Two further chapters, by Simon Coningham and Alexander Wilson, explore the introduction and modernisation of the air and mechanized arms, taking us from the Inter-War Years to the Second World War. Further transformation was wrought in the Burma campaign of the 1941-45 period and other theatres involving Indian troops, and Alan Jeffreys' chapter compliments his recent edited collection titled *The Indian Army, 1939-47* (Ashgate, 2012), admirably.

To ensure loyalty to a foreign empire, two competing approaches emerged in the late-nineteenth century: there were those that advocated a balanced selection of recruits that drew from all regions and classes of India, and others advanced the concept of selecting "martial races". The martial race theory has been subjected to a variety of scholarly interpretations, although there are often ideological motives behind them, then and now. It is significant that several chapters in this book continue and develop the debate. In effect, what we find is that the Indian Army that emerged was the product of a symbiosis of indigenous customs, Western bureaucratic management techniques, and competition between the two theoretical approaches to recruitment. This compromise influenced not only the Indian Army but other ways of approaching imperial forces.

The organisational or bureaucratic approach to the recruitment and management of the army enabled the British to overcome the problems of the pre-1857 army, where customs and caste prejudices had impaired military efficiency. There were essentially three elements to this: the welfare system which provided incentives to enlistment and long service; regimental organisation, which absorbed the clan and caste ethos of various communities and created new identities; and the courts martial system which imposed a moderate system of coercion to assist with the cohesion and integrity of the individual units. Leadership was important, but this must be contextualised within the distinct colonial system rather than attributing it to patronage, paternalism and personality as others have done. Nevertheless, that said, it is often striking in what affection and esteem British officers spoke of their Indian soldiers and how important personal connections remained. In a later era, Brigadier F.J. Dillon recorded that new recruits “became yours in a much more personal way than in the British Army. You knew all about him, where he came from, what his family [trade] was. You probably visited his village and knew his parents”. Another officer, Geoff Hamilton described his Indian regiment as: “a happy band . . . , I was intensely proud to be their leader, and they knew it. We fought and played together, undeterred by race, rank, class or creed, or age for that matter”. The agonies of breaking up this curious hybrid of bureaucracy and personality are reflected in Charles Messenger’s chapter on 1948 and the ‘Opt’.

In sum, this edited volume offers a modest contribution on the study of the design, tactics, evolution, modernisation, performance, and challenges of an army that was a curious phenomenon, particularly the fact it was made up of South Asian personnel but led by the British, and all serving an alien, global, imperial system. The Indian Army was not atypical in the way that service loyalty was constructed, in the importance of leadership, *esprit de corps*, ideology, pay and conditions, and the efforts to create distinctiveness. Even the detail of uniforms, locality, elite status, the position of depots, training regimes and eating arrangements could enhance distinctions and difference. Yet, the British made great efforts to encourage particularly Indian customs and rituals, such that observance of religious ceremonies was in some ways fossilised and protected in a far more “pure” form than in civilian life. Rites and rituals, colours and standards, even the threads on a uniform could enhance separateness, and the British combined different ethnic or class groups into each unit to foster healthy competition within single regimental identities. This encouragement of the local, parochial identity within a greater global

entity enabled the Indian armed forces to survive significant losses and setbacks.

The British were pragmatic rulers and they made use of cultural factors within South Asian society to create a fighting force able to maintain internal security, ensure border integrity and augment its expeditionary capability at minimum cost and maximum effectiveness. The costs of British manpower to ensure the security of their possessions was offset by the vast reserves of India, but the British were eager to select to create distinction, not only to ensure loyalty, but to ensure the greatest efficiency and professionalism. Consequently, the way this army (and Marine, Navy and Air Force) was raised was not so dissimilar from other forces of this period including those of Europe, but in its regimental traditions, and its collection of practices, it was a unique phenomenon. Ultimately, this volume finds that the Indian Army was a product of its time and historical circumstances, and, despite all the stresses and strains placed upon it, functioned well enough for the tasks demanded of it, before the old system was altered significantly by the World Wars and then transformed again by independence.

Despite the fact that the Indian Army of the British period was important, not least because it was the primary arm of the colonial state and made colonialism possible, and even though the recent scholarship is vibrant, its study has, in fact, been rather neglected and marginalised both in India and the United Kingdom. Many scholars have been distracted or driven off by years of rather obsessive adherence to the tropes and paradigms of post-colonial critiques. This book illustrates that it is perfectly possible to apply the historians craft without the obfuscation of ideological agendas. Indeed, it is clear that the tide is turning away from post-colonialism to more reasoned historical analyses. This edited collection seeks to be a valuable, if small, contribution to the re-emerging interest in the history of the Indian Army in the British period.

There are a number of persons to thank, including Major-General Melvin for his work as the British Commission for Military History President, and his Secretary General Professor William Philpott who worked hard to make the conference of 2012 happen. Thanks are due to the authors for their hard work in producing the chapters, and Carol Koulikourdi of Cambridge Scholars Publishing who has been a most enthusiastic ally from the outset, for which all the authors are immensely grateful.

CHAPTER ONE

MAKING A VIRTUE OUT OF NECESSITY: THE INDIAN ARMY, 1746-1947

ROB JOHNSON

The colour and pageantry of the old colonial Indian Army, and the rather nostalgic way it is remembered, can easily distract any analyst from understanding its primary purpose, namely, to act as an instrument of war raised and developed through necessity. The Indian Army, and its predecessors, the Honourable East India Company and Presidency Armies, were designed to defeat Asian conventional armies, rebellions and insurgencies, and act as expeditionary forces from East Africa to East Asia. The various forms they took, so admired at the time and since, should be seen for what they were: tactical infantry formations specialising in conventional linear engagements, light artillery for mountain warfare, armed constabulary to “watch and ward” on the frontiers, light cavalry able to meet any emergency, and later, fighter squadrons to defend Indian air space, destroyer crews to dominate the Bay of Bengal, or armoured regiments to fight their way to Rangoon against the Imperial Japanese Army. The various changes made to the Indian Army throughout its history reflected developments not only in technology or strategic threat, but reactions to failure and setback, attempts to incorporate diverse cultural expectations and the need to inculcate a specific military ethos. Above all, change was through both necessity and a prescient recognition of changing tasks and roles. Unlike the armies of Persia, the Ottoman Empire, Afghanistan, Burma, or China, which failed to transform successfully, the Indian Army was equipped and guided through its evolution under European control.

It is often noted that, in 1945, the Indian Army was the largest volunteer army in history, apparently a positive reflection on British colonial supervision, but the history of the Indian Army, including the surge in its scale in the two World Wars, was born of necessity. Much has been written, particularly in recent decades, on the rather selective

character of British recruitment and the preference for “martial races” in the nineteenth century which was swept away by the manpower demands of the World Wars, but the policy of necessity was not the exception to the rule. The British had always sought the most physically robust, those with the strongest reputation for fighting, and those most likely to retain cohesion under pressure. Conscious of the cost of raising and maintaining troops, and the need for the most combat effective units to overcome their relatively small numbers to engage and defeat much larger forces, the British consistently sought out the most aggressive, reliable, enduring and accessible troops. It is true they generated “elite” status in certain units, but this too was a sound military necessity. The Indian Army was stratified according to necessity, role and performance.

In contrast to recent historiographical trends that seek to emphasise ideological judgements about the use of South Asian labour, archival records suggest the British were eminently pragmatic in their decisions about manpower from the outset.¹ They interpreted conditions in India through their own experiences, looking for particular “types,” but they also borrowed from local practices, particularly when the sheer demand for trained manpower, from the 1750s onwards, outweighed any ideological considerations. The British were aware of the need to acknowledge cultural sensitivities, and the Company army was not converted entirely to a “European” model, but native or mercenary forces were employed with an emphasis on the steady improvement of their efficiency, cost-effectiveness and their quality, which was linked to the tasks they were to perform. The recruitment of an effective, trained and disciplined army was a crucial element of this process, and was seen as fundamental to the exploitation of the military labour market. This was vital when there were severe limitations for British personnel in terms of health, quality, and availability in tropical garrisons. The British demonstrated considerable acumen when they took account of local conditions to establish their own local supremacy, the free flow of trade, minimal costs, and maximum profit using local agencies, including Indian armed forces.

¹ The debate here is extensive, but is characterised by Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretations of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London and New York: Palgrave, 1988), 271-313; David Washbrook, “Orientalism and Occident: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, V, Historiography*, ed. Robin Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 601-607.

Some recent studies emphasise the draconian discipline of the Indian Army, and the relegated position of the sepoys, especially in the conflicts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.² Yet, there was little difference, in fact, between the life of European and Indian troops. Men with rural backgrounds, lacking education, characterised both European and Indian infantrymen and troopers. The Indian recruits had to stand 5'7" tall and meet the same physical standards as would any British enlisted man. There was little ideological about this, and the approach was universal. Discipline was firm for both, but was proven, time after time, to be necessary to drill men to overcome their instinctive desire to save themselves in a close quarter battle. The forging of a collective solidarity and sense of purpose, often through the moniker of the regiment or the willingness to follow a particular leader, also applied equally to British and Indian troops. Furthermore, the growing campaign-combat experience of the troops through the Carnatic Wars (1746 – 1763) made a significant difference to the quality of the Company's army. New units could draw on the expertise of veterans, especially junior commanders, and apply this directly to their training. Clive's sepoys displayed remarkable endurance when besieged, on campaign marches, and in battle, as did those who followed.

The confusion over elitism and ideology is understandable. In 1750, Robert Orme drew up a categorisation of "martial races" based on the dietary habits and climatic zones of the subcontinent.³ Whilst the issue of "martial races" has since become mired in ideological debates on race that belong to the later nineteenth century, the criteria and associations were actually pragmatic and again born of necessity.⁴ In general terms, Orme believed that wheat-growing areas produced physically stronger and therefore more "martial" types than the areas where rice was grown and where people were shorter. Accordingly, the Company confined its recruitment to villages in wheat zones and therefore largely within its own

² Channa Wickremesekera, *European Success and Indian Failure in the SEC: A Military Analysis* (Monash Asia Institute, 1998). See also Channa Wickremesekera, *Best Black Troops in the World: British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoys* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003).

³ Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire* (London, 1805; reprntd., New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1974).

⁴ The debate and its origins are fully unravelled in Kaushik Roy, *Brown Warriors of the Raj: Recruitment and the Mechanics of Command in the Sepoy Army 1859-1913* (Delhi: Manohar, 2009).

territories.⁵ In 1757, immediately after Plassey, the Company recruited in the Bengal Presidency because it was dissatisfied with the standards of recruits in the Nawab of Bengal's forces, but it found few men met the required height standard.⁶ The rural men were thought to be "undersized". As a result, by the 1770s, recruitment had been extended into northern India, where, again, wheat growing predominated. There, the British most often selected what they considered "higher caste Brahmins," a nomenclature the recruits readily gave themselves. This was not just because of their physique, but of their self-perception of "warrior tradition" and their ability to influence the recruitment of other "sturdy" peasants. Let us not forget, however, the importance of material, "pull" factors of Company service. Compared with their Indian rivals, the British could offer regular pay at six rupees a month, and pensions, which in a region where pay was low or intermittent, this source of income was deeply attractive.⁷

Another criterion for the recruitment of troops in India had been the need to find employment for unskilled men who might otherwise foment disorder, a strategy also used in Europe and North America.⁸ The significant demographic shift in Britain in the mid-to-late eighteenth century meant rural overpopulation could be managed in part by a natural flow to urban areas, and by employment in the armed forces. Having just confronted the serious rebellion of the '45 in Scotland, it was understandable that British authorities should be focussed on questions of civil order and the management of populations. In the Terai areas of Bengal, Robert Brooke was charged with establishing a regiment to absorb selected hill raiders and to employ them in the pacification of their own homelands. The Company therefore continued to co-opt potential and even actual enemies, throughout the next seventy years, and, with the exception of the Bengal regiments, looked particularly for men from marginalised or peripheral rural communities who would have little sympathy for the majority of the population. Unsurprisingly, much of the Indian Army in the nineteenth

⁵ See, for example, Major Stainford to K. Kyd, 9 March and 17 March 1779, P/18/47, India Office Records (IOR), British Library, London.

⁶ Ghulam Hussein Khan, *Seir Mutaqerin* (Review of Modern Times), (reprintd., 1975).

⁷ Bruce Lenman, *Britain's Colonial Wars* (London: Pearson, 2001), 100.

⁸ John Prebble, *Mutiny: Highland Regiments in revolt, 1743-1804* (London: Penguin, 1977); Colin C. Galloway, *White People, Indians and Highlanders: Tribal peoples and Colonial Encounters in Scotland and America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

century was recruited from more autonomous communities like the Punjab, or mountainous frontier regions because they showed little sympathy with the majority of the population of the subcontinent.

Local traditions were also to be absorbed, maintained, and even enhanced into a new elite status for similar pragmatic reasons. Warren Hastings expressed the view that preserving the caste system in India would prevent the “danger that they will soon be united and embodied as an armed nation after the example of the Sikhs”.⁹ He was concerned that they might otherwise “become too formidable for their rulers”. The effect was to exaggerate the special status of caste privileges in Indian units, initially preserving their preference not to travel across the *Kala Pani* (the sea), to eat only certain foods and to respect religious rituals. This developed the self-esteem of the troops and was designed to increase recruitment, separate the sepoy from any attachment to the people, and ensure continued loyalty to the Company above the local population. Christian evangelism was opposed by the Company in India because, as the Commander-in-Chief, Charles Cornwallis, put it, they might: “endanger a government which owes its principal support to a native army composed of men of high caste whose fidelity and affections we have hitherto secured by an unremitting attention not to offend their religious scruples and superstitions”.¹⁰ What forged the Company forces together were features common to all armies: the shared hardships, regular pay and continuous employment, shared and exclusive identities, and the camaraderie of the ranks. These transformed an otherwise alienating experience into a positive one. In other words, recruits became regular soldiers with an *esprit de corps*, and a professional indifference to outsiders. Oaths of loyalty were introduced in 1766, and they appear to have underpinned some existing understanding about service in the Company armies and how it related to concepts of personal honour.¹¹ The creation of battalions led to the adoption of colours and these were incorporated into a symbiosis of European and South Asian rituals to create a bond of loyalty and possession. Indian troops thought of their leaders and their colours as distinctly and uniquely *theirs*.

By the 1840s, much of the subcontinent was under Company rule or allied to it. The Bombay Presidency had recruited such a large number of

⁹ Warren Hastings, Collections of Essays, Add. 29234, Hastings Papers, British Museum (BM), London.

¹⁰ Cornwallis to the Bishop of Salisbury, 1788, Cornwallis Papers, PRO 30/11/187, The National Archives (TNA), Kew Gardens, London.

¹¹ Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), 66.

local sepoy by 1805 that it could muster over 26,000 men, while Madras and Bengal could each muster a further 64,000 each.¹² In 1808, there were some 155,000 Indian sowars, sepoy, gunners, miners, and pioneers in the formations of the East India Company, making it one of the world's largest standing armies. The use of close order linear tactics, to maximise the firepower of musketry, combined with mobile artillery and light cavalry, proved an effective combination against the irregular cavalry armies of South Asia. In 1807, the government-appointed Board of Control in London established a Military Department to assist the Governor General and Commander-in-Chief in India, itself a co-ordinating appointment set up in 1786. However, the Company armies suffered from a parsimonious attitude from the directors, and there were no senior officer appointments until Lord Cornwallis, the first Commander-in-Chief, reorganised the staffing of regiments. Crown officers were then encouraged to serve in the Company forces.¹³ Indian personnel found that the influx of Europeans, however limited, deprived them of their former responsibilities. Indian officers were consulted only with regard to cultural matters and welfare, and ceased to enjoy operational command. Many senior officer appointments were not filled even by the mid-nineteenth century and the consequent lack of supervision, and general complacency, meant that many European junior officers neglected their troops. The Europeanising of Company administration added to the gulf emerging between the sepoy and the British officer corps which led, ultimately, to the Mutiny of 1857.¹⁴

While attention is invariably focussed on the causes and consequences of the Mutiny, it was, of course, confined to just one Presidency. The Madras forces, numbering fifty regiments of infantry and eight regiments of Madras Light Cavalry in 1857, were unaffected.¹⁵ What was distinctive about the Madras regiments, compared to the units raised in Bengal, was their wide social base of recruiting. There was little consideration given to caste sensibilities, with men serving together in composite battalions. By

¹² Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 140; W.J. Wilson, *A History of the Madras Army from 1746 to 1826* (Madras: The Government Press, 1888).

¹³ Raymond Callahan, *The East India Company and Army Reform 1783-1798* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Peter Stanley, *The White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India, 1825-75* (London: Hurst and Company, 1998); Byron Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 135.

¹⁴ A.L. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour: The Indian Army from the Seventeenth Century to the Twenty-first Century* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1993; republ. Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ W.J. Wilson, *Historical Record of the Fourth Prince of Wales' Own Regiment Madras Light Cavalry* (Madras: Government Office, 1877).

contrast, the Bengal units were dominated by high caste Brahmins who guarded their status jealously and rose in rebellion when they were offended by a series of reforms in the 1850s.¹⁶ Overseas service had been a particular cause of complaint, even though Indian units had served successfully in Egypt in 1801, Burma in 1824-25, China and Persia. After the Mutiny, following the Peel Commission (1858), the Indian forces that replaced the Company armies were subject to significant changes, with larger numbers of Punjabis and Sikhs being recruited, although they were still organised along its traditional Presidency lines. Despite proving their worth in the campaign against China (1858-60), the Madras Army was the victim of a late-nineteenth century preference for northerners, mountain-dwellers and “martial races”.¹⁷ Madrassi units were not deployed on operations again until 1885 and sepoys drawn from poor rural communities tended to stay in service for long periods which affected their performance. British officers were apt to avoid service in Madras in favour of better promotion prospects elsewhere and the Madras Army was gradually reduced in size and strength until necessity forced expansion again in 1914 and in 1941.

Mention should also be made of another service too often neglected in studies of the nineteenth century, namely, the Indian Navy. Known properly as the Bombay Marine, it was the world’s first all-steam force, having converted entirely to paddle steamers in 1837.¹⁸ This small but formidable flotilla was instrumental in determining the outcome of the Anglo-Chinese conflict in 1842. The paddle steamer *Nemesis* was a 700 ton, iron-hulled private ship crewed by Indians and commanded by officers of the Royal Navy which alone destroyed eleven Chinese war junks.¹⁹ Once the waters of the Chinese coast were secure, the East India Company could make amphibious landings with impunity. Nevertheless, the Indian Marine was absorbed within the Royal Navy in 1863 as more centralised systems of imperial defence were made possible.

The trend of greater centralisation reached its limits on the peripheries of Empire. Here, at the boundaries of imperial power, auxiliary forces were retained and interspersed with specialist formations. The Punjab

¹⁶ David Omissi, *The Sepoy and The Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 4.

¹⁷ Roy, *Brown Warriors of the Raj*, 120ff.

¹⁸ Andrew Lambert, “The Introduction of Steam,” in *Steam, Steel and Shellfire: The Steam Warship, 1815-1905*, ed. Robert Gardiner (London: Conway Maritime Press Ltd., 1992), 28.

¹⁹ Lawrence Sondhaus, *Naval Warfare 1815-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 36.

Frontier Force (PFF) was established in 1850 to maintain security along the frontier after the incorporation of the Punjab two years earlier. Originally just one regiment of infantry and one of cavalry, formed around the Guides (who had been raised in 1846); they had expanded by 1857 to ten infantry regiments, five cavalry regiments and five batteries of artillery, including two specialist mountain gun batteries. Men were recruited by special selection. Sir Harry Lumsden had enlisted men for the Guides on the basis of their individual reputation and skills, “conspicuous for daring and fidelity,” as Sir Henry Daly put it, rather than any question of physique or origin.²⁰ As a result, his troops were a combination of ethnic and sectarian groups, inured to the hardships of the frontier environment, offered a higher rate of pay and pension, and uniquely suited to the gathering of local human intelligence. While Sikhs and Punjabis were the basis of the PFF, the same criteria were applied in enlistment as the Guides. To augment this highly-motivated and specialist cadre, armed frontier constabulary and later Imperial Service Troops provided garrison forces. Various “Scouts” and “Militia” formations were also created amongst particular communities where the presence of regular troops was likely to generate resistance, including the Tochi Scouts and Khyber Rifles. They provided the perfect combination to ensure the state “monopoly of violence” was not jeopardised. Among the regular units of the Indian Army, the mountain-dwelling Gurkhas were regarded as particularly well-suited to conditions experienced on the North-West Frontier. Although racial characteristics reflected late-nineteenth century values and expectations, status and necessity was more important than race: the Gurkhas fulfilled a reputation for aggression, agility and loyalty that the British prized most in frontier fighting.

British acceptance of local customs and traditions, where it did not affect their “monopoly of violence,” reflected a pragmatic and necessary compromise in South Asia. Princely State forces, the Hyderabad Contingents, the Central India Horse, the local units of Malwa, Erinpura and Deoli, and the preservation and even enhancement of rituals, such as *darbars* and *pujas*, enabled the British to bolster the status of their subordinate personnel, establishing a hierarchy that was acceptable both to the rulers and their subjects. Personal relationships between British officers and Indian personnel on the *mam-bap* principle were expected. In some Indian regiments, the sense of paternalist ownership was so strong that regimental titles retained their founder’s names, such as “Jacob’s

²⁰ Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Daly, “The Punjab Frontier Force,” speech delivered at the Royal United Services Institute, 27 June 1884, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* 28:127 (1884): 907-924.

Horse" (6th Bombay Cavalry), "Murray's Jats" (14th Bengal Cavalry) or "Coke's Rifles" (1st Punjab Infantry, later 55th, Frontier Force) and "Rattray's Sikhs" (45th Bengal Native Infantry). Even then, specialist roles were emphasised. Within the order of battle of the Imperial Service Troops, the Bikaner Camel Corps, one of three such units, reflected the need for appropriately mounted local security. The Malerkotla State raised a corps of Sappers and Miners, which offered a special status in an army where such units enjoyed an elite reputation. During the First World War, the Princely States raised over 22,000 men in formations such as these.

In 1895, for reasons of necessity, a single Indian Army was created and the Presidency system was abolished in favour of four regional "commands". The linking of four or five battalions to a regimental training centre, of which there were 45 in total, ensured a more even flow of recruits, a constant cycle of training, garrison and operational units and therefore a more reliable system of available reserves. While it is true that the centres were depleted in wartime, it was an improvement on the older practices. In 1903, even the old Presidency titles disappeared, and in 1908 for administrative purposes, a Northern and Southern army system was introduced. As Commander-in-Chief in India, Lord Kitchener was determined to create forces that could be deployed beyond the borders of India, but by the outbreak of war in 1914, the logistical, staff and transport arrangements were still inadequate for major operations. In East Africa and in Mesopotamia, *ad hoc* processes broke down until more manpower was available, better equipment was provided and greater organisation could be achieved. By late 1917, the Indian Army had made considerable progress and after the war, it was recognised that Indians must be permitted to serve in the officer corps just as they were able to do within various parts of the civilian administration.

In the inter-war years, the army in India had competing roles to prepare for, which it tended to prioritise as conventional war fighting, frontier warfare, and internal security.²¹ In terms of the conventional threat, the army had to prepare itself for a potential attack across Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, a continuation of the Russian menace which had so exercised the minds of British strategists in the nineteenth century.²² Afghanistan too had confronted the British with a conventional security problem in the brief Anglo-Afghan War of 1919 and there was a probability it would do so again. The experience of the First World War

²¹ *Expert Investigation of the strength, composition and functions of the Army in India, 1931* (Simla, General Staff India, 1931).

²² " 'Russians at the Gates of India': Planning the Strategic Defence of India, 1884-1899," *Journal of Military History* 67 (2003): 697-743.

had also reinforced the possibility that the army in India would have to send forces overseas at short notice to the Persian Gulf, East Africa and South-East Asia. At the same time, the army had to train to meet the internal security problems which required quite different force structures and tactics. Each of these threats by necessity shaped the form and ethos of the Indian Army. On the North-West Frontier, cavalry and unsupported light infantry, although obsolete in the West, could still match the speed and agility of the lashkars in the hills in a way that mechanised formations could not.²³ During the 1936-37 Waziristan campaign against the Faqir of Ipi, "WazDiv" (the Waziristan Division), a formation based at Dosalli, prepared to strike against the Tori Khels in Shaktu, the Faqir's stronghold, and on 11 May 1937 the column made an unorthodox overnight advance over the Iblanke Range led by the Tochi Scouts.²⁴ Another brigade advanced in a converging arc, and after a brief fire fight, the Faqir's lashkar was cut down by aircraft as it tried to escape across the Sham Plain. The operation indicated that combined arms operations, seasoned with some traditional tactics, produced the most effective results.

The Waziristan campaign, like most fought by the Indian Army, highlighted the importance of role and necessity. The auxiliaries, namely the Tochi Scouts, a force about 5,000 strong, had proved useful when deployed with regulars or on independent pursuits. They were mobile, had local knowledge, and could operate on the flanks and rear against insurgent attacks, although they were too lightly armed for sustained battles. In light of this, it was suggested the Indian Army should perhaps recreate a specialised frontier unit which would be made up almost entirely of this sort of light infantry. However, the idea was rejected as impractical, largely on the grounds that every man of the army needed to be prepared to fight in Afghanistan against regular forces, although concerns about the reliability of the existing locally-recruited auxiliaries in certain cases may also have played a part in the decision.²⁵

Reliability was also a consideration in Military Aid to the Civil Power, which was the least popular amongst the troops because it was regarded as glorified policing and a far cry from "real soldiering". Most deployments were by British units because of concerns about the loyalties of Indian

²³ Timothy R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 129 and 135.

²⁴ *Operations North West Frontier, Intelligence Summaries, 1936-7*, 90-93, L/PS/12/3192, IOR, London; Alan Warren, *Waziristan: The Faqir of Ipi and the Indian Army: The North West Frontier Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178 and 180-81.

²⁵ Moreman, *The Army in India*, 179-180.

troops, although, on the occasions that Indian soldiers were put on the streets, as in 1942-3, they were wholly impartial and professional. Indeed, the Indian Army had always been there for internal security duties, and without Indian personnel, the outcome of the Mutiny of 1857 might have been quite different. The major wartime challenge to British internal security in India broke out at precisely the moment that India faced the prospect of a Japanese invasion. In August 1942, Gandhi's "Quit India" campaign was supposed to be a mass movement of non-violence, where the retraction of cooperation with the British would force the Raj to collapse. Assuming the self-sacrifice of Gandhi and his supporters would shame the British into halting their operations, the Indian National Congress (INC) argued that brutality would be met with *satyagraha* (non-cooperation). Disruption at this point was a serious strategic consideration and as a result, INC ringleaders were arrested *en masse* on the eve of the demonstrations. Nevertheless, there were two weeks of rioting following the arrests, while boycotting and civil disobedience spread rapidly. Disruptions to food supply caused acute shortages in some areas. Telephone lines, post offices, courts, revenue offices and even police stations were the targets for attack and arson. In extreme cases, railway tracks were torn up and stations torched. At its height, the Quit India campaign required an entire British division to be diverted to Bombay to quash the unrest. The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, informed Churchill that he was: "engaged here in meeting by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed for reasons of military security.... Mob violence remains rampant over large tracts of the countryside and I am by no means confident that we may not see in September a formidable effort to renew this widespread sabotage of our war effort."²⁶ The response was robust: crowds were dispersed by troops, sometimes with live ammunition.²⁷ Throughout the unrest, the morale of Indian personnel was described as "steadfast".²⁸ Officers were nevertheless cautioned to avoid suggestions of "scorn for the 'unenlightened Indian' who

²⁶ Nicholas M. Mansergh, Esmond W.R. Lumby and Penderel Moon, eds., *Constitutional Relations between Britain and India: The Transfer of Power: 1942-47*, vol. II (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), 853-4.

²⁷ During the Quit India campaign, the police and the army had been compelled to open fire 369 times, killing an estimated 1,000 and wounding a further 2,000; Mansergh, Lumby and Moon, *Constitutional Relations*, 933.

²⁸ Home Department: History of the Congress Rebellion, Part 1, 1942-3, *Gandhi's Independence Campaign: Statistics to assist the [Secretary of] [State] to reply to [Parliamentary] Questions* L/PJ/8/628, IOR, London.

wants independence... since freedom and independence are probably sought after by the troops themselves".²⁹

The nadir of the army's fortunes came in 1943. In Burma, the Indian Army's attack at Arakan failed. Morale was so low that some Indian troops talked of simply giving up, although this was against a background of difficult conditions, insufficient equipment and the memory of the defeats in Malaya and Burma. There were already large-scale defections by prisoners of the Japanese to the Indian National Army (INA) which at this stage numbered 12,000.

Anxieties about Indian loyalties were revealed by the effort put into orchestrated morale-building measures, and, through necessity, the modernisation of the Indian Army. General Sir Claude Auchinleck, as Commander-in-Chief, expanded the Indian officer corps and gave them more responsibilities, including the command of British troops.³⁰ Indian soldiers were entrusted without British officers, and wherever possible racial divisions were brought to an end. He increased rates of pay for Indian troops, visited their villages and talked with small groups to lift morale. His personal style left a legacy of greater consensus. He made visits to particular Indian princes to enlist their people for the war effort, but he also met Muslim and INC leaders to hear their grievances. He would not allow the authorities to condemn INC leaders, and aimed for their political neutrality. This approach paid off. Although still censored, letters by soldiers reveal that they felt new skills could be learned by military service. Military equipment, which had always been limited in quality and quantity before the war, now arrived in abundance. These new weapons and vehicles gave the men confidence, and was a useful propaganda tool. It was also arranged that women could serve, greatly enhancing their status. Auchinleck understood that it was essential to "Indianise" the military forces, because the Indian Army was vital for the maintenance of security and to sustain the war effort, although the situation would be quite different after the war. A secret dispatch from Headquarters informed the Military Secretary: "It is fair to say that, as the war draws to its close... the general I[nternal] S[ecurity] position is bound to deteriorate, as interested parties begin to prepare (as they are now

²⁹ Brigadier-General Cawthorn, Director of Military Intelligence (DMI), Secret, 31 Aug 1942, L/WS/1/1337, IOR, London.

³⁰ Daniel Marston, "A Force Transformed: The Indian Army and the Second World War," in *A Military History of India and South Asia: From the East India Company to the Nuclear Age*, eds. Daniel P. Marston and Chandar S. Sundaram (Bloomington, IN: Indian University Press, 2008), 121.