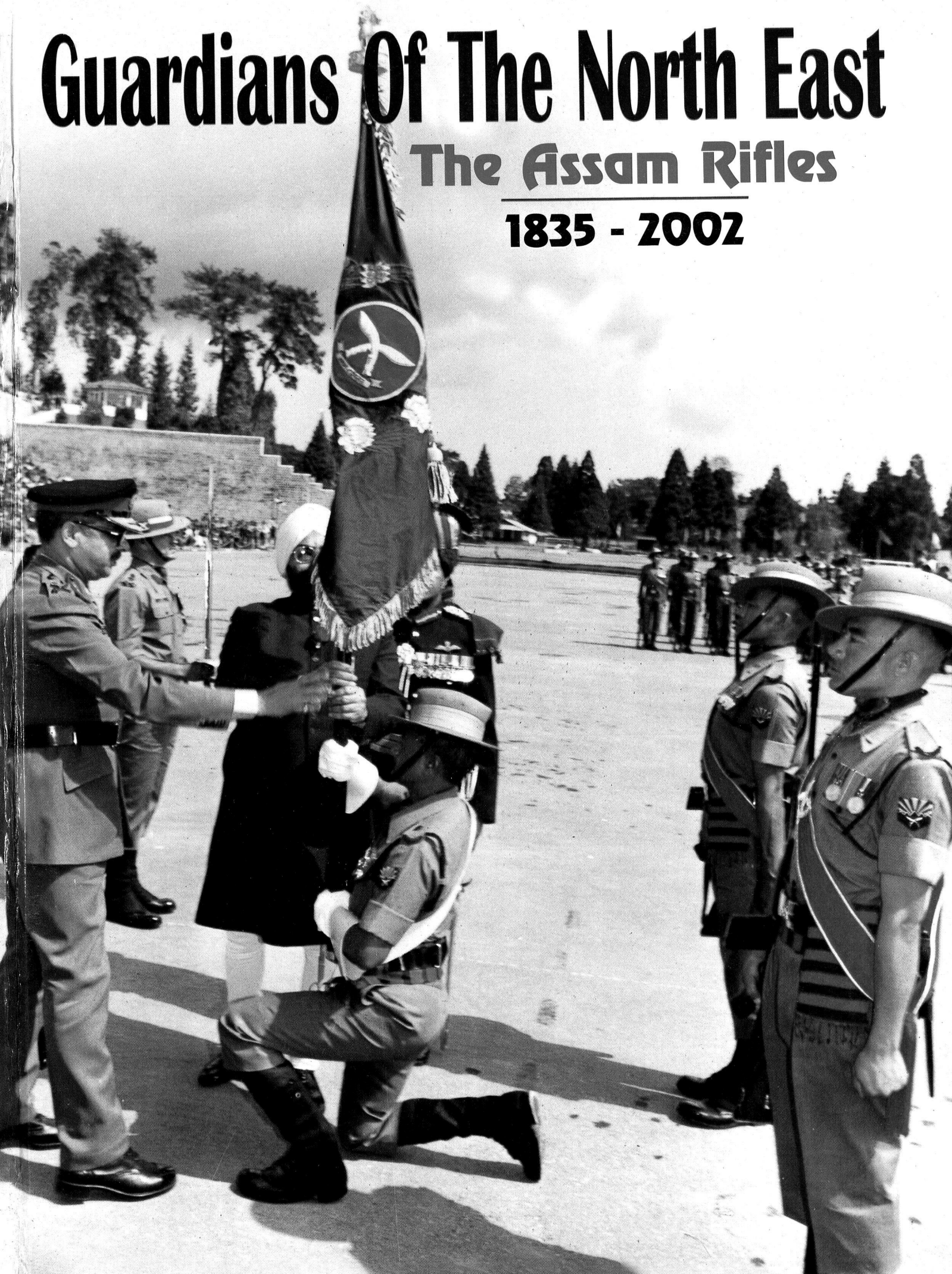


# Guardians Of The North East

The Assam Rifles

1835 - 2002



The history of Assam Rifles, the oldest Para Military Force of our country is entwined with the history of growth and development of the tribal areas of North East region of our country. The Assam Rifles has been continuously operating in the North Eastern region since its inception in 1835 and is the only existing witness to the vicissitudes through which North Eastern region of our country has passed. In fact history of Assam Rifles is the history of North East region.

This pictorial presentation is a result of three and half years of extensive research work. The book chronicles and unfolds the mysteries of how the oldest Para Military Force of our country has provided continuous service in the most difficult and inaccessible tribal areas of the region for the last 167 years. The book is about how Assam Rifles performed the task of assimilation of the tribals of the North East region into the national mainstream, successfully tackling insurgency, restoring peace, winning confidence of the local population and establishing efficacy of civil administration. It also covers the history of growth and development of North East region of our country in a brief and lucid manner.

Sure to serve as a reference book on North Eastern region for the future military historians, the book is prized possession and of immense value to all soldiers and civilians alike.

Rs 950

*Text, Photographs and  
Compilation  
by*



**Lt Col RS Chhetri**

**Cover photographs :**

*Front:* Colours presentation by HE Giani Zail Singh, President of India, on the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of Assam Rifles on 29 March 1985. Colours being received by Lt Gen PE Menon, PVSM, DGAR

*Back Top:* Nb/Sub Amar Prakash, 12 Assam Rifles (left) and Hav Chanchal Singh, Kumaon Regt (right) on the world's highest peak Mount Everest-28028 ft - 23 May 2001

*Back Bottom:* Rfn (now Hav) Surja Bahadur Gurung of 6 Assam Rifles winner of Bronze Medal for India in Eighth Asian Youth Boxing Championship held at Taiwan - 1995

ISBN 81 7062 294 8

*Published by*

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**The Assam Rifles**

Directorate General Assam Rifles  
Laitumkhrah, Shillong-793011

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# Guardians Of The North East

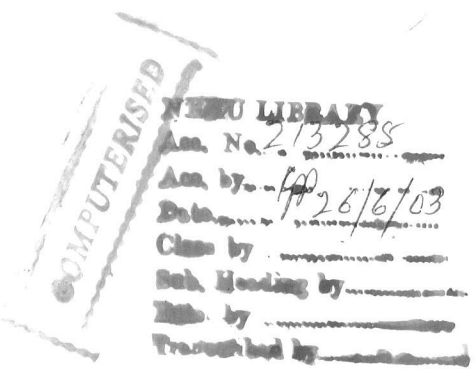
## — The Assam Rifles — 1835 - 2002



A Jawan of the Assam Rifles assisting a refugee family fleeing from Burma ahead of the advancing Japanese forces during World War II. Ill-clad, trekking for months, suffering from diarrhoea, dysentery, dehydration, malnutrition, malaria, leeches and hounded by the Japanese snipers at every step on their way, these people were provided succour, sustenance and hope by the gallant men of the Assam Rifles.

**Directorate General Assam Rifles**

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2003

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- (i) Based upon Survey of India map  
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- (ii) The interstate boundaries  
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and Meghalaya shown on the maps  
are as interpreted from the North  
Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act  
1971, but have yet to be verified.
- (iii) The external boundaries of India  
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ISBN 81 7062 294 8



## Dedication



Assam Rifles War Memorial at Happy Valley, Shillong

*In memory of the valiant  
Assam Rifles  
Officers, Junior Commissioned Officers  
and men who laid down  
their lives in the service of the Nation*

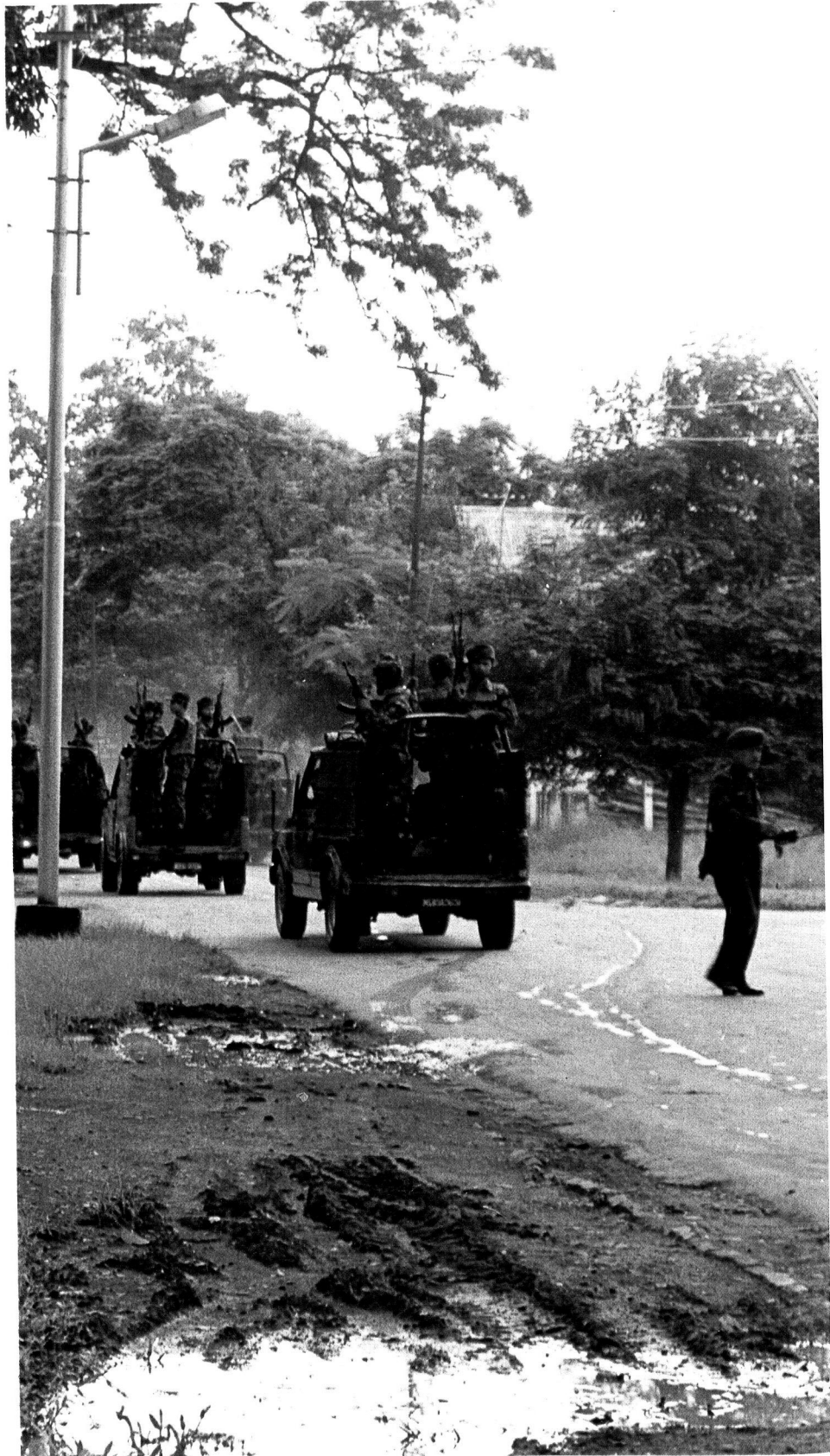
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## Acknowledgement

Text, Photographs  
and Compilation  
By  
Lt Col RS Chhetri

Director General Assam Rifles is greatly indebted to Lt Col RS Chhetri (1 MARATHA LI), the Public Relations Officer of the Assam Rifles for undertaking the laborious research work to produce accurate and authentic text along with collections of rare and historic photographs. Without his untiring zeal and dedication this book would not have been possible.

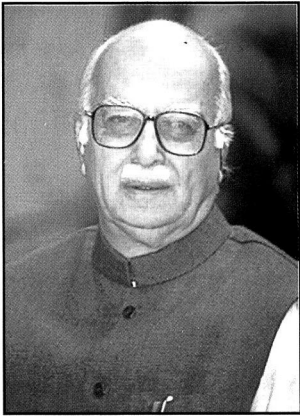
Lt Gen GK Duggal, PVSM, AVSM, VrC  
Director General Assam Rifles



## Foreword



The Assam Rifles is one of the premier and the oldest Para Military Force of our country. It has a proud record of 167 years of uninterrupted service to the country, particularly in the North East region. The history of this elite Force is synonymous with the history of development in the North East region.



Hailed as “Sentinels of the North East” and “Friends of the Hill People” the Assam Rifles has rendered invaluable service in guarding our North East frontiers, maintaining internal security and carrying out various civic action programmes for the welfare of the people in the remote parts of this region. The Force enjoys the complete confidence of the people of the region for its professional competence. The important role played by the Assam Rifles in counter insurgency operations in the North East region and in creating an atmosphere of security and peace is commendable.

Though the Force is primarily meant for deployment in the North East, its units have served overseas in the Middle East during World War I and in Sri Lanka during Indian Peace Keeping Force operations. The Assam Rifles was also employed in Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. In operations outside the North East, the Force was equally effective and has earned many laurels for its sterling contribution.

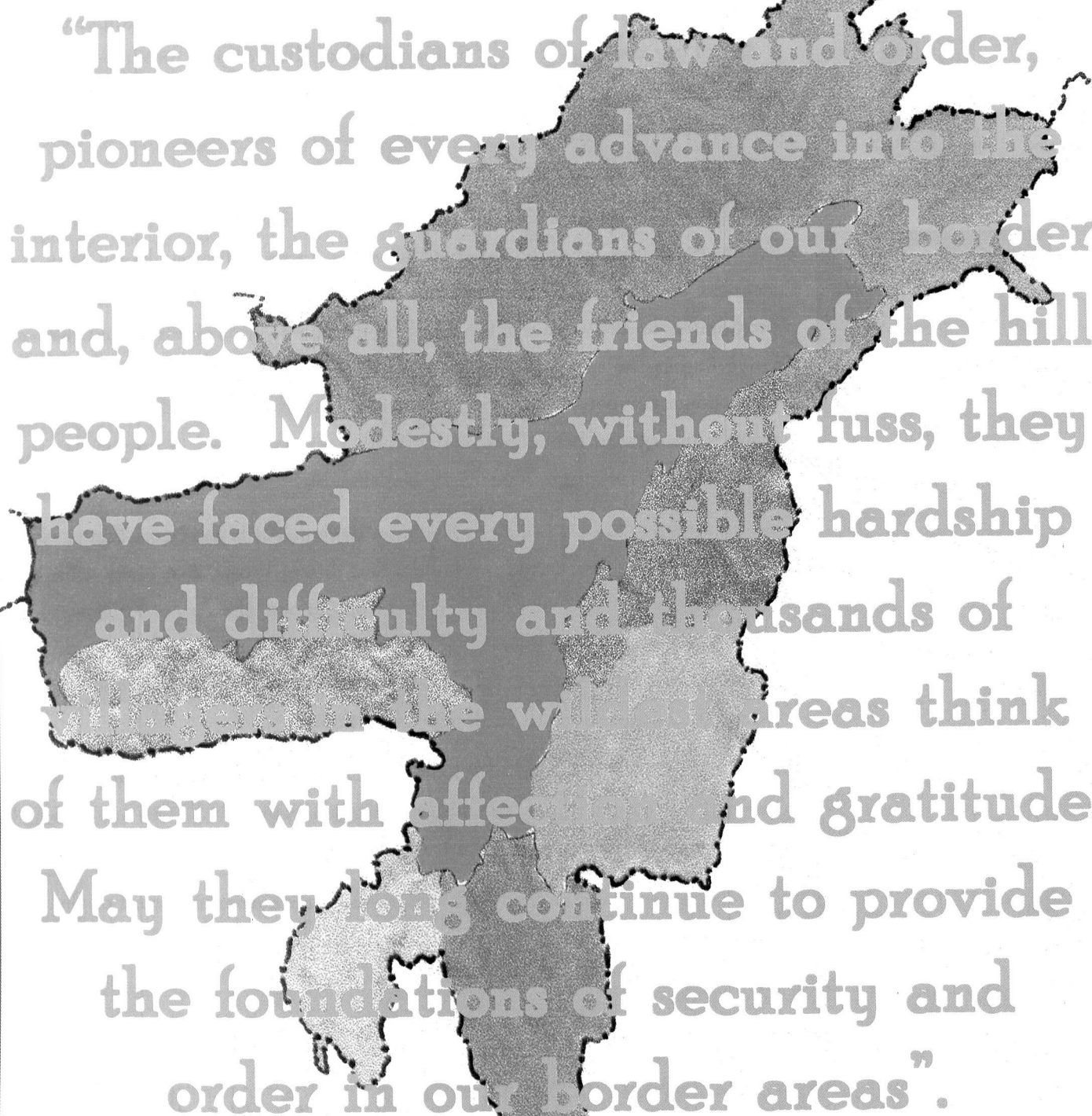
The Directorate General of Assam Rifles has produced an excellent book covering the journey of the Assam Rifles since its inception in 1835 ; capturing the history and functioning of the Force very intimately and accurately.

I am confident that this book will serve as an authentic record of the achievements of the Assam Rifles and will undoubtedly inspire other wings of our security forces.

(L K Advani)

Deputy Prime Minister  
and Home Minister  
Government of India

Place: Delhi  
Dated : 27 Dec 2002

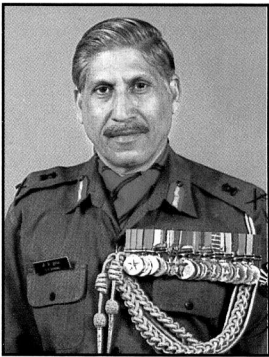


“The custodians of law and order, pioneers of every advance into the interior, the guardians of our border and, above all, the friends of the hill people. Modestly, without fuss, they have faced every possible hardship and difficulty and thousands of villagers in the wildest areas think of them with affection and gratitude. May they long continue to provide the foundations of security and order in our border areas”.

— Dr. Verrier Elwin

(Famous anthropologist and Advisor to Governor of Assam on Tribal Affairs from 1955 to 1965)

## Tribute



**A**ssam Rifles is one of the premier Para Military Force of our country, which has served the nation both in war and in peace time through its exemplary devotion, dedication to duty and courage. It is largely officered by Army Officers on deputation and thus, over a period of time, has acquired the Army's culture and ethos. The eventful and glorious history of Assam Rifles is so intimately inter-linked with the opening up of the North Eastern tribal areas and their development that it sounds like chronicles of the development of the North East region. The Force has rendered invaluable service to the people of this region, identifying itself with the local tribes, helping in their economic upliftment and progress. In its pioneering efforts to open up the North East region, Assam Rifles dispatched its detachments and established posts in remote areas, around which the civil administration gradually developed. Almost all existing major towns of North East Hill States, i.e. Aizawl, Lungleh, Kohima, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Haflong, Cherrapunjee, Tura, and many others came up around Assam Rifles' posts.

The Force has also taken an active part in both World Wars, the Indo-China War of 1962, Indo-Pak War of 1971, as part of the Indian Peacekeeping Force in Sri Lanka and counter insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir during 1990-97. In all these operations, units of Assam Rifles distinguished themselves and were honoured with numerous gallantry as well as distinguished service awards.

The Force in the past century and a half has evolved itself into a true Para Military Force, responding to all challenges with élan. It is now on the verge of a major upsurge in its size in the forthcoming years, which will vastly improve its capabilities as also operational effectiveness. In sum, the Force is well poised to meet the challenges of the twentyfirst century.

"Guardians of the North East" is an admirable record of Assam Rifles' origin and exploits over a period of 167 years of its history. I am sure that this book will be a fitting tribute to all those who contributed to the creation of Assam Rifles' history.

Place: Shillong

Date: 01 Jan 2003

(G K Duggal)

Lieutenant General

Director General

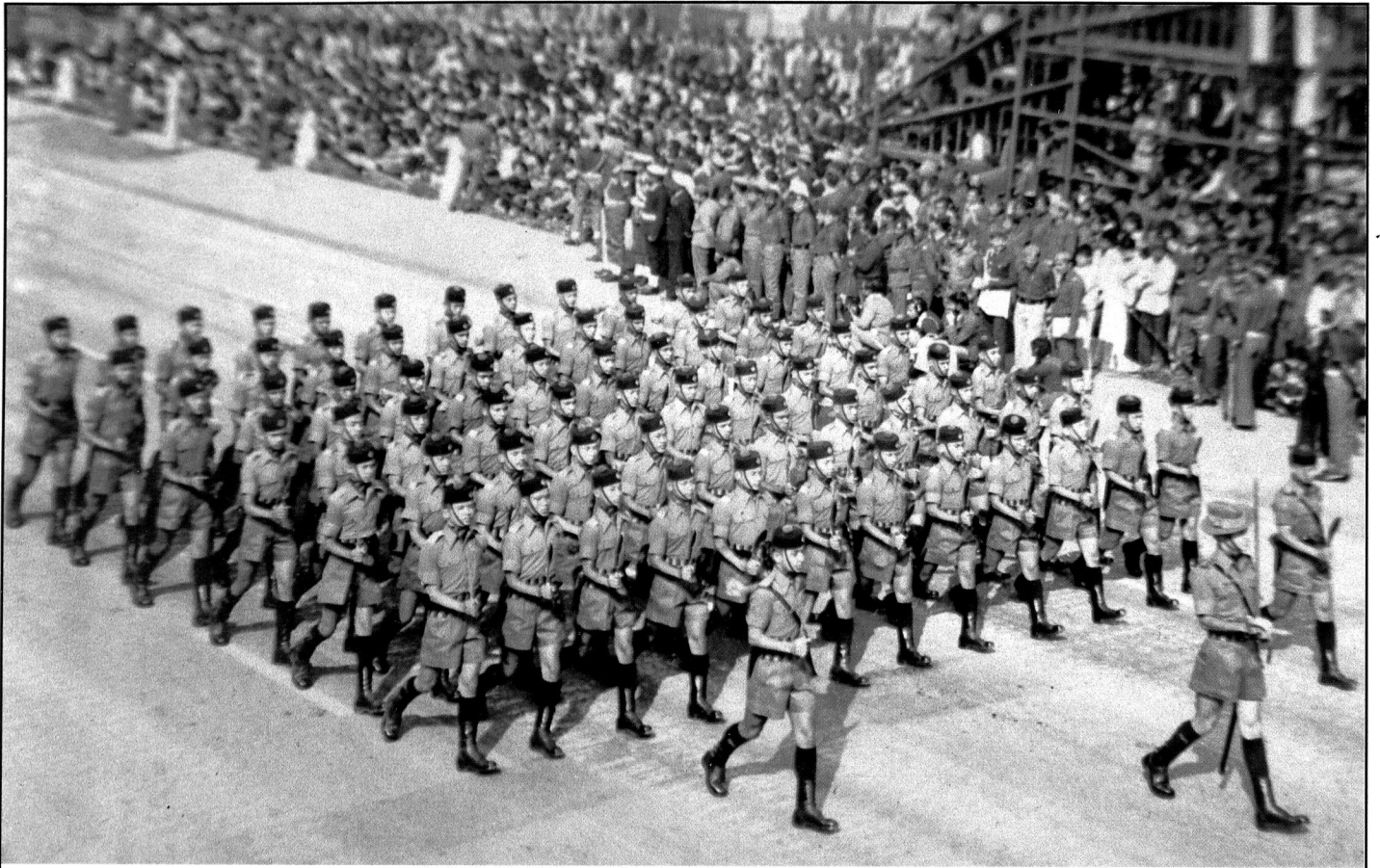
Assam Rifles



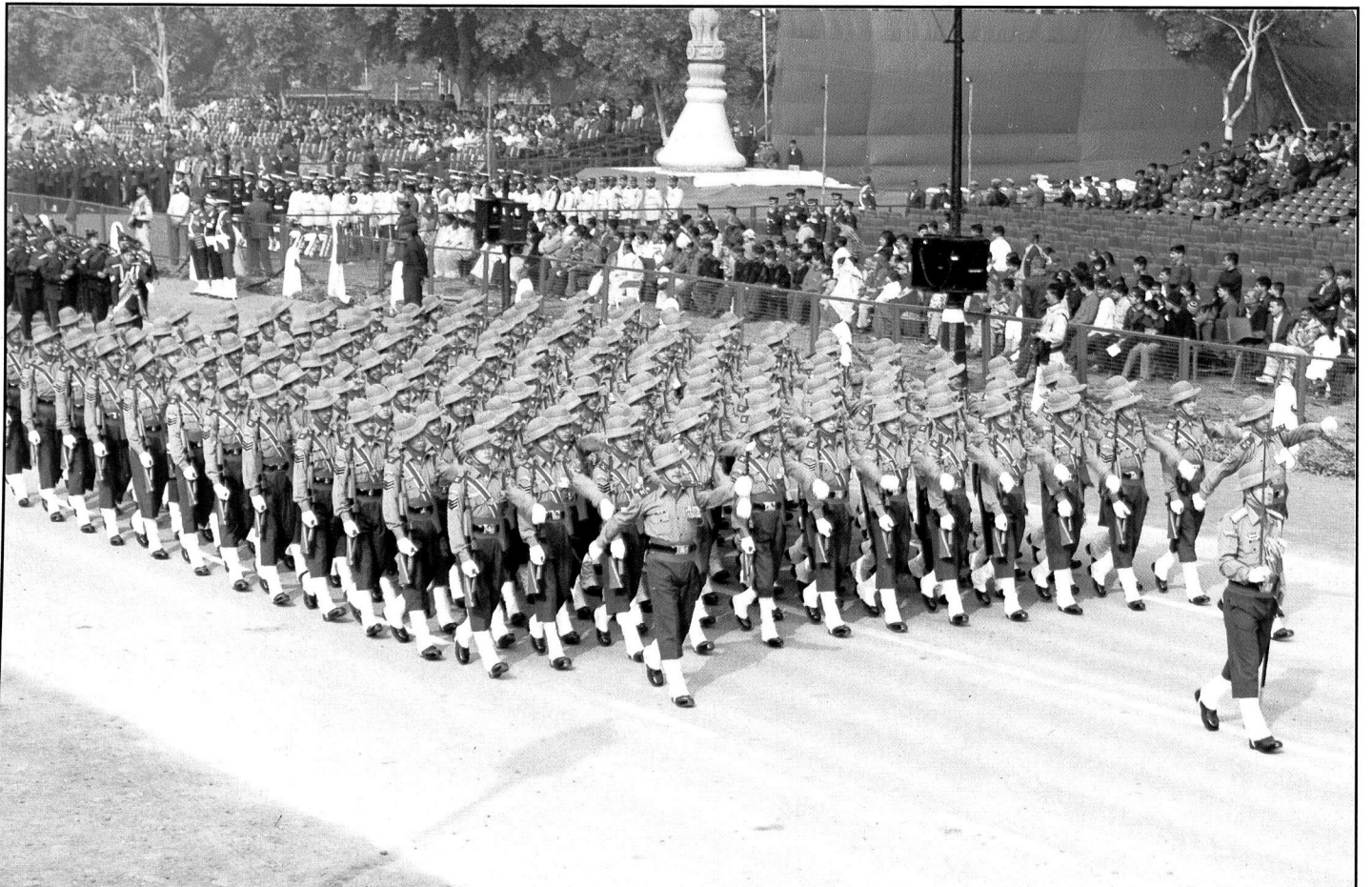


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Assam Rifles Republic Day Parade contingent with Khukhris - Delhi - 1953



Assam Rifles Republic Day Parade contingent - Delhi - 2001

## Evolution Of Assam Rifles

Assam came under British rule after the conclusion of the Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The British take over led to an improvement in the administrative set up, economic growth and prosperity in the region. The tea industry started by the British in 1832, soon spread all over Assam and became one of the principle sources of wealth because of its large-scale export to Britain. Coal and oil deposits were discovered and forest produce also provided substantial income. Assam thus became prosperous, and new settlements came up in different places offering attractive targets for the trans-border forays of the tribals. This in turn posed a serious threat to the British industries and plantations in Assam.

### BIRTH OF ASSAM RIFLES

In order to meet the threat posed by the tribals to the tea gardens and to reduce the prohibitive cost of

keeping a large number of regular troops in Assam, it was decided to raise a *Levy or Militia* body as a separate force under the civil government distinct from the Regular Army and the Armed Police. The Levy was to serve as a “cheap semi military body”; clothed

like civil police, placed on a footing better than the ordinary Armed Police, it was to perform military duties and was to replace some of the regular army units in certain parts of the tribal border. It was to be officered by Police Officers and men were to be drawn from the Civil



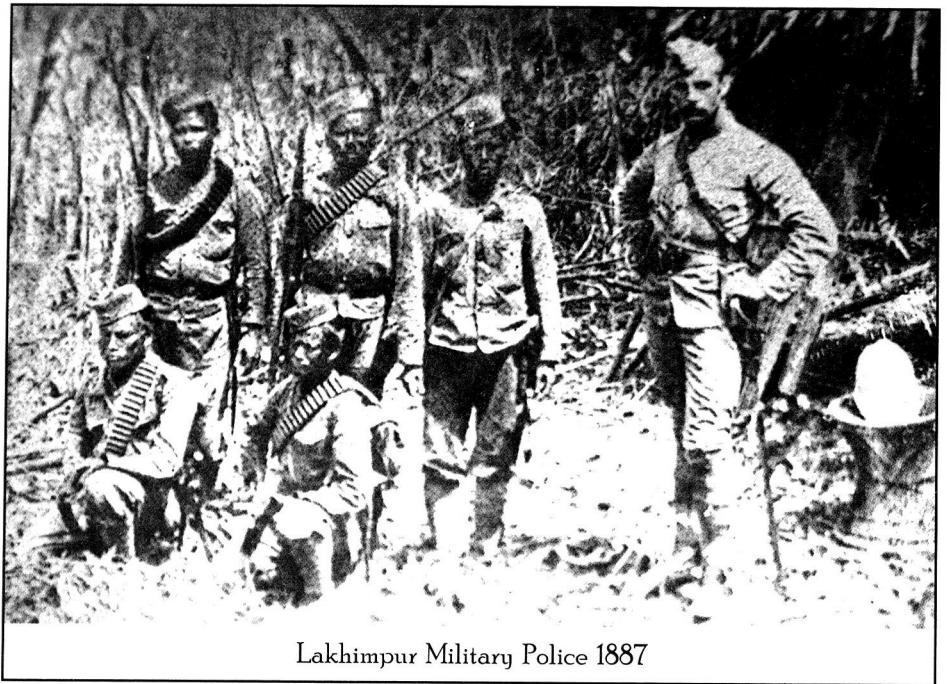
3 Assam Rifles (Naga Hills) Battalion has constructed a cottage in Kohima, dedicated to “The Father of the Force” Mr Grange, the Civilian Officer in charge of Nowgong. Mr Grange had raised the Cachar Levy (forbear of 3 Assam Rifles, the oldest unit of the Force) in 1835

Police. The first unit of this new organisation, the "Cachar Levy" comprising 750 all ranks - Inspectors, Head Constables and Constables was raised in 1835 by Mr Grange, the Civilian Officer in charge of Nowgong.

As the name implies, the Cachar Levy was merely a collection of ill-armed, partially trained, haphazardly organised, poorly clothed and miserably paid men under a civil officer. It was essentially a civil force and merely acted as a strong arm of the local administration.

### CHANGE IN TITLE

The Cachar Levy, after its raising, was initially employed in frontier watch and ward duties, mainly to



Lakhimpur Military Police 1887

protect British settlements, tea gardens owned entirely by the English companies and to maintain law and order in tribal areas. In 1878 the British decided to expand their dominance and set in motion a series of annexations. Gradually,

as the "forward policy" was adopted by the British Government, the task of the Levy changed from mainly defensive to positively offensive involving punitive expeditions not only in British administrated areas of erstwhile Assam but also in the tribal areas and with it changed the name of the Force and its entire character as under:

- **LEVY/MILITIA**

After raising of the Cachar Levy in 1835, the Jorhat Militia was raised in 1838 followed by the raising of the Kuki Levy in 1850.

- **FRONTIER POLICE (FP).** In 1862 the Levy / Militia was reorganised and renamed as FP. Later more FP units were raised which were named based on their place of origin or place of operation e.g. Nowgong FP, Chittagong FP, North Cachar Hills FP, Bengal FP, Naga Hills FP, Surma Valley FP etc.

- **ASSAM MILITARY POLICE (AMP).** In 1882 further changes were instituted. The most far-reaching was reorganisation of the Frontier Police into the Assam Military Police battalions under the territorial titles of Naga Hills MP battalion (forbear of 3 Assam Rifles, oldest battalion of the Assam Rifles),



A "Cachar Levy" constable 1835

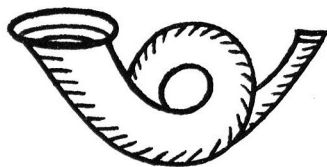
Surma Valley MP battalion in 1898 was renamed as Lushai Hills MP battalion (forbear of 1 Assam Rifles) and Lakhimpur MP battalion (forbear of 2 Assam Rifles). In 1913 a new Assam MP battalion named

Darrang MP battalion, (forbear of 4 Assam Rifles) was raised.

- **ASSAM RIFLES.** In 1917 in recognition of meritorious services rendered by Military Police Battalions during World War I in the Middle East, the

name of the Force was finally changed to "The Assam Rifles". With this change, the Force adopted the black buttons and badges of a Rifle Regiment in place of silver ones worn by the Assam Military Police.

## Assam Rifles' Crests Since Raising



**1835**



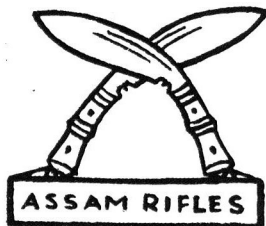
**1862**



**1882**



**1917**



**1947**



**1992**



**2001**

Till 1917, i.e. before the Force was given the title of 'ASSAM RIFLES', the units of the Force used to write their abbreviated name on both sides of crossed Khukris e.g., Naga Hills Military Police Battalion (NHMP). Once the title changed to 'ASSAM RIFLES' the units started writing the numeral of the battalion above the crossed Khukris. In April 1992, the Force adopted the existing crest with crossed Khukris and Assam Rifles written below it. Based on the fact that the crown was carried above the crossed Khukris of the Assam Rifles' crest till the time India got independence, a case was taken up with the Ministry of Home Affairs to allow an Ashoka emblem above the crossed Khukris. On 28 September 2001, this was approved and has been introduced into the Force.

# Assam Rifles' Uniforms Since Raising

