HISTORY OF THE ASSAM RIFLES

BY
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"LOCAL HISTORY OF POONA AND ITS BATTLEFIELDS"
"HISTORY OF UPPER ASSAM AND UPPER BURMA," "HISTORY OF THE 2ND K.E.O. GOORKHAS"

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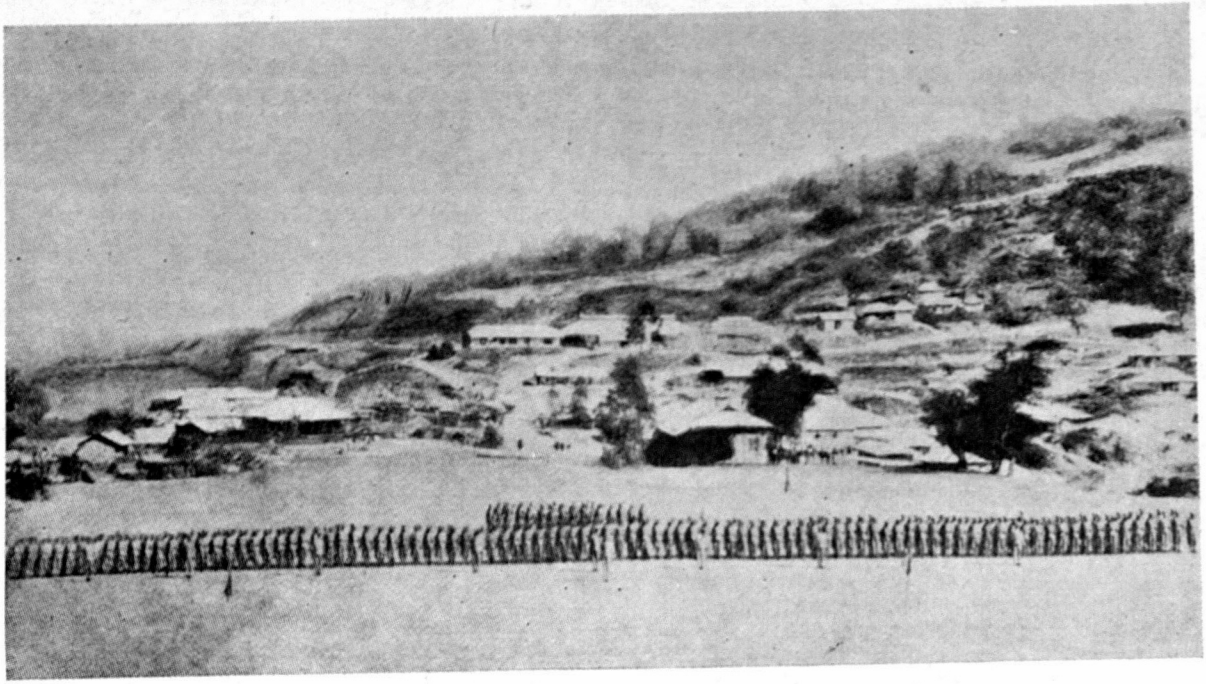

Head-quarter Companies Naga Hills Military Police Battalion on Parade, 1897. Frontispiece

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A NOTE

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FOREWORDS

COLONEL SHAKESPEAR has asked me to contribute a few words of introduction to his history of the origin and development of the Assam Rifles. I do so with pleasure, as I have still very grateful recollections of the resourceful strength with which this force endowed the Government of the province. The economic growth of Assam has been threatened with a peculiar danger—that of trans-frontier forays. Its two valleys run deeply into mountainous country that is inhabited by tribesmen who are still inspired by the ancient ideas that war is one of the most exhilarating of life's experiences, and its commemoration, in war-dress and war-dances, the most enjoyable of amusements. To possess the head of an alien man, woman or child has been a treasured assurance of success and a necessary passport to good fortune in courtship. Society is organised upon a war footing. "*Mutuo metu separati et montibus*," peoples of the same blood have grouped themselves into clans, isolated so completely from one another as to have developed languages that are mutually unintelligible. To ambuscade an alien village—even its women when drawing water from the stream—to burn its houses and massacre its inhabitants have been regarded as "sporting" enterprises that relieve the monotony of life. Forays into the lowlands have been still more tempting ; and, had they not been checked, the development of the tea industry would have been impossible.

The most obvious method of stopping these marauding raids was by retaliatory incursions into tribal territory. For such small expeditions regular troops would have been too elaborate and costly an instrument, and have involved too serious commitments. The punishment that was required could be inflicted most rapidly

and economically by a special Police Force led by Civil officers. So originated the Military Police that has developed into the five battalions of Assam Rifles. The knowledge that was acquired in the course of these expeditions naturally stimulated further exploration; and the influence which they begot took shape in such political control over the nearer villages as would protect the weak from being harried by their stronger neighbours. This influence could only be maintained by the occasional visits of British officers—very frequently at the risk of their lives. Holcombe, Butler and Damant were killed in the Naga Hills, Stewart and Browne in the Lushai Hills, Williamson in the Abor country. For the repression of the outbreaks in which they fell, it was necessary to undertake military expeditions in some strength, ending, in the case of the Naga and Lushai Hills, in the annexation of extensive areas of tribal territory. It was fortunate for the Government of the province that, on these emergent occasions, it could rely upon a garrison of regular troops that included three Gurkha regiments; and it was fortunate for the troops that they were assisted by trained police forces with special knowledge of the localities. The annexed territory was garrisoned by localised battalions of Military Police that were constituted and organised on the model of Gurkha regiments. This has, indeed, been the ideal of the Assam Military Police generally. There could not have been a better one.

The definite control which annexation involved relied very greatly upon the establishment of Military Police outposts, and upon tours of inspection, under Military Police escort, which kept the District Officers in touch with the people. To punish offending villages it was occasionally necessary to proceed in arms against them. And it was exceedingly difficult to confine government intervention rigidly within the limits of the annexed territory; for villages inside the boundary line were sometimes raided from the outside. Moreover, our officers could hardly

ignore atrocities that were perpetrated just outside their jurisdiction: they could not stand unmoved on their frontier watching villages go up in flames, when by crossing a boundary stream they could stop this cruelty. By promptitude in action and steady pressure peace was gradually established throughout an area that was considerably larger than that originally annexed. Men who had been accustomed to decorate their houses with skulls felt almost content in using pumpkins for this purpose; and so, instead of raiding villages of the open country, they commenced to trade with them. Schools were opened. The tribesmen are by no means lacking in intelligence, and the children could show quite remarkable aptitude in learning arithmetic. The civilising influence of Christian missionaries spread to the interior, and in one district—the Lushai Hills—an astonishingly large proportion of the people have accepted Christianity. Progress was interrupted by the Kuki insurrection of 1917, which required a large Military Police force for its suppression. But this disturbance was due to a special cause—the recruitment of labour for service in the Great War—and there is little reason to suppose that it was a protest against the normal activities of the Government. It is true, no doubt, that, if released from control, some of the tribesmen would revert to their head-hunting. There is a craving for some excitement to relieve the dulness of habitual routine. But war is not the only means of procuring it. Detachments of Military Police in the course of their rounds have been known to drop their official dignity and "let themselves go" in organising games for the entertainment of the people. They are proud of their battalion sports, and in time may be able to bring home to the village braves that one can gain almost as much excitement in football and hockey as by harrying a village and massacring its inhabitants.

The task of pacifying and humanising these primitive hill people would have been impossible had there not been at the

command of the Civil Government a trained and armed force which could be employed in small detachments, could be rapidly set in movement and could make shift with a minimum of transport. These have been amongst the distinctive features of the Assam Military Police. The province is very largely indebted to regular troops for its expansion. But the experiences of the Mishmi campaign of 1899 and of the Abor campaign of 1912 have shown that the employment of regular troops for the making of punitive expeditions into the hills may result in a very large expenditure with quite incommensurate results.

The Military Police have now attained a higher status as the Assam Rifles, and have in great measure replaced the military garrison of the province. This leaves the position unchanged, viz. that they are under the orders of the Civil Government, and can be set in action without the formalities and delay that are involved in a recourse to the Military Department of the Government of India. And they will, no doubt, retain the easy mobility which has rendered their services so effective in the past. In 1904 there were threats of disturbance in the State of Manipur. Troubles, which might have had serious developments, were arrested by the prompt arrival of the Naga Hills Military Police: a strong detachment put itself on the march immediately on the receipt of orders and covered a distance of 88 miles in three days—an achievement which received the Viceroy's special commendation. The chief difficulty in the hills is that of transport. In old days men carried their own rations. Coolies are now gathered together for this purpose. But so long as it is realised that demands for transport must be kept at the lowest possible figure, the Assam Rifles will retain their credit for resourceful mobility.

BAMPFYLDE FULLER.

THIS history already has a Foreword written by my former Chief, Sir Bampfylde Fuller, but Colonel Shakespear has asked

me to add a word from one who has been long and closely associated with the Assam Rifles. I do this with extreme pleasure, as it enables me to pay two tributes, one to the officers and men of the Assam Rifles, and the other to the author of the history.

Few can have had my opportunities of judging the quality of the Force which I have known throughout my thirty-four years of service. For some five years I held charge in succession of two districts, at the headquarters of each of which was a battalion of Military Police. Both battalions furnished me from time to time with escorts on trans-frontier tours—some peaceful, some warlike. Both were ever ready to meet at the shortest notice any call made on them. Later on, as a Collector and a Commissioner in Eastern Bengal, I had occasion to admire the discipline of the men and the tact and forbearance shown by the officers of detachments sent down to assist in keeping the peace in times of seditious trouble, under conditions outside all experience. Later still I saw the same qualities displayed during the railway strike of 1921 and the promenade of 1922. I witnessed the honourable part played by all the battalions so far as opportunity was afforded them in the Great War—a part which the history sets forth in language eloquent in its simplicity. The Assam Rifles have a fine record of arduous undertakings on the North-eastern Frontier of India, now for the first time made available. The spirit that carried Lieut. Eden and his little band to success in 1855 still animates them, and obstacles as great as those which attended the capture of Kaisha in his mountain stronghold have been surmounted in more recent days with too often none to chronicle the feat.

Colonel Shakespear's book goes far beyond its modest title, for not only does it record the history of the Assam Rifles, but it covers the gradual pacification of Assam since the British Power was first compelled to interfere in its affairs, and closes with a chapter on the ancient ruins of historical interest to be found in various parts of the Province. To him are due in

special measure the thanks of the Government for his services, first as Commandant of the Naga Hills Battalion, which in his time was easily the most efficient in the Province, and, secondly, as Deputy-Inspector-General, a post which he was peculiarly well fitted to occupy.

17/7/28. W. J. REID.

PREFACE

In compiling this history of the five battalions of the Assam Rifles, in one of which I had the honour of serving as Commandant thirty years ago, to be in later years followed by being appointed Deputy-Inspector-General to the Force, I have endeavoured to search all available documents and books from the early days of Assam under British rule onwards for material with which to form it, and have arranged it as far as possible in proper sequence. Sometimes information has been turned up in most unlikely places ; for instance, who would have thought that the best account of Col. Hannay's Abor Expedition in 1859 could have come out of the "History of the Indian Navy?" But so it was, and due to the fact that in early days the Indian Navy had a few gunboats on the main rivers, two of which were on the Brahmaputra river at Dibrugarh, and sent a naval contingent with Hannay's force. Again the "History of Indian Railways" (Assam section) gave accounts of Frontier Police escorts to railway survey parties which were not alluded to anywhere else, for prior to about 1899 no such thing as Battalion Records were kept up. Many episodes of the consolidation of British rule east of Bengal have been derived from old musty records and books and are brought out as a connected narrative, trouble having been taken to get as true and complete a history of this little known old Force, without embellishment or drawing on the imagination, in spite of Bacon's statement that "the mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure."

I am most grateful to the Commandants of the Assam Rifle Battalions for assistance given me in their extracts from their Battalion Records, and to the Inspector-General of Police for

kindly allowing me the use of numerous notes on the internal economy of the Force and other matters, without all of which this history would have been incomplete. My hearty thanks are also given to Col. J. Shakespear, C.M.G., C.I.E., D.S.O., who kindly helped me in a large measure with a great portion dealing with the Lushai Hills, of which he was Superintendent for many years, and to Major A. Dallas Smith, M.C., lately Commandant 4th A.R., who went through most of the work in the rough and assisted with corrections and useful suggestions.

In the earlier years of the province the Frontier Police being one body, they are dealt with as such until the 'sixties, when this body was divided into territorial units, as it were. From then onwards to the Great War separate chapters deal with the life and doings of each individual unit or Military Police Battalion, as they came to be designated on the reorganisation of the Frontier Police and border defence in 1882. From 1914 on the history deals with the Force as a whole, for its activities in this last period embraced detachments from all battalions.

The Assam Rifles, whose units have recently been affiliated with the different groups of Goorkha regiments of the Indian Army, have had, as will be seen in these pages, a career of not far short of a century, full of arduous undertakings and borderland service connected with their duties as Wardens of our long N.-E. Marches of India. They have taken their share in the heat and burden and stress of every expedition officially recognised as such or otherwise, labours which formerly have too frequently passed unnoticed, and in spite of the recent depletion of their ranks, due to temporary economic reasons, it is pleasant to read the remarks of the Governor of Assam in the last Police Review for 1925. These run: "Notwithstanding the reduction in the complement of British officers and men and the undue strains consequently placed on the remainder of the battalions, the Force surpasses

its former high standard of efficiency. Generally the last year's record (1924) has been one with which officers and men have every reason to be satisfied, and the Governor-in-Council congratulates the several Commandants who have succeeded in spite of difficulties in maintaining the high traditions of the Assam Rifles."

Floreant custodes terminorum Imperii nostri.

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* Showing movements of principal expeditionary columns.

HISTORY OF THE ASSAM RIFLES

CHAPTER I

General information from 1824 to 1839—The province of Assam in early days—Its progress—Protection—Early frontier line—Armed civil police—Raising of the old Cachar Levy and the Jorhat Militia—Their duties, posts, etc. on the Nowgong border—Sylhet and Cachar—Khasia and Jaintia Hills—Description of frontier posts—Mr. Grange, first Commandant of the Cachar Levy—Naga and other tribes.

THE object of this book being to trace from its starting point the history of the force formerly known as the old Military Police of Assam, but now as the Assam Rifles of five Battalions, and to record its services in border defence among strange wild tribes, it will be necessary to describe briefly Assam as it was when it came under British rule a century ago and its development as seen in the present day. Thus the various vicissitudes of the force under the gradually improved conditions in this far-off corner of India may be the better understood.

Assam, known to many only by reason of its flourishing tea gardens and by a certain prominence acquired by it when Lord Curzon's famous "Partition" took place, uniting the district of Eastern Bengal with Assam, and which in 1911 was reversed by Royal Command, has had a long history of its own since ancient times. The Koch and Cachari races warred with each other incessantly until the arrival of the Ahoms about 1220—Shan peoples of the great Tai race from Burma, who gradually conquered the country and governed it with more or less severity for nearly 700 years, until it eventually came under British rule on the conclusion of the first war with Burma in 1824-25.

The province, which at first after this war comprised only the country lying between Sylhet on the south, Golaghat and Tezpur on the north-east, and Cooch Behar and Bengal on the west, has been enlarged from time to time until at the present day it extends from the Arrakan border in the south to the furthest confines of the Sadiya district towards South-West China in the north, and from the eastern border of the Manipur State to the eastern boundary of Bengal, or a length of nearly 600 miles by 340 in breadth. It is traversed by two important river systems — the Brahmaputra flowing through Upper and Lower Assam and the Surma through Cachar and Sylhet (Sketch Map 1), the neighbourhood of each giving the only flat country, for the rest is covered with magnificent forest-clad mountain ranges. These are the Himalayas on the Brahmaputra north bank, the Naga, Patkoi, and Manipur hills to the east, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills in the centre, while to the south are the Lushai hills. All these mountain regions are inhabited by wild tribes differing in every conceivable way from those of India proper. A former Chief Commissioner records that it is "a most interesting locality, because there is hardly any part of India where there is a greater mixture or gradation of races than is found in it." The depredations and raids of these wild folk have necessitated at varying intervals their particular tribal areas being taken over by the British, to ensure peace and prosperity as civilisation extended up both river systems. Until 1885 Assam was the eastern frontier province of the Indian Empire when the annexation of Upper Burma advanced this border still further eastward, and it is still such so far as the valley of the Brahmaputra is concerned for some 400 miles of its course. Up to 1874 Assam was incorporated in the province of Bengal, was administered by an Agent to the Governor-General in India, and ruled from Calcutta; in that year it was made a separate province under a Chief Commissioner. Having a much heavier rainfall than India, it is a green land with, except in a few stretches in

both great valleys, dense vegetation and forests with magnificent scenery.

In the later years of the Ahom rulers, whose power was deteriorating, the country became filled with the turbulent ruffianism of the great bazaars in Bengal, with disbanded soldiery and fighting fanatics, who pillaged villages and laid waste the fields, reducing the country to ruin. British intervention in 1792, when Captain Welsh's expedition (details of which can be read in the "History of Assam and Upper Burma") to quell the state of civil war and anarchy produced no good effect, was followed by incursions of Burmese forces which only increased the distressful condition of affairs. The latter remained more or less as conquerors till 1824. In that year, as a natural consequence of the declaration of war with Burma, British forces assembled at Goalpara the frontier station of Bengal in this direction since 1765 when that area together with that of Dacca was taken from the Mahommedans. Assam and the Surma valleys were entered, and after a year of fighting the Burmese were expelled and the country was taken over by us, though the district of Cachar did not come directly under our administration till 1830. From being a land devastated from end to end, it now gradually improved. The tea industry started by Mr. Bruce in the first tea garden at the mouth of the Kundil River near Sadiya about 1832, spread over Assam, to be taken up later in Cachar, where the first garden was laid out in 1855, until both valleys became covered with flourishing tea concerns. Coal and oil were discovered, the forests were found to be a source of valuable timber produce, and with improved communications Assam gradually became a very different country from what it was in 1826.

For very many years the only means of entering and travelling about the province was by large country boats up the two great rivers, by smaller ones and "dug-outs" in the lesser streams, and by the roughest of roads, bridle-paths or tracks in the interior. Major J. Butler (in civil employ) mentions in 1844

that the river journey from Gauhati to Sadiya by country boat (the only means of progression) occupied him a tedious six weeks, while that from Goalundo, the nearest river point to Calcutta, took three months, and often longer. Few houses, either private ones or Rest-houses, had doors and windows, being mostly miserable shanties ; in fact most of the houses occupied by Europeans in Assam in early years were but "wattle and daub" structures with thatched roofs, devoid of any comfort. One reads that many officials when on tour used to carry with them window frames complete, to fix in the rest-houses where they put up. Gauhati and Goalpara were the only places with a few masonry houses where any attempt had been made to ameliorate the conditions of life for the higher officials. The rise of the tea trade brought steamers on to the two main rivers in 1850, while railway enterprise did not start till 1883, and then to connect Dibrugarh and the river with the coal-fields of Margherita and Ledo. This was followed by the Assam and Bengal Railway, some 600 miles in length, to connect the port of Chittagong with Dibrugarh, the first survey in connection with this undertaking taking place in 1893. Construction was begun about 1897, and the whole line, with an extension to Gauhati from Lumding, was open by 1901. About 1910 the Eastern Bengal Railway extended its line from Santahar to Amingaon on the Brahmaputra, nearly opposite Gauhati, and the principal stations of the province were brought into direct and easy touch with the outer world.

In the early days of our rule in this province the Honourable East India Company, being averse to increasing its obligations by taking over more of the country than was actually needed, instructed Mr. David Scott, the first Agent to the Governor-General in India, to hand over the portion of Upper Assam from Golaghat to Dibrugarh (or Muttuk, as it was then called) to Purunder Sing, the last of Ahom royalties, who was to rule in the position of a protected prince, guaranteed against invasion, and was given uncontrolled civil power. The tract of country,

however, east of Purunder Sing's domain, of which Sadiya and Rangarora were the most important places, was retained by the British and held by the Assam Light Infantry to prevent possible incursions by Burmese or Chinese.

Thus the earliest eastern frontier of the newly-acquired country with which we shall be first concerned ran from Nowgong to Silchar, or, to be more correct, as shown in an old map of 1828, it followed the line of the Dunsiri river through the Nambhor forest *via* Borpathar, Mohun Dijoa, Mahur, Semkhor, Lankye, in the north Cachar hills, to the Jatinga valley, down which it ran, skirting the plains as far as Jirighat on the Barak river (Sketch Map 4). From this point the boundary turned south-west, running along the foot of the Lushai and Tippera hills. Beyond this border the country was unknown ; the earliest visits into it for very short distances were in 1839 and 1840, save for Captains Jenkins and Pemberton, who sixteen years previously had visited the Manipur State. These two officers entered the hills from the Silchar side and left the State with a large escort of Manipur troops for the Assam valley *via* Paplongmai and the Naga hills, having to fight most of the way, the records state, eventually reaching the plains at Nagura near Golaghat. It was not till 1844 that the first effort was made to enter the Lushai hills.

From the end of the Burmese war the country had for many years a large number of troops maintaining order, these being stationed at Goalpara, Bijni, Gauhati, Golaghat, Nowgong, Tezpur, Jorhat, Sibsagor, Lakshimpur, and Sadiya in the Assam valley, and at Sylhet, Cherrapoonji, Jaintiapur and Silchar in the Surma valley, in both cases with a large number of detached posts. The police force (belonging to Bengal) was divided into the armed Civil Police for protection of jails, treasuries, and for guards and escorts, and into the ordinary Civil Police for criminal administrative purposes. This state of affairs, subject to small and gradual reduction of troops, at first by moving those nearest to Bengal, continued till 1838, when

the Hkamti-Singpho rising during the following year, in which Colonel White and most of the Sadiya garrison lost their lives, together with Purunder Sing's mismanagement, constrained Government to take over the whole of Upper Assam from the Dunsiri river to Sadiya. In 1840 the station of Dibrugarh was decided on as the headquarters of the administration of this part of the province, and work on it was commenced, while Gauhati remained until the late 'sixties as the headquarters of the Agent to the Governor-General.

Excessive annual expenses in keeping a large force of troops in Assam, when the country had settled down and only depredations of wild hill tribes remained to be guarded against, caused Government to review the situation from the defensive aspect and to reduce the military force, which about 1840 was brought down to four regiments, *viz.* the 1st Assam Light Infantry at Gauhati, the 2nd Assam Light Infantry at Sadiya, the Sylhet Light Infantry in Sylhet, and a Bengal Infantry Battalion at Silchar. As throughout practically all border troubles and expeditions our Frontier Police will be found working in close touch with the first three regiments, it may not be out of place to mention their origin and the dates when they came into existence.

The two battalions of the Assam Light Infantry started life as follows: The older one was raised in 1817 as the "Cuttack Legion" at Chaubiaganj for the protection of the Cuttack district to the south of Calcutta, and in 1823 it was moved to Rangpur in Eastern Bengal, where it was renamed the "Rangpur (Local) Light Infantry." Four years later, after service in Assam, it became known as the "1st Assam Light Infantry" and with its headquarters at Gauhati remained in the province as such till 1864, when its title was changed to that of the "42nd Bengal Infantry (Goorkhas)" and in 1903 to that of the 6th Goorka Rifles, as at present. The younger battalion, raised at Gauhati in 1835 for service in the province and later moved to Sadiya, was known as the "Assam Seebundy Corps

(Irregulars)" and was stationed in the Sadiya district, where eight years later its title was changed to that of the "2nd Assam Light Infantry" on being brought on to the strength of the Bengal Army. In 1864 it became known as the "43rd Bengal Infantry (Assam)," and after two other slight changes received its present title of the 2/8th Goorkha Rifles. The Sylhet Local Battalion was raised in 1824 in Sylhet for the protection of that portion of Assam when the first Burmese war broke out, in 1864 its name was changed to that of the "44th Sylhet Light Infantry" on being incorporated into the Bengal Army, in 1901 this Regiment became known as the "44th Goorkha Rifles," and in 1907 this was changed again to the 1/8th Goorkha Rifles, which it has since retained. All these regiments served entirely in Assam and Burma until 1899, taking part in every border expedition, after which year they were sent to serve in other parts of India, the 43rd Goorkha Rifles being the first to be moved to garrison Chitral.

The early uniforms of all these regiments appear to have been red, later changed to green, with accoutrements of black leather; for many years they were recruited locally or from Bengal, until, about 1870, they began to enlist Nepalese in increasing numbers, and in 1885 each unit was given two 6-pounder mountain guns, which in 1903 were handed over to the Military Police battalions.

From 1830 the armed Civil Police had been gradually increased in numbers, and now, with the reduction of the troops in the province, the first idea of a "Levy" or Militia body was put forward, to be a separate force under the Civil Government and apart from the armed police branch. This proposed "Levy" was to be placed on a better footing than the ordinary police, would perform military duties, and would replace the troops in certain parts of the border. As it was to be officered by Civil Police officials it was realised that its drill, training and discipline would perforce be of an elementary nature, but it was expected this might suffice. It was to be a cheap semi-military

body, clothed like the Civil Police and armed with the old Brown Bess, but it was badly paid, though slightly better than was the case with the ordinary police. The men were to carry out arduous duties, often involving fighting and danger in what were then most unhealthy jungle localities, and they were drawn from the armed Bengal Civil Police at first comprising all classes, chiefly from Bengal.

The first unit of this new organisation was definitely raised by Mr. Grange, in civil charge of the Nowgong district, during 1835, and was named the "Cachar Levy," with a strength of 750 of all ranks, *viz.* inspectors, head constables and constables, as they were called until 1883, in virtue of their being a purely civil force. Three years later a similar body, but of lesser strength, the "Jorhat Militia," was raised at Jorhat for the protection of the Sibsagor border and recruited mostly from Shans settled in that area. This unit in old books is alluded to as the "Shan" and sometimes as the "Police" Militia, and after a few years became amalgamated with the "Cachar Levy." The duties of this force were to guard the then eastern frontier of Assam from the Brahmaputra river to Cachar, supported at each end of this line of some 250 miles by strong detachments of troops at Nowgong and Silchar (Sketch Map 4).

Along this stretch, which ran for scores of miles through the great Nambhor forest near the foot of the Naga hills and through the north Cachar hills to the plain of the Surma valley east of Silchar, the Cachar Levy held posts (stockades or block-houses) at Borpathar, Dimapur, Mohun Dijoa, 30 miles south-west of Dimapur, Mahurmukh, Maibong, Hosang Hajoo, Guilon, Gumaigajoo, Hangrung, Baladhan and Jirighat, at the south-east end of the north Cachar hills At Asaloo (16 miles east of Haflong) a small administrative station was established about 1845, together with Levy's strongest detachment. All were in the heart of dense forests and amongst hills, paths between each being cut and kept clear for constant patrolling. Most of these places have disappeared entirely from maps, and

the most important ones were those at Dimapur, Mahurmukh, Maibong and Asaloo, these being on routes most used by the Nagas when leaving their hills to trade or raid below, more often than not the latter being their object (Sketch Map 4).

This Cachar Levy thus formed the earliest embodied unit of what eventually developed into the fine force of the five Assam Rifle battalions of the present day. Other portions of the north and north-eastern borders were for many years more guarded by troops and the armed Civil Police of Bengal, with a small body of Hkamtis in the Sadiya area for duty between the Lohit river and the Patkoi range, across which runs one of the routes into Upper Burma. These latter, however, did not last long, and were disbanded as being unreliable. For many years after the Burmese war this tract towards the Patkoi range was a troublesome one, both the Hkamtis and the Singphos, who in some cases received support from Burma, having to be subdued after much fighting between 1826 and 1843. This period was marked by expeditions, at first under Captain Neufville and later under Captain Charlton with the Assam Light Infantry and detachments of other troops. These officers established military posts at Bisa, Koogoo, Ningroo and Nungrang on the western slopes of the Patkoi, which were held till 1850 and then given up (Sketch Map 3). It was at Sadiya in 1839 that the principal Hkamti rising took place with extreme suddenness, when a large body of these warriors surprised the garrison and little station, cutting up Colonel White and 80 odd men and rushing the stockade, which was only retaken after a stiff hand-to-hand fight. It is believed the present earthwork fort, which originally had timber palisading along the top of the parapet, is the same one which witnessed the tragedy, though Major Butler, writing in 1844, mentions Colonel White as having been buried at Saikwa, on the opposite bank of the Lohit river. As this part of the country did not concern the Cachar Levy, it is at present unnecessary to go into further details of military action here.

With regard to the districts of Cachar and Sylhet, forming what is known as the Surma valley, the latter, which lies at the foot of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, had been taken over by the British at the same time as Dacca and Rungpur, *viz.* in 1765, but, owing to turbulent Mahommedan inhabitants and utter lack of communications, had been much neglected and really was but little known till 1824. The few English officials who were there in early days seem to have busied themselves, one reads, in amassing fortunes from the valuable limestone quarries lying along the outer spurs of the Khasi hills, their superintendents and quarrymen frequently, by injudicious conduct, irritating the hill people, thus causing an unsettled state which often ended in retaliation and murder.

The Cachar district, which for some years prior to the first Burmese war had been more or less under the influence of the neighbouring State of Manipur, was visited for the first time in 1763 by Mr. Verelst, the Chief of Chittagong (as the high Government official was styled in those days), who marched a body of troops through Sylhet and Cachar to assist Manipur against Burmese aggression. He did not, however, enter the hills beyond the Barak river owing to great transport difficulties and much sickness in his force. Cachar was brought under British political control in 1826 after considerable opposition by a Burmese force of 8000, which had come through Manipur and had advanced to the vicinity of the Khasi hills. This force was engaged by General Shuldham's troops near the present site of Badarpur Junction, severe fighting surging round the old fort, the remains of which are to be seen just above the railway bridge on the left bank of the Barak river. Driven back, the Burmese made a last stand on the Tilain Tilas, a ridge of low hills between Salchapra and Silchar, where they were finally defeated and pursued into the Manipur hills to a point a little beyond Aqui, a few miles north of Nungba on the present Silchar-Imphal road (Sketch Map 2). In 1830 Cachar was taken over definitely as an administered district, its first superintendent

being Captain Shewart, who held the position at Silchar for many years, and maintained order with the aid of the Sylhet Light Infantry and a Manipuri Levy raised amongst the large numbers of those people who for years had settled in this part of the country. Two years later this Levy was made over to the Manipur State, being replaced in Cachar by an increase to the armed Civil Police. The North Cachar Hills district was, until about 1864, administered from Nowgong, after which it was made over to Cachar.

During the period 1826 to 1833 the unsettled state of the Khasi and Jaintia hills was a source of much trouble. The people (Syntengs) inhabiting this area have characteristics different from any of the other tribes met with in this part of India in that, though like the Shans, Singphos, Hkamtis and others of Indo-Chinese origin whose early home in ancient times, according to Sir Charles Lyall, K.C.I.E., a former Chief Commissioner of the province, lay probably in North-west China, the Syntengs' language, habits and matrimonial customs are those of the Mong Kmer peoples of the Cambodian side. They appear to be an isolated remnant of the earliest wave of Indo-Chinese migration westwards, with no relatives now left within the province, their nearest kindred being the Palaungs and Wās in Upper Burma. But they belong to the same racial group, which, much more advanced in civilisation, is represented to-day by the Talaings of Pegu and Tenasserim and the Cambodians, all living hundreds of miles eastwards of the Khasi hills.

Mr. Davil Scott, who in the early part of the war had been the first European to cross the Khasi hills with an escort of troops and armed Civil Police from Sylhet to Gauhati, strongly urged a road being opened through them to connect the Surma with the Assam valley. This was sanctioned and begun in the winter of 1827 from Cherrapoonji *via* Nunklow, 20 miles west of Shillong. By 1829 it was finished and was known as "Brigg's Trace," though so rarely used that by the time Shillong came into being it had practically been abandoned. At Nunklow in 1829 the Khasis rose, attacked Lieuts. Bedingfield and Burlton,

killing both, together with most of their men guarding the road-working parties. A punitive expedition entered the hills, consisting of the Sylhet Light Infantry, 23rd Bengal Infantry, and a strong detachment of armed Civil Police, all under command of Captain Lister, with whom were Lieuts. Townshend, Vetch and Brodie, who were actively employed till 1833, when these hill tracts were subdued. During this period Cherrapoonji in the Khasi hills came into existence as a combined civil and military station from which to control the people and administer the region. Armed Civil Police posts were also placed at points further into the hills. From these brief accounts it will be seen that the armed Civil Police, forerunners of the Assam Rifles, took their share in almost all military activity connected with the settlement of the new British acquisitions.

Returning to the Cachar Levy, or Police Militia as it is referred to in some old books, we find very few records of its earliest years of existence along the eastern frontier line ; and what there are show that life for them must often have been solitary and monotonous, cut off as the men were from the amenities of civilisation and settled life by long distances and difficult country. Their occupation lay in constant patrolling towards posts on their right or left in parties of ten or four, according to the strength of the posts, in keeping these in a complete state of repair and defence, in escorting ration or treasure parties, in sending assistance to neighbouring posts or warding off attacks on their own post, or in acting on instructions by which a raiding party might be headed off or rounded up. Numbers of small skirmishes occurred which were never heard of outside the Police, or were unrecorded as being all in the day's work, and very likely gallant services went by unnoticed and unrewarded. Life at these frontier posts was but rarely enlivened by visits from the one European officer in command, such probably occurring but once in the year, if then ; for the reason that he could not get more often over his long extent of borderland with all his district work to do as well, and it also was not often that a junior official could be spared to go on tour for so long.

Frontier posts in those days were usually earthworks with a ditch outside and a loopholed palisading along the top of the parapet—examples of these are still to be seen in the old post to the north of the ferry at Jirighat and in one close to Charduar near Balipara in Tezpur district; or they were plain timber stockades with a deep fringe of abattis work running round the outside, to prevent an enemy getting close to the timber wall, or again, where nearer to civilisation and material was available, the posts were masonry block-houses, of which the present Rest-house at Borpathar, near Golaghat, and the old post at Dikrang, near Sadiya, are extant examples.

With 1838-39 the eastern frontier entered on more interesting and stirring times for the Cachar Levy under command of Mr. Grange, who has been called the "Father of the Frontier Police." This officer was also the principal civil official at Nowgong, a place on the Kullung river, some seventy miles from the border of those days, which six years earlier had replaced the first administrative station at Raha, near the present-day railway station of Chaparmukh (Sketch Map 4). Burma was again causing anxiety, giving expectation of a fresh war, and Captain Gordon, then Political Agent in the State of Manipur, reported the intention of its Raja to bring the Naga hills permanently under his rule, action by not means approved of by Government. These, together with constant tribal raids and depredations across our border, constrained greater notice being taken of the Naga tribes, with a view to bringing them under British influence and their chiefs to friendly terms.

A few words may here be said relative to these tribes and their origin, hitherto scarcely known to us. The Naga and Kuki tribes, with which latter the Lushais are included, with whom our dealings and troubles along the eastern and southern border lands are concerned, belong—again to quote Sir Charles Lyall—to the Thibeto-Burman racial division who inhabit all the hills not occupied by the Khasias. The aborigines of Assam would appear to have been largely of Dravidian stock, but in the main

this country, according to certain authorities, was peopled from North-west China, Mongolian tribes, swarms of whom in far-off times found their way into Assam, Bengal. and up the Tsan Po river, while others moved southwards down the Chindwyn, Irrawadi, and Salween valleys, peopling Burma, Siam, etc. Pressure from those behind caused the earlier swarms to turn aside from the large valleys and to enter the hill areas. Scientific analysis of the speech of these tribes (with the exception of the Khasias), which classes the various tribal languages as Thibeto—Bodo, together with in most cases their Mongoloid appearance, vouches, it is said, for this statement as to their original homeland.

Another school of thought gives them a southern origin, classing them as akin to the great family of the Borneo Dyaks and Malay peoples, who in the dim past probably trekked northwards until stopped either by the wall of the eastern Himalayas or by the southward migration of other races. Their views for this are based on head-hunting propensities which the Dyaks have, on similarity in village arrangements and styles of building, on certain slight affinity in language, and in the love of the tribes for marine ornaments, shells, etc. Mr. J. P. Mills, for many years a civil officer in the Naga hills, and an authority on tribal matters, states that the huge war drums made from hollowed-out tree trunks and used by many hill tribes show unmistakable signs of having been developed from old-time canoes. He also says that many words used by these people would be easily understood by the Maoris of New Zealand. These points it is thought, give evidence of an ancient home near the sea, whereas they are now far inland-dwelling communities. As if bearing out this theory in our own times, we find the Kukis still continually pressing northwards, while in Upper Burma the great Kachin (Singpho) tribe were still moving southwards, threatening to oust the Shans, until the British annexation in 1885-86 put a stop to such a possibility. Many of these tribes, the Angamis and the Semas of the higher ranges in particular, are very fine specimens of humanity—handsome, athletic, and accustomed for long generations to dominate their surroundings.

The Manipuris or Meitheis, who also concerned this history later on, belong to the same Thibeto-Burman group. According to Colonel McCulloch, who was Political Agent in Manipur for many years up to 1867, the Meitheis were the strongest of several clans inhabiting the Manipur valley, who eventually obtained the mastery and gave their name to all the other clans ; but their origin is somewhat obscure. Captain Pemberton, one of the earliest visitors to and writers on this region, believes they hailed from China and came south. The race of Meitheis has been continuously fed by intermarriage with and additions from various hill peoples surrounding the valley, and from paganism and serpent worship., etc., the entire Meithei tribe became converted to Hindooism about 1750. Since then they have become most bigoted in that region.