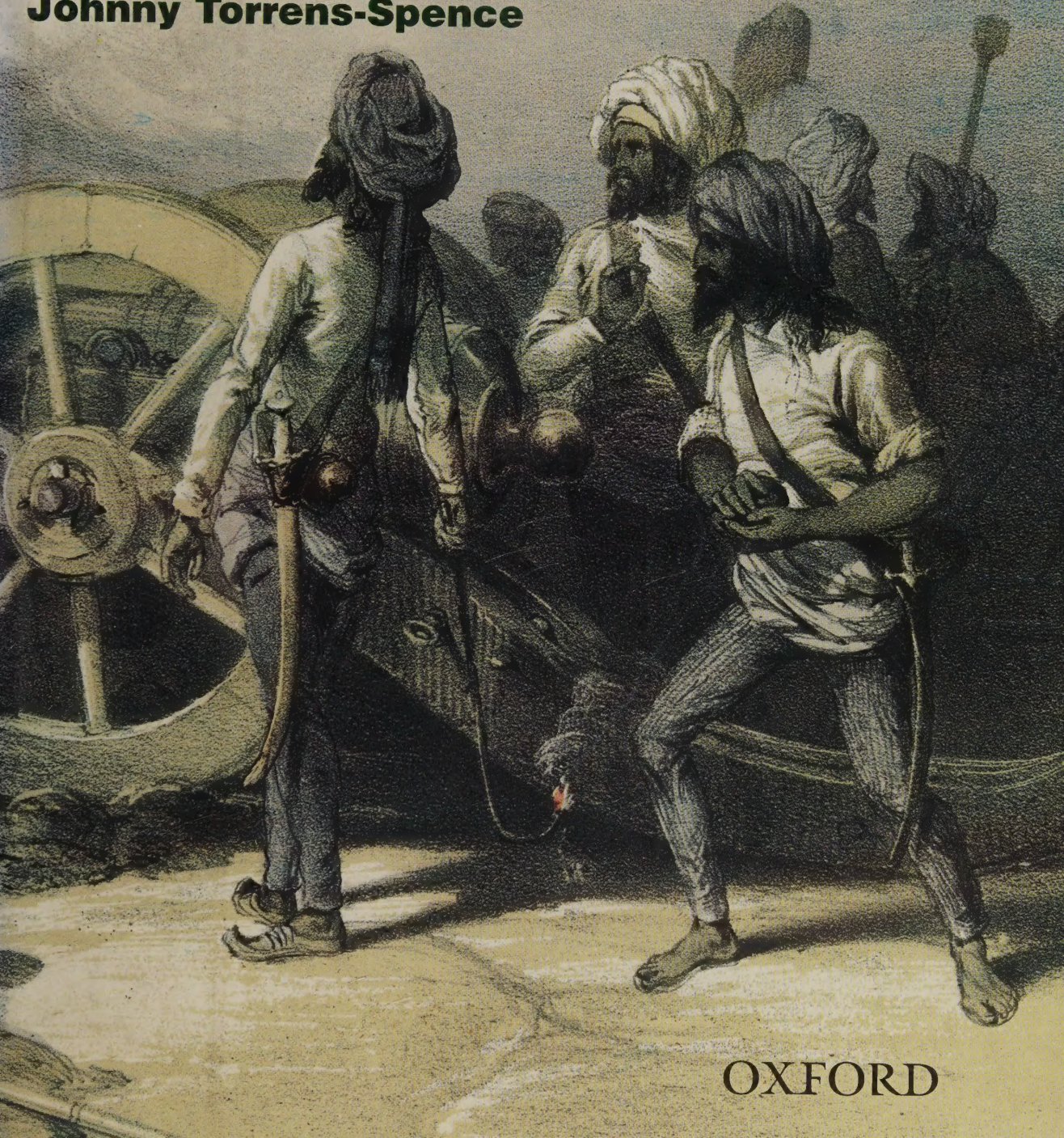


# HISTORIC BATTLEFIELDS OF PAKISTAN

Johnny Torrens-Spence



OXFORD

## About the Editor

Brigadier Johnny Torrens-Spence was brought up in Northern Ireland.

After taking a degree in Botany at St Andrews University in Scotland, he was commissioned into the British Army in 1972.

He has served in a wide range of command and staff appointments, including operational tours in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and Bosnia and commanded The Royal Dragoon Guards. He enjoys traveling off the beaten track and has participated in a number of expeditions, including to Ellesmere Island in the Canadian high arctic and Mount Ararat in Eastern Turkey.

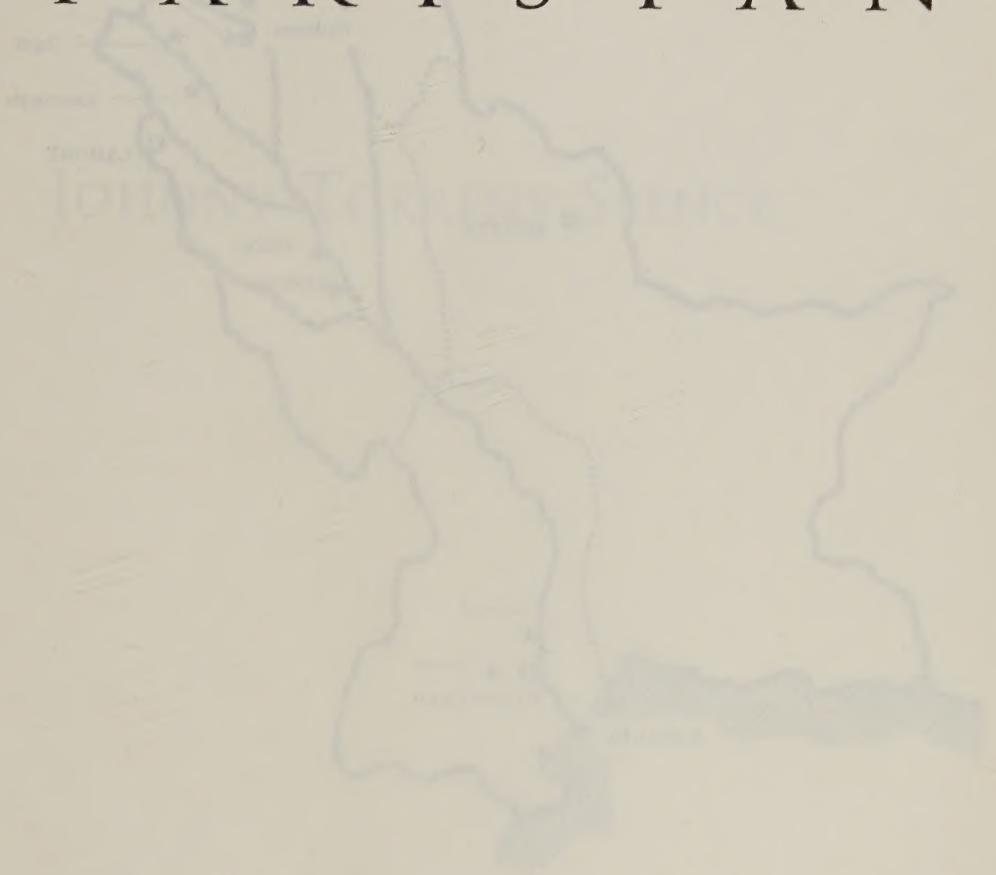
He has a long-standing interest in military history, and has strong family connections with the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

He attended the Indian Staff College at Wellington, Tamil Nadu, India, and from 2000 to 2004 he was Defence Advisor in Islamabad; it was during this time that he researched this book.

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PAKISTAN

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P A K I S T A N





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JOHNNY TORRENS-SPENCE

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








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# LIST OF SYMBOLS

## Military Symbols

	Advance/Attack
	Withdraw
	Defence
	Infantry
	Cavalry
	Archers
	Field Artillery
	Heavy Artillery
	Mortar
	Elephant
	Chariot
	Commander, headquarters

## Geographical Symbols

	River, stream
	Road
	Track
	Rocks
	Town, village
	Bridge
	Mosque, church, temple
	Cliff, embankment
	Jungle, woods
	Sand



# FOREWORD



AMBASSADOR OF PAKISTAN

EMBASSY OF PAKISTAN  
3517 International Court, N.W.  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

Brigadier Johnny Torrens-Spence did what every soldier should do. He spent time on the battlefields. He did this in spite of the very hectic schedule of a hardworking military attaché in Islamabad. The result of his endeavours is a marvellously readable and extremely well researched book that takes us on a really interesting arm-chair tour of the battles fought from 326 BC to 1897 in what is now Pakistan.

The account of one battle brought back many memories. When I was a young cavalry officer, my brigade commander decided to recreate the 'Battle of Chillianwala' down to the horses and uniforms. We were in a brand new cantonment close to Chillianwala village and I can still remember the many days that we spent on horse back and foot around the monument that commemorates that battle! The mock battle was, of course, a great success.

Brigadier Torrens-Spence not only gives us vivid descriptions of people and places but has also ensured great accuracy in the details. A very interesting aspect is the update he provides on the present state of the ancient battle grounds and how they can be reached. We truly owe him a debt of gratitude because most of the places that he visited are in very remote and less travelled locations.

From my personal association with them, I know that Johnny and Fiona represented their country wonderfully well in Pakistan. They are now great ambassadors of Pakistan and in this book they have presented a little known facet of Pakistan to the world. The 'Historic Battlefields of Pakistan' is an insight not only into the history of Pakistan but also an overview of Pakistan today. Johnny has successfully negotiated 'the minefield in which he chose to wander.'

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jehangir Karamat', with a large, stylized flourish above it.

Jehangir Karamat  
General (Retired)  
Ambassador of Pakistan, USA

almost every case one-sided (the best exception to this, surprisingly, is the Battle of the Indus, the only battle I have studied where detailed independent reports from both sides are available). Other battles, particularly those of Alexander the Great, despite (or perhaps because of) extensive academic study are still mired in intense scholastic dispute. Some of the primary sources are in Greek, Persian or other local languages, which I am unable to read. Nor is my command of the languages of modern Pakistan good enough for me to tap directly into local oral traditions.

Such is the minefield into which I have chosen to wander and I am very conscious of my limitations in this regard. Inevitably I have had to make a number of deductions, interpolating what is known of the battle with what can be seen of the battlefield today, informed (I hope) by military judgment and something of a 'soldiers eye' for ground. Nevertheless, it is likely that some of these deductions are, to a greater or lesser degree, wrong, and other people will have information that clarifies or contradicts what I have written. So be it. I have done my best with the time and information available, and I welcome comments and (hopefully constructive) criticism.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to those many people in Pakistan and the United Kingdom who have materially assisted me in the preparation of this book. I should start with Sue Farrington who (perhaps inadvertently) started me on this project and provided excellent first-hand data on Chillianwalla. I am grateful to Commodore (retd.) Arshad Siddique for his insights into the Alexandrian period and to Colonel (retd.) Yayha Effendi for his excellent monograph on Jalaluddin Khwarzmi (without which I would scarcely have been aware of the Battle of the Indus). Mr Rishad Khan and his wife Barbara, gave unstintingly of their time and local knowledge during my visits to Ambeyla, and Mr Said Nazir of Gurroo village escorted me around the hills of the battlefield. In particular I should mention the remarkable Subedar-Major (retd.) Raja Ahmed Khan, in whose house in Gilgit I sat for most of an evening poring over sketch maps of Nilt, and his son who gave so generously of his time to show me around the battlefield. His information was greatly enhanced, very late in the day, by a chance email exchange with Mr Chris Cork, General Manager Naunehal NGO in Nilt, who unexpectedly offered some fascinating insights into the battle, which have been included as footnotes to Chapter 15.

My researches into the Siege of Multan would not have been possible without the unstinting support of Lieutenant-Colonel Janjua and Major Inayat of The Guides Infantry and the invaluable knowledge of that excellent local historian Mr Umar Kamal Khan. Likewise I am grateful to Mr Ali Raza Gardezi for giving up his time to escort me in my wanderings around Kineyree and Soorajkund. My visit to Meanee was unexpectedly facilitated by a chance meeting with the estimable Mr Noor Muhammed Solangi, who not only showed me around the battlefield, but also led me to the remarkable map of the battle, hanging on the wall of the Mianee Forest Resthouse, probably the single most useful piece of original material I have come across in the preparation of this book. I am most grateful to Mr Muhammed Anwar and the staff of the Government Primary School Baghanwala for their advice and assistance during my visits to Nandana.

My studies into the Battle of the Indus were greatly facilitated by the assistance of SP Sajjad Mohmand from Nowshera, the officers of Nizampur Police Station (particularly Talawat Khan Moharoor and Darakhshan Mohammed) and especially Mr Malik Haji Shamrose Khan, the malik of nearby Shagai village. Mr Yahya Khan showed me some lesser-known corners of the Naushera battlefield. I would like especially to thank Colonel (retd.) Khushwaqt ul Mulk who, despite his advanced years personally showed me around Chitral Fort where he had lived as a boy, and Major (retd.) Khushamat ul Mulk and Captain (retd.) Siraj ul Mulk, who provided me every assistance in my studies into the Chitral Siege.

I must record my appreciation of my most excellent driver, interpreter and companion Mr Zahid Abassi, who accompanied me on so many trips and waited patiently for me in so many out-of-the-way spots, and whose developing interest in the whole subject stimulated my own, and finally to my wife Fiona, who patiently tolerated the mountains of books and papers around the house and the hours spent tapping away on the computer.





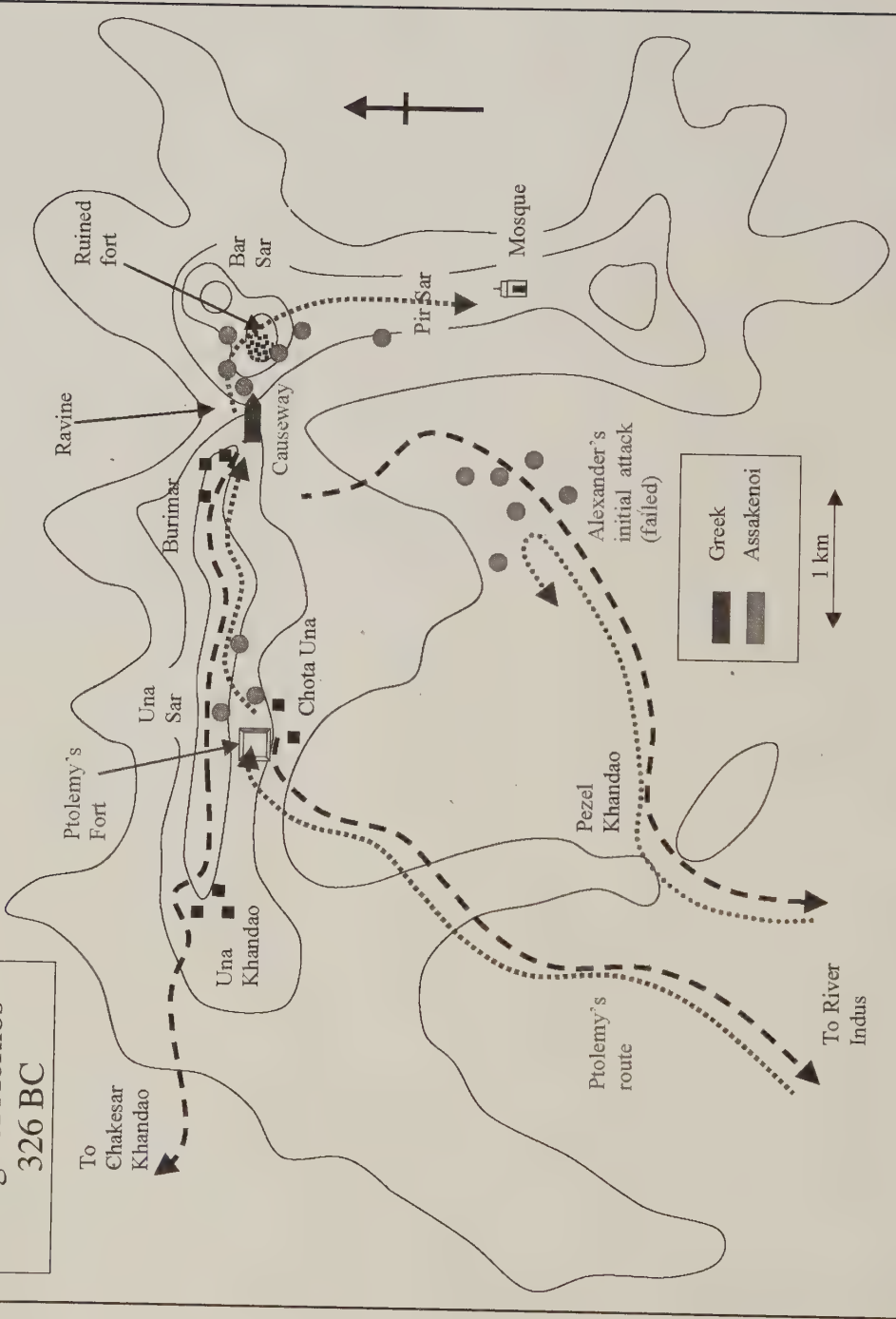
SECTION I

ALEXANDER THE GREAT





# Siege of Aornos 326 BC



# 1

## SIEGE OF AORNOS, 326 BC

In 327 BC, Alexander the Great left Kabul and set out on his conquest of India. He split his army; the main body under Ptolemy advancing down the Kabul River to Peshawar, while he himself led a lighter force on a subsidiary axis across the mountains, entering modern-day Pakistan in Bajaur. Crossing the Panjkora River in Dir, he entered the territory of the Assekenoi, a large and powerful tribe, whose territory extended throughout the hills of modern Dir, Swat and Buner, as far east as the Indus. They initially gathered to oppose Alexander with an army of 2000 cavalry and more than 30,000 infantry (including 7000 Indian mercenaries) besides thirty elephants, but dared not oppose the Greeks in open battle and dispersed again to defend their individual towns and villages.

Alexander crossed the Swat River near Chakdara and swiftly broke the back of the resistance in two decisive battles at Bazira and Ora (now identified as modern Bir-Kot and Udegram respectively). Arrian, the most reliable of Alexander's biographers, tells us that with the fall of these towns, resistance collapsed and the Assakenoi fled 'to a mighty mass or rock in that part of the country called Aornos'. Arrian's history was written some time after the event, but he had probably spoken to Ptolemy, one of Alexander's key commanders during this period, and his account is precise and analytical. He offers a remarkably accurate description of Aornos:

A report is current concerning it that Herakles, the son of Zeus, had found it to be impregnable. The rock is said to have had a circuit of about two hundred stadia and at its lowest elevation a height of eleven stadia.<sup>1</sup> It was ascended by a single path, cut by the hand of man, yet difficult. On the summit of the rock there was, it is also said, plenty of pure water, which gushed out of a copious spring. There was timber besides and as much good arable land as required for its cultivation the labour of a thousand men. On learning of these particulars, Alexander was seized with an ardent desire to capture this mountain also, the story current about Herakles not being the least of the incentives.

Alexander's attack on Aornos remains one of the best-known moments in his whole remarkable career, but despite Arrian's description, for many years its location was unconfirmed. It was not until the 1920s, when the British started to penetrate the hills of Kohistan, that the puzzle was resolved. Sir Aurel Stein, probably the most thorough of the early explorers and historians to consider the matter, concluded that Aornos was the modern Pir Sar, a dominating ridge on the west bank of the Indus above modern Beshem, in the Shangla hills; a judgement that is now generally accepted. The topography of Pir Sar matches Arrian's description with remarkable accuracy. It is a long ridge at an elevation of about 2200 metres, with its southern end overlooking the Indus River. Though the top of the ridge is comparatively broad and flat, the sides are steep (in some places precipitous). Even today, the only practicable access is via Una Sar, a second ridge that joins the northern end of Pir Sar, forming the shape of an inverted 'L'. At the hinge of the two ridges is a deep ravine, which slices right through the feature to a depth of about 100 metres. On the Pir Sar side of the ravine is a steep rocky pinnacle, Bar

Sar, which rises about 200 metres above the general level of the ridgeline and dominates the narrow path across the ravine. It is a formidable natural defensive position, which lay in the furthest corner of the Assakenoi territory, and it appears that the tribesmen relied entirely on its remoteness and natural strength, neglecting to enhance it with man-made obstacles.

Although the reference to Herakles must have appealed to Alexander's sense of destiny, it is likely that he was also mindful of a more prosaic strategic consideration: the need to remove any threat to his tenuous supply lines through the mountains before advancing out onto the plains of India. Therefore, instead of following the fleeing Assakenoi over the mountains to Aornos, Alexander first dropped back down into the plain of the Kabul River, where he rejoined the main army at Charsadda. It was not until he had secured this important district and established a bridgehead over the Indus for later use that he was ready to deal with Aornos. He advanced back up the west bank of the Indus, taking with him the archers, the Agrianians, the brigade of Koinos (one of his best commanders), with the lightest and best-armed men of the phalanx, 200 of the Companions cavalry and 100 horse-archers. This was not only the easiest route to Aornos, it also cut off the Assakenoi from their allies, the Abisares tribe, who inhabited modern Hazara.<sup>2</sup> A logistic base was set up in a town called Embolina,<sup>3</sup> a two-day march south of Aornos, under the command of an officer called Krateros, who was tasked to collect as much corn as possible, and other requisites, in case a protracted siege was required.

Some men familiar with the neighbourhood offered, for a reward, to guide the Greeks up the hill to a preliminary position from where they could launch an attack on Aornos. Alexander selected a body of lightly armed troops —Agrianians and Hypaspists—under the command of Ptolemy for this, and gave orders that he should be informed as soon as the position had been secured. The route was difficult but largely out of sight of the defenders, and Ptolemy's men were able to establish themselves on the ridge-line unopposed. They erected a palisade and dug a trench, and then fired a beacon to inform Alexander of their success. Aurel Stein considered that the most likely spot for Ptolemy's camp was on the small plateau called Chota (Little) Una, on the southern side of Una Sar.

The next day Alexander moved up with the main body of the army. He appears to have taken a different, more exposed route than Ptolemy (probably the track that runs direct to Pir Sar over the Pezal Kandao saddle), but he was spotted by the Assakenoi and after a brisk fight was forced to withdraw. This allowed the defenders to turn on Ptolemy's small camp at Chota Una. Hard fighting ensued throughout the day, with the tribesmen trying to break through the palisade, but the defenders held out and at nightfall the Assakenoi withdrew. That night, using a trusted tribal deserter, Alexander sent a secret message to Ptolemy, telling him that he intended to make another assault the next day, and that Ptolemy was to support this by sallying out from his position to attack the tribesmen from the rear.

At daybreak next morning Alexander again started up the hill, this time using the same route that Ptolemy had taken earlier. He was quickly spotted by the Assakenoi, who again put up a firm resistance to the advancing Greeks. However, by bringing up his reserve troops in echelon, Alexander was able to maintain the momentum, and by the afternoon he had linked up with Ptolemy. The Greeks were now firmly established on Una Sar, but it was now too late in the day to mount an attack on Pir Sar itself, so the fighting died down at nightfall.

The next day showed that the tribesmen had now withdrawn for a final stand at Bar Sar and the deep ravine in front of it. This chasm, about 100 metres deep and 600 metres wide, was (and is) a formidable obstacle. Alexander ordered that a causeway be built across the ravine. Stakes were cut—100 per man—and thrown into the gap with earth. By the end of the first day the causeway had grown by about 200 metres, but progress slowed as the deepest part of

the ravine was reached. By the second day, the Greeks were probably about half way across the gap; close enough for their siege engines, catapults and slingers to be brought forward. These had a range of about 300 metres, so were just able to reach the far side and suppress the enemy fire. Two days later, a few Macedonians managed to establish a precarious hold across the ravine on the lower slopes of the Bar Sar rock. Alexander drove forward the work on the causeway yet more urgently, to link up with this group.

After perhaps a week the causeway was complete, and Alexander probably ordered an early morning attack. Historians of the campaign differ in what happened next. Diodorus suggests that the garrison slipped away in the dark by a pass which the Greeks had purposely left unguarded, a magnanimous gesture which seems out of character with Alexander's normal behaviour. Curtius, in his usual purple prose, describes a full-blown Greek assault in the face of rocks and missiles from the defenders, together with an exciting hand-to-hand contest between Alexander and Karos, the King of the Assakenoi. The most credible description is given, as usual, by Arrian. He records that the Indians, seeing that the end was approaching, sent out a herald, ostensibly to discuss terms for surrender, but in practice to buy time for the garrison to slip away. Alexander, perceiving this, agreed upon the times at which the withdrawal of sentries, and the general evacuation of Pir Sar, would begin. However, once the tribal sentries had been pulled back, he himself, with 700 of his personal bodyguard, swarmed up Bar Sar 'pulling one another up, some at one place, some at another' and at a pre-arranged signal, charged down upon the retreating tribesmen. Caught by surprise, many were killed, others throwing themselves off the precipitous cliffs to their death.

We know little of Alexander's movements after the battle. He made sacrifices to Minerva and Victory on Aornos, and built a fort on the hill, which he entrusted to one Sisikottos, a trustworthy Indian deserter. Returning to his base camp at Embolina, he was briefly diverted by an attempt to destroy the remnants of the Assakenoi army, now commanded by the late king's brother, which was thought to be lurking in the region of modern Buner. He failed to find the tribesmen, but came across their war elephants at pasture in the valley and incorporated these into his own army. He then marched back down the Indus<sup>4</sup> to rejoin Hephaiston, who had been preparing the crossing over the Indus River at Hund, and thence out onto the plains of the Punjab. The Greek historians give no specific dates for the attack on Aornos. However, we know that by the middle of 326 BC Alexander was across the Indus at Taxila, so we may date the Aornos operation with some confidence to early spring 326 BC.<sup>5</sup>

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The topographical features of the battlefield are essentially unchanged since Alexander fought here. One can see why Karos chose Pir Sar for his final stand. It lay in the remotest corner of his kingdom and must have seemed impregnable to the primitive tribesmen. The top is broad, largely devoid of trees and heavily cultivated, supporting Arrian's contention that it had water and could support 1000 farmers. It is also highly defensible; apart from the narrow neck at its northern end, which is totally dominated by Bar Sar, it seems almost totally inaccessible. There is still no regular path leading from the river directly up onto Pir Sar. The best route is the track that runs up to Chota Una, a small plateau about half way along the Una Sar ridge. This is probably the one taken by Ptolemy and still used today by the local Gujars moving their herds up to the summer pastures. Chota Una is the only flattish ground on this part of the hill. It is out of sight from Pir Sar, with a spring nearby and is probably the site of Ptolemy's fort. There is now a small village on the site, occupied in the summer months only. From Chota

Una the path contours eastwards along Una Sar, which grows increasingly narrow until it reaches the village of Burimer, which lies on a series of broad terraces looking across the ravine towards Pir Sar itself. The Greeks almost certainly came along this path and camped here during the siege.

About 300 metres down the path below Burimer, there is natural ledge or platform from which one gets an excellent view of the ravine, Bar Sar immediately beyond (with a small outcrop half way up where the Greeks established their first foothold) and the length of the Pir Sar ridge running south towards the Indus. Alexander's causeway probably began from somewhere near this ledge. To have started below this would not have gained enough height on the other side; to have gone much above it would have required an unacceptably large construction effort. In some ways, it's hard to see why Alexander bothered to build the causeway at all. Even starting from this outcrop, the work would have been prodigious and the tactical advantage gained thereby more than offset by the canalization of the assault; considering the effort involved, it might have been easier to order a direct assault on Bar Sar. Two possible alternative explanations present themselves. Perhaps the real reason for the causeway was not so much to facilitate the assault, but rather to bring the Greek siege engines within range of the top of Bar Sar (something of this is hinted at in Arrian's history). Alternatively, what Arrian called a 'causeway' may in fact have been little more than a pathway constructed over the snow. This ravine fills with deep snow in the winter, which becomes steep, hard packed and extremely treacherous in the Spring. Alexander's attack was made early in the year; he may have needed a flat, broad and firm pathway over the ice-filled ravine to launch his assault.

Beyond the ravine, on top of the Bar Sar peak, are the footings of a substantial building of irregular outline, about 40 metres long and 20 metres wide. The whole structure is semi-buried in earth and vegetation, but the walls are five feet thick, made of unhewn stone slabs, similar in construction to early Buddhist structures in Bir Kot and Taxila. Aurel Stein identifies this as a fort and a local legend has it that this building is called Landi Saart, because it houses the graves of seven kings. However, its provenance has not, as far as I know, been seriously studied.

There are two further points of interest on Pir Sar, though neither is probably connected to the Alexandrian story. In the centre of the ridge is a small *ziarat* that is supposed to mark the grave of a Muslim saint called Pir Beghan, who lived there before the Pushtuns took the land. Three hundred yards south of this there is a mosque, which has two large white calcareous stone slabs, clearly of ancient origin, supporting the roof.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the Karakorum Highway to Beshem, where you turn left up the road leading over the Shangla Pass to Swat. About 14 kilometres up the valley, you come to the village of Karora. Two kms above the town, turn left up the road to Chakesar. About 15 kilometres up this road (mostly metalled, but in poor condition), past the small village of Upal, you reach the top of the pass and the hamlet of Chakesar Kandao where you can park the car.

From here a footpath climbs steeply up onto the ridge of Una Sar, then runs all the way along the ridge among the pine trees to Burimer. On the path you get some spectacular views down to the Indus below and, as you approach Burimer, the flanks of Pir Sar. There is a small, clean spring about 1 kilometre west of Little Una, and water is also available at Burimer. From here the path drops into the ravine, and there is then a steep scramble back up to Bar Sar and



thence onto the open fields of Pir Sar itself. The walk from Chasekar Kandao to Burimer is lovely, but takes at least three hours each way and is not for the unfit. It is possible to make it from Beshem to Pir Sar and back in one day, but it is a long and tiring trip and it is probably better to make it a two-day expedition, camping overnight on Una Sar (where there are plenty of suitable sheltered spots).

### NOTES

1. An ancient Greek stadium is equivalent to 607 feet, making these dimensions 23 miles around and 2035 metres high.
2. It is noteworthy that very similar considerations drove the British plan of operations in the Ambeyla campaign against the Bunerwals in the same area over two thousand years later.
3. Embolina possibly derives from a combination of Amb and Balimah, twin towns that lie on opposite banks of the Indus near Sitana.
4. His route was blocked by a tribal chief called Erix, who thus earned himself a brief if inglorious footnote in history. Before the Greeks could attack, the unfortunate chieftain was killed by his own men and his head brought on a plate to Alexander as a token of submission.
5. Some tentative collateral for this is provided by two separate references to the presence of snow. Aristobulos mentions the use of packed snow in the causeway. Chares of Mytilene, one of Alexander's chief officials, says that at the siege of 'the Indian town of Petra' (probably Aornos), Alexander ordered trenches to be dug and filled with snow, to provide a water supply for the troops.

## 2

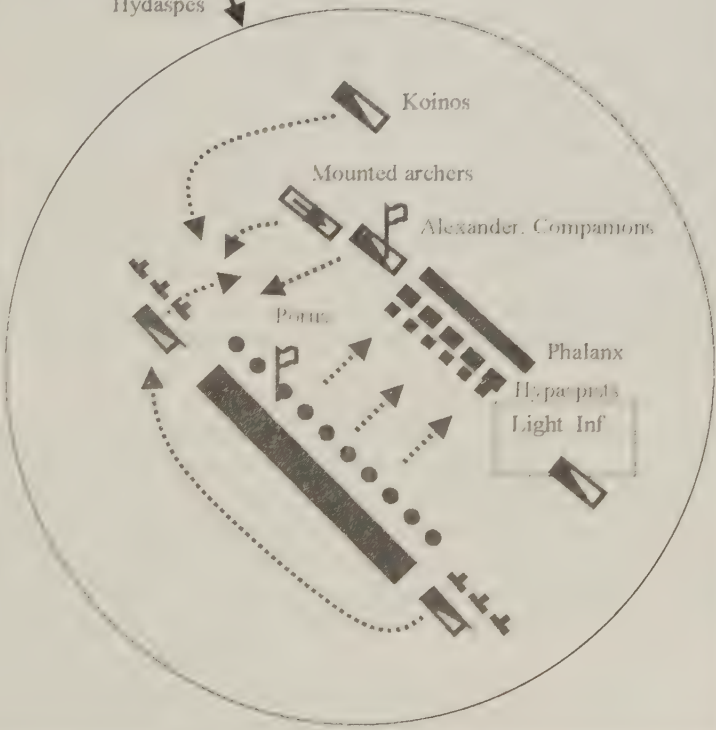
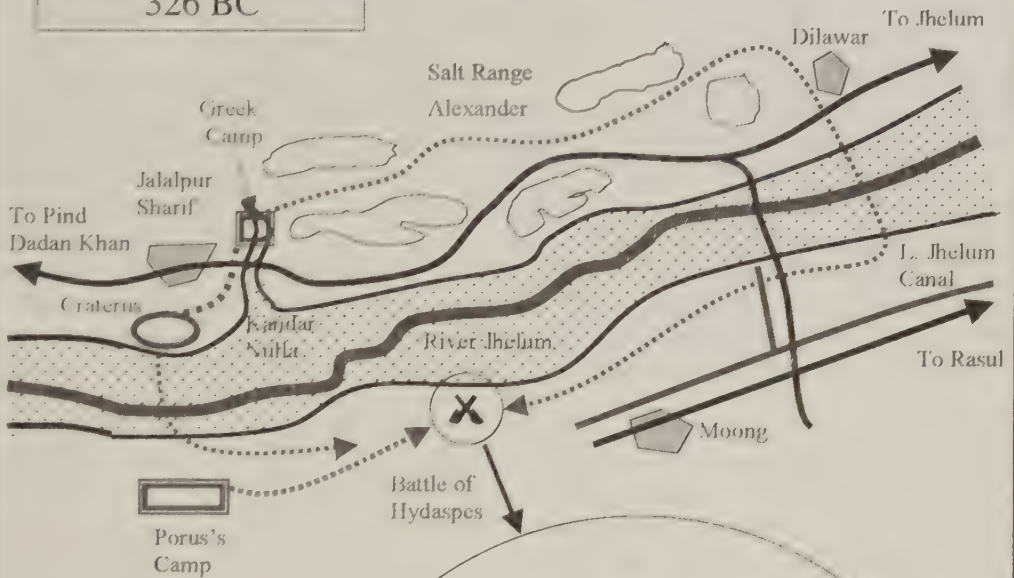
### BATTLE OF HYDASPES RIVER, 326 BC

In March 326 BC, Alexander arrived in Taxila and rested there awhile, enjoying the pleasures of the sophisticated metropolis, and conducting desultory negotiations with Poros and Abisares, the Rajahs of the Punjab and Kashmir respectively. Aware that there were more rivers ahead of him, Alexander sent Koinos back to the Indus to dismantle the pontoon bridge that had been left there and bring it forward overland. It was therefore not until June that he started out for the River Hydaspes (now Jhelum),<sup>1</sup> which marked the border of Poros's kingdom, but by this time the monsoon had begun. The Greeks marched over the Salt Range on the ancient 'Royal Road' via Chakwal and Nandana in a torrential downpour, heading for Girjak (probably modern Jalalpur Sharif),<sup>2</sup> where there was a ford by which Alexander hoped to cross the river. However, by the time he got there, the Jhelum was in flood, with Poros, who had sequestered all the available boats, camped in strength on the other side. The bulk of Poros's army was infantry, probably around 20,000 strong. His cavalry was comparatively weak, probably no more than 3000, but these were supported by about 250 chariots and 200 war elephants.

The core of Alexander's army was still Greek, phalanxes of heavy infantry armed with long spears, Macedonian cavalry and Thracian slingers and javelin throwers. These were now supplemented by troops from Central Asia—principally bowmen and mounted archers—and a contingent of the Taxilan army. The army, which totalled around 50,000, was numerically stronger than the Indians but a direct crossing of the swollen river in the face of Poros's elephants looked impractical. Although the Greeks had seen elephants at Taxila, and had probably incorporated some into the army, they had never faced them in battle and were clearly apprehensive at the prospect. It seemed that Alexander was checked, and he set about reinforcing this impression. He camped on the riverside at Jalalpur Sharif in full view of the Indians and, letting it be known that he intended to wait until the monsoon ended before he attacked, he ordered up large convoys of grain, as if settling down for a prolonged wait. Fires were lit at night and ostentatious manoeuvres were repeatedly staged by day. Poros was initially alarmed by these demonstrations, but after about two weeks he began to relax and failed to spot that the Macedonian cavalry were discreetly reconnoitering the higher reaches of the river for a suitable crossing site. They found what they were looking for about 17 kilometres upstream, where a spur of the Salt Range comes down to the river. Here the river narrowed, with a broad nullah on the home bank and a large wooded island in midstream that provided cover for the crossing.

Alexander now split his forces. The bulk of the army under Krateros was left at Jalalpur to distract Poros while Alexander with about 5000 cavalry and 6000 infantry, supported by 1000 Bactrian and Scythian mounted archers, moved covertly through the hills north of the town to the crossing site. The crossing itself was made at night in a violent monsoon storm, the cavalry on rafts and the infantry using improvised floats made of animal skins and straw, as well as some of the boats brought up earlier from the Indus bridge. It was not easy. The river was deep and fast, and what the Greeks thought was the far bank turned out to be a small island with

# Battle of Hydaspes 326 BC





another, faster stream beyond. It was daylight before they struggled wet and cold onto the southern bank of the river.

Word of the crossing had been brought to Poros by his scouts and he dispatched his son (or possibly his brother Hages) with a small force<sup>3</sup> to oppose it. These came on the Greeks as they were still forming up after crossing the river. However, the heavy six-man Indian war chariots became bogged in the monsoon mud and Alexander was easily able to defeat this small force with his cavalry and horse archers alone, without the need to commit his bedraggled infantry.

Alexander now pressed on down the southern bank of the river with his cavalry, bearing down on the right flank of the main Indian army, with his infantry following on as best as it could. Poros was forced to realign his forces to meet the new threat. Leaving a small contingent to oppose Krateros on the river he moved the bulk of his army to face Alexander. He chose a flat, sandy plain (probably near the modern town of Moong) where his elephants and cavalry would have room to manoeuvre. He deployed his army in the conventional manner of the times, with the infantry concentrated in the centre, behind a line of 200 war-elephants spaced at about 30-metre intervals (the Greek authors remark how this gave the Indian line the appearance of a city wall, with the elephants appearing as towers). Poros placed himself on the largest and most magnificent of his elephants towards the left of the line. His remaining cavalry and chariots were on the flanks.

Seeing that he was opposed by the full strength of the Indian army, Alexander halted his cavalry to allow time for the infantry to catch up, and to give his men a short rest. His infantry was deployed in the centre, in three lines—a screen of light infantry in front; the Hypaspists, or heavy infantry under the command of Seleukos behind these; and five battalions of the phalanx in the rear. He himself commanded the right wing, comprising the bulk of his cavalry reinforced by his small force of mounted archers. Two additional divisions of cavalry, under the experienced Koinos, were held back out of sight on the extreme right wing. A light cavalry screen, possibly reinforced with elephants, covered the left flank. Alexander seems to have had a clear plan in his mind: to destroy Poros's cavalry early in the battle, thus allowing his own horsemen freedom of manoeuvre against the flanks of the main Indian divisions before they were able to overwhelm his own tired and outnumbered infantry. He gave specific instructions to this effect; Koinos was to be prepared to 'hang close upon the rear' of the Indian cavalry once it had become engaged, and the phalanx and Guard battalions were ordered 'not to engage until it was evident that the Indians, both horse and foot, had been thrown into confusion by the Macedonian cavalry'.

Before Poros had time to order a general advance (which would almost certainly have overwhelmed the Macedonian infantry) Alexander launched a series of attacks to draw out the Indian left wing. First the mounted archers went forward and knocked out most of the remaining Indian chariots. Then Alexander himself charged the Indian cavalry at the head of the Companions, forcing Poros to bring across his remaining uncommitted cavalry from his right wing. This was the moment Alexander had been waiting for. Koinos, with his two uncommitted divisions, charged down on the rear of the Poros's horsemen, driving them inwards into the shelter of the Indian elephant line where, without the freedom to manoeuvre, they became entangled with the main Indian force.

Though Poros's cavalry was largely destroyed, his centre, led by the war-elephants, now advanced upon the Macedonian infantry. A general and terrible mêlée now developed. The Greeks, though better trained, were greatly outnumbered and the phalanx nearly broke under the shock of the elephants, many of whom, maddened by wounds and noise, ran amok through the battlefield, trampling Greek and Indian alike. As the infantry struggled and fought, the

Macedonian cavalry, now grouped into a single division (as a result of the battle rather than an order), repeatedly charged the now-unprotected flanks and rear of the massed Indian divisions, whose tight formations began to break up. Poros made a final charge with his reserve of forty elephants, but the Greeks were beginning to learn how to deal with these behemoths, and many were brought down. Caught between the Greek phalanx and Alexander's marauding cavalry, the Indian army began to shatter. Krateros, perceiving this, forced a crossing of the river and came up in time to take over the pursuit from Alexander's exhausted men. Poros continued to fight on, until he was severely wounded in the right shoulder and withdrew in some order with a small rearguard. Large numbers of Indians were slaughtered; the Greek historians put the Indian casualties at around 12,000 infantry and almost all of the cavalry, with their own losses about 1000. However, despite his crushing victory, as soon as the battle was over Alexander sent Taxiles, the Prince of Taxila after Poros, offering terms. He rode up to the retreating elephant as close as it was safe, but was recognized by Poros who, despite his injury, twisted around on his beast and almost succeeded in spearing his old enemy and rival with his lance. Whereupon Taxiles wheeled and rode back to Alexander who, anxious to take the king alive, sent after him a more welcome ambassador. In due course, Poros reluctantly presented himself and, on being asked how he wished to be treated, replied 'like a King', at which Alexander, apparently impressed by his courage during the battle and his fortitude in defeat, reinstated him to his throne, albeit as a vassal ruler.

Alexander founded two cities to commemorate his victory, one called Nicaea on the site of the battlefield and the other Bucephala, after his famous horse Bucephalus which died during the campaign. The most credible accounts suggest that Bucephalus died of old age<sup>4</sup> rather than in the battle itself, probably on the west bank of the river, either in the camp or at the river crossing site.

The Battle of the Hydaspes marks the highwater mark of Alexander's remarkable career. His tactical management of the battle was outstanding and showed him at the height of his powers as a commander. However, even in his hour of triumph, his unusually magnanimous treatment of Poros (his defeated opponents were seldom allowed to keep their heads, let alone their crowns) suggests that Alexander himself recognized that his strategic position was not as secure as might have been expected. If so, his concerns were fully vindicated; a few weeks later the army, with Koinos the hero of the Hydaspes battle as their spokesman, finally refused to go any further and Alexander was forced to turn for home. It is clear that the Macedonians' nerves had been shaken. The monsoon weather and the heat were certainly factors in this, but the troops had been traumatized by the ferocity of the fighting at the Hydaspes and their first encounter with massed Indian war-elephants, and discomfited by rumours that the kingdoms deeper into India could field even greater numbers of these beasts than Poros. The Hydaspes battle was the final straw for Alexander's tired and homesick soldiers and Poros should perhaps get the credit for this.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Although few of Alexander's movements can be definitively located, much can be surmised. Jalalpur Sharif is the most likely spot for his camp on the Jhelum. There is considerable archaeological evidence of a substantial ancient town on the site, which was probably associated with some sort of crossing (probably a ford or ferry). We know the Macedonians came down through the Salt Range via Chakwal and Nandana, which would have brought them out on the Jhelum in just this area. Furthermore, the configuration of the town fits what

we know of the tactical story. It lies at the southern edge of the Salt Range spur that runs down to the river at this spot. To the south of the town the ground is open and flat and easily visible from across the river. To the north is broken hilly ground, from which runs a large nullah called Gandar Nullah.<sup>5</sup> The town has a splendid and imposing memorial to Pir Haider Shah that is well worth a visit, not only for its own sake, but also for the excellent views it offers over the general area and the river. To the north of the town, on the banks of the nullah, an imposing Alexander the Great Memorial and Study Centre is under construction.

From Gandar Nullah a bad but passable track snakes some 17 kilometres through the Salt Range hills to emerge at Dilawar, 3 kilometres above the modern Rasul barrage. There is another large nullah here where the crossing force could have assembled. It is probably Alexander's crossing site, though any topographical evidence has been covered by the lake created by the barrage. However, the stretch of river immediately below the barrage, which is much narrower and swifter than the broad sluggish stream lower down opposite Jalalpur, matches the description of the river given by the Greeks. It is likely that the whole operation (both the move through the hills and the crossing itself) were conducted in one night to preserve security. Given the distances involved, this would have been possible but difficult, and may explain why the Greeks struggled to establish themselves firmly on the far bank by first light.

Once Alexander was across the river, he turned right and followed the southern bank of the river back down to where Poros was still encamped facing Krateros. The battlefield itself cannot be precisely located with any certainty. The course of the river itself has changed substantially over the ages, and the surrounding plains have been washed by innumerable floods. All that can be said with any confidence is that the battlefield was near Moong, an area that accords with the choreography of the events and the Greek historians' description of the site as a 'flat sandy plain'.<sup>6</sup> Early British historians were wont to locate it at Chillianwalla, the site of a critical battle of their own in 1849, but this seems to be based more on sentiment than analysis. There are also occasional references to the battle being fought at a place called Kari. However, this should probably not be equated with the modern village of Khorī, about ten kilometers northwest of Dinga, which is upstream of where Alexander crossed the river.

The locations of the towns of Nicaea and Buchephala have been much disputed. Nicaea, built close to the battlefield itself, is probably the modern town of Moong. Buchephala, which was on the right bank of the river, grew into an important commercial emporium, mentioned in later Greek texts. It is probably modern Jalalpur Sharif, where extensive archaeological evidence of a Graeco-Indian city has been found.

## HOW TO GET THERE

The quickest way from Islamabad is down the Motorway towards Lahore. If you have time, come off at Balkasar and follow the country roads along Alexander's probable route through the Salt Range—through Chakwal, Choa Saidan Shah and Ara to Jalalpur Sharif. The quicker but more prosaic route is to stay on the Motorway for two more junctions (to the Lilla exit) and take the road east up the north bank of the Jhelum, through Pind Dadan Khan to Jalalpur Sharif (35 kilometres). Eleven kilometres north of Jalalpur is the Rasul barrage, and about 3 kilometres above that is the village of Dilawar, Alexander's probable crossing site. Alternatively, you can cross the river on the barrage and, turning right on the far side, reach Moong a few kilometres downstream.

You can also approach the site from the opposite direction, via the Grand Trunk Road, turning right (west) in Serai Alamgir, immediately after crossing the River Jhelum. Follow the road south-west along the right bank of the Upper Jhelum Canal, with attractive views down to the river on your right. After about 30 kilometres you reach Rasul, where the road swings round to the left and crosses the canal. About 5 kilometres beyond that is the right turning which takes you to the southern end of the Rasul barrage. Either route from Islamabad will take about two and a half hours.

### NOTES

1. The word Hydaspes probably derives from Vidasta, an ancient Sanskrit name for the River Jhelum.
2. Some authorities suggest that Girjak was modern Haranpur, near Pind Dadan Khan.
3. Aristobulos states that this force comprised only sixty chariots, but the normally reliable Ptolemy gives the numbers as 2000 men and 120 chariots.
4. The horse was very old, perhaps thirty, and had carried Alexander throughout his campaigns.
5. Some commentators have suggested that the name Gandar is a derivation of Alexander.
6. Elliott mentions that in his day local people were able to point out an area uncultivated ground near Moong called Ghorian Kabra ('burial ground of the whites') which they believed held the remains of Greek soldiers killed in the battle. On 24 Dec 1899, a pot of Greek coins was found in this area. These were of the type called Pan or Panas, bearing the Greek letters NIK. Gen Cunningham identified these letters with Nikaea, but modern scholars believe they were probably minted in the Greek city of Nicomedia circa 300 AD.



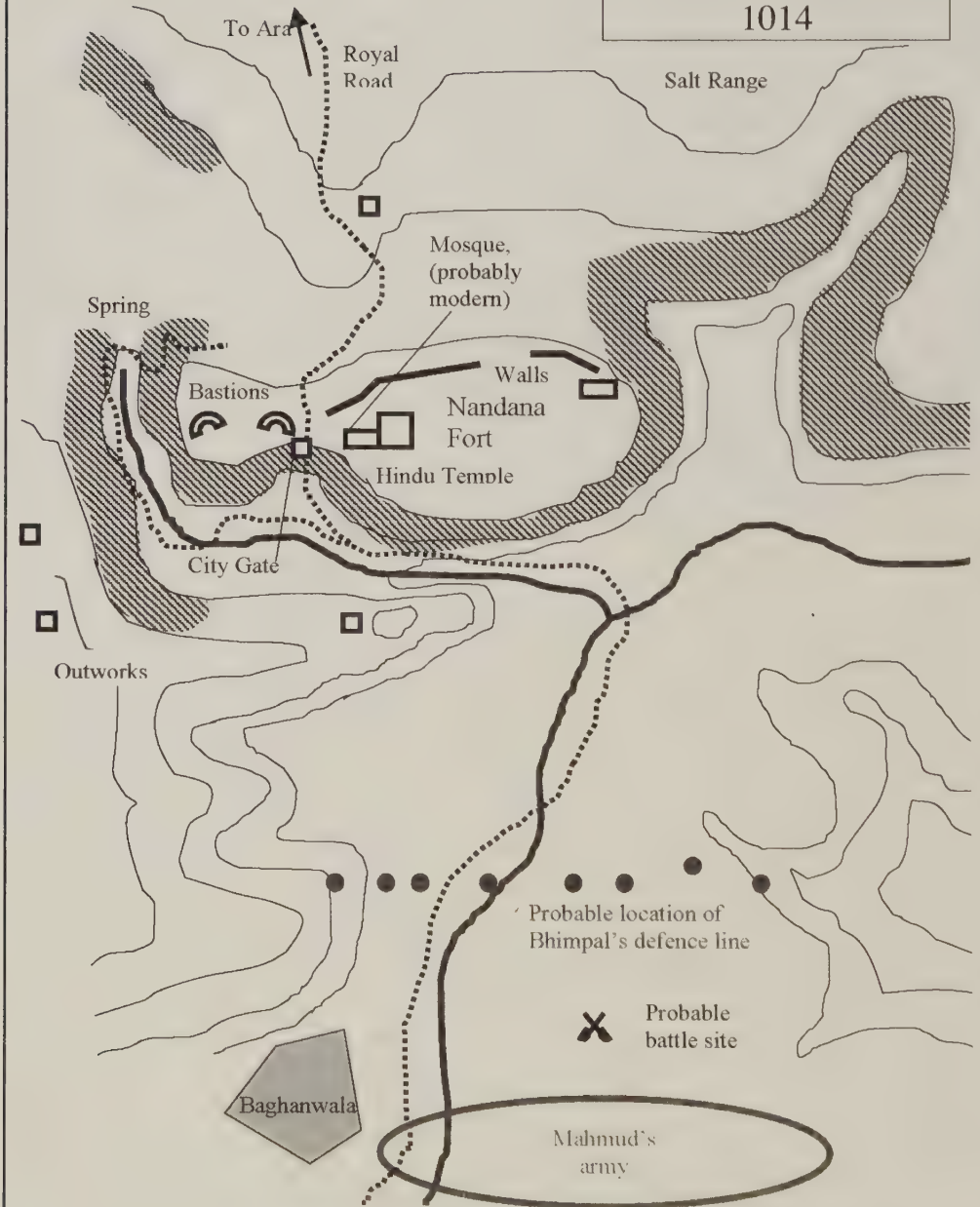
SECTION II

EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD





# Battle of Nandana 1014



# 3

## BATTLE OF NANDANA, 1014

In the tenth century, the Hindu Shahiya dynasty ruled most of what is now northern Pakistan from Swat to Multan. However, towards the end of the century the Shahiyas began to be threatened by the burgeoning power of the new kingdom of Ghazni, in modern Afghanistan, which was prospering under the aggressive and acquisitive rule of its Sultan, Subuktigin. In a series of battles, Subuktigin expelled the Shahiyas from all their territory west of Peshawar, but it was with the accession of his son Mahmud to the throne that a showdown between the Ghaznavids and the Shahiyas became inevitable. Mahmud was attracted by the riches of the Indian plains as well as the opportunity to spread the Islamic faith, so when the Caliph of Baghdad acknowledged him as an independent sovereign in the year 999, he made it obligatory on himself to conduct an expedition to Hind every year.

Two years later Mahmud launched his first major assault on Hindustan. Jaipal the Shahiya king advanced to meet him with a huge force of over 40,000 men and the two armies met near Peshawar on 27 November 1001.<sup>1</sup> The battle raged all day until the Hindus, unable to withstand the repeated charges of the Muslims, broke and fled, leaving 5000 dead on the battlefield. The Shahiya capital Waihind<sup>2</sup> was captured and booty 'beyond all bounds of calculation' taken. Jaipal himself was taken prisoner with no less than fifteen of his sons and grandsons. He was ransomed back to his people for a vast sum and soon thereafter burnt himself to death in shame.

Seven years later, Jaipal's son Ananadpal, apprehensive at Mahmud's growing power and in despair at his repeated incursions into Shahiya territory, resolved to take the field against him. Drawing on the support of neighbouring Hindu rajas, he assembled another vast army, which advanced towards Peshawar. Mahmud learned of this in midwinter but, despite the severity of the weather, he left Ghazni on 31 December 1008, crossed the Indus and met the invaders on the plain opposite Waihind.<sup>3</sup> The Hindus fought with great courage, but were again utterly defeated. The Ghaznavids occupied large swathes of territory east of the Indus and the Shahiyas were forced to move their capital back to Nandana in the Salt Range. Anandpal died and was replaced by his son, Trilochanpal.

Mahmud now resolved to finally crush the power of the Shahiyas. In the colourful language of ul Utbi, his principal biographer:

The Sultan, in order to fulfil his previous vow, commenced a brisk march into another conquest, which might be the margin of the ornamental title page of other victories and settlements, the record of which might adorn the page of time, the height of whose glory might be a heavy load (of merit) and might be a cause of confirming the advancement and approximation of his Highness to glory and exalting his greatness.

He set out from Ghazni in November 1013, marching by way of Kabul, but was forced to turn back by unseasonably heavy snow and did not start again until the following Spring. Entering

the provinces of India he commenced his usual policy of rapine and plunder and, in ul Utbi's words:

Began with an open hand to devastate the lands, to punish the infidel, to overturn the idols and make an example high and low. As to the Prince of these doomed ones, and the chief of the insignificant ones, he sent him abject and prostrate to hell, and his viler followers scattered and dispersed like leaves exposed to the wind.

Despite these diversions, he in due course arrived in front of Nandana, which occupies a strategic position on a small hill guarding the narrow pass on the southern slopes of the Salt Range, where the old Royal Road<sup>4</sup> drops down onto the Punjab plains. From below the fortress seems impregnable, perched on the top of a towering rocky outcrop protected by sheer gorges on both sides. However from above, at the top of the Salt Range escarpment, it seems far less dominating. Its strategic significance comes not so much from its tactical strength as from its location dominating the main pass down from the Salt Range to the Jhelum. Indeed, the fort actually lies astride the Royal Road, so that travellers up or down the road had to pass through the citadel, with its various outworks and guardhouses.

The fort itself was comparatively modest, covering only about 20 hectares. This did not compare in scale to the huge fortresses that the Shahiyas erected on their frontiers, let alone the constructions of Sher Shah Suri or the Mughals. It was similar in size to Hund, and like the old capital lay deep inside Shahiya territory, so its function was probably as much administrative as military. The fort may have had a tank or a well, though there are no signs of either and its position on a rocky outcrop makes a well unlikely. More probably the inhabitants relied for water on a copious spring that rises in the gorge just to the west of the fort, which can be readily reached by a well-hidden albeit precipitous path.

As Mahmud approached Nandana, Trilochanpal set off for the 'Kashmir Pass'<sup>5</sup> to gather reinforcements, leaving the fort with a strong garrison commanded by his son (or possibly a governor) called Niddar Bhimpal or Bhimpal the Fearless. Mahmud was coming from the north, and probably approached Nandana along the Royal Road, which ran down the hill from Ara on the escarpment above towards the northern sector of the fort. This was the weakest point of the defences and one would have expected the Muslims to mount their attacks from this side. In fact the bulk of the Ghaznavid army seems to have bypassed the fort and deployed on the plains below, around the modern village of Baghanwala. This cannot have been easy, because the hills on both sides of the pass are precipitous, but the uncritically partisan ul Utbi makes light of this, referring to the Ghaznavids 'penetrating the pass like gimlets into wood, ascending the hills like mountain goats and descending them like torrents of water'.

It is not clear why Mahmud abandoned his advantageous tactical position on the hills above Nandana and moved his army down onto the plains, opposite the strongest (indeed almost impregnable) southern approach to the fort. Perhaps the Ghaznavids were not strong enough to dislodge Bhimpal's forces from its prepared defensive positions. However, they were probably confident that if they could entice him out onto the plains where there was room to manoeuvre, they could use their superiority in cavalry to overwhelm the ponderous Shahiya army by rapid tactical movement, as they had already done twice in recent years. Another consideration may have been water; the hills above Nandana are dry and Mahmud may have been forced to move onto the plains where there was plentiful supply of water for his men.

Whatever the reason, the Ghaznavids seem to have invested Nandana from the south. Bhimpal entrenched himself in a strong position 'between the two hills at the junction of which the fort was situated' and closed the entrance to the pass with a line of elephants, and Mahmud,

facing him on the plain, apparently rested his men for a few days. After several days' fruitless skirmishing the Muslims did induce a detachment of Bhimpal's forces to emerge from their defences onto the plain, and promptly destroyed it, after which the Shahiyas stayed firmly in their entrenchments. However, after some time Bhimpal received reinforcements (presumably from Trilochanpal) and decided to take the offensive. The Muslims attributed this change of heart to misplaced confidence, but there may have been other factors—perhaps, with more mouths to feed, the garrison was running low on food. In any event, Bhimpal, throwing caution to the winds, personally led his army out onto the plain, with his back resting on the hills and his flanks protected by elephants. Now the end came quickly. The main Shahiya attack was beaten back and Bhimpal ordered a charge of elephants, but the Muslims assailed them with such a deadly shower of arrows into their eyes and trunks that they too were forced to retreat. Mahmud now launched such a furious counter-attack that the whole Hindu line broke and the survivors fled back to the safety of the fort.

The Sultan now laid siege to the fort itself. Mines were dug under the walls and the Turkoman archers maintained a terrific shower of arrows onto the defenders. A Persian poem describes the scene:

All around the castle were iron-clothed men  
On all side of the fortress was an iron-cutting circle....

It is likely that the Muslims had also captured the spring, the only source of water for the fort, and realizing that it would be impossible to hold out long, the garrison surrendered unconditionally. Mahmud entered the fort in triumph and captured immense booty, including a large number of elephants and a big store of arms and other valuables. Ul Utbi reports that 'slaves were so plentiful that they became very cheap; and men of respectability in their native land (India) were degraded by becoming slaves of common shopkeepers (in Ghazni)'. An idol was found in a temple with an inscription that it had been made 40,000 years ago—which, according to ul Utbi showed how ignorant the Hindus were, because, as everyone knew 'only 7000 years have elapsed since the creation of the world'.

The fall of Nandana effectively marked the end of Hindu rule over the western Punjab. The local chiefs sent a delegation with sixty elephants to Mahmud, offering fealty and a large annual tribute, which became a fixed source of revenue for the court at Ghazni. The area was opened up for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Large-scale conversions to Islam began and Mahmud ordered mosques to be built all over the country, with teachers to instruct the converts in the rudiments of their new faith.

Nandana was not destroyed; indeed it seems to have flourished under its new Muslim rulers. Mahmud appointed one Sarugh as the commander of the city<sup>6</sup> and in August 1014 returned to Ghazni. Only three years later the great scientist Abu Rehan ul Beruni came here and made his famous measurement of the curvature of the earth from which he made the first accurate calculation of the circumference of the globe. Ul Beruni was from Khiva, and had been captured by Mahmud in an earlier campaign. After several unhappy years as a 'trophy intellectual' in the court at Ghazni he managed to get permission to visit India. In his work *Qanun al Masudi* he wrote, 'When I happened to be living in the fort of Nandana in the land of India, I found a high mountain to its west and also a plain to its south, and it occurred to my mind that I should examine this method there.'

Trilochanpal withdrew further east and attempted to organize further resistance from the remaining provinces of his much-diminished kingdom in a series of short-lived alliances with the Hindu rajas of Sharwa and Kalinjar. However, he suffered further defeats at the hands of

the Muslims in 1018 and 1019 and, after an unsuccessful attempt to make his peace with the Sultan, he was assassinated by some of his own followers in 1021. His son Bhimpal the Fearless, the defender of Nandana, succeeded to the throne (by now little more than a title) but with his death in 1026 the Shahiya dynasty came to an end. Mahmud did not long survive him, dying the following year. With his death, the Ghaznavid empire also collapsed, but his lasting legacy was the establishment of Muslim dominance over the trans-Indus regions of India.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Nandana is a little-known but beautiful spot, well worth a visit in conjunction with a trip to the nearby Khewra salt mines. The Royal Road, now only a track, runs up the river from the nearby village of Baghanwala. This was the area where Bhimpal deployed his army in their initial defensive positions. Though no trace of these remains, one can readily discern how secure such a position would have been. At the foot of the hill the path leaves the river and zigzags up the steep slope below the fort, passing through outworks and guardhouses before it enters the fort by a narrow, ruined gate. The fort stands on a dominant buttress, surrounded on three sides by cliffs, with deep gorges on both sides. The prominent ruin in the centre of the fort is a Hindu temple with, close by, a lower building partially restored as a mosque. The footings of two large bastions can still be seen on the knoll at the western end of the fort, with the remains of some sections of north wall running across the slope.

Below the north wall is a shallow valley with a dry stream. At the western end of the stream, where it plunges down into the ravine, there is a small precipitous path that leads down to the spring at the bottom of the gorge. This is a beautiful spot, almost hidden from above, with pools of clear water. From here you can follow the stream back down the gorge to Baghanwala. Though this was outside the main walls of the fort, it was probably the main (and perhaps only) water supply for the garrison. There are the remains of outworks and blockhouses on the top of the cliffs just to the west of the gorge as well as down the stream, which suggest that this area would have been defended in times of siege. Another spring rises in the ravine to the east of the fort, but this is further away and would have been impractical for the garrison to defend.

From the fort, the Royal Road runs up the hill to the village of Ara, on the top of the escarpment about 5 kilometres to the north. In most places it is now reduced to little more than a camel track, but some remains of paving and stone revetments can be seen. From the fort it is hard to pick it out, but the remains of outworks and a cairn marking the track can be seen on the lower slopes of the spur that runs up to the ridgeline directly opposite the fort. It is a stiff one hour's walk to Ara.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the Motorway from Islamabad, coming off at the Lilla exit. Take the road east up the north bank of the Jhelum, through Pind Dadan Khan. Twenty kilometres beyond Pind Dadan Khan you come to the small village of Dhariyala Jalip (called locally Factory Mor). At the far end of the village, beside the sign for the Gharibwal cement factory, turn left. After 2 kilometres turn right for Baghanwala. After a further 4 kilometres take the right fork at the Government Model School Baghanwala. This road peters out about 1 kilometre beyond the school, in the



village of Baghanwala, beside the stream. From here you can see Nandana fort on the ridgeline above—it is only half an hour's walk up the stream to get there.

### NOTES

1. The location of the battlefield is not known.
2. Modern Hund on the banks of the Indus near Swabi
3. The precise location of the battlefield is lost, but was probably somewhere near Hazro.
4. In ancient times this was the main route from Peshawar to Lahore. It crossed the Indus at Hund and ran through Taxila and Chakwal, dropping out of the Salt Range at Nandana and crossing the Jhelum at the ford at Jalalpur Sharif. Alexander the Great came this way when he entered India in 326 BC, but it was not until the road was substantially improved by Chandragupta Maurya that it became known as the 'Royal Road'. It fell into disuse when Sher Shah Suri built the Grand Trunk Road, but remnants of the old road can still be found, particularly in the Salt Range near Nandana.
5. Probably the lower part of the Loharin Valley.
6. Sarugh remained in charge of Nandana until Mahmud died in 1027.

capture the fugitive prince, and returned empty-handed to Chingez, reporting that 'The heat of this place slays men, and the water is neither fresh nor clear'.

Jalaluddin survived, but lived on as an incidental figure. He married the daughter of a petty local raja but his attempts to establish an alliance with Sultan ul Tutmish in Delhi were rebuffed by that wily potentate, who was anxious not to provoke Chingez Khan into invading the Punjab. Jalaluddin, now reduced to little better than an adventurer and bandit, drifted south down the Indus and left the subcontinent through Makran, thence fading from history.

The Battle of the Indus had a broader historical significance. It was the last stand of Khwaresmi chivalry, with whose demise Muslim rule over Central Asia was irretrievably broken. So, though India was spared the Mongol conquest, the Muslim rulers in Delhi were cut off from the main Islamic societies further west, and thus started the development of the unique Islamic culture of South Asia that still echoes today.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

There is some uncertainty about the precise location of the battlefield, but several specific topographical clues are known. It took place on the right bank of the Indus south of Attock,<sup>6</sup> near to the Nil-Ab ferry, between a bend in the river and some precipitous mountains. There was a 30-foot drop into the river bed and the water was calm enough for a horse to swim across. The battlefield was flat enough to allow the deployment of massed infantry and an effective cavalry charge. Furthermore, assuming that the figure of 30,000 given for his army is correct, we may reckon that, using the tactics of the period, the frontage of Jalaluddin's position was perhaps 5 kilometres.

Based on these points, by far the most likely location for the battle is around the village of Nizampur, 35 kilometres downstream of Attock and only 10 kilometres below the village of Bagh Nilab, where there is still a ferry over the Indus today. The ground here fits the description that we have and local tradition holds that the battle took place here. It is a rolling plain, about 5 kilometres across, between a loop in the Indus and the hills of what is now the Khawarra Reserved Forest. Between the plain and the Khawarra hills is a very deep and steep gorge, which would have been Jalaluddin's natural left flank, and fully explains why Bela Noyan had such difficulty breaking through on this side, despite the weak Khwaresmi defences here. The plain is somewhat cut up with nullahs, but open enough to accommodate the sort of battle that took place. Close to the battlefield there is a rocky outcrop over the river. Local legend has it that this is where Jalaluddin swam the river and the spot is still called Ghora Trap, which means 'horse's leap' in Pushtu. There is a matching rock on the other side of the river called Ghora Mar ('dead horse'), where the imprint of a hoof can apparently be seen. The river here is less than 50 yards across and the current is fierce, but just below it widens into a calm stream that a horse could easily swim. The foreshore on the opposite (Punjabi) side of the river is, intriguingly, called Sujanda ('red flag' in Pushtu) and the rough hill tract behind this, running up to the Kala Chita hills, is called Chul e Jalali (Jalal's Wasteland). Tantalizingly, the whole region around Nizampur is called Khawarrah, though this probably refers to the large number of nullahs (*khawar* in Pushtu) that run down to the Indus in this area, rather than the Khwarezmi dynasty. Kajlah, where Jalaluddin's rearguard under Uz Khan was destroyed by the Mongols, has not been located, but lies one night's hard march (perhaps 20 kilometres) to the north-west, probably in the Khattak Hills near Cherat.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Turn left off the Grand Trunk Road in Khairabad, immediately across the bridge at Attock, and a few yards before the arch that marks the start of NWFP. Follow this road south along the right bank of the Indus, past the old British railway bridge, towards Kohat. After about 10 kilometres, the ground opens up into an attractive, broad and grassy plain between the Khattak Hills on your right and the river on your left. About 20 kilometres from the GT Road is the junction for the Askari cement factory, which can be seen a little to the left of the road. Six kilometres beyond this take the small road that runs off to the left to the village of Shagai. From the village it is a 20-minute walk to the main battlefield area, and a further 20 minutes to Ghora Trap. Alternatively, you can carry on along the main road for another 3 kilometres to Nizampur (a very helpful police station here) from where you can walk down the nullah that runs through the village to the battleground. The whole area is picturesque and worth a picnic visit. The trip will take about two and a half hours from Islamabad.

## NOTES

1. He was so destitute that no shroud could be found in which to bury him.
2. The argument arose when Amir Malik struck Saifuddin Ighrak over the head with a whip in an argument over a single horse. Jalaluddin, unsure of his authority over the Afghans, felt unable to intervene. Saif ud Din, smarting with the insult, stayed with the Sultan for the rest of the day, but when night fell departed with his followers 'with the instincts and cunning of the wild beasts'.
3. Kajlah has not been located, but it was only a night's march from the Indus, probably in the Cherat hills.
4. Some more romantic reports describe how he dispatched his wife and children in the few remaining boats available, but these sank, either by accident or (some think) on his orders, to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy.
5. The Persian historians suggest that, in an improbable display of bravado, Jalaluddin rested on the far bank in full view of the Mongols while his clothes dried.
6. It is sometimes contended that the battle took place at Kalabagh, probably based on Timur's (incorrect) assertion when he crossed the Indus at Kalabagh in 1398, that this was the same place that Chingez had defeated Jalaluddin.

## BATTLE OF MALANDRAI PASS, 1586

By the mid-1580s, Akbar, the greatest of the Mughal emperors, was at the height of his powers and had consolidated his control over northern India. However, in 1585 the stability of his northern provinces was suddenly threatened when the ruler of Transoxiana occupied Badakshan and threatened Kabul, then ruled by Akbar's unreliable and only intermittently loyal half-brother Hakim. Fortuitously, in July of that year, Hakim died, opening the way for Akbar to assume direct control of Kabul. He immediately sent Man Singh, one of his most reliable generals, to occupy Kabul, and set about widening and improving the road that ran from his great new fort at Attock via the Khyber Pass to Kabul. The area through which the new road ran was then, as now, wild and lawless, populated by fierce and independent Pushtun tribes whose main source of income was extortion and theft from passing travellers. Akbar spent a fortune employing levies from the local Khattak and Mohmand tribes to police it, but despite this the Afridis of the Khyber and Yusufzai raiding parties from modern Swat and Buner became increasingly bold and their depredations on law-abiding travellers increasingly irksome.

Things came to a head in 1586 when the Afridis overran the Khyber Pass and attacked Peshawar, killing the governor. Enough was enough. Akbar planned two concurrent punitive expeditions. Man Singh marched back down the Grand Trunk Road from Jalalabad and, not without difficulty, re-opened the Khyber Pass. However, Akbar was determined to also chastise and intimidate the recalcitrant Yusufzai tribes in Bajaur and Swat and dispatched a punitive expedition for this purpose under the command of his own foster-brother, the tough and competent Zain Khan Khoka. The column started from Attock and, having harassed the region between Peshawar and the Swat River, marched up into Bajaur. However, as the Mughals entered Swat, they ran into increasing resistance from the Yusufzai tribesmen, who were reported to be 'as numerous as ants and locusts'. Zain Khan halted at Chakdara and started to build a fort<sup>1</sup> while he sent to Akbar for reinforcements. The emperor agreed and a contingent was readied, but there was disagreement over who would command it. Two of his principal courtiers, the scholar-historian Abu Fazl and Raja Birbal, a poet and court wit, both vied for the honour of a military command for which neither was in the least qualified. Unwilling to choose between them, Akbar resolved the dilemma by casting lots; Raja Birbal was chosen and soon left to join Zain Khan in the hills. Shortly afterwards a second contingent of reinforcements was dispatched, this time under the equally unsuitable command of Hakim Abdul Fateh, another close friend of Akbar's.

The three commanders met at Chakdara, near where Churchill's Piquet now stands, and held a stormy council of war. It is hard to think of three men so ill-assorted as these. Zain Khan was the son of Akbar's first wet-nurse by a Turk from Herat. He was almost illiterate, but a tough warrior, a brave man and a good commander who was able enough to have risen through the ranks. Birbal and Hakim were very different. They were cultured and urbane members of the Mughal court, neither of whom had ever commanded an army in the field.

Birbal was Akbar's poet laureate, a scholar and wit—the Muslim chronicles call him a 'proud and pampered Brahmin'—who, though he had briefly been in nominal charge of the construction of Attock Fort, had no military experience or ability whatever. Hakim was perhaps an even worse choice. He was a Persian poet and philosopher with unconventional, even heretical, religious beliefs, whom many believed had been responsible for luring Akbar from the path of Muslim orthodoxy.

The conference got off to a bad start when Birbal refused to enter Zain Khan's quarters and after some acrimony the meeting had to be moved to the Brahmin's tent. When substantive discussions at last began, Zain Khan proposed that they should complete the fort in Chakdara, from which the army (by implication, with himself in charge) could campaign against the tribes. However, neither of the others would agree to this, insisting that the whole army must decamp together through Buner and back by the quickest route back to Attock (though Birbal commented bitterly that 'he did not know what would be the upshot of climbing mountains in this horrible country'). Zain Khan argued in vain that it was madness to entangle the whole army in the unknown and precipitous defiles without a base, but was overruled. Fearing that the two 'elegant courtiers' would complain against him to the emperor, he submitted with an ill grace, insisting only that he take the rearguard. Birbal, anxious to get out of the mountains as quickly as possible, set himself in the van.

The imperial forces, now numbering about 16,000, left Chakdara on 12 February 1586 and the next day ran into heavy tribal opposition on the approaches to the Karakar Pass. A whole day was needed to clear a passage to the summit, but instead of stopping there, Birbal pressed straight on down into Buner and to prevent the army being split, Zain Khan was forced to follow. Great confusion ensued, for the pass is much steeper on this side and almost impassible for elephants or heavy gear. Zain Khan's rearguard fought off a succession of heavy attacks in which he personally killed four tribesmen with his matchlock, and it took two more days of incessant fighting to reach the flat ground of the Buner valley. Once there, the troops imagined they were safely down on the plains of the Peshawar Valley, only to discover with dismay that they faced yet another stiff climb by a narrow and difficult defile over the Malandrai Pass. A further council of war was held. Again Zain Khan proposed that they should do what they had failed to do in Chakdara: build a camp and reorganize before undertaking further operations against the tribes. They were lucky to have got so far. The tribesmen could not stay in the field for long, and must be thoroughly cowed before the Mughal army attempted the passes ahead, which were even rougher than those they had come through. It was no use; frightened now, the others wanted only to get out as quickly as they could. Again Zain Khan yielded and the march resumed, with Birbal in the lead and Zain Khan taking up the rear as before.

The Yusufzai opposition continued to grow and everything fell into confusion as the Mughals struggled on in increasing disorder. On the 24th, as the army entered the Malandrai Pass, the tribesmen lined the hills on both sides of the track, pouring in volleys of arrows and stones. Birbal was killed and, as night came on, panic set in. The route was blocked by an inextricable mêlée of elephants, horses and stores. Disoriented soldiers fled into the maze of hills, to be slaughtered by the tribesmen or fall over precipices. Only the rearguard under Zain Khan retained any semblance of order. Pushing on doggedly through the mayhem, he picked up the Hakim, who was discovered cowering under a bush, and bivouacked for the night just short of the crest of the pass. The tribesmen, sated with the slaughter, drew off to loot, and three days later the sorry remnant of the Mughal army struggled into Attock, having lost some 8000 men, or about half the army.

Akbar was so angry about the defeat, and grieving for the loss of his old friend Birbal, that for two days he neither ate nor drank and refused to see either of his commanders. However, on the third, news came that a strong force of Yusufzai tribesmen, flushed with victory, had come down from the hills and was approaching Attock itself. Once more, Zain Khan was called for. He marched out with Akbar's son Prince Murad and what was left of his shattered army, and succeeded in beating off the tribesmen who, on the plains, were no match for disciplined regular troops.

This was not the end of Zain Khan's career. He was a rough diamond, but remained one of Akbar's most reliable generals and in 1587 he was appointed as Warden of the Western Marches, subsequently rising to be commander of 5000 men and governor of Kabul, before dying of drink in 1602. Akbar's son Jehangir fell in love with and married his daughter.

Nevertheless, the expedition had been a disaster and marked the end of any genuine attempt by Akbar, or his successors, to conquer the northern hills tracts. The Mughal chronicles report regular punitive expeditions, with 'severe chastisements' and 'tribesmen exterminated', but this was mostly courtly hyperbole. In practice, military expeditions into the hills were few, short and low-key. The Pushtun tribes paid no tribute and provided no recruits for imperial service. Indeed, the Malandrai expedition marked the last serious effort to subdue the Frontier tribes for over 300 years. The veil was not to be lifted again until 1895.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

There are of course no signs of the battle remaining. Though it is not high, the Karaker Pass is a significant obstacle. The pass itself is narrow and the approach from the Swat side is steep and broken and even today heavily wooded. The descent into Buner, as the Mughals found, is worse; treacherous and lacking water. Today it is largely bare, but in Mughal times it would also probably have been wooded and it is easy to imagine how the regular units of the Mughal army, used to operating on the plains, must have struggled in these narrow defiles.

From Laganai, the village at the bottom of the Karaker, the Mughal army probably followed pretty much the path of the modern road through Jowar to Daggar. All the way along this road, a forbidding, unbroken ridgeline blocks the right-hand horizon—the route down to the plains. However, beyond Daggar the ground appears to open out, with the long and attractive valley of Nawakalai apparently winding out through the hills towards Rustam. Even today this gives the impression that one might be on the Yusufzai plains, so it is no surprise that the Mughal soldiers thought so. However, beyond Nawakalai village it suddenly becomes clear that this is an illusion; the valley narrows and the heights of the Malandrai Pass can be seen ahead. The chronicles suggest that it was this discovery that triggered the second disastrous council of war, which probably took place near here. The Malandrai Pass is not high, nor (by local standards) particularly difficult, though there is little water. The destruction of the Mughal army here was principally a result of poor leadership and poor discipline.

## HOW TO GET THERE

You can easily follow the route taken by the Mughal army. It makes an interesting journey from Swat, an alternative (if slightly longer) to the better-known Malakand-Mardan road. Turn off the main Swat road in Barikot about 16 kilometres south of Saidu Sharif, heading for the Karaker Pass (1336 metres), with the rocky slopes of the sacred Mount Ilam on your left. There

is a forest resthouse at the top of the Karaker Pass, of modern construction and in good condition, which can be booked through the Chief Environmental Officer Peshawar. Once over the pass, follow the road down to the village of Laganai, and thence south through Jowar about 25 kilometres to Daggar. Turn right at the T-junction just as you leave Daggar, on to the road to Ambeyla and Mardan. About 1 kilometre out of the town, you come over a small crest. Just beyond the crest turn right, on a good road that runs to Nawakalai. A couple of kilometres beyond Nawakalai, where the metalled road ends, you cut left on the *kutch*a track along a dry riverbed. After 1 kilometre, the track forks; take the right fork through some attractive groves of olive trees up to the top of the Malandrai Pass. The pass itself is dusty and unexciting, but at the top there is a *ziarat* to a Sufi saint, Pir Baba Masum. This is clean and cool, a pleasant spot for tea or food while you take in the splendid view down to the plains around Rustam. The track ends at the top of the pass and there is currently no way down the western side of the pass, though a new road is reportedly under construction. Return to the main road near Daggar, and turn right. This will take you over the Ambeyla Pass to Rustam and Mardan and thence back to the Grand Trunk Road. The drive from Barikot to Islamabad on this road takes about six hours, though the road is being improved. The detour from Daggar to the top of the Malandrai Pass and back will take about an hour.

#### NOTE

1. The foundations of which lie under the present British-built fort at Chakdara.





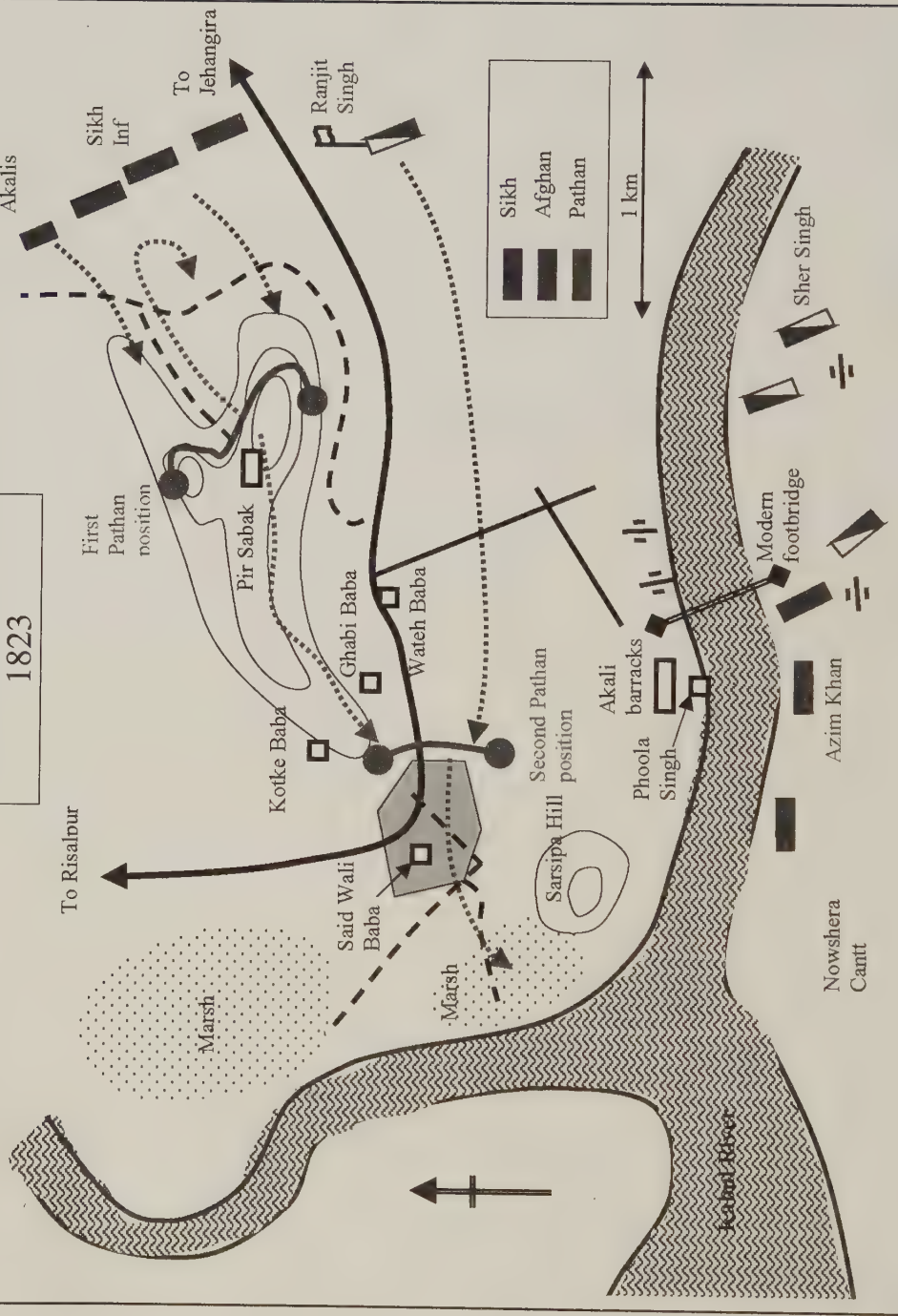
SECTION III

RANJIT SINGH





# Battle of Naushera 1823



# 6

## BATTLE OF NAUSHERA, 1823

In the autumn of 1822, Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab, sent his envoy Fakir Azizuddin to Peshawar to collect the annual taxes. The Fakir was well received by the governor, Yar Mohammed, who ordered that the city be illuminated in his honour. However, beneath the surface, all was not well. Peshawar and the surrounding districts had been under Sikh control for only four years and the people were far from reconciled to their new rulers. No sooner had Azizuddin and his tax collectors left the city than the cry of *jihad* echoed through the passes and the local tribes rose in revolt. Within days a *lashkar* of over 25,000 Khattak and Yusufzai tribesmen had assembled under the leadership of Syed Akbar Shah of Buner. Yar Mohammed fled as his brother, Mohammed Azim Khan, came marching down from Kabul with an Afghan army, intent on exploiting the unrest to depose his sibling. In response Ranjit Singh ordered his own army, the Khalsa, northwards.

This was the largest and best-equipped force the Sikhs had yet deployed.<sup>1</sup> The core of the Sikh army were the new regiments trained and equipped on European lines by the renegade Frenchmen, Allard and Ventura, who had been engaged by Ranjit Singh the year before. Jean Francois Allard was a highly decorated cavalry officer from Napoleon's army who was to serve Ranjit Singh loyally for seventeen years. Of the fifty or so foreign mercenaries who worked for the Sikhs at one time or another, he was probably the only one whom Ranjit Singh genuinely liked, having particularly endeared himself to his master by coming back from leave in France with a large consignment of French cuirasses, carbines and pistols. Described as 'a man of firmness and decision of character and a handsome and benevolent man' he nevertheless contrived to live in considerable state.<sup>2</sup> Jean-Baptiste Ventura, though less flamboyant, was probably the more able officer. About thirty years old, he was described as 'a fine looking young man, very neat in his person and dress and wearing his beard long'. Though Ranjit Singh never warmed to him personally, he trusted him implicitly and entrusted him with several difficult missions—indeed he seems to have been intimately involved with the key tactical decisions at the Battle of Naushera. The best of Ranjit Singh's infantry regiments had been trained by Ventura, and the uniform he designed for the Gurkha units was adopted by the British and is still worn by regiments of that corps today.

The army was accompanied by a contingent of 500 Akalis under their veteran commander Phoola Singh. The Akalis (or *nihangs*—from the Persian for crocodile) wore blue turbans and uniforms and since the time of Guru Govind Singh had formed the shock troops of the Khalsa. Ranjit Singh never really trusted them—describing them as 'of crooked mind and short sight', but he nevertheless made great use of them in his battles against the Muslims. Phoola Singh was perhaps the best known of the Akali commanders. Famous for his bravery and devil-may-care attitude, he had been a dacoit until captured and then pardoned by Ranjit Singh, whom he afterwards served with total loyalty.

An advance column of some 8000 cavalry under Ranjit Singh's son, Prince Sher Singh, crossed the Indus at Attock in January 1823 by means of a pontoon bridge and seized the fort

of Jehangira some 10 miles beyond. This induced Azim Khan to set out from Peshawar with his army of Afghan regulars. Sher Singh, seeing that he could not oppose the combined forces of the Afghan army and the local tribesmen, who had risen *en masse* against him, called on his father for support. Ranjit Singh, who had been following by easy stages with the main army, hunting wild boar and waterfowl as he came, hurried to Attock, but found that the Afghans had destroyed the bridge and his son was besieged in Jehangira fort with the whole country thirsting for his blood. The river was impassable due to an early thaw, and snipers prevented his engineers from rebuilding the bridge, but an informer brought news that the Afghans were planning to storm Jehangira the very next day, so the Sikhs had no alternative but to swim the swollen river as best they could. In the early hours of the morning the Maharaja himself was the first to plunge into the icy water; elephants, camels, horses, mules and foot soldiers followed. Many were swept away and much equipment was lost, but the tribesmen were taken by surprise and the Sikhs were soon established on the western bank.<sup>3</sup>

With Jehangira relieved, the tribal *lashkar*, now comprising about 12,000 men, pulled back to the north bank of the Kabul River and took up a position on a small but dominating hill called Pir Sabak. Azim Khan seems to have drawn up his forces around Nowshera, just across the river from the tribesmen, blocking the main road to Peshawar. Ranjit Singh split his army, ordering Sher Singh to stay on the south side of the Kabul River in order to tie down Azim Khan, while he himself crossed with the main army onto the northern bank to engage the tribesmen at Pir Sabak. The two contingents advanced in parallel up either side of the river and as Ranjit Singh approached the hill he consulted his generals. Aware that Azim Khan might cross the river and link up with the tribesmen, Ventura pressed for an immediate attack, advising that 'Today the strength of the Maharaja would prove ten times that of the Afghans. Tomorrow the situation may be reversed'. Ranjit Singh was persuaded. Having dispatched some of his artillery down to the river-bank to prevent Azim Khan from crossing,<sup>4</sup> he ordered an immediate attack on Pir Sabak and, riding to a mound, took the salute of the troops going into action, raising his unsheathed *kirpan* to his forehead in acknowledgement. It seemed an unequal contest. As Moorcroft wrote:

The matchlock, the spear, the sword, the bow, the knife and even the staff of an undisciplined multitude were opposed by the cannon, the musket, and the sabre, directed by disciplined artillerymen, under the command of Ranjit Singh himself and consisting of the flower of the Sikh army.

Despite this, it was a hard-fought and close-run battle. The attack was opened by the Sikh infantry, but their fire proved ineffective against the tribesmen on the hill, who were protected by a breastwork. As the infantry fell back in disorder, the Sikh cavalry advanced, galloping in turn up to the enemy, firing, wheeling and turning back, to be replaced by another line—a manoeuvre surely taught by Allard. The patience of the tribesmen broke under this galling though hardly decisive fire and a large body made a wild charge down the hill onto the Sikh infantry battalions, which wavered and started to break. The battle hung in the balance and Sikh tradition speaks of Ranjit Singh himself, sword in hand, vainly exhorting his troops to stand firm. Two Sikh guns were briefly captured, but were retaken by the Sikh cavalry before the tribesmen could work out how to fire them. Phoola Singh led a desperate counter-charge and was struck from his horse by a musket ball that shattered his knee. The situation seems to have been saved by a single Gurkha battalion on the flank, which formed a square and fired steadily at the advancing hordes, checking their advance, and as the tribal onrush lost its momentum the Pushtuns fell back again to the rocky hillocks of Pir Sabak.

Ventura's Gurkha and Muslim regiments re-formed and for a second time advanced up the hill, supported by the Akalis, led by the wounded Phoola Singh who was now mounted on an elephant. As they approached the breastwork, they were met by a storm of musketry. For about an hour the rival armies were locked in deadly hand-to-hand combat. The *mahout* of Phoola Singh's elephant was wounded and, panic struck, tried to turn his beast back. The fanatical Akali commander pulled a pistol from his belt and shot him through the head, before urging his animal on himself with his sword until he himself was struck down. The Sikhs made three charges before the resistance finally broke and the tribesmen fled westwards down the hill, with many of them coming into range of the Sikh artillery on the river-bank, which wheeled round and opened fire. There was a short-lived rally at the foot of the hill, but the Sikh cavalry, possibly led by Ranjit Singh himself, swept round the base of the hill and into the disorganized mass with their lances, putting them to flight in the greatest tumult and confusion. Large numbers of the tribesmen hiding in the long grass of the nearby swamps were shot down or cut to pieces. Some 300 *ghazis* broke through the Sikh lines but were drowned trying to swim the river.

There seems to have been little fighting on the south bank of the river. Azim Khan, seeing that the main battle was taking place at Pir Sabak, tried in vain to cross the river to support the tribesmen but in the end found himself watching impotently as the massacre unfolded. As night fell he turned back, and harried by the advancing Sikhs and too ashamed to face the people of Peshawar, carried on direct back to Kabul, where he died shortly afterwards.<sup>5</sup> It was a crushing defeat for the Pushtuns. Their casualties are not known with any accuracy, but Moorcroft claims that they lost about 4000 men.<sup>6</sup> Sikh losses were lower, but still considerable, including the commander of the Gurkha Division, General Balbhadra, and Phoola Singh the Akali. The latter was cremated by the river close to where he fell, and the shrine built on the spot is still revered by Sikhs today. Three days after the battle Ranjit Singh, at the head of his victorious troops, entered Peshawar, which the Durbar held without resistance until the arrival of the British twenty-five years later.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The east face of Pir Sabak hill is now much cut up with marble quarries, but with its conical aspect and steep sides it is still the dominating feature in the local landscape; one can well see why the tribesmen from the hills should have chosen it for their defensive position. Ranjit Singh's army approached from the east, roughly along the line of the modern road from Jehangira. The slope of the hill on this side is comparatively shallow, with a broad gully between two spurs, and it is likely that the main battle was fought here. The last stand of the *lashkar* took place at the south-west foot of the hill, where the modern village now is; the only Muslim memorials, the shrines of four *ghazis* killed in the battle, are scattered around here, suggesting that most of the tribal casualties occurred in this area.<sup>7</sup> The charge of the Sikh cavalry which swept them away must have come across the open ground on the southern flank of the hill, roughly along the line of the present road. The remains of the swamps where many fleeing tribesmen perished are still found on the banks of the river.

Phoola Singh's shrine is on the river-bank inside the nearby CCRI Farm complex, whose entrance is on the left of the road opposite Pir Sabak. Enter here, turning right at a small crossroads about 300 yards beyond, towards the farm bungalows and administrative buildings on the river-bank. A short walk to the right (up river) from here brings you to Phoola Singh's shrine. The Sikh guns were probably deployed near here, from where they could dominate the

river and wheel round to engage the retreating tribesmen. The shrine itself is a modest affair, a small dais covered by a simple canopy, half clad in pink marble. Close by is a complex of buildings, some covered in the same pink marble and clearly contemporaneous with the shrine itself. The local people call this a fort, but the construction suggests that it was more likely some sort of Akali headquarters or barracks. It is now much dilapidated and in use as a school.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the Grand Trunk Road to Peshawar. About 5 kilometres past Attock Bridge, in the centre of Jehangira, turn right towards Swabi and almost immediately cross the Kabul River. About 100 metres after the bridge, in the village, by the sign for the Global Public School, turn left up an unmarked, apparently *kutch*a road, which quickly turns back to tarmac. Follow this road along the north bank of the river (the same route that Ranjit Singh took on his way to Pir Sabak). After about 19 kilometres you reach Pir Sabak, very obvious on the right of the road, with the CCRI Farm on the left. If you follow the road another 10 kilometres, through the village of Zandu Banda, you emerge beside the railway station in Risalpur. Alternatively, the site can be reached on foot from Nowshera Cantonment, from where a pedestrian suspension bridge crosses the Kabul River directly to the CCRI Farm complex.

## NOTES

1. Unusually for this period, there are three separate accounts of the fighting that followed—the oral Pushtun tradition, as recorded by Olaf Caroe; the Sikh histories; and a written report to the British authorities by Moorcroft, who was present at the battle. Predictably, these sources provide markedly different accounts.
2. His house in Lahore still stands—‘a miniature Versailles’ beside Anarkali’s tomb. Thousands turned out for his funeral in Lahore in 1839.
3. McGregor claims, more prosaically, that Ranjit Singh crossed the river on the still-intact pontoon bridge.
4. The disposition of the Sikh artillery is confusing. Olaf Caroe states that it was all on the south bank of the river (with Sher Singh). This is unlikely. Ranjit Singh relied heavily on his guns and would surely not have moved the main army without them. It is also known that later in the battle, the Sikh guns engaged tribesmen fleeing from Pir Sabak, which would scarcely have been possible from the south side of the river. There is only one reference (McGregor) to Sikh artillery engaging the tribal defences in the early stages of the battle. The probable explanation is that Ranjit Singh detached some of his artillery with Sher Singh, and more to guard the crossings of the river, leaving himself too few guns to support the main attack.
5. The memory of his failure lives on; even to this day Yusufzais and Khattaks are traditionally cautious of relying on the commitment of a Muhammedzai *sardar*.
6. Local tradition holds that many of the dead were buried in the graveyard south of Tarakai Hill near Risalpur, whose size is an indication of the scale of the slaughter. Perhaps drawing on this, Olaf Caroe suggests that the Sikhs engaged a second tribal contingent at Tarakai. This is unlikely. Tarakai is at least 5 kilometres from Pir Sabak and separated from it by the Swat River, even now a substantial obstacle.
7. The most illustrious of them, that of Wateh Baba, is just beside the gate to the CCRI Farm complex. Local tradition has it that, such is the power of this shrine, that the British bulldozers building the adjacent road were brought to a physical halt in front of it, and the road had to be re-routed to avoid the shrine.



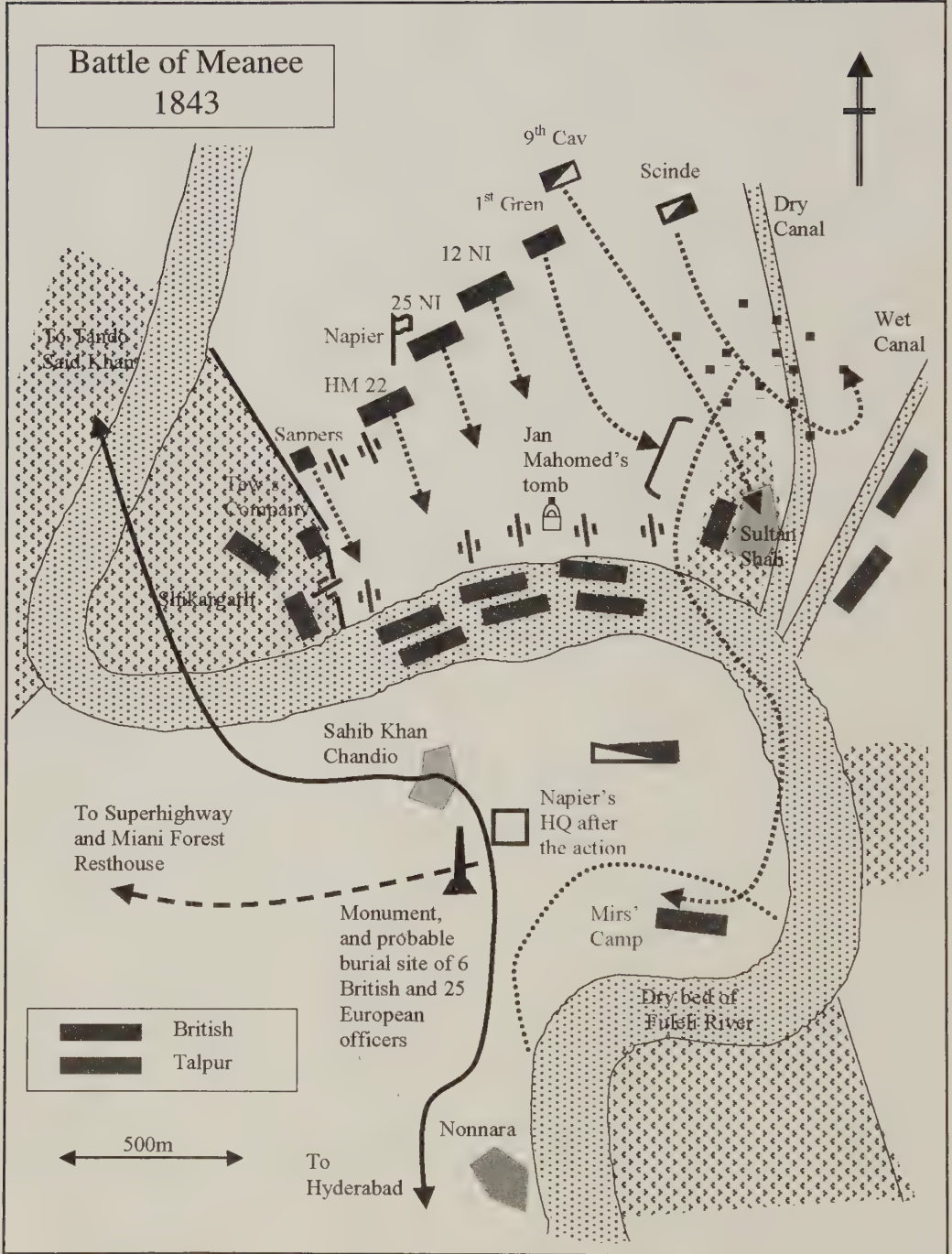
SECTION IV

BRITISH CONQUEST OF SINDH





# Battle of Meanee 1843



# 7

## BATTLE OF MEANEE, 1843

In the 1830s, Sind had for more than fifty years been ruled by the Talpurs, a Baloch clan whose Mirs held the country in a patchwork of feudatory districts. The few British officers who knew or cared anything about the country believed that the Mirs' oppressive and bigoted government was deliberately calculated to prevent the development of the country. In reality, although the Talpurs were an Islamic autocracy, their rule was in many ways less despotic than that of Ranjit Singh, their neighbour to the north. The power of the Mirs was limited by tradition, by indolence and by the large *jagirs* that they were wont to bestow on loyal subjects, and the local Hindu population, though poor, was basically amenable to their rule.

The British had hitherto taken no interest in the area, thinking it of no commercial or strategic value. However, in 1838 came the First Afghan War. A series of treaties were forced on the reluctant Talpurs, providing the British with concessions and bases from which to support their operations in Afghanistan. When the debacle in Kabul came in 1840, the Mirs, sensing British weakness, schemed ineffectually to expel them from Sind and restore their own control over the lucrative tolls on the Indus River trade. This had the opposite effect to the one intended. Slowly and erratically the British came round to the view that, despite their official policy that 'the Government of India is content with the limits which nature appears to have assigned to its empire', Sind would have to be secured and a showdown with the Mirs was sooner or later inevitable.

Into this murky scene stepped, in 1843, Major-General Sir Charles James Napier. Napier had joined the army at the age of twelve, and had served with distinction in the Peninsula campaign, having been severely wounded and captured at Corunna, released under a prisoner exchange scheme and wounded again at Busaco. He was a complex figure, strong-willed, impetuous and utterly convinced of his own righteousness, but at the same time compassionate and tenderhearted (maltreatment of animals would always arouse his fury). He was an impossible subordinate and his career having been blighted by a series of acrimonious disputes with senior officers, who distrusted his 'impetuosity and violence of character and politics', he was retired on half pay in at the age of forty-eight, with an invalid wife and two children.

He arrived in Bombay on 12 December 1841, with only a couple of pounds in his pocket and a still burning ambition. He had a deep-seated dislike of everything Indian, having written earlier 'Anywhere better than the East. The distance and the service are both disagreeable' and he had only taken the job because, after eleven years on half-pay and the death of his wife, he needed the money. However, within six months he was unexpectedly appointed to command the British forces in Sind, and wrote in his diary 'Charles! Charles Napier! Take heed of your ambition for military glory; you had scotched that snake, but this high command will, unless you are careful, give it all its vigour again'.

Napier was soon engaged in enforcing a new and unpopular treaty on the Talpurs, by which large tracts of land were to be ceded to the British and the neighbouring Nawab of Bahawalpur. The negotiations, which lasted over four months, were extraordinarily convoluted, and

characterized by duplicity and misunderstandings on both sides, which Napier disingenuously blamed on the 'tyrannical, drunken, debauched, cheating, intriguing, contemptible Ameer'. Despite these setbacks, Captain James Outram, the political agent, managed to assemble the Mirs at Hyderabad in February 1843 and with difficulty persuaded them to sign the hated new treaty. Within hours, however, news came that Napier was approaching Hyderabad with his army and had detained a band of armed Baloch tribesmen. This was the final straw; popular sentiment boiled over and the Talpur chiefs, equally exasperated, threw in their lot with the insurgents. Outram found himself besieged in the Residency at Hyderabad, and was only evacuated with difficulty by the British steam gunships *Planet* and *Satellite*, which were operating on the Indus.

Napier's force, encamped 15 miles up-river of Hyderabad, was only 2800 strong, with one British and three native battalions of infantry, two cavalry regiments and a single battalion of native foot artillery, all drawn from the Bombay Presidency Army and in varying degrees below strength. However, though only half the troops had experience of combat, morale was high. Napier had taken considerable trouble to train his men and they had great confidence in him. Despite his temper and his eccentricities, he was popular with the soldiery. He lived frugally, with none of the baggage that most senior officers of the time took for granted, and on field manoeuvres was wont to publicly highlight what he considered to be his own, as well as others' mistakes.

On 15 February, Napier received intelligence that the Mirs were assembling their tribesmen and their few regular troops among the *shikargarhs* (hunting forests) on the banks of the River Indus. Paramount leadership was vested in Mir Nasir Khan, the senior of the Hyderabad Mirs. Although he was intelligent, liberal and urbane, taking pleasure in the company of British officers, he was extremely fat and no man of action. Field command was therefore vested in Mir Jan Mohammed Khatami, a member of one of the senior branches of the Talpur house, known and respected for his bravery. The Baloch army was variously estimated by Napier's spies as between 18,000 and 30,000 men (in reality it was probably around 15,000), but more were coming in every day so, despite the enormous disparity in forces, Napier decided that he must take the immediate offensive. On the evening of the 16th, Lieutenant-Colonel John Jacob, the already legendary commander of the Scinde Irregular Horse, who had been dispatched to locate the enemy camp, came in to report that they were at Meanee, less than 10 miles away. After less than three hours sleep, at four o'clock in the morning, the British army was on the move, led as usual by the Scinde Horse, supported by a contingent of Sappers to prepare the road for the main contingent with the guns.

The troops followed the track along the east bank of the Fuleli, a dry branch of the Indus adapted for irrigation. Just beyond the village of Kalgery a cannon was heard. Napier himself moved forward, escorted by the Scinde Horse, to a small sand hill from where he could see the Baloch position on the bank of the river about a mile away. It seemed well chosen. A line of guns, supported by infantry, was deployed on the near bank of the river. Behind that could be seen a large body of horsemen, and the flags and tents of the Mirs' camp. The approach was canalised up a 500-metre wide stretch of flat ground, bounded on the right by a *shikargarh* fronted by an 8-foot high wall, and on the left by a deep, dry watercourse leading to a wooded village called Sultan Shah, both of which were occupied by an unknown number of matchlockmen.

Jacob led his regiment forward in line abreast, halted about 500 yards from the Baloch position and went ahead a little with a small escort. Mir Nasir Khan, hoping that this might be an attempt to parley (he had brought with him five or six lakhs of rupees to pay off his levies in this eventuality), tried to stop his people firing. But as soon as he saw Jacob turn

back, he gave the order for his guns to open fire, with Mr Howell, the Mirs' Anglo-Indian chief artilleryman, forced to point the guns himself, with 'eight matchlocks to his head'. For about an hour the Scinde Horse stood in line exposed to the shot of the Baloch artillery, and the desultory fire of matchlockmen from both flanks. The regiment stayed perfectly steady throughout and, amazingly, only six horses were lost.

At last the main British column appeared and formed up some 300 yards behind the Scinde Horse. The line was dressed, skirmishers thrown out and some intervening brushwood cut down. The Balochi cannonade continued, but the range was long and it caused little damage, so Napier gave orders for the men to have their breakfast while he studied the enemy dispositions. There was little alternative to a frontal assault, but he was concerned about the security of his right flank, so the British artillery was brought up on the right of the line, protected by a company of Madras Sappers. Some matchlockmen appeared on the *shikargarh* wall, but were driven off, until after a while only one remained, sitting astride and firing his weapon as it was passed up to him by others below, before he himself was shot down.

It was nearly eleven o'clock and the day was becoming very hot before Napier gave the order for the infantry to advance in a staggered line, with his single British battalion, HM 22nd Foot on the right of the line, leading. They approached to within 300 yards of the Baloch position, with the artillery conforming to their right. Now at point-blank range, the British guns opened up and quickly forced the Baloch artillery to withdraw into the river bed behind them. However, Napier was still troubled about the possibility of a flanking attack from the right and ordered the Grenadier Company of the 22nd Foot under Captain Tew to hold a vulnerable gap in the *shikargarh* wall at all costs. Having arranged for the baggage to be mustered inside an *ad hoc* stockade made of camels and fodder bales and guarded by four companies of Bombay Grenadiers, he posted Jacob to watch his left flank and ordered a general advance.

The 22nd charged up the slight incline to where a line of turbaned heads showed above the natural parapet at the edge of the river-bank. But as they reached it, they saw for the first time that the river bed at their feet was swarming with thousands of Baloch warriors who had until now been completely hidden, only the front rank, who were standing on a rough fire-step, being visible. The 22nd fired a volley into the multitude and then braced to meet the charge of the foremost tribesmen who, throwing down their matchlocks, rose to meet them with sword and shield. After a sharp struggle, the tribesmen were thrown back, but the men of the 22nd, obeying their own instincts rather than the furious instructions of their officers, slowly recoiled until they were a few yards back from the brink, all the while keeping up a steady rolling fire from alternate ranks at the tribesmen who showed their heads above the bank. The 25th and 12th Native Infantry, coming up successively on the left of the 22nd, deployed in similar fashion. On the extreme right of the line, the Madras Sappers brought the guns up across some difficult broken ground. The leading horses of the gun teams were shot the moment they showed their heads above the river bank but, driving back the swarms of swordsmen, Captain Hutt the troop commander managed to manhandle two 12-pounder howitzers into the narrow gap between the 22nd Regiment and the *shikargarh* wall. The muzzles of his guns were only a few yards from the foremost tribesmen, and each discharge cut a bloody swathe through the brave men who stood in the river bed 'as thick as corn', but made no concerted attempt to charge.

Many tribesmen were now seen moving into the *shikargarh*, with the obvious intention of outflanking the British right. The Grenadier Company of the 22nd deployed to guard this flank had become embroiled in a running battle in the woods and Captain Tew had been killed, so the tribesmen were able to open a galling matchlock fire from the *shikargarh* wall down onto

the British sappers and artillerymen. Despite this fire, the sappers managed to knock down a section of the wall, and Hutt trained two more howitzers obliquely through the gap, firing charges of grapeshot alternatively across each other's muzzles and keeping the Balochis back in the dense jungle beyond.

On the left of the line, Major Clibborn, commanding about 200 men of the 1st Grenadiers, maintained contact with the advancing 12th Native Infantry to his right, but soon found his left flank threatened by heavy fire from the village of Sultan Shah. He halted short of the riverbank and formed left to face this threat. Although he was too weak to assault the village, he effectively screened the main force from this threat for the duration of the battle. The Scinde Horse, advancing on Clibborn's left, was forced to swing round the outside of Sultan Shah. Here the ground was rough, with (it seemed) a matchlockman in every nullah, hole and hedge. So many falls occurred as the regiment galloped through these obstacles that over fifty horses and men were on the ground at the same time and all control was lost. When the whole charge was brought to a sudden halt within 60 yards of the village by a deep and wide canal, strongly manned by Balochis, Jacob accepted the inevitable and, with his own charger mortally wounded, ordered his regiment to withdraw and re-form.

On the river-bank, a ghastly sort of stalemate had ensued. It was now past noon and the British still kept up an incessant fire from the artillery and infantry into the throng in the river bed, while still the Baloch swordsmen pressed forward to replace those that had been shot down by the musketry of the sepoys on the bank above. The whole area was enveloped in a pall of dust and smoke, and intermittently bands of swordsmen stormed up the bank and threw themselves desperately on the thin red line of bayonets. The line would sway and give a little under the sheer weight of the charges, but it did not break. The officers, urging their men on from the front, fell fast<sup>1</sup> but still the troops could not or would not counter-attack. As soon as they were back in their old position, six or eight paces from the brink, the British troops would resume their self-chosen system, advancing rank by rank to the river edge to fire, then withdrawing to reload.

Mir Nasir Khan sent word to Mir Jan Mohammed Khatami that he must lead a general assault to break the deadlock. The *sardar* made a valiant effort, and made his way to the front to encourage his men. Lieutenant McMurdo, Napier's aide-de-camp, who was fighting on foot having had his horse killed under him, saw this and dashed down into the river bed with a handful of men, hoping the others would follow. In hand-to-hand fighting, he killed Jan Mohammed and another, but finding himself unsupported had to fight his way back to his own lines again. In vain he urged the men of the 22nd to charge, until one man called back: 'Mr. McMurdo, if you don't leave off, we'll shoot you'.

With the loss of Jan Mohammed, command of the Baloch army devolved on Ghulam Shah Talpur, but he too was shortly afterwards killed. Without these brave and respected leaders, the tribesmen were unable to mount the concerted charge that would surely have carried away the tiny British force. Their rushes were uncoordinated, but even so, the British were hard pressed to repel the repeated onslaughts. Napier himself rode forward to rally his men. He made an extraordinary apparition 'bare headed, with spectacles on his eagle nose, grey whiskers singed by the wilder firing of his own men, waving his jockey cap in the air,<sup>2</sup> yelling and blaspheming', but still he could not make them advance.

Perhaps in desperation, he sent orders that the cavalry on the left wing was to charge. The instructions were delivered to his deputy on that side of the field, Lieutenant-Colonel Pattle, who, being deaf, purported to be unable to understand them in the din. The aide-de-camp persisted that a forward movement by the cavalry was now essential to relieve the pressure on the infantry, and Pattle at length acquiesced. After some confusion, the 9th Bengal Lancers



made a poorly co-ordinated drive into the village of Sultan Shah, first with one squadron, then two more. This was a task better suited to infantry than cavalry but they succeeded in clearing the village, though with five officers and many troopers killed and wounded, the cost was high.

However, the Scinde Horse had by now re-grouped, and Jacob, threading through the narrow gap on the left of the line between the 12th Native Infantry on the river bank and the Bengal Lancers in Sultan Shah, led them down onto the bed of the Fuleli. Swinging down the dry river bed, the Scinde Horse fanned out and charged into the Mirs' camp half a mile behind. The camp was strongly held by foot soldiers, who fought sternly, but were little match for cavalry in the open; they were almost all killed and Mir Nasir Khan's own standard was captured. The Baloch cavalry, some 4000 strong, seeing that their camp behind them was overrun, and themselves outflanked, quit the field without striking a blow. At that moment, a message came that the Scinde Horse was to retire to protect the baggage, which was thought to be under attack (this later proved a false alarm). The trumpets sounded the 'Retire', but Major Fitzgerald, the brawny second-in-command of the regiment, declined to comply, and led his troopers after the fleeing Balochi horsemen, pursuing them for several miles.

The loss of the Mirs' camp and the flight of their cavalry were decisive. The infantry, who had stood under a ceaseless hail of musketry and grape for more than an hour, began to waver and fall back. With a shout of triumph, the British line swept down into the river bed. Here fighting continued, but co-ordinated resistance ended as the Balochi *lashkar* broke up into smaller groups round their individual commanders and retired slowly across the river. The right wing, which was almost unscathed, showed some inclination to reoccupy Sultan Shah, but was dislodged by the British artillery. Other guns were ordered onto the river bed, to break up the remaining bands.

The British bivouacked not far from the now abandoned Mirs' encampment, which in the confusion of looting was burnt and totally destroyed. They had suffered 262 casualties, of whom 62 were killed (they were buried next day close to the camp). Losses among the Baloch were estimated at around 2000. Napier himself rode over the field at dusk and slept so soundly that Outram, returning in the small hours, could hardly wake him. Next morning Mir Nasir Khan and his two surviving nephews came into the camp and surrendered, and the following day the victorious British army marched into Hyderabad, where the other Talpur princes handed themselves in. The fort at Hyderabad was taken over, the treasury sequestered and the entire contents of the fort, including the jewelry of the *zenana begums*, handed over to the prize agents for public auction.

However, this was not the end of Baloch resistance. Sher Mohammed, the independent Prince of Mirpur, who had come up too late to take part in the battle, remained at large, and tribesmen continued to rally to his flag. It would take another pitched battle and several months of mopping up before Sind was secure. In due course the Talpur princes were dispatched to prison in Calcutta, where, over the next few years, several died. In 1855 the survivors were given small pensions and allowed to return to modest estates on their former principalities.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Though the conduct of this battle has been well documented, the terrain has been so thoroughly altered that it is hard relate the action to the ground. In particular, large stretches of the dry river bed of the old Fuleli River have been filled in for agriculture, and only short, unconnected sections remain. Old villages have been re-named and new ones have grown up. Some of the

old *shikargarh* remains, now known as the Miani Forest, but its boundaries have been substantially altered.

However, there is a fine British-built sandstone column commemorating the battle that is well worth a visit. It is still in good condition, and has an unusual description which (presumably at Napier's instigation) lists by name all those killed on the British side, not only officers but soldiers as well, including the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim sepoys from the native infantry regiments. It was erected on the south side of the Fuleli River, probably on the spot where the British casualties were buried at the end of the battle. The village close by the monument, called Sahib Khan Chandio, was not there in 1843, but if you walk down the road from the monument to the village, and carry straight on into the fields beyond, you will be looking over the site of the battlefield, as if from behind the lines of the Talpur army. The dry bed of the river, where the Baloch army was massed, ran directly across your front, about a kilometre away. The British army approached from the north across the open ground beyond that. The small mosque to the half-right is probably the site of the grave of Mir Jan Mohammed Khatami, which (Napier says) was in the open ground about 60 yards north of the river. Just visible to the right, about 500 metres beyond the mosque, is the small village of Sultan Shah (formerly Kothree), the right flank of the Baloch position. The line of forest to the half-left in the middle distance marks roughly the line of the *shikargarh* that was the Baloch left flank. The Mirs' camp was about a kilometre to the right-rear.

If you are in the area, you should visit the Miani Forest Resthouse, which is just off the road on the west side of the main Hyderabad to Matiari road, close to the battlefield. This attractive building, set amongst mature trees, was built by the Talpur Mirs, probably around 1820, as a lodge for hunting (and, if some local stories are correct, dalliance). On the wall there is a remarkable sketch map of the Mianee battle which, judging by the detail, was drawn by someone who knew the battle well, and may actually have been present.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the new superhighway north from Hyderabad towards Matiari. About 10 kilometres from Hyderabad, 1 kilometre beyond the village of Hatri, you reach the trees of the Meanee Forest on the left. About 200 metres further on, an unmarked drive leads through the trees directly to the Miani Forest Resthouse. About 100 metres beyond the Resthouse turning, on the opposite (right hand) side of the superhighway, is a rough track, only suitable for 4x4 vehicles, that meanders about 2 kilometres through the eucalyptus forest to the battle site. Ordinary cars should take the small road that starts from the village of Tando Said Khan, about 1 kilometre further up the main road towards Matiari. In both cases, you will need to ask the way to the village (Sahib Khan Chandio) and the monument ('devri chandio' in Sindhi). The round trip from central Hyderabad can be done in less than a couple of hours, though of course longer if you linger and explore.

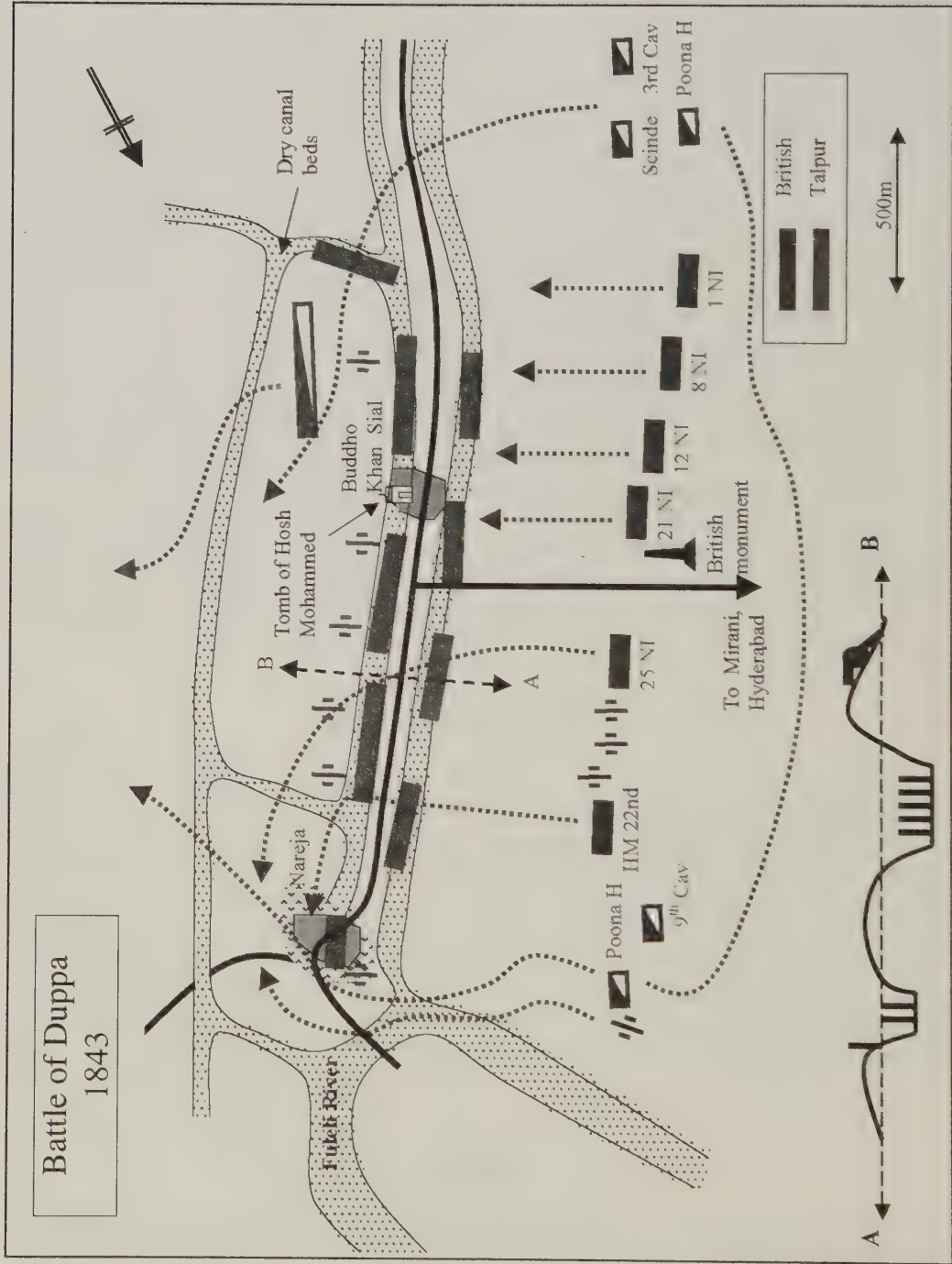
## NOTES

1. The commanding officers of all three battalions were killed or wounded.
2. He had sprained his wrist nine days before punching the head of a delinquent camel man, so could not carry a sword.



# Battle of Duppa

1843



# 8

## BATTLE OF DUPPA, 1843

Sir Charles Napier's victory at Meanee on 18 February 1843 marked the end of Talpur rule over Sind. The day after the battle, Napier's victorious army occupied Hyderabad and detained the Mirs of both that city and Khairpur. However, one substantial Talpur leader, Sher Mohammed, the prince of Mirpur Khas and head of the third main branch of the Talpur dynasty, remained at large. He had initially been of lesser concern to the British because his territory was small compared to the other Mirs and, except for the small isolated port of Shahbandar at the mouth of the Indus, neither abutted the river nor the main routes north-west towards Afghanistan. However, he was an intelligent and capable man, described as 'vigorous in mind and body, a born leader though almost, if not quite illiterate'. Sher Mohammed had been on poor terms with Nasir Khan, the head of the Hyderabad Talpurs, so had largely kept himself aloof from the intrigues that had engulfed the rest of the clan and had absented himself from Meanee, possibly on the advice of his friend Mir Sobdar Khan, who was supporting the British.

However, a few days after the battle, Sher Mohammed, wishing to test the water, advanced at the head of 8000 men to within six miles of Meanee and sent an emissary to Napier with a letter asking what were the general's intentions towards him. Napier wrote in reply, 'If you disperse your troops and keep none with you, I shall reckon you the same as before. Otherwise you will be attacked.' Unfortunately the effect of this somewhat cryptic message was undermined by the emissary's report that Napier had imprisoned all the Talpur Mirs and princes, including the loyal Sobdar Khan, confiscated their treasure and the contents of Hyderabad fort and humiliated their *begums*. Doubting Napier's sincerity, Sher Mohammed withdrew to his own territories, but decided to watch events a little longer before disbanding his levies. In an effort to make himself as strong as possible and in the hopes perhaps of securing better terms, he borrowed a lakh of rupees.<sup>1</sup> Disenchanted Baloch warriors from all over Sind rallied to his banner in the hope of a second trial of strength with the British. The country folk were also active supporters, for Sher Mohammed was the most popular prince in Sind.

Napier got wind of these developments and wrote again to Sher Mohammed on 3 March: 'You are rallying the defeated Baloochees; you have increased the number of your troops; and unless you come to my camp at Hyderabad and prove your innocence, I will march against you and inflict a signal punishment on you.' Bold words, as Napier's own position was vulnerable. His troops were scattered and the weather was getting hotter; his camp was only partially entrenched and his only British battalion, HM 22nd Foot, was still recovering from the stiff fighting at Meanee. It therefore came as something of a shock when, ten days later, he received intelligence that Sher Mohammed had now assembled 30,000 men, with artillery, at Mirpur Khas. On 15 March, the Talpur prince approached within twelve miles of Hyderabad with a very large force, and sent a blustering letter to Napier that if he released his prisoners and returned their treasure, he would be permitted to evacuate the country unmolested. As the

note was being delivered, the evening gun sounded, and the general told the messenger that that was his answer. Nevertheless, he sent urgent requests to the British authorities for more troops and supplies (with apologies for the expense), but luckily for him the governor-general, with great foresight, had anticipated him and had already dispatched several units from Sukkur, and a boatload of grapeshot up the Indus by steamer from Karachi. The Baloch seem to have made some desultory efforts to interrupt these moves, by harassing movement on the road from Karachi, and plundering wood and coal stations on the Indus, but to little effect.

On 18 March and again on 20th, Napier reconnoitered Sher Mohammed's position at Tando Jam Ali, which he found 'very strong, and not unlike Miani'. On his return, he issued a general order to the troops that they would march on 24th, 6000 men against 15,000, but 'all of them men you have beaten', adding:

I do not tell you to be brave, for I know you to be; but I mean that no man is to fire without orders. Let all sepoy's keep their ranks, shoulder to shoulder, close and firm, and level (aim) at your enemies' knees. That is all I have to say; do this and another glorious battle will be yours.

He had almost given up hope of reinforcements when, on 21st, two fleets of boats arrived almost simultaneously. From Sukkur came infantry and guns, and from the Karachi more artillery, officers and men; the next day, yet more troops marched in. Thus reinforced, Napier marched on the evening of 23rd with his whole available force—4000 infantry, 1100 cavalry and 17 guns—leaving only a motley collection of recruits, sailors and convalescent soldiers to garrison Hyderabad. Whilst he was putting his troops through some basic manoeuvres, yet another delegation arrived from Sher Mohammed with a final ultimatum. Napier led the emissaries along the lines of his battalions before sending them back with his own demand for Sher Mohammed's unconditional surrender.

Before sunrise next day, Napier crossed the Fuleli and advanced towards Tando Jam Ali, some ten miles to the east, with the Scinde Horse leading. The country was much broken by canals, villages and groves, so he threw out a screen of cavalry on both flanks for extra security. After about four miles, a peasant told them that the Baloch had moved their position some two miles to the north. Napier at once swung the advance towards the new objective and sent the Scinde Horse off to find them. Jacob soon discovered Sher Mohammed's position and, as at Meanee, deployed his regiment into line to endure a cannonade by the Baloch artillery until the main body came up. The British dispositions were conventional. On the left were two regiments of native cavalry. To their right was the single British battalion, the 22nd Foot. Then came the heavy artillery, and to its right, the five battalions of native infantry. The Scinde Horse and 3rd Cavalry, supported by Leslie's Troop of horse artillery, protected the open right flank.<sup>2</sup>

Napier sent some staff officers forward to examine the enemy dispositions, and then followed himself. He confesses to having found it quite as baffling as Meanee. The position was obviously entrenched and strongly held, but it was impossible to ascertain its full scale or configuration. The Baloch right flank was protected by the bed of the Fuleli River, with a thick grove of trees on the far bank. On the near bank of the river was a substantial village called Duppa, set on a small mound and surrounded by trees. Running away from the village for more than a mile directly across Napier's front was a dry canal with a high bank of heaped-up earth, along the crest of which could be seen the heads of the Balochis and the flashes of their cannon; and behind a mass of native cavalry. One of his staff officers pointed out several earthen ramps, where the canal bank had been cut through.<sup>3</sup> The left flank was open, protected only by the banks of the dry canal, but there was a small grove of trees some two miles distant

that, it was feared, might also be held. Nevertheless, as a round shot whizzed past Napier's face and into the chest of a nearby soldier, he felt that further delay would undermine the confidence of the troops and he ordered the heavy artillery to open fire.

Seeing no sign that Duppa was occupied, Napier decided to launch his initial attack here and turn the right flank of the enemy position. Leslie's Troop was brought across from the right of the line and, supported by the Poona Horse and 9th Cavalry, advanced towards the village, unlimbering at intervals to fire obliquely into the Baloch lines. Sher Mohammed's men were now seen to be moving into the village, which confirmed Napier's impression that this end of the line was not strongly held. He therefore ordered a general advance by the infantry, led by the 22nd Foot on the left, with the regiments on the right of the line held back a little to provide against any counter-attack from the woods on that side. However, as the 22nd, supported by the horse artillery, came within musket range of the bank, they came under heavy matchlock fire from Duppa, which, contrary to expectations, was in fact held in great strength. Half the Light Company of the 22nd went down, but the battalion pressed on. Just at this moment, Napier received an urgent report from the right wing, telling him that his cavalry on that flank were charging. Nonplussed, he galloped over to the right, just in time to see the Scinde Horse and 3rd Cavalry as they swept forward over the crest of the bank to their front.

Sitting quietly (and, one suspects, impatiently) with their regiments on the right of the British line, Lieutenant Colonel Jacobs and Captain Delamain, commanding the Scinde Horse and 3rd Cavalry respectively, had noted that there was no matchlock fire coming from the bank to their front. When they saw the tribesmen shifting towards Duppa in response to the advance of the 22nd Foot, they became increasingly convinced that the left of the Baloch position was only lightly held. Both were bold and aggressive cavalymen and they were not going to waste an opportunity like this. After a brief discussion with their brigade commander, Major Stack, but without reference to Napier, they charged; the fiery Delamain conspicuous at the head of the whole line. Their judgement had been right. They breasted the bank, crossed the canal without opposition, and poured out onto the far bank. Now they came in sight of the real left wing of Sher Mohammed's position, along a second embanked canal running obliquely back from the first. The Balochi defenders were in strength here, but hardly had time to fire their matchlocks before the British horsemen, swinging left, were amongst them. Crashing though the infantry, they completely smashed the left of Sher Mohammed's line, and fell on his unprepared cavalry, which was posted in reserve behind this wing, chasing them clean off the field.

Knowing nothing of this, but seeing that it was too late to influence events on the right, Napier galloped back to the left wing, just as the 22nd, having fired a single volley at 40 yards' distance, stormed up the embankment onto the Baloch position. As they crested the bank they saw that the trench behind, some 6 yards wide, was crammed with tribesmen, so tightly packed that there was hardly room for them to wield their swords. Their charge carried the regiment down into the trench, where a bloody and confused hand-to-hand fight ensued, the close line of bayonets soon prevailing. On the right of the 22nd, the 25th Bombay Native Infantry now also entered the fray. As the Balochi swordsmen fell back, the attackers fought their way out of the first trench and down into a second, wider and deeper ditch behind, in which tribesmen were massed in even greater numbers. Lieutenant Hutt managed to get his guns to the edge of the first entrenchment on the right of the 25th Native Infantry, firing down at point-blank range among the Baloch reserves, but the Mir's guns continued to fire, and were not silenced until captured by the infantry.

The Baloch position was now entirely cut in two and the left of their line, outflanked by the charge of the British cavalry, offered comparatively little resistance to the remaining British

battalions as they in turn came up. Though the firing of the British artillery on this side was curtailed by fear of hitting the men of their own cavalry, now established in the rear, these battalions were able to cross the trenches using the ramps identified earlier and as the defence on this side started to crumble, also broke clean through the line. By this time, Sher Mohammed had left the field—to fight another day.<sup>4</sup> Command of the Baloch army devolved on Hosh Mohammed Kambrani, an Abyssinian by birth, who had come to Sind as a slave and had risen to high command in the household of Sobdar Khan. He gathered round him a devoted band of fellow-servants who, yielding not an inch but fighting to the last man, died where they stood. Sher Mohammed's son, Mir Ali Murad, built a beautifully sculptured tomb over the grave of Hosh Mohammed.

The British cavalry on the left wing dropped down into the bed of the Fuleli and skirted round the left of Duppa with comparatively little loss, followed (as soon as the Sappers had cut a path) by the horse artillery. Establishing themselves on a bank beyond the village they were able to bring down an enfilade on the withdrawing Baloch until compelled to cease firing by the approach of the cavalry brigade from the right flank.

Fierce resistance continued in Duppa where, from behind breastworks and loopholed houses, a strong force of tribesmen, reinforced by those displaced from the main position, still held out. However, as the 22nd Foot emerged, considerably reduced from the fighting in the double trench, they swung left and, supported on their right as before by the 25th Native Infantry, drove through the village. The fight here was stubborn and confused. A magazine blew up close to Napier, killing several people around him, though he himself was unscathed. At length the surviving Baloch were expelled and fell back sullenly before they were completely surrounded by the wheeling advance of the 21st Native Infantry. The victory was complete; the British infantry regrouped in two lines in the open ground south of Duppa, at right angles to their original line of advance, and gave Napier three cheers.

The British lost thirty-nine killed and 231 wounded in the battle, while Baloch losses were estimated at around 2000 killed, with fifteen guns and seventeen standards. Napier sent the wounded back to Hyderabad, and ordered that Baloch casualties should also be collected and treated.<sup>5</sup> In his dispatch after the battle, he wrote: 'I have every reason to believe that not another shot will be fired in Scinde.' While this turned out to be somewhat optimistic, the back of Balochi resistance had indeed been broken. Sher Mohammed made no attempt to defend his capital, which was captured on 27 March, with Umarmkot falling a week later without a fight. British rule over Sind was proclaimed, but Sher Mohammed was still at large. He made several tentative offers to come in, but Napier would hear of nothing but unconditional surrender, which the Mir was unwilling to accept. On 1 May, he was reported to be in Kunhera with 10,000 men, but by then the summer heat had arrived and further campaigning was impossible. He was to elude the British for another ten years, first in Kandahar, and later under the protection of the Marri tribesmen in the hills north of Kachhi, and stories soon grew up around him of daring escapes and help from brave but penniless widows that earned him the sobriquet of the 'The Lion of Sind'. He was eventually rehabilitated in 1854, returning to a small estate in Mirpur Khas where he lived out his days.



## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

This is one of the least-spoiled battlefields in the country, with all the main features of the topography immediately discernable. The Fuleli river bed is still intact, as is Duppa village (now more usually called Nareja), which is still dominating and wooded, as it was in 1843. Until living memory, the two canals that formed the front of the Baloch position ran on either side of the road running south-west from Nareja. They are now disused but can still be seen in places. About 1 kilometre from Nareja is a new village, called Buddo Sial where, beside the road, is the *ziarat* of Hosh Mohammed Kambrani. The 'beautifully sculptured tomb' is no more, having been replaced by a modern brick and concrete building, but the grave itself is still there, very probably built on the spot where he fell (in the centre of the line, in the second trench). Beyond Buddo Sial the road continues to run south-west a further 500 metres, where the remains of a canal running obliquely back marks the left flank of the Baloch position in the battle.

The new road that runs north-west from Buddo Sial is roughly on the centre-line of the British advance. Unlike the area to the rear of the Baloch position which, nowadays at any rate, is broken and difficult, the ground here is open and clean. About 500 metres up the road is an old British-built sandstone column, now in the middle of a thorn and scrub thicket. The inscription says: 'To the memory of those who fell at the Battle of Dubba on 24th March 1843 and who were buried near this spot' and lists the thirty-nine casualties suffered by regiment, including 'One drummer from the 21st Bengal Native Infantry'. The monument is surrounded by six large cannons, half-buried, muzzle downwards, in the earth, all marked with a crown and the letters 12P (for 12-pounder?) WG and a date 1796. Whether these were used at the battle is not clear.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the Tando Jam road out of Hyderabad. About 7 kilometres from the city centre you cross the New Fuleli Canal, and 1 kilometre beyond this is the village of Mirani. Turn left shortly after the village, crossing over the railway line at Jakrapatak. Follow this road 2 kilometre through the woods to Noonari village, where you turn right. About one kilometre from here, through the village of Gul Mohammed Mangsi, you reach the British monument on the right hand side of the road, and about 500 metres further on, the main battlefield itself. The drive from Hyderabad will take about half an hour.

## NOTES

1. The money came from Mir Nur Mohammed's widow, one of the few Talpur *begums* who had managed to conceal her fortune from the depredations of the British at Hyderabad.
2. According to Napier, he had to position each corps himself as it came in, because his brigade commanders were so inexperienced. If so, this was not a great success, as they initially found themselves too close to the Baloch guns, and had to withdraw out of range.
3. It later transpired that the Baloch had cut these in order to get their guns into place.
4. Two officers of Stack's Brigade saw him go, mounted on an elephant, and could probably have captured him, but were restrained by Colonel Pattle, Napier's cautious Second-in-Command, who judged that the cavalry was already too dispersed.
5. Thirteen wounded men were captured alive, which Napier noted was 'an improvement' over Meanee, when only three wounded men had given themselves up.



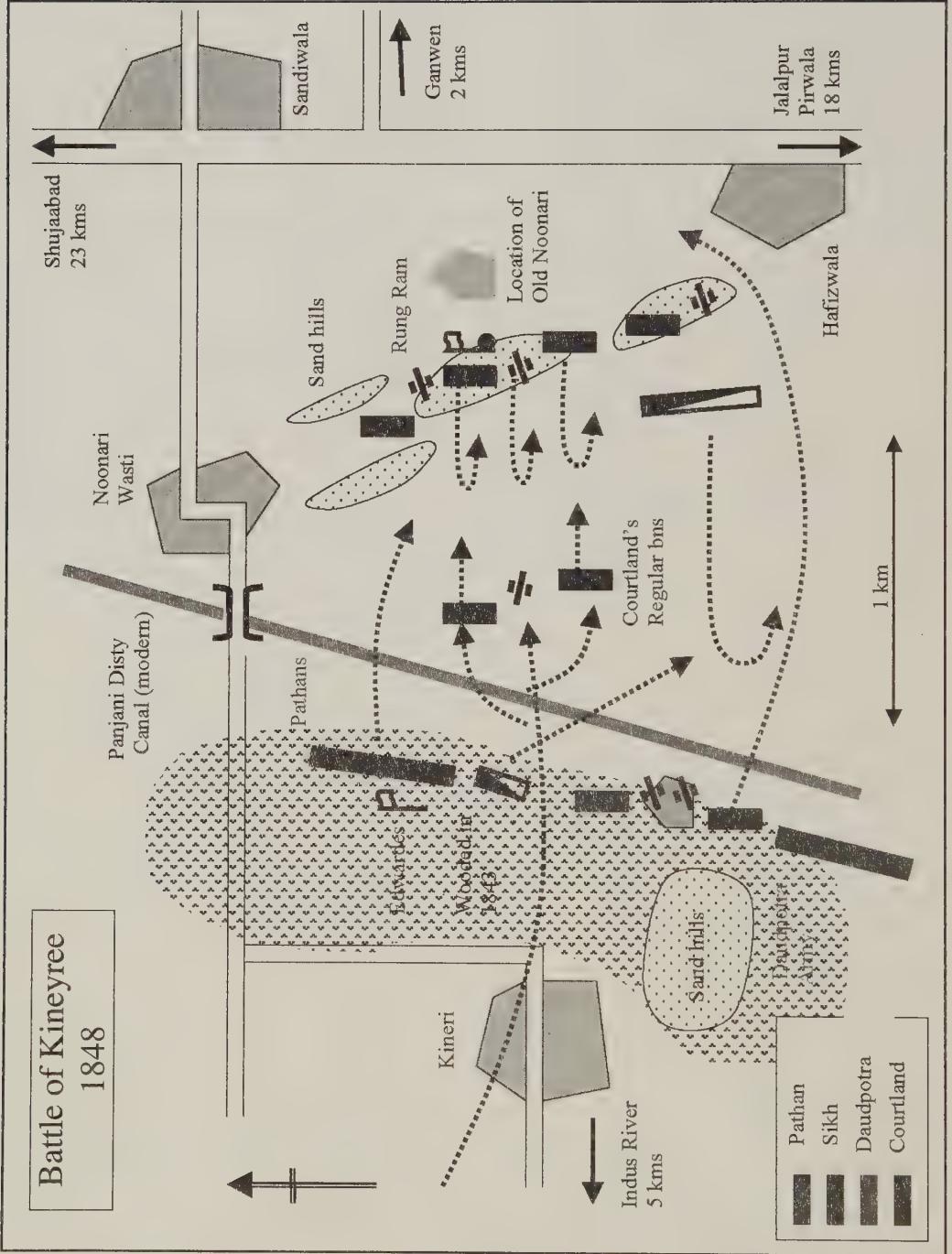
SECTION V

SECOND SIKH WAR





# Battle of Kineyree 1848



- Pathan
- Sikh
- Daudpotra
- Courtland

Shujaabad 23 kms

Ganwen 2 kms

Jalalpur Pirwala 18 kms

Noonari Wasti

Panjani Disty Canal (modern)

Pathans

Sand hills

Rung Ram

Location of Old Noonari

Hafizwala

Edwards

Wooded fir 1843

Courtland's Regular bns

1 km

Kineri

Indus River 5 kms

Sand hills

Pauchpoutr Wasti

# 9

## BATTLE OF KINEYREE, 1848

Following the First Sikh War in 1846, the government of the Punjab was still ostensibly in the hands of the Sikh Durbar in Lahore. However, the British had established a loose network of political officers to oversee, and where necessary discreetly direct, the administration. One such 'political' was Lieutenant Herbert Edwardes, the sole British officer in Bannu.

Edwardes was an archetypal representative of the soldier/administrators who were at the sharp end of British expansion in India during the nineteenth century. He had obtained a commission in the 1st Bengal Europeans in 1842, but he was an ambitious and egotistic man, and had immediately set about improving his career prospects, qualifying within three years as an interpreter in Hindi, Urdu and Persian. He served as an ADC to Lord Gough during the First Sikh War and was wounded at Moodkee. In 1847 he was dispatched to Bannu, to regularize the collection of revenue from the Derajat tribes that had been alienated by the depredations of the Sikhs.<sup>1</sup> In this he was highly successful. Combining supreme self-confidence with a remarkable understanding of the tribal character, he soon gained the respect of the local *maliks*.

On the 22 April 1848, he was hearing a court case in Dera Futteh Khan when a horseman dashed in and handed over a scribbled note. It was from his friend and colleague in Multan, Lieutenant Vans Agnew, who reported that the town, under its ruler Dewan Mulraj, had risen against him and his companion Lieutenant Anderson, and that they were both wounded and feared for their lives. In the spirit of Drake, Edwardes finished hearing the trial before turning his mind to Multan. He was personally outraged by the treacherous attack on the two British officers in Multan and determined that their deaths (of which he soon learned) must be avenged. He also happened to be the only British officer close enough to help; Mulraj's rebellion was his opportunity and he seized it with both hands. He sent for Fojdar Khan Alizai, a Pushtun whose grandfather had been killed defending the city against the Sikhs in 1818. Fojdar was well connected throughout the tribes and the Multani Muslim community, and was an invaluable friend, confidant and ally. Using Fojdar's contacts Edwardes was able to rally to his banner some 3000 Pushtuns, many tempted by the chance of plunder and revenge for the defeat of 1818. These were the only fighting men available but they were 'bold villains ready to risk their own throats and cut those of anyone else' and it was only by the force of his own personality and the unstinting support of Fojdar that he was able to maintain any sort of control over them.

And, well aware that the defences of Multan were being strengthened and an army of about 10,000 soldiers with ten guns had been sent to hold the line of the Chenab against him, he was in a hurry. He told his friend Hodson (perhaps a little melodramatically) that 'Mulraj is daily adding to his means of resistance; digging up and mounting long-buried guns; enlisting on the average 100 men per diem, collecting revenue etc'. He wrote repeatedly and with increasing frustration to Sir Frederick Currie, the British political agent in Lahore, urging him to send troops, but to no avail—the official military hierarchy considered that it was too hot for

campaigning. However, the Nawab of Bahawalpur did respond to his call, dispatching an army of about 8000 irregulars and levies (called Daudpotras), both horse and foot, with eleven guns and thirty *zumboorahs* (swivel guns). Though these were scarcely more effective than Edwardes' own army, which now numbered some 5000 enthusiastic but untrained Pushtun volunteers, both cavalry and infantry, they were nevertheless welcome. His only heavy weapons comprised ten old *zumboorahs* seized earlier from the tribes in Bannu, but in mid-May he received welcome reinforcements from the Sikh Durbar in Lahore—two regiments of regular infantry (in total about 1500 soldiers) and ten guns, under the command of the loyal and competent General van Cortlandt, a European who had held a commission under Ranjit Singh.

With these, Edwardes was able to evict the Multanis from their territories west of the Indus and on the 15 June he crossed the river and seized the fort at Khangurh on the banks of the Chenab. His next priority was to link up with the Daudpotra army which was now encamped in the village of Goweyn (modern Ganwen), about 20 miles to the south, but on the other side of the river. Its commander, Futteh Mohammed Khan, had been brave and active enough in his prime, but was now over eighty, doddering and hopelessly indecisive (it was said of him that he changed his mind so often that he had to lie to appear consistent). Luckily for Edwardes, the British Agent at the court of Bahawalpur, Pir Ibrahim, was also with the Daudpotra army. Edwardes, not a man to mince his words, wrote: 'This able and faithful officer counteracted in no small degree the imbecility of the General.'

Directly across the Chenab from Edwardes and upstream of the Daudpotras, a rebel Sikh army commanded by Rung Ram, Mulraj's brother-in-law, was guarding the southern approaches to Multan.<sup>2</sup> This consisted of around 8000 men, mostly professionals from the Sikh Khalsa, supported by ten guns and a substantial contingent of Pushtun cavalry (though under the circumstances, these must have been of doubtful loyalty) and the two companies of Gurkhas who had deserted Vans Agnew at Multan. Rung Ram's aim was clear—to destroy the Daudpotra army while Edwardes was still on the other side of the river. However, if he moved too early, Edwardes would be able to cross the river behind him, cutting him off from his base in Multan. He therefore waited until he was sure that Edwardes himself was moving south before committing himself.

Edwardes broke camp on the night of 16 June, and headed south down the right bank of the Chenab at best speed, planning to cross the river at the ferry near Kineyree, about 5 miles south of Goweyn. It was around midday before Rung Ram discovered that he was moving, but he reacted quickly, moving down the river and camping overnight within easy striking distance of Kineyree, with the intention of occupying the town early the next morning. With Edwardes' only possible crossing place thus blocked, Rung Ram could then have destroyed the Daudpotras at his leisure. However, news of his movements was carried by spies to Pir Ibrahim. Seeing the danger, he immediately wrote to Edwardes, suggesting that the Daudpotra army should pre-empt this move by seizing Kineyree themselves. Edwardes immediately concurred, ordering the Pir to: 'March down to the ferry at whatever hour of the night this reaches you, and if Futteh Mohammed refuses, supersede him.'

Edwardes' priority now was to link up with the Daudpotra army as soon as possible. The big boats needed to transport General van Cortlandt's regular troops and artillery across the river were not available, but using such small craft as were to hand he was able to get 3000 of his Pushtun irregulars under Foujdar Khan across during the night, and by morning these had linked up with the Daudpotras in Kineyree. Edwardes himself was crossing the river at dawn when he heard the cannonfire that signified that the Sikh army had also arrived.<sup>3</sup>



When he reached the bank there was no guide and he was unsure which way to go. Guessing that the Sikh artillery would be larger and better manned than that of the Bahawalpuris, he headed for the sound of the weaker guns. Passing through Kineyree, he soon came up to the battlefield and an already critical situation. Rung Ram had marched at dawn but finding Kineyree occupied by the combined force of Bahawalpuris and Pushtuns, he had withdrawn to a strong position on the salt hills around the village of Noonar, about 2 kilometres back, from where he commenced a bombardment. The semi-trained Daudpotra levies, thinking the enemy was defeated, rushed impetuously forward, together with a confusion of baggage and artillery, and immediately recoiled under the disciplined volley fire of the Sikh battalions. As Edwardes came up, they were streaming back to the village, where Pir Ibrahim was doing his best to restore some kind of order, extricate the baggage to the rear and re-form a defensive line. A young and somewhat distracted Englishman hurried up, exclaiming: 'Oh Sir, our army is disorganised.' This was Macpherson, the commander of one of the Nawab's two regular regiments and, apart from Edwardes himself, probably the only other Briton on the battlefield.<sup>4</sup> Nearby was General Futteh Mohammed himself, sitting under a peepul tree telling his rosaries and muttering, seemingly oblivious to the cannon balls crashing through the branches above his head and the chaos all around him. Seeing that Futteh Mohammed was incapable of making a decision ('I might as well talk to a post'), Edwardes gathered Pir Ibrahim and his principal commanders about him and issued orders that the troops were to form a defensive line in the cover of the jungle and lie down and wait until his own artillery came up. Then, sitting under a bush, he called his imperturbable Hindu secretary and wrote a dispatch to General van Cortlandt, telling him that he could hold out in his current positions till 3 p.m., but the guns must arrive by then or the battle would be lost.

This was at 8 a.m. and for the next seven hours the army lay under fire from the Sikh guns, the Bahawalpuris on the right of the line and the Pushtuns on the left. The tribesmen became increasingly frustrated by their mounting casualties and the lack of action, demanding: 'Let us strike a blow for our lives! If we are to die, let us die; but let us kill somebody first!' Edwardes threatened, cajoled, and pleaded with his men to be patient, to stay where they were and await the arrival of the artillery.

Initially, the fire of the Sikh guns fell mostly on the Daudpotras, particularly on their small contingent of artillery, and unbeknownst to Edwardes, a little after 2 p.m. General Futteh Mohammed seems to have issued orders for his forces to fall back to the river. As the Daudpotra fire slackened, the Sikh cavalry started to reconnoitre forward more boldly. Edwardes had kept his ten *zumboorahs* in reserve for fear of betraying their position. Now however he ordered these to engage the Sikh horsemen, who rapidly withdrew, but this quickly brought the full force of Rung Ram's batteries onto his own men. Shots tore through the ranks and ploughed up the ground, and under the cover of this fire, the Sikh horsemen came forward again. The situation was becoming critical, and Edwardes was in danger of losing control. Turning to Foujdar Khan, he ordered him to gather whichever chiefs and officers still had horses, form them into a compact body and charge the Sikh cavalry. The *ad hoc* squadron formed up in the jungle and, uttering a quick prayer, dashed out into the ranks of the Sikhs who, taken totally by surprise, fled back to their own lines. Many of the Pushtun chieftains were killed and Foujdar Khan himself received two severe wounds, but a little more time was gained.

At around 3.30 p.m., Rung Ram threw forward his troops for a third time, this time with the regular battalions leading. Edwardes knew the crisis had come. His irregulars could not hope to stand against trained soldiers. He steeled himself to make a last throw of the dice: a near-suicidal, unsupported general charge by his whole line. At this moment he heard the

bugle-note of artillery in the rear—van Cortlandt's guns were coming at last. Up came a single battery, supported by two regiments of infantry. Edwardes himself led them through the trees to where, directly ahead, the Sikh battalions, with six guns in support, were struggling through the sugar cane in the open fields beyond. In Edwardes' words:

Round went our guns, and round went theirs; and in an instant both were discharged into each other. It was a complete surprise, for the Rebels believed truly that all the guns we had in the morning had left with the Daoodpotras. Down sank their whole line among the long stalks of the sugar. To and fro rode their astonished and vacillating colonels.

Two Sikh guns were quickly silenced, and the fire of the rest slackened sufficiently for Edwardes to order forward one of the newly-arrived battalions. Away they went, Soobhan Khan the commanding officer, a stout heavy man, 'leaping over bushes like a boy'. At this moment, half a dozen Pushtun horsemen dashed out from the trees, and, sweeping past the advancing infantry, threw themselves on the Sikh guns. Their leader received a cannon-ball full in the face and fell dead over the muzzle of a gun, which a few moments later was carried at the point of the bayonet by Soobhan Khan's men. Edwardes himself had a narrow escape when he approached too close to a small body of Sikh horsemen, thinking they were Pushtuns, and received a musket ball through his shirt 'within a hair's breadth of my elbow'.

The Sikhs started to fall back, but rallied around the four remaining cannons deployed in depth along a nullah running in front of Noonar; but Rung Ram, who had directed the battle seated on an elephant from the hills near the village, was no longer to be seen. After one more volley from his artillery, Edwardes ordered a general advance by his increasingly excited Pushtun irregulars. With their commander gone, more than half their artillery lost, and outflanked by the Daudpotras (who were returning to the battlefield in increasing numbers) the Sikh intermediate position was quickly overrun and they fell back in disarray into the village. Once behind the ridge and among the shelter of the houses, they threw down their weapons and fled, pursued by Futteh Mohammed's remaining cavalry.

Victory was complete. The Sikhs lost around 1000 men, together with eight of their ten guns. The Gurkhas, who bore the brunt of the fighting on the Sikh side, suffered particularly severely—only seven survived.<sup>5</sup> The Sikh camp, with all the ammunition and stores, fell intact into Edwardes' hands (providing his irregular levies with tents for the first time in the campaign). His own losses were comparatively slight—58 killed and 89 wounded, with an estimated 100 more casualties from Futteh Mohammed's forces.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps because the battle was entirely fought by native Indian troops, with only two Englishmen present on the battlefield, it is now almost entirely forgotten, overshadowed by more glamorous, but perhaps less significant engagements. Nevertheless, Kineyree was the first battle of the Second Sikh War and though on a small scale, it was decisive. The remnants of Rung Ram's army struggled back into Multan over the next few days but Mulraj irretrievably lost his freedom of manoeuvre and control of the hinterland of southern Punjab. Bottled up in his mighty fort, he held out for six months more but never again threatened to break out, thus giving the British a free hand to develop operations against the main Sikh army in the north.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Though the general layout of the battlefield can be discerned, most of the tactically significant details have been lost. In 1843, the whole area was a patchwork of low sandy hills and jungle, with strips of cultivated land near the villages. Today the jungle has been cleared, the sand hills levelled and the whole area is under intensive cultivation. The village of Kineri lies on a low mound about 4 kilometres from the river, though the villagers report that in the old days the river used to be closer (Edwardes mentions 1 mile). A broad strip of jungle that lay just east of the village has gone, though it is likely that the eastern edge of this roughly coincided with the line of the modern Panjani Distributary Canal, which now runs straight across the battlefield. The small unnamed village where the Daudpotra guns were placed at the start of the battle also seems to have disappeared. The Sikh positions were on a range of sand hills (some up to 30 feet high) that ran north-west between the modern villages of Hafizabad and new Noonari. These hills (and the original village of Noonari, which lay just to the east of them) have now all been levelled for agriculture.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the road from Multan via Shujaabad to Jalalpur Pirwala. Twenty-three kilometres south of Shujaabad you reach the unremarkable village of Sandiwala, on a crossroads. Turn right here and follow the road about 4 kilometres through the village of Noonari Wasti to Kineri. The tarmac road ends here, but you can follow the mud road through Kineri and about 4 kilometres beyond to the River Chenab. The trip takes about one and a half hours from Multan.

## NOTES

1. As Reynell Taylor observed, political work was 'by far the best line for a military man to get into. It contained all the best plums and even in the lower grades, a man is in a more independent and responsible position than he is with his regiment.'
2. Rung Ram appears to have been ambivalent about the rebellion. In the first days of the revolt he had publicly advised Mulraj to 'fly to the British' and had been attacked and severely wounded by an enraged Sikh soldier for his pains. He had only been persuaded to take this command with the inducements of generous gifts.
3. As he buckled on the chinstrap of his hat, he recalled that it was 18 June, the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, a day on which he trusted 'no Englishman could be beaten'.
4. General van Cortlandt, despite his name, was probably half English.
5. It was reported that they had fought with halters around their necks as a symbol of their disloyalty.
6. There was no European doctor in Edwardes' army, so the wounded men suffered greatly.

# 10

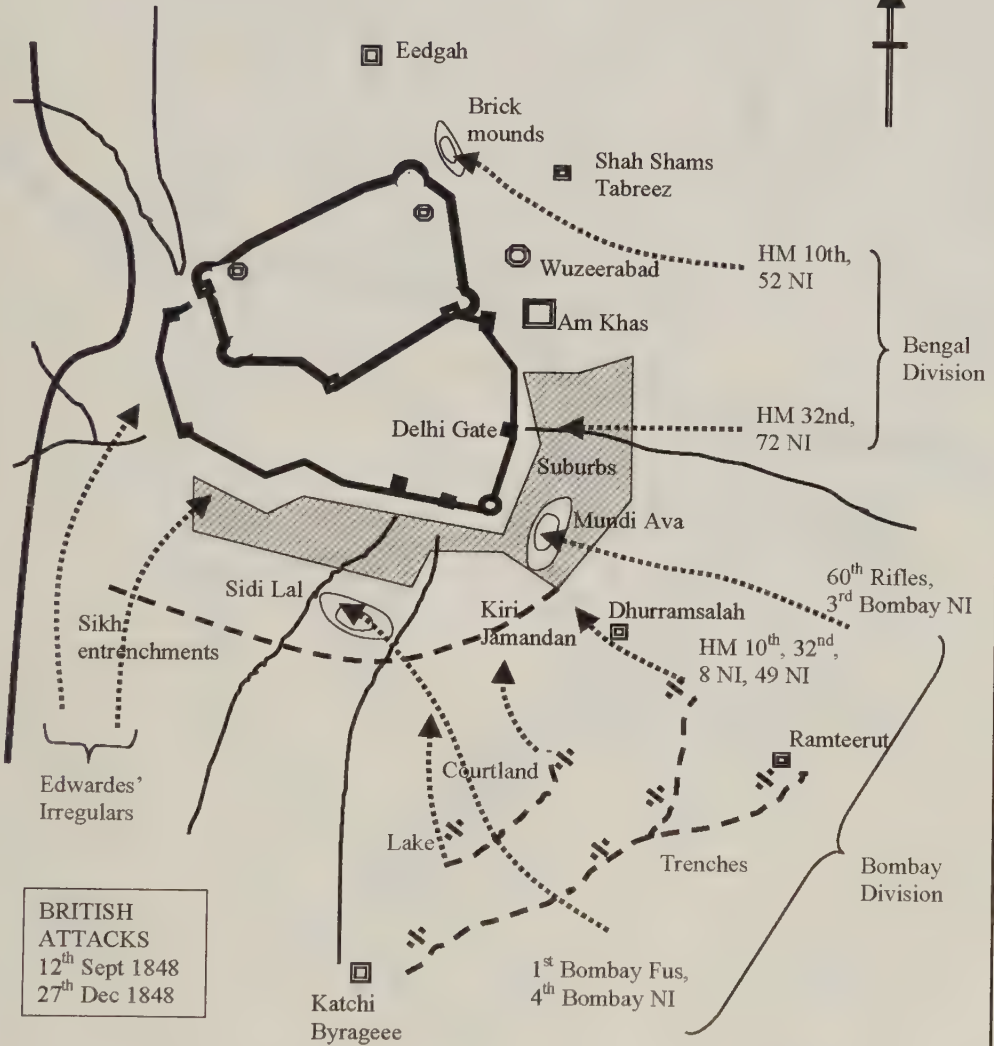
## SIEGE OF MULTAN, 1848

On the morning of 19 April 1848, two young British officers, Mr P.A. Vans Agnew of the Indian Civil Service and Lieutenant W.A. Anderson of 1st Bombay European Fusiliers, arrived in Multan with a small Gurkha escort to take over the fort from Dewan Mulraj, the ruler of that city. Vans Agnew, a civilian whose only previous experience was of the settled areas of Bengal, may have underestimated the vulnerability of his position. He established his temporary headquarters in the Eidgah, a spacious but unprotected mosque within range of the guns in Multan, and decided to take possession of the fort without first evicting the existing garrison. Though Mulraj had agreed to step down (indeed he had proposed it) his soldiers, particularly the Sikhs and Hindus, were unsettled by rumours that that they were to be demobilized by the new British rulers and the atmosphere was not improved by the high-handed manner of the young officers.

The next day the two British officers, accompanied by Mulraj, made a tour of inspection of the fort. As they were passing out of the Sikhee Gate, a soldier called Ameer Chund suddenly lunged at Vans Agnew with his spear, throwing him from his horse. Within seconds, the whole garrison was in uproar. As Mulraj fled to his house, his retainers chased after Lieutenant Anderson and cut him down, leaving him for dead. The Gurkha escort gathered up their wounded officers and hurried back to the Eidgah. As soon as his wounds were dressed, Vans Agnew dispatched letters to the British authorities and set about preparing his little camp for defence. He made an attempt to persuade Mulraj to come to terms, but the die was cast; urged on by his family and intimidated by his soldiers, the Dewan threw in his lot with the rebels. The next day, the guns of the fort opened fire on the Eidgah, and the Gurkha escort deserted *en masse*.<sup>1</sup> That night, a mob stormed the building and the two wounded British officers were hacked to pieces and hastily buried in shallow graves nearby. This was the spark that ignited the Second Sikh War, one of the most sanguinary in the British history of the subcontinent, which led to the downfall of the Sikh kingdom of the Punjab.

The character and motives of Mulraj have been much debated. To most British officers at the time he was a traitor and an assassin ('a practiced disciple of deceit and cunning'), driven to rebellion by personal ambition and greed. Modern historians are more equivocal. Mulraj had assumed the governorship of Multan in 1844, following the assassination of his father, who (though a Hindu) had ruled the city for many years as a vassal of the Sikhs. Though he was an able administrator, Mulraj was never to achieve the same security as his father. His tenure was undermined by the growing unrest in the Punjab after the death of Ranjit Singh, and deteriorating municipal finances. By 1848, conscious of the increasing vulnerability of his position, he asked the British if he could resign. He was well aware that this would be unpopular with his own people and tried to keep it a secret, until the governor-general, Dalhousie, without Mulraj's knowledge, casually informed the Sikh Durbar. As Sir Lepel Griffin wrote:

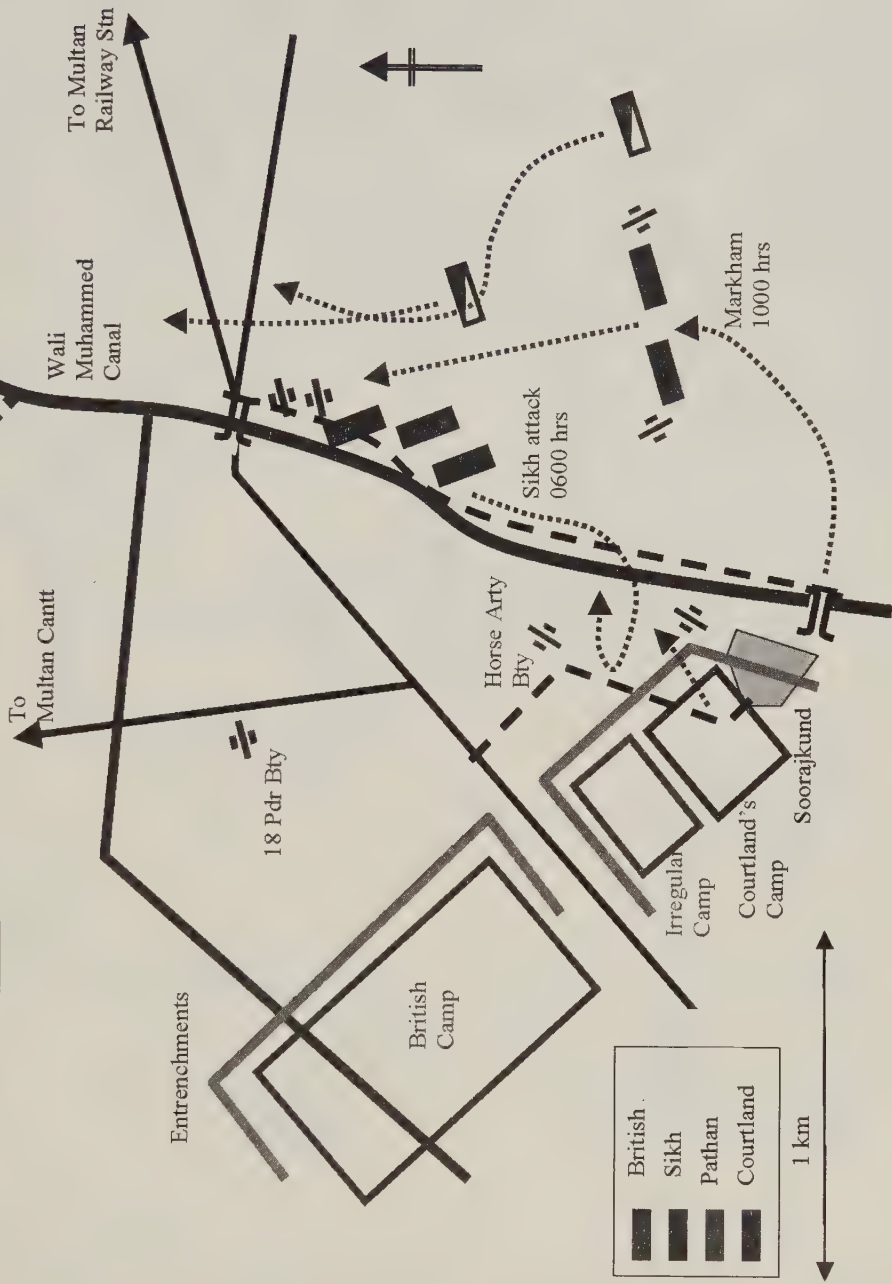
# Siege of Multan Operations Jul.-Dec. 1848



1 km



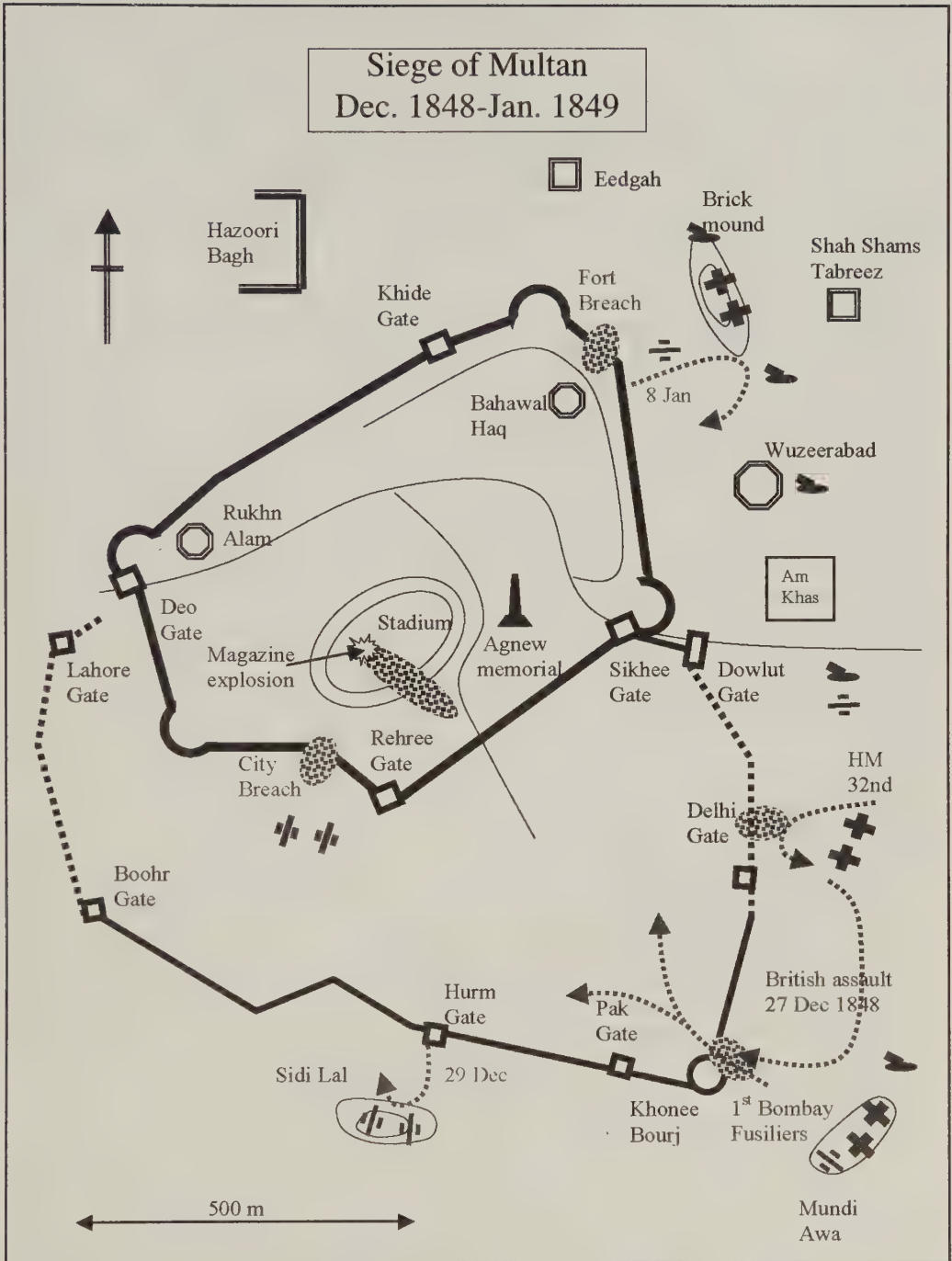
# Soorajkund 1848







# Siege of Multan Dec. 1848-Jan. 1849





Mulraj was surrounded by relatives, friends and troops who depended on him for place and wealth and power and who saw in a new Governor nothing but ruin for themselves. They determined to force him to rebel, for his victory could enrich them, and his defeat could not be more injurious to them than his resignation.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is unlikely that Mulraj was involved in planning the initial attack on his two English guests; indeed he seems initially to have feared for his own life. Nor is it certain that he was involved in the subsequent attack on the Eidgah, though the British court that tried him afterwards convicted him of complicity to murder. What is clear however is that once the two British officers were dead and there was no prospect of going back, Mulraj threw in his lot unreservedly with the mutineers and subsequently held out in Multan with considerable tenacity.

The defences of the city were indeed formidable and many natives considered it impregnable. The fortress, perhaps the strongest in India at the time, was built on an ancient city mound, faced with three massive brick walls that rose in concentric rings one above the other. The fort was surrounded by a wide dry ditch, 30 feet deep, which was spanned by three frail bridges, each leading to a fortified gate. Behind the ditch was the outer wall of great thickness, made of mud, called the Katcha Qila. Behind this rose the main masonry wall of the fort, the Pucca Qila, built against the steep slope of the mound and reinforced with bastions, each with embrasures for cannons. At the centre of the fort, and standing above it, was the citadel, which was protected by a third massive brick wall. The citadel was spacious, with mosques, gardens and storehouses, with Mulraj's house in the middle. The town, which lay in a loose arc around the south of the fort, was the second biggest in the Punjab, with about 50,000 inhabitants, a polyglot mixture of Punjabi Hindus, Muslims, Pushtuns and Sikhs. It was protected by a high brick wall, with semicircular bastions and five well-defended gates. Outside the town walls there were suburbs of mud houses and gardens, with a cluster of palaces and tombs on the eastern side that impeded the approaches to the town from that direction. The Eidgah, where Vans Agnew and Anderson met their deaths, was a little to the north of the fort, in what was then open countryside.

The British were slow to react to the uprising in Multan. The principal responsibility, in theory at least, lay with the Sikh Durbar in Lahore. The Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gough, was also concerned that the deployment of a British army to Multan might transform a local difficulty into a general Sikh uprising and, with the monsoon approaching, he was reluctant to commit British troops to a long, hot siege in a notoriously unhealthy region. However, Lieutenant Herbert Edwards, a young English political officer based in Bannu, had no such apprehensions. He was personally outraged by the murder of his countrymen and more alive to the dangers of delay than his superiors. Single-handedly, and almost unaided by the British authorities, he took up the challenge, and by the end of June he was marching on Multan at the head of a motley army of Pushtun tribal volunteers and levies from the Nawab of Bahawalpur's native army. He defeated one Sikh army at the Battle of Kineyree on the banks of the Chenab, and another at Sudoosam just west of Multan, and by July was encamped beneath the walls of the city itself. However, he was totally lacking in the heavy artillery needed to breach the massive walls and had insufficient troops to enforce a blockade. He therefore established his camp at Tibba, near the town, awaiting the arrival of reinforcements and relieving his frustration by badgering Sir Frederick Currie, the British Resident in Lahore, with requests for siege guns, sappers and all manner of specialist stores. Currie was sympathetic but Gough would not oblige; with Mulraj apparently bottled up in Multan by Edwardes, there seemed even less urgency. He was reluctant to dispatch the guns without supporting British

infantry, and was reluctant to send the infantry until the monsoon was over and 'the proper season for military operations shall arrive'. In due course, the whole issue was presented to the governor-general for a decision. Dalhousie, whose contempt for military men, according to Lewis Butler 'was comprehensible only on the theory that he felt confident in his own personal qualities of a Bonaparte', sided (as he had to) with his commander-in-chief. However, no sooner had he done this than it was learned that Currie had pre-empted his decision and on his own authority dispatched the siege train of thirty heavy guns to Multan under the command of Major-General Whish, an act of insubordination that the governor-general took in surprisingly good heart.

A third army was also approaching Multan. The Sikh Durbar in Lahore saw Mulraj's uprising as a challenge to its own authority and with the sanction of the British dispatched a column of 5000 men and ten guns under Raja Sher Singh to assist Edwardes in bringing Mulraj to heel. This was an exclusively Sikh force, mostly comprising Ghorchurras, the aristocratic yeomanry that formed the flower of the Sikh Army who, Currie hoped, would remain loyal to the Durbar because of their substantial *jagirs*, or land-grants. However, no sooner had the Sikh contingents assembled than he started to worry about their reliability. Indeed, as the shock waves of the revolt in Multan spread, what had started as a local rebellion in Multan against the authority of the Durbar rapidly transformed into a general uprising against the British. There were reports of mutinies by Sikh garrisons across the Punjab and deserters flocked to Mulraj in increasing numbers. Sher Singh himself remained loyal, but his soldiers were not immune from the general sentiment and by the time his army reached Multan the rank and file were thoroughly disaffected. The Raja's position was further undermined by his father Chuttur Singh, the governor of Hazara, who urged him to join the general uprising against the British. Under the strain of divided loyalty, Sher Singh discussed his situation with remarkable frankness with Edwardes, his current ally and potential adversary. This was a tricky situation for the young Englishman, who was semi-incapacitated, having accidentally shot himself in the hand with his own pistol. For a month, from his sick-bed, he tried to stiffen the Raja's resolve, whilst keeping the Sikh army close enough to his own to prevent mass defections, but not so close as to invite a treacherous attack. However, despite the problems and the great pain of his wound,<sup>3</sup> Edwardes was enjoying himself. Each evening, his six English officers would assemble for dinner under a *shamiana* in front of his tent, where he could join in their banter. Bottles of 'the immortal Bass' would be consumed (and on one memorable occasion, a 'prime stilton' sent down the river by Currie with a shipload of cannon-balls). Then Mr Cole the doctor would be called upon to sing, before they retired to their camp beds to 'breathe the refreshing night air and look at the moon and stars'.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards, he looked back fondly on this period, and later wrote: 'Happy nights indeed were those, though spent after days of danger and anxious thought, in the midst of a barbarian camp and within three miles of a powerful and blood-thirsty enemy.'

It was hoped that the arrival of General Whish's brigade with the artillery train might stabilize affairs. The troops arrived during the second half of August (some regiments having marched all the way and suffered considerably from the heat *en route*),<sup>5</sup> but now the stage was at last set, as they thought, for the proper commencement of the siege. A council of war decided that the heavy batteries must be brought closer to the city walls, and for this it was necessary to dig two parallel approach trenches through the town suburbs which were still held by Mulraj. The digging began on 7 September, with Edwardes' Irregulars taking the day shift and the British troops working at night when it was cooler. The Sikhs, seeing the line of the advance, started to build up their defences. In Edwardes' words:

So there were the two armies throwing up works within a few hundred yards of each other; the rebels, with little science but unbounded zeal, rearing stockades and piling up felled trees, and the woodwork of wells and houses, for the defensive warfare in which the soldiers of the Punjab excel.

After only two days, it was found necessary to clear some houses and gardens in front of the sap. Four companies of HM 10th Regiment, supported by native infantry and horse artillery, were launched in a poorly-planned night attack but were beaten back with considerable loss of life.<sup>6</sup> Three days later, at dawn, the British made a second attempt, this time led by two British battalions, HM 32nd on the right and HM 10th on the left, each supported by native infantry. Initially, progress was good and two lines of entrenchments were overrun. However, the Sikhs managed to re-occupy a strong building called the Dhurrumsalah on their original front line and the British were obliged to fall back to protect their rear. Using scaling-ladders to break in, the 10th Regiment recaptured the Dhurrumsalah in a bloody and desperate fight, in which the commanding officer was killed fighting in the courtyard. The battle broke down into a series of hand-to-hand encounters,<sup>7</sup> which continued for about two hours until a timely charge by the British cavalry broke up the Sikh reinforcements and the attackers were able to stabilize their new positions about 1000 yards ahead of their old line. This was close enough to the walls of Multan to set up the siege guns and it seemed that the fall of the city was imminent. General Whish was already selecting prize agents to manage the expected spoils of victory, when news came that Sher Singh and his whole army had gone over to the enemy.

Although fully engaged with operations in front of Multan, the British had been well aware of the deteriorating situation in Sher Singh's camp. Desertions were increasing daily, and the Raja and his immediate chiefs were increasingly isolated. An apparent attempt by Sher Singh to kidnap Edwardes during a dinner had been foiled by the observant and quick-thinking General van Cortlandt. Fearing the possibility of mutiny by the Sikh rank and file, Edwardes arranged for Sher Singh's army to be marched off to safer locations in the countryside away from Multan. However, as the regiments broke camp, the situation boiled over. Passionate orators harangued the soldiers, order broke down and in the ensuing melee Sher Singh at last bowed to the will of his men. The whole force moved in a disorderly mass to the city gates, but Mulraj (who suspected treachery) would not let them in and ordered them instead to camp in Huzooree Bagh, under the big guns of the fort.

With his own army thus depleted and Mulraj's strength apparently enhanced, Whish had no choice but to break off the siege. That same evening, the British withdrew to their earlier camp at Soorajkund, each of Edwardes' men carrying an 18-pound cannon-ball in addition to his personal equipment, to prevent these falling into the hands of the Sikhs. For nearly a month, Sher Singh lingered under the walls of Multan, negotiating with the still-suspicious Mulraj, while Edwardes successfully undermined their relationship by a campaign of deceits and disinformation. On 9 October, the Raja had had enough, and marched his whole army north to join his father, taking with him many of Mulraj's soldiers, who saw that Multan was already something of a side-show and the decisive show-down with the British would come in the northern Punjab. There was some criticism of Whish for letting Sher Singh get away without a fight, but the British commander argued that his first duty was to contain Mulraj.

However, with Sher Singh's departure, neither side at Multan was now strong enough to dislodge the other, so again a stalemate ensued, which both used to improve their defences and prepare for a second siege. The British camp at Soorajkund, about 3 miles south-west of Multan, seemed secure. Edwardes' Irregulars were posted on the east side of the camp, his open right flank protected by a deep, dry canal called Wali Mohammed's that ran from there to the city. However, on 2 November, three weeks after Sher Singh's departure, the British

awoke to find that under the cover of darkness the Sikhs had dug in a strong battery of six guns, revetted with the trunks of palm trees and well protected by infantry, on the far bank of the canal from where it could bring down effective fire into the British lines. A battery of heavy 18-pounders was set up to counter this threat, but the Sikh guns were so well protected that it was not possible to dislodge them and for several days the Irregulars' camp was under fire, with cannon-balls 'bounding like cricket-balls through the tents and ropes'. It was therefore decided on 7 November to clear the Sikh position with a coordinated dawn assault, with a British brigade advancing up the eastern side of the canal, supported by Irregular troops on the west bank. To free up British troops for this, Edwardes agreed that one of General van Cortlandt's units, the Kuthar Mookhee Regiment, mostly comprising East Punjabi Hindus, would take over the security of the 18-pounder battery. At 2 a.m., before the attack, half this regiment suddenly deserted to the Sikhs, apparently at a pre-concerted signal. Van Cortlandt and Edwardes, now doubting the loyalty of the rest of their troops, were forced to go to General Whish in the middle of the night to recommend that the Irregulars should be withdrawn from the coming battle. An immediate victory was necessary to stifle the disaffection, but the British troops must get this by themselves.

This was agreed, but at first light the Sikhs again seized the initiative by launching a surprise attack with about 7000 men across the Wali Mohammed canal into Edwardes' camp. The Sikh column threatening the camp itself was quickly driven off, but within five minutes the horse artillery battery, posted a little to the front and protected only by a low mud wall, was surrounded and in danger of being overrun. General van Cortlandt, ignoring his earlier advice, called on his remaining battalions to demonstrate their loyalty. The regiments responded, poured into the bed of the canal and after a sharp fight expelled the Sikhs.<sup>8</sup>

The planned British attack, now by two British brigades, was re-scheduled for ten o'clock. The regiments, under the command of Brigadier Markham (than whom, according to Edwardes: 'there is no better soldier in the Army'), crossed the nullah by the bridge at Soorajkund and, wheeling left, advanced up the east bank of the canal 'under a smart fire of grape and round shot'. Seeing a body of Sikhs hurrying forward to extract their guns, Markham ordered his cavalry, who were protecting his right flank, to charge. In a neatly executed move, the cavalry swept across the front of the advancing brigades, dispersing the Sikhs and capturing a standard as they went. Then, after a brief barrage from the accompanying horse artillery batteries, the infantry battalions charged and quickly overran the Sikh guns, capturing them all intact. Some of Edwardes' men were still in the canal and the British soldiers, mistaking them for Mulraj's sepoys, would have shot them down had not one brave man, Private Howell of 32nd Foot, stood in front of the Pushtuns waving his shako to warn his comrades of their error.

Edwardes described Soorajkund as 'the most gentlemanly battle ever fought, in that a mere manoeuvre of fine soldiery turned a large army out of a strong entrenchment and routed them, with the loss of five guns, before they even understood the attack.' By the standards of the time it was certainly well managed, involving manoeuvre and coordinated all-arms operations.<sup>9</sup> It was also extremely economical; the British lost only three killed and sixty-one wounded. The battle marked the end of the first siege of Multan. After this, Mulraj retreated into his fort and never again attempted substantial offensive operations. Inside the city, morale was slipping. Though well supplied with ammunition, food was in short supply and Mulraj was running out of silver and had to resort to paying his troops in hastily minted gold coinage. Increasing numbers were slipping away to their villages, though there were still probably about 12,000 soldiers in the city.

However, Whish still needed reinforcements before he could re-commence the siege. After many changes of plan, it was finally decided that these should come from the Bombay

Presidency Army that was considerably closer to Multan than the troops from Bengal. On 21 December the Bombay contingents marched in. Whish's officers, all from the Bengal Army, were struck by the immaculate turnout and bearing of the new arrivals, and by the 'most soldierly and serviceable custom of every man, native and European, carrying his own canteen of water.'<sup>10</sup> General Whish now had more than 32,000 men at Multan (of whom 15,000 were British) and 150 guns, including 67 heavy siege weapons.<sup>11</sup> With the new arrivals, the Irregulars that had played such a large part in the first siege were (to Edwardes' regret) dispersed to dominate the local countryside and secure the lines of communications; they were to play little part in the forthcoming operations.

It was decided that the main breaching effort should be directed against the north-east corner of the fort, and to this end it would be necessary to conduct a preliminary operation to clear the suburbs in front of this section of the wall. On Christmas day the combined British force moved forward to their old camp at Seetul-ki-Maree, south-east of Multan, and two days later the attack began. The objective of the main assault was the old brick mound to the north-east of the fort, with other columns making diversionary attacks on the city and the Irregulars staging a demonstration against the opposite (western) walls of the fort. The diversionary attacks went in first, making such good progress that after a brisk fight the two key features overlooking the city walls—the mounds of Mundee Awa and Sidi Lal—were captured (the latter by 60th Rifles) and the soldiers fanned out on either side to secure the neighbouring areas. The main assault, when it came, was completely unexpected. The Sikhs hastily abandoned the whole north-east sector of the suburbs and within two hours the British, to their own surprise, had secured the whole eastern approaches to the town,<sup>12</sup> an achievement that had eluded them for the previous six months.

The siege now began in earnest. The heavy batteries were mounted on the brick mound to break down the walls at the north-east corner of the fort. Mortars of all calibres were set up to bombard the interior and smaller howitzers deployed to sweep the battlements. Engineer saps were dug forward from the breaching batteries, in order to lay charges to blow down the banks of the moat. However, after a few days Whish approved the plan of his chief engineer that the main effort should be shifted to the walls of the city, which were less massive. By 1 January, two new batteries, each of eight 18-pounder guns, were in action. One, manned by men of the Indian Navy, was within 120 yards of the Delhi Gate and the other faced the Khonee Bourj, or Bloody Bastion, both firing in salvos for maximum effect.

The Sikh defenders were not completely passive. They made a sally against the Irregular positions to the south of the city on 29 December, and another on the engineer tunnels at the Shams Tabreez on 8 January, which caused a momentary panic. The next day, they made a concerted effort to destroy the naval battery in front of the Delhi Gate. Engulfed by a storm of shot and shell from the fort, the fascines protecting the battery caught fire, and the guns were only saved with the 'greatest difficulty and exertion of the seamen'. Despite these alarms, the British bombardment continued day and night, and on 30 December, a lucky shell from a mortar hit the principal powder magazine of the fort, causing a huge explosion. Edwardes, as usual, provides the best description:

Slowly, almost reluctantly rose up a mass of smoke and costly ruin, followed by an explosion which seemed to shake both armies at their posts. The dark volume expanded as it mounted into the sky and hundreds of separate circles (each with its own tale of perished arch or minaret) might be seen wheeling with the varying rapidity of the impetus it had received, and the burden they still bore. Then at a vast height the heavy cloud stood still, like some great tree, and its shadow fell as night over the camps below. Not a gun was fired; every eye was turned up with awe and watched the strange vision

gradually sink and disappear. The site of the explosion is marked by a long deep pit, around which buildings are piled upon buildings; corpses, carcasses of animals and every description of property strew the ground.

By 2 January, the breaches at both the Khonee Boorj and Delhi Gate were declared practicable. After a diversionary attack, two assault parties went in at 3 p.m. The storming party at the Delhi Gate, led by Captain Smyth of HM 32nd Foot, dropped into the ditch in front of the city wall, and immediately found what could not be seen from the outside; that the bottom 30 feet of the wall was still intact. Without ladders this was quite unscalable, so Smyth, despite taking heavy casualties and himself wounded, withdrew and led his men round to support the attack on the Khonee Bourg breach. Here the assault was led by three companies of the 1st Bombay Fusiliers, under the command of Captain Leith ('six feet five inches high and stout in proportion—a splendid figure'). In this case the breach was comparatively easy to surmount, but the fire from the defenders was intense. As the sepoys crested the breach, they received a fusillade from a crowd of matchlockmen behind a hastily-erected stockade (which all went high, except that Leith received a ball in the shoulder). Firing a volley, the Fusiliers charged with the bayonet. A fierce hand-to-hand struggle ensued, in which Leith was severely wounded for a second time, before the British broke through into the city itself. For 200 yards round the breach site the houses had been utterly demolished by the British artillery and the route from there to Delhi Gate was 'quite impassable on account of the rubbish, arms, corpses and carcasses of all sorts'. As soon as Mulraj became aware that the breach had been carried, he withdrew himself into the fort with three thousand picked men, leaving the bulk of his army to the mercy of the attackers. The British soldiers fanned out through the narrow lanes of the old town, shooting down the fleeing Sikhs wherever they found them, but it took more than two days before the city, which had been reduced to near ruins, was finally secured.

The next day, Mulraj made his first overture of surrender, but while the inconclusive negotiations carried on, the British artillery continued to batter the fort. With some difficulty the heavy siege guns were brought forward through the narrow alleys of the town, and a battery of 18- and 24-pounders was set up firing at point-blank range from the esplanade of the town into the southern wall of the fort. By 18 January, the wall at this point was broken down, though the ascent was still too steep to assault. The engineers therefore used heavy howitzers, firing delayed-action shells, to throw down loose earth from the top of the breach into the ditch below. At the same time, preparation of the 'fort breach' site was also nearing completion. The mines in front of the ditch were blown on 19 January, completely filling it and smashing the counter-scarp, and a battery of light 9-pounder howitzers was moved forward to break down the foot of the fort wall at short range.

The defenders continued to fight back, though resistance was slackening. The fortress itself was a total wreck, with a constant storm of shells falling in it day and night, 'a battered mass of ruined fortifications, of which scarcely a house has not been ventilated with a shell.' Both breaches were now practicable, shallow enough for dogs and horses, which the Sikhs drove over as an experiment, to walk up and down with ease. Orders were issued for the storming of the fort on the morning of the 22 January, but that night Mulraj sent a message that he was ready to surrender.<sup>13</sup> Next morning, the 1st Fusiliers and 10th Queens lined the route from the Dowlut Gate. First some 3000 men of the Sikh garrison came out and laid down their arms. A little later Mulraj appeared, riding an Arab charger and accompanied by his two brothers and several *sirdars*. He was gorgeously attired in silks and splendid arms and, according to a British bystander:



... looked round without the smallest emotion and showed in his countenance neither defiance nor dejection, but moved like a man conscious of deserving the admiration of even his enemies for having done his duty to the last.

The British authorities were less impressed. Mulraj was taken to Lahore, tried by a military tribunal of complicity to murder Vans Agnew and Anderson and sentenced to exile; he died in prison in Calcutta while awaiting transportation. Four days after the fort fell, the bodies of the two British officers were exhumed, wrapped in Kashmiri shawls, and escorted thence in a deliberately symbolic procession up through the fort breach, to be reburied inside the citadel.

Although the British had been encamped under the walls of Multan for nearly seven months, the siege proper had lasted only twenty-seven days. However, firing had been nearly incessant throughout that time. The British had expended nearly 30,000 rounds of shot and shell, and lost 210 killed and around 1000 wounded in the operation. The aim was achieved but, as had been clear for some time, the main theatre of the war had already shifted to the north. No sooner was Multan secure than General Whish with the majority of the army hurried north to join Lord Gough, arriving just in time to participate in the battle of Gujerat, the decisive victory that marked the end of the Second Sikh War and the start of British rule over the Punjab.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Multan fort still dominates the old city, but most of the interior has been rebuilt and little remains of the original structures, except for the two dominant shrines, the Rukn-i-Alam at the western end, and the Bahawal Haq in the north; both are still prominent landmarks today, as they were in 1848. Nevertheless, the outlines of the fort and town walls can still be easily discerned, and the location of the main events of the siege located fairly accurately. You can walk right round the fort, along the line of the old walls, though in most places all that remains are steep and crumbling banks, where the original bricks have been removed. There is a section of wall near the Rukn-i-Alam in good condition, but this is of recent construction, put up when the mosque was renovated in 1976. Some original sections of wall on the southern side around the Rehree Gate remain intact, though these are in poor condition, and mostly hidden by rubbish and encroaching buildings, so it is not possible to identify the so-called 'city breach' with any confidence. However, the site of the 'fort breach' can be accurately located. It lies in the northeast corner of the fort, just north of the white-domed Bahawal Haq, and can be reached by following the small road that runs north along the fort wall from the Sikhee Gate. From here the low hill (originally a brick mound) where the main British breaching batteries were mounted can be easily seen, about 500 metres away, with a small white mosque at its right-hand end. Behind that, and a little further to the right, is the green dome of the Shah Shams Tabreez mausoleum; both these features were captured in the British assault on the Multan suburbs on the 27 December 1848. At the eastern end of the fort, just to the north of the new sports stadium, is a small park with an imposing memorial column and the graves of the Agnew and Anderson, unmarked but otherwise both still in good condition. A little to the north of the memorial is the Sikhee Gate. Although little of the original construction remains, the steep ramp that runs down from here into the bazaar below follows the line of the old bridge over the moat; this was the spot where the Vans Agnew and Anderson were first attacked.

Little of the original city wall survives either, though the line of the battlements is easily discerned by a double road, the inner running along the line of the battlements and the outer

one running below, over the old moat. Fortuitously, the best preserved section of the city walls is at the Khonee Bourg, where the British first broke into the town. Much of the bastion itself is still intact, although most of the brickwork is new so the actual site of the breach cannot be discerned (contemporary drawings suggest that the right-hand side of the bastion itself was broken down in the breach). Some other stretches of the original city wall survive, particularly between Bohr Gate and Delhi Gate. A row of small shops around Pak Gate is being demolished by the city authorities, in the hope that this might expose some original sections of wall in this area. None of the original city gates have survived, though both Delhi Gate and Hurm Gate have imposing red brick gatehouses, built at a later date by the British.

The Mundi Awa brick kilns, where the heavy breaching batteries were deployed under the protection of the 60th Rifles, were only a couple of hundred metres east of the Khonee Bourg but are now lost in the city suburbs. On the other hand, the Sidi Lal hill feature, which dominates the Hurm Gate and was also captured by the British on 27 December, can still be seen. It can be reached by following the road out of the Hurm Gate for about 300 metres, turning right up a short alley at the crest of the hill just before the railway line. It now comprises a cluster of picturesque Sufi shrines and is well worth a visit in its own right.

The Eidgah, where Vans Agnew and Anderson were killed, still survives. It is about a mile north of the fort, on Fatima Jinnah Road. Though somewhat dilapidated, it is a substantial building with a fine central dome. It used to have a tablet commemorating the two officers whose death was the initial cause of the whole affair, but this is now lost.

The Sikh entrenchments during the first siege ran in a wide loop around the south of the old city, from Mundi Awa through Kiri Jamandan and thence westwards, roughly along the line of the modern railway, as far as the modern cantonment. The British dug two approach trenches, from the south and south-east respectively, which converged in the area of Kiri Jamandan. The Dhurrumsalah, which was the scene of bitter fighting on 9 and 12 September 1848, has gone, but it was located a little to the east of Kiri Jamandan, close to the railway line (it was visible to Victorian travellers coming from the north by train). The suburbs of modern Multan now cover all this ground, including the area where the battle of Sudoosam was fought, and nothing of historical interest remains.

However, the battlefield at Soorajkund, the site of the battle on 3 November, is still extant. It lies about 8 kilometres south-west of Multan, on the Shujaabad road. Soorajkund itself is an interesting village, built round a now derelict Hindu temple and tank. The canal network in this area remains largely as it was in 1843, with Wali Mohammed's Canal running north-south just east of the village, though the bridges at Soorajkund have since gone. The Irregulars' camp was on the low ridge just to the west of the village, with the British encampment beyond that, with its left flank protected by the Hamidpur Minor Canal.<sup>14</sup> The main action of the Soorajkund battle took place along the eastern bank of Wali Mohammed's Canal. The Sikh battery that was the cause of the battle was probably located pretty much where the modern bridge over the canal now is, with the British 18-pounder battery not far from where the main road to Multan Cantonment crosses the Hamidpur Minor Canal. The best place to get an overview of the battlefield is from the north-east corner of Soorajkund village. From here, the site of the Sikh attack across the canal and Mr Quin's heroics is about 300 metres up the canal (which was then dry of course) and the land beyond the canal, where Brigadier Markham's brigades made their attack later in the day, is still flat and open.



Greek dekadrachm coin, celebrating Alexander's victory over Porus at the Battle of Hydaspes River. The obverse may depict the moment of Porus's capture. The reverse shows Alexander in a Persian helmet, with spear, sword and olive branch. Probably struck in Taxila between 326 and 306 BC.

*Reprinted by permission of Jona Lenderberg*



*Akalis. Reprinted by permission of Harjinder Kanwal*



*A rare contemporary portrait of Akali Phoola Singh. Reprinted by permission of Harjinder Kanwal*



Foreign officials in the army of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. From the left, Allard, Avitabile, Ventura, Foulks, Steinbach, Courtland. Reprinted by permission of Harjinder Kanwal



Sir Charles Napier and his staff—McMurdo, Green and LH Perry, Kurrachee 1843.

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Sikh Elephant Guns, 1849. From the Illustrated London News, 10 March 1849.



1st Bombay Europeans storm the breach at Kooni Bourj, Mooltan at 3 p.m.,  
2 January 1849.

*Reprinted by permission of Ian Heron*



Viscount Sir Hugh Gough in general officer's frock coat, c.1850.

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John Penn, who fought with the 3rd Light Dragoons at Ramnuggar, Chillianwalla and Gujrat. He also saw action in Afghanistan (1839–42), the First Sikh War and the Crimea. He was invalided out of the Army in 1855, having received eleven decorations for gallantry.

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Charge of HM 14th Light Dragoons at Ramnuggar 22 November 1848.  
*Reprinted by permission of National Army Museum*



The assault of HM 24th Foot at Chillianwalla. The Sikh guns can just be seen in the background, across the ponds. *Reprinted by permission of National Army Museum*



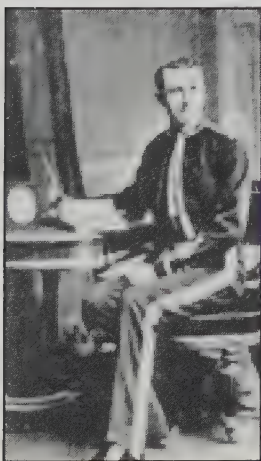
The rear of General Walter Gilbert's division at the Battle of Gujrat. Gujrat town itself can be seen in the left rear, with Bara Kalra in the right rear through the trees.  
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Western Lookout, Ambeyla, looking across to the British camp.  
*Reprinted by permission of National Army Museum*



Captain Davidson (centre) and Lt. Snow with the Native Officers of 1st Punjab Infantry in 1863. Davidson was killed later that year on Crag Piquet at Ambeyla.  
*Reprinted by permission of National Army Museum*

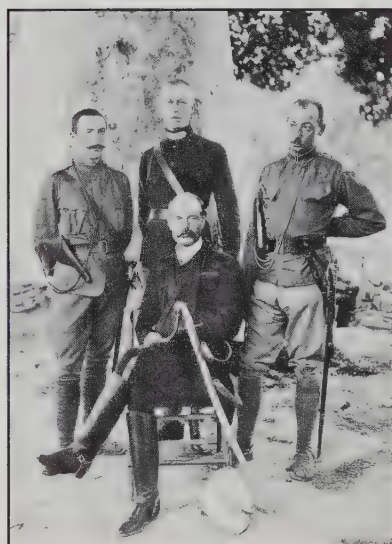


Lieutenant John Manners-Smith VC, 5th Gurkha Rifles, who led the assault up the 1200 ft precipice at Nilt in Hunza, 19 December 1891.



Gunners of No. 4 (Hazara) Mountain Battery with a 7 Pounder Gun.

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The defenders of Chitral. From the left, Harley, Gurdon, Robertson (seated), Townshend. Probably taken in the garden of Chitral Fort, with the entrance to the tunnel behind Townshend's left elbow.

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The besiegers of Chitral. Sher Afzul and his advisors.

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Afghan tribesman fighting in a sangar. *From the Illustrated London News.*  
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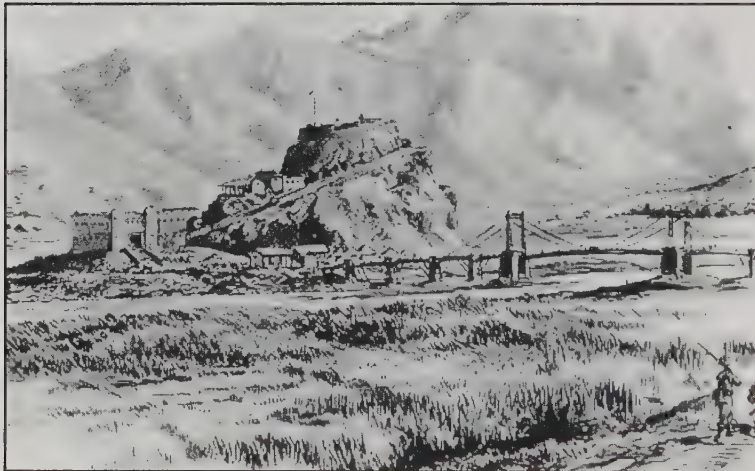


The attack on Malakand Camp: The 45th Sikhs holding the cutting on the Buddhist Road 10.30 p.m. 26th July 1897. Lieutenant Colonel McRae runs to join his men, Major Taylor lies mortally wounded. *From the Illustrated London News.*  
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Officers and men of the 45th Sikhs after the gruelling battles at Malakand and Chakdara. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel McRae is third from the right. Lieutenant Rattray is on the left with a bandage over his neck wound. Lieutenant Wheatley is 3rd from left.

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A heavily romanticised view of Chakdara Fort, looking north-west across the Swat River.  
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## HOW TO GET THERE

The fort is in the centre of the town, a short taxi ride from the airport. The best way to see it is on foot. It takes about an hour to walk around the walls, stopping at the three most interesting sites connected with the siege; the Vans Agnew memorial, the Sikhee Gate and the Bahawal Haq breach.

To see the city walls you need a car. Starting at the Lahori Gate *chowk*, the road follows the exact line of the walls; at the Hurm Gate, you can take a brief diversion to see Sidi Lal, or pass straight on to the Khonee Bourg. A car or taxi is also needed to see the Am Khas, Shams Tabreez and Eidgah.

To get to Soorajkund, take the Shujaabad Road from Multan. There are two roads out of the city, one from the cantonment area, the other from the Railway Station, which merge about 5 kilometers south of the city. About 200 metres south of the road junction, turn left off the road up a track a few hundred metres to Soorajkund.

## NOTES

1. Except for their commanding officer, Guldeep Singh, who was imprisoned by Mulraj and committed suicide by throwing himself down a well, in remorse for the behaviour of his men.
2. Foremost among these was his implacable mother who, according to a contemporary Punjabi ballad, spoke to Mulraj thus: 'I will kill myself, leaving a curse behind on your head. Either lead your forces to death or get out of my sight, and I shall undertake the wars in my own person. I shall send word to Shujaabad and send for Sham Singh (my second son). I will give rewards and put my forces on the battlefield.' Even if the specifics are confused, the sentiments are clear.
3. Edwardes' hand was sewn up by a native doctor using a packing-needle. The stitches were too tight and with the heat, inflammation and swelling caused him 'an agony I never can forget'.
4. Dr Cole seems to have been a good sport. Though no horseman, he was persuaded by the other British officers to ride in a steeplechase they organized around this time. At the start of the race his animal was so terrified by the 'Irish yells' of the soldiers that he could not make it move at all, until it set off backwards into the jungle, much to everyone's amusement.
5. HM 32nd Foot lost fourteen men killed and 175 incapacitated by heatstroke during their march to Multan.
6. Including Captain Christopher of the Indian Navy, who commanded the flotilla of gunboats that had brought the siege-train up the River Indus from Karachi. He was hit in the foot while bringing up reinforcements, a wound from which he subsequently died.
7. The correspondent of the *Bombay Times* reported that 'During that time the volleys of muskets, matchlocks, not to mention the whizzing of cannon and zumbooruk balls, made us keep our eyes open for fear of being knocked over before we knew where we were.'
8. Mr Quin, Edwardes' irrepressible clerk, was involved in the fighting. He was struck full in the chest by a spent roundshot and was carried to the hospital apparently completely paralysed, but remarkably, two hours later he was on his feet again 'pale as a sheet and in much pain, but with his sword in his hand'.
9. Edwardes attributed this success to the fact that all the commanders involved were under forty.
10. There was also general approval of the system of promotion in the Bombay Presidency, which was based on merit, not purely on length of service as in the Bengal Army.
11. It is remarkable that the combined divisional and brigade staffs for this force amounted to only forty-three officers and one solitary NCO.
12. Including several strongly-held positions; the blue mosque of Shams Tabreez, Sawan Mull's tomb, the Wuzeerabad, and Am Khas, Mulraj's own garden-palace.
13. Perhaps the final straw was when the guardian of the shrine of a famous Multani poet was killed by a stray bullet; local legend stated that as long as he was alive, the reign of Mulraj would prevail.
14. Interestingly, the area of the British camp at Soorajkund, just to the west of the Multan-Shujaabad road was owned by the old British Indian Army and older residents of the village can remember British officers in the 1930s making an annual visit to the site, presumably in connection with the anniversary of the battle. The land was passed to the Pakistan Army on Partition and remains in military hands today.

## BATTLE OF RAMNUGGAR, 1848

The First Sikh War of 1846 was to most observers an unequivocal success for British arms. Lord Hardinge, the departing governor-general, reflected the general view when he reported in 1848 that there was 'no native power remaining able to face a British army in the field' and, 'It would not be necessary to fire a gun in India for seven years to come.' Only the wise old bird Sir Charles Napier saw differently, writing that: 'This tragedy must be re-enacted a year or two hence; we shall have another war.'

Napier was right—the Sikhs may have been chastened, but they were not broken. With the Sikh court in Lahore riven by faction and the army, the Khalsa, deeply resentful of its lost prestige, conditions were ripe for a further outbreak. It came in April, when rebellion broke out in Multan and two young British officers were murdered. Dalhousie, the new governor-general was outraged, declaring, 'Unwarned by precedent, uninfluenced by example, the Sikh nation have called for war, and on my word sirs, they shall have it with a vengeance.' Despite this, the British were unprepared and slow to react and it was not until the autumn that an army, under the command of Lord Gough, was assembled in Ferozepore. By this time the situation in the Punjab had deteriorated markedly; the revolt in Multan had developed into a full-blown Sikh uprising against the British and a large force under the command of Sher Singh was threatening Lahore.

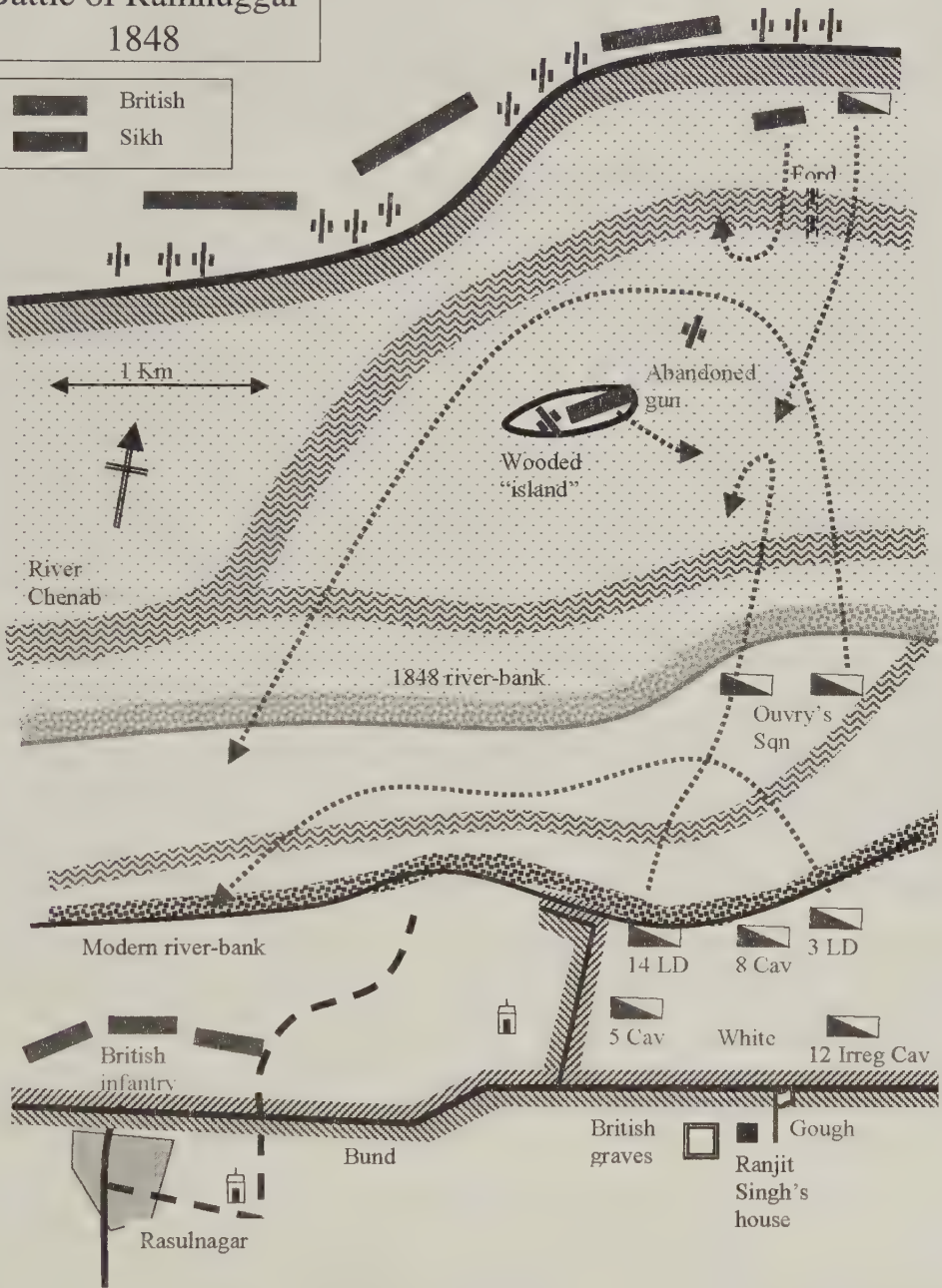
Gough was sixty-nine and nearing the end of a remarkable career. He had been born in Limerick, and though he never went to school, he had picked up enough rudimentary education from his brothers to enable him to take a commission in the city militia at the age of fourteen. He soon transferred to the regular army, seeing service in the Caribbean and Central America. He commanded the 87th Foot in the Peninsula War, where he was wounded twice, but his battalion was disbanded at the end of the war and he was retired on half pay for twenty frustrating years. It was not until 1837, at the age of fifty-eight, that he unexpectedly returned to active service, to command a division in the Opium War with China. Following the successful Gwalior campaign against the Mahrattas he was appointed Commander-in-Chief in India, in which capacity he had emerged battered but victorious from the First Sikh War.

Gough was hugely experienced, having commanded more general actions than any other soldier in the nineteenth century except Wellington. He had an instinctive understanding of what we now call the operational level of command—the likely moves of the enemy and how best to manoeuvre against him. On the other hand, many regarded him as tactically inept and insensitive to casualties. There is something in these criticisms—Gough believed that battles were won by courage and determination rather than fancy tactics.<sup>1</sup> Staff work was not his forte. He allowed his best men to serve with the fighting units—in line with his own inclination, and his headquarters were always too small and too inexperienced for their proper role. Hardinge, admittedly not an admirer, wrote that 'Sir Hugh Gough has no capacity for order or administration...His staff is very bad and the state of the army is loose, disorderly and unsatisfactory.' Gough was equally dismissive of civilian administrators, writing to his son to

# Battle of Ramnuggar

1848

- British
- Sikh





'send them in chains to Lahore if they interfere with my military preparations.' On the other hand, he was genuinely popular amongst the soldiers.<sup>2</sup> They admired his personal bravery, emphasized by the white 'fighting coat' that he always wore to make himself conspicuous on the battlefield. Sergeant Keay of the Bengal Artillery wrote that:

When he was present the soldiers looked upon success as certain, and it was not as a commander alone that he was respected, but as a kind-feeling and good-hearted old man, who took a lively interest in the welfare of all those who were under him. I don't think that men could ever have been more attached to a commander than they were to old Gough.

The Army of the Punjab, as it was known, crossed the Sutlej into Sikh territory on 9 November 1848 and advanced slowly westwards. In the face of this threat, Sher Singh abandoned Gujranwala and pulled back to a position astride the ford over the River Chenab at Ramnuggar. Gough dawdled, waiting for his heavy artillery to come up, but on the 21st he apparently learned that Sher Singh was pulling back over the river. At three o'clock next morning, leaving the bulk of his army behind, he set off towards Ramnuggar with only one cavalry brigade, two troops of horse artillery and a single brigade of infantry. His intention seems to have been to conduct a reconnaissance in force and if possible catch some of the Sikh army still on the south bank of the river. Perhaps in the interests of security, or more probably due to the inadequacies of his notoriously inefficient staff, most of his senior commanders were unaware of his plan.<sup>3</sup> By the time the main army caught up, the Battle of Ramnuggar was already underway, and they took no part in the engagement, merely watching as 'interested spectators'. As one commentator at the time disingenuously put it 'the dashing nature of Lord Gough was fully exemplified in this notable instance.'

Gough's cavalry commander was General Charles Robert Cureton. Described as 'a robust figure of middle stature, with grey whiskers and moustaches of startling dimensions', he was a flamboyant character who like Gough had had a remarkable career. He had served throughout the Peninsula Campaign. At one stage, plagued by gambling debts, he had resigned his commission, faked his own death by drowning and re-joined the army as a private soldier in the 14th Light Dragoons under the assumed name of Charles Roberts. Wounded three times, his identity became known and his commission was restored. After Waterloo and unable to find employment, he had transferred to the East India Company. He was seventy-four, even older than Gough, though still sprightly and tough and was widely regarded as the best practical commander of cavalry in India.

Cureton's cavalry division was affected by the same social snobbery and professional recklessness that was to prove so disastrous in the Crimea ten years later. The smart and rich British cavalry regiments, the 3rd and 14th Light Dragoons,<sup>4</sup> sneered at the locally recruited 'Company regiments', which in turn looked down on the (as they saw it) disreputable and ill-disciplined regiments of Irregular Horse. These tensions were compounded by personal animosities between officers, particularly over Cureton's appointment ahead of several less qualified but better connected rivals, such as Brigadier Alexander White, commander of the 1st Cavalry Brigade.

Pressing ahead of the infantry, by seven o'clock White's brigade had reached Ramnuggar, a small, walled town about two miles from the river. Between the village and the river was a broad, open flood-plain, firm under foot but broken, especially near the river banks, by dry nullahs and clumps of jungle. Beyond this, a sharply-cut mud bank fell into the river bed, which was itself about a mile across, sandy and muddy but at this time of year mainly dry. In the middle of the river bed was an 'island', quite dry and covered with greenery, but surrounded

by stagnant pools. The main river channel ran along the far bank of the river bed, beyond the 'island', and beyond that was the wooded far bank of the river. The main body of the Sikh army, with most of the guns, was now established on the far bank, but the rearguard was still in the process of pulling back across the ford, covered by a contingent of infantry deployed forward on the green island and dispersed in the nullahs on the south bank. However, Gough's rapid advance seems to have caught them by surprise. The bones of dead camels and horses strewn the ground and the embers of many recent camp fires confirmed that the Sikhs had recently been encamped in force on the southern side of the river.

Gough halted near a well-built house set in a spacious walled garden one mile upstream from the village. It had been a summer residence of Ranjit Singh's and was commandeered as a temporary British headquarters and hospital. The two troops of horse artillery, under Captains Lane and Warner, were sent forward to engage the Sikhs crossing the ford. They advanced across the flood-plain to the river-bank, and then down onto the sandy river bottom, but were engaged by the heavy Sikh guns on the far bank, and were soon in trouble. They started to withdraw, but one of Lane's guns became inextricably stuck in the sand and, after taking a number of casualties, he was forced to abandon it. To cover the retreat of the artillery, a squadron of the 3rd Light Dragoons under Captain Ouvry charged a body of Sikh infantry near the island. The momentum of the charge carried the cavalymen far out onto the river bed, and round the back of the island. Though a number of horses got stuck in quicksand, the charge was executed with such dash that Ouvry's losses amounted to only one man wounded.

Seeing that it would not be possible to charge across the river without taking heavy and unnecessary casualties, Brigadier White judiciously started to pull his brigade back from the river bank, which drew out a number of Sikh infantrymen who had been lurking in the nullahs. White let them follow, but as soon as he judged that the Sikhs were far enough out onto the open ground, he ordered two regiments (the 3rd Light Dragoons and 8th Light Cavalry), supported by the horse artillery, to turn and charge them. This manoeuvre was completely successful; the Sikhs were driven pell-mell back into the river bed, and the British regiments were able to withdraw unmolested.

Colonel Havelock of the 14th Light Dragoons had watched with increasing frustration the charges of the other regiments and White's apparent lack of offensive spirit. Despite his considerable experience in the Peninsula, Havelock, 'the flaxen-haired boy', was an impetuous man. He was thirsting for glory and, in his own words, felt the opportunity had come to 'win his golden spurs'. Seeing a body of Ghorchurras (irregular Sikh cavalry) coming up the near bank of the river on the British right, he sought out Gough and requested permission to charge them. In approaching Gough he had bypassed two intermediate officers in the chain of command—White and Cureton. However, the commander-in-chief, apparently against his better judgement, agreed, perhaps motivated by his evident enthusiasm for those whose instinct, like his own, was to close with the enemy. Before Gough had a chance to change his mind or Cureton (who was probably nearby) could intervene, Havelock led his regiment, supported by a squadron from the 5th Light Cavalry, in a bold charge across the flood-plain which again swept the Sikhs from the near bank.

But Havelock's blood was now up and seeing a further body of Sikhs coming from the green island, he plunged down the steep bank onto the river bed, re-formed his regiment (not without difficulty) and prepared to charge out across the sand. Cureton, realizing the danger, rode hurriedly forward to stop him, but was himself immediately shot dead by a bullet from a concealed matchlockman, which struck him in the chest.<sup>5</sup> Unaware of this, the 14th Light Dragoons set off at the gallop towards the island. For the second time, the horses began to struggle in the soft ground as the Sikh gunners on the far bank and the island opened a heavy



fire on them. Seeing the British in difficulty, the matchlockmen swarmed back to cut them off. There followed a short but bloody *melée* in which 118 men and 152 horses were lost. Havelock was last seen 'in the midst of the enemy, his left arm half severed from his body, dealing frantic blows with his sword'. His headless and mutilated body was recovered some days later. Colonel Alexander, commanding the 5th Light Cavalry, was also wounded, struck in his uplifted sword-arm by a cannon ball whilst leading his troops, and would certainly have been killed but for the gallantry of Sergeant-Major Mallet, who single-handedly kept the Sikh swordsmen at bay until help arrived.

The infantry brigade now came up, followed soon afterwards by the main body of the army, which had had a grandstand view of the whole affair from the hills in front of Ramnuggar. But by now Gough had had enough and prohibited any further attacks. The Sikhs completed their withdrawal to the north bank of the river and, apart from some ineffectual long-range artillery exchanges, the fighting subsided.

Ramnuggar was a minor affair, involving only the cavalry, but the apparent lack of control by the senior commanders over the brave but impetuous subordinates, and the ensuing high casualties, became the subject of considerable debate in England. Gough himself later wrote disingenuously: 'Why Havelock charged where he did, no human being can now tell.' Surprisingly, however, much of the criticism for this affair was directed not at Havelock, whose behaviour, although foolhardy, was deemed to have been very gallant, but at White and the 3rd Light Dragoons, who were accused in some quarters of lacking sufficient martial zeal—an assertion which, from today's perspective, seems more than a little harsh.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The topography of the battlefield has considerably changed since 1848 and the only three points on the ground that are positively identifiable today are Ramnuggar village, Ranjit Singh's house, and the wooded 'island'. The village of Ramnuggar has been renamed Rasalnuggar. It is on a distinct mound (so is probably ancient), with some interesting old facades and a well-preserved temple that testifies to its Hindu origins. The house where the British cavalry probably formed up at the start of the engagement and which Gough used as his headquarters and hospital during the battle can still be seen about 2 kilometres upstream from the village. It is in poor condition but retains much of its original character, and has a plaque testifying that it was formerly Ranjit Singh's summer house. Local villagers confirm that until quite recently it was surrounded by a walled garden, but this has now disappeared. Beside the house are the recently restored memorials to Cureton, Havelock and others killed in the battle.

A large man-made bund now runs straight through the battlefield and totally obscures the view from the summer house, but provides a good view over the general area. The river has shifted about a mile south since 1848, and the flood-plain over which most of the battle took place is only half as wide as it was then. There are a couple of small dilapidated Hindu temples on the flood-plain, but these are not mentioned in the contemporary reports of the battle, so are probably more recent.

A spur of the bund runs down to the river bank from where a good view of the river-bed can be obtained. The river still has three channels. The southern channel, immediately to your front, was dry in 1848. The main channel, which in 1848 was on the far (northern) bank, has now shifted to the centre and can just be seen about a mile away across the river-bed. The 'wooded island' is still there. It lies just beyond the main channel—a belt of trees that look distinctly closer than those on the far bank of the river, which are almost lost in the distance.

This island has grown and is now about a mile long, but the older part is discernable at the right-hand (upstream) end, where the trees are tallest. Lane's gun (whose loss caused so much trouble) got stuck in the wastes of sand somewhere in front of the island, and the ford by which the Sikhs crossed the river was just upstream of it. Behind the island, and not visible, is the northern channel of the river, which was large in 1848 but is now much reduced.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the Grand Trunk Road south through Gujrat. Soon after Gujrat, about 200 metres south of the Chenab River bridge, take the slip road to the left, signposted to Wazirabad. Follow this road (the old Grand Trunk Road) into the town and past the railway sidings. In the centre of the town, beside a flyover, turn right towards Rasalnuggar. Follow this road about 23 kilometres, until you cross a railway line, and about 4 kilometres after that, the Lower Chenab Canal. About 6 kilometres beyond the canal, turn right at a crossroads (if you reach the Qadirabad Barrage on the Chenab River, you have gone too far). From the crossroads it is less than 1 kilometre into the village. Turn right in the centre of the village (before you reach the temple). After about 1 kilometre, as you leave the village, bear left at a small white mosque. Five hundred metres down this track takes you up onto a large bund. Turn right on the bund (you can drive along the top). Ranjit Singh's house, with the memorials to those killed in the battle is about 1 kilometre down the bund, on the right-hand side.

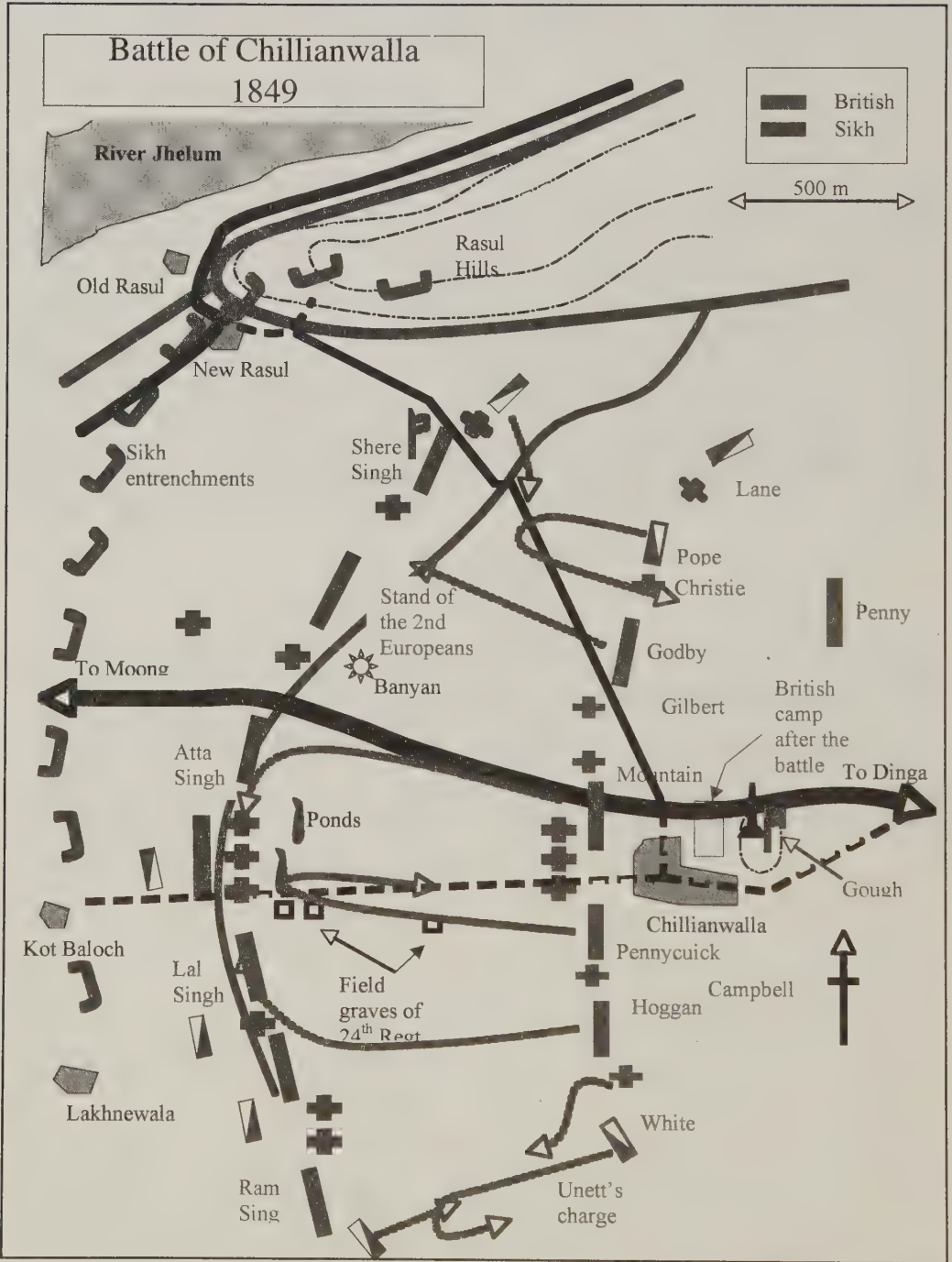
## NOTES

1. When, during the Battle of Sobraon, Gough was told that his artillery had run out of ammunition, he said, 'Thank God. Then I'll be at them with the bayonet.'
2. A soldiers' song of the period contains the line 'Paddy Gough is a cross betwixt bulldog and salamander', which suggests that they understood their commander pretty well.
3. The Quartermaster-General of the Army learned what was going on from the army chaplain when he got up next morning.
4. 3rd Light Dragoons was a particularly strong regiment. They had served in the Afghan War with distinction and had the remarkable record (for those days) of having had no courts martial in the regiment for the first six months of 1845.
5. His son was killed two months later at Chillianwalla.



# Battle of Chillianwalla

1849



## BATTLE OF CHILLIANWALLA, 1849

At the end of 1848, there seemed little prospect of an early conclusion of the Second Sikh War. Raja Sher Singh, commanding the Sikh army, having been bested by the British at the skirmishes of Ramnuggar and Sadalpur, was anxious to avoid another fight in the open until he had gathered reinforcements from the outlying garrisons, and (hopefully) from his Afghan allies assembling around Peshawar. In the meantime he had withdrawn to the hills around Rasul, on the southern bank of the Jhelum River, where he set about improving this naturally strong position with trenches and bastions. Lord Gough, commander of the British Army of the Punjab, was equally reluctant to take the offensive. Though firmly established in Sikh territory across the Sutlej, he was significantly outnumbered both in overall numbers and particularly in artillery. He therefore held back near Gujrat, protecting the approaches to Lahore and waiting until reinforcements could be released from the large British contingent currently tied down besieging Multan.

However, events soon broke the stalemate. Responding to public opinion in India, which was increasingly impatient of the apparently lackadaisical progress of the war, Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, wrote to Gough on 7 January, urging on him the necessity for a victory, albeit (perhaps mindful of Gough's reputation from the First Sikh War) one 'at little cost'. More critically, three days later, intelligence came in that the small British garrison at Attock had fallen and the substantial Sikh and Afghan forces which had hitherto been bottled up west of the Indus were now moving up to join the Sher Singh at Rasul. On 12 January Gough held a conference with his commanders at which the Sikh strength was assessed as some 25,000 strong, with sixty-two guns. The British thought little of the Sikh cavalry ('bad riders, badly mounted, who justify their appellation as Irregulars as much by their dress as by their behaviour'), but had learned during the First Sikh War to respect the tenacity and bravery of the infantry and artillery, particularly when they were fighting from prepared, defensive positions. Gough, who had only 12,000 men, remarked that 'It looked like the devil's own fight' but he nevertheless broke camp and advanced.

The next day, the British marched up the road from Dinga, reaching the small village of Chillianwalla, 5 miles south east of Rasul, by midday. A Sikh outpost on a small hill outside the village was quickly driven off and Gough himself climbed the hill to get a better look at the ground. The ground immediately around Chillianwalla was open, but few hundred yards beyond the village the fields gave way to a belt of thick jungle about a mile deep, principally of thorny bushes of 7 or 8 feet in height. Beyond this the ground again became more open as it crested a low ridge before running gently down towards to river. In the rear, about 4 miles away to the north, was the low range of hills around Rasul, where the Sikh army was entrenched. Their positions were indeed strong. The site had been prepared with professional skill (presumably with the help of the European military advisers who were still serving in the Sikh Army at that time), with continuous lines of batteries, entrenched internally and externally,

and the ground in front planted with thick, strong bushes to delay and disrupt attacking troops.<sup>1</sup>

Gough could see little across the thick intervening jungle so, assuming the Sikhs were still in their trenches, he decided to camp at Chillianwalla where there was a ready supply of water and make a reconnaissance prior to attacking the next day (he was probably intending to break through the left of the Sikh line near Rasul). However, unknown to him, Sher Singh had quietly swung the right wing of his army forward to a position only about a mile west of where Gough now stood. The Sikhs were now drawn up along the shallow crest behind the belt of jungle in a shallow crescent running some 5 miles long from Rasul to Lakhnewala. Their army was organized in four infantry divisions, each supported by artillery and cavalry. The two best divisions, commanded respectively by the experienced Attar Singh and Lal Singh, were in the centre, on the Chillianwalla-Moong road, with the bulk of the artillery. The right flank was held by Ram Singh's division and Sher Singh himself commanded the left wing. The artillery was pushed forward a little ahead of the infantry and large bodies of ghorchurras (irregular cavalry) hovered in depth and on each wing.

Around noon, as the British were moving into the village and starting to mark out their camp, some Sikh guns suddenly opened up from the jungle to the west. It is not clear whether this was Sher Singh's intention. Some Sikh sources speculate that he was trying to move his force forward under cover of the jungle for a night attack on the British camp or an ambush, but this plan was pre-empted by his over-eager artillery commanders. In any event, the British guns replied and the firing quickly developed into a general barrage. Gough was reluctant to withdraw because, having been marching all day, the troops were very thirsty and Chillianwalla was the only local source of water. So, despite the lateness of the day and being seriously outnumbered, he immediately committed himself to an attack.<sup>2</sup> There was not enough daylight left to organize a flanking movement (which was anyway hardly his style of manoeuvre), so he opted for a frontal assault. He called up his artillery, which deployed in extended line just west of the village and opened a bombardment on the Sikh guns, which could still only be seen by their muzzle flashes in the jungle and the clouds of smoke rising above the trees 'like a line of white surf on a far-off shore'. The infantry deployed in line behind the guns, with Brigadier Colin Campbell's division in the south and General Gilbert's in the north. Each division had two brigades, each comprising a single regular British battalion supported by two or three native infantry regiments. A brigade of cavalry protected each flank and a single brigade (Penny's) comprised the only reserve. Although the British line was about 3 miles long, it was outflanked at both ends by the Sikhs.

The British cannonade had lasted about an hour and had done little to degrade the Sikh artillery when Gough, probably mindful of the few remaining hours of daylight, ordered a general advance by the infantry. The whole line advanced together but control quickly broke down as the soldiers entered the jungle. Visibility reduced to less than 50 yards and the men, encumbered as they were by their thick uniforms and disorientated by the enemy sniper fire, got entangled in the thorny undergrowth. Regiments lost direction and got separated from their supporting guns. Each of the four brigades fought largely independent actions, unable to see, let alone support, what was happening to their right and left.

On the left of the line, the three battalions of Hoggan's Brigade advanced in line abreast some 800 metres through the jungle.<sup>3</sup> There was comparatively little opposition because, although they could not see it, their open left flank was effectively covered by White's cavalry brigade, which repeatedly deflected flanking moves by bodies of Sikh horsemen (Captain Unett, commanding a squadron of the 3rd Light Dragoons, charged a large body of ghorchurras threatening the left of the British line. So impetuous was this charge that it carried him straight

though the enemy until he emerged, severely wounded, some distance beyond and had to fight his way back to safety). Hoggan's brigade emerged from the cover of the jungle about 80 yards from the Sikh line and, despite heavy fire from the Sikh artillery, fired an effective volley and charged. Though the 36th Native Infantry on the right was repulsed, the two left-hand battalions of the brigade carried the position and captured a number of guns. After beating off a series of counter-attacks by infantry and cavalry, the remains of the brigade wheeled right to sweep up the Sikh line, spiking thirteen guns as they went. It was perhaps as well they did, because the other half of Campbell's division, to Hoggan's right, had suffered a severe reverse.

Pennycuick had deployed his brigade with his English regiment, the 24th Foot, in the centre, flanked by the 25th and 45th Bengal Native Infantry on the left and right respectively. The 24th had only been in India six months and, having missed the First Sikh War, was still inexperienced about the deprivations of climate and disease. The commanding officer, Colonel Brookes, had been posted in only a few days previously and was barely known to his men. The problems were compounded by Campbell, the divisional commander, who called out to the men as the regiment started to move forward: 'There must be no firing; the bayonet must do the work.'<sup>4</sup> As the brigade plunged into the jungle, it lost its supporting field artillery. The 24th, despite being in full dress uniform, including the cumbersome hats called Albert shakoes, soon got ahead of the flanking native regiments. Struggling through the thorny undergrowth, with an ever-increasing fire from cannon and matchlocks, the companies got separated and broken up. They emerged into a swampy clearing, with a shallow grassy slope beyond, directly in front of the main Sikh batteries, and were immediately struck by a storm of grape and canister. Without artillery support, hampered by the boggy ground and reluctant to fire because of their commander's words, most of the regiment never reached the Sikh line. A few small groups pressed on—Lieutenant Andrew Macpherson wrote:

My company was near the centre, we held the Colours and made a good target. One charge of grape-shot took away an entire section and for a moment I was alone and unhurt. On we went, the goal is almost won, the ground clears, the pace quickens...the bayonets come down to the charge. My men's pieces were loaded, but not a shot was fired, with a wild choking hurrah, we stormed the guns and the battery is won.

Three guns were briefly captured but the success was short-lived—the 24th were soon driven out by a determined counter-attack. Completely outflanked, the men had to fight their way back to the British lines through repeated attacks by Sikh cavalry and infantry. Nearly half of the 1000 soldiers in the regiment were killed or wounded. The commanding officer was killed and only nine officers emerged unscathed.<sup>5</sup> The whole Colour Party perished and the Queen's Colour was lost, but the Regimental Colour was carried back by Private Perry, who was later awarded with promotion and a Good Conduct Medal. The brigade commander, Pennycuick, was killed with the 24th, as was his son, who was serving in the regiment and had only that morning come off the sick list and fell while trying to protect the body of his father.<sup>6</sup> At the other end of the scale, a poor *bheesti* (water-carrier) attached to the 24th Regiment was killed in front of the Sikh guns, having of his own volition accompanied the men into the thickest of the fighting. The survivors, shocked and exhausted, struggled back into Chillianwalla, where they took no further part in the battle but lurked until order and discipline was restored by the few surviving officers. The native infantry regiments on either side of the 24th Foot fared little better—both were repulsed in front of the Sikh guns, suffering heavy casualties and losing their Colours.

The attack of Gilbert's division on the right was equally expensive, though somewhat more successful. The left-hand brigade (Mountain's) advanced through thick jungle, taking casualties from Sikh snipers in the trees. The Sikh infantrymen wore red or blue coats with crossed belts, and looked very similar to the sepoy in the British army, so telling friend from foe was not easy. Sita Ram, a sepoy who fought at Chillianwalla (probably in this brigade) describes an incident as they went forward:

The Colonel Sahib saw the red coats of the enemy and imagined them to be one of our regiments. He immediately stopped us firing saying that he was certain we were firing on our friends. Some of the officers said they were certain they were Sikhs. The Colonel then rode at full gallop up to this dubious regiment, which was about 200 yards away and half hidden by the jungle. He was received with a volley full in the face, but wonderful to relate, he escaped without a scratch. He returned among us and called out 'All right, fire away, *sepoys*'. He was a brave officer and fearless, but none of us knew him in the regiment, or (understood) his word of command, which is a great drawback for a regiment in action.

Mountain's brigade emerged into a veritable storm of fire from one of the main Sikh batteries, fired a volley and charged. The Sikh infantry were driven from their trenches and though, as usual, the artillerymen fought with great gallantry, the British soon had a tenuous hold on the position. The Sikhs mounted a series of desperate counter-attacks, which drove out one of Mountain's regiments, the 56th Native Infantry, with the loss of 322 men, including eight officers and the commanding officer, Major James Bamfield.<sup>7</sup> The remaining two regiments, though hard pressed, hung on and were able to work their way left down the Sikh line, until they met with the men of Hoggan's brigade coming up in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, this brigade suffered more casualties than any other in the battle, with the two native infantry regiments losing over 300 men each.

Godby's brigade, on the right of the line, advanced through particularly thick jungle and seems accordingly to have suffered less from the Sikh artillery. They managed to reach the Sikh lines and set about spiking the guns, whilst fighting off ferocious counter-attacks by Sikh infantry and horsemen from right, left and rear. An officer in the 2nd European Regiment, in Godby's brigade, described the attack:

Into the jungle we plunged, dashing through the bushes and bounding over impediments. Faster rolled the musketry—crash upon crash, the cannon firing. The enemy's bullets whizzed about our heads; the very air seemed teeming with them; man after man was struck down. The Sikhs fired a last volley and fled, leaving the ground covered with dead and wounded. Pursuit in a jungle like that is useless—we could not see twenty yards. We began to collect our wounded when all of a sudden a fire was opened on us in our rear. A large body of enemy had turned our flank. Another party was on our left. We found ourselves, with our light battery, completely surrounded, alone in the field. 'A shower of grape in there'—and a salvo was poured in that sent horse and man head over heels. If it had not been for that battery we would have been cut up to a man. The fire was fearful—the atmosphere seemed alive with balls. I can only compare it to a storm of hail. They rang above my head and ears so thick that I felt that if I put out my hand it would be taken off. A man was knocked over either side of me and I expected every moment to be hit. Keeping the men in line in the jungle was extremely difficult, but our firing was beautiful; every man as steady as a rock, firing low and well. Captain Dawes' battery was the saving of us.

The reason that Godby's brigade had found itself almost completely surrounded was that, unbeknownst to them, the cavalry brigade guarding their exposed right flank had collapsed. Pope, the brigade commander, was a brave but elderly officer, with no experience of handling



large bodies of cavalry. Advancing on the extreme right of the British line, he lost direction in the thick jungle and, swinging left, found himself in front of Christie's horse artillery battery that was trying to support Godby, thus preventing the guns from firing. Pope was wounded by a *tulwar* cut to the head and at that moment a body of Sikh horsemen appeared to the flank. An incorrect order was given, perhaps by Pope himself, and the whole brigade started to withdraw, a movement that quickly degenerated into panic and the whole mass galloped to the rear in confusion, overturning Christie's battery as they did so. The Sikh horsemen following close behind immediately overran the battery, cutting down Christie before he had a chance to draw his sword. A British chaplain managed to halt some of the fleeing British cavalrymen at pistol point<sup>8</sup> and others rallied at the administrative area, saving a complete rout of the right flank. However, the majority of the brigade took no further part in the action.

By the evening, despite their heavy losses and near total confusion, the British were in tenuous possession of most of the Sikh line, including some of their guns, and the Sikh army was seen to be withdrawing in disarray. However night was drawing on, the commissariat wagons were threatened by parties of ghorchurras who had penetrated far into the British position and, critically, there was no water. Despite his wish to hold the ground he had so dearly won, Gough gave orders for the wounded to be collected and the whole army to pull back to Chillianwalla. At eight o'clock that night it started to pour with rain. Stragglers back in the dark, the British bivouacked around Chillianwalla wherever they could, in discomfort and disorder; the majority of the Europeans without shelter of any kind, while the sepoy crowded into the mud hovels in the village. Finding the British gone, the Sikhs came forward again during the night and recovered all the guns they had lost, as well as six pieces of abandoned British artillery.<sup>9</sup>

Gough planned to resume the battle the next day, but the army was not in a fit state to fight. One officer commented that, had the enemy made a resolute attack, 'they must have effected the complete disorganisation of the army.' However, it is clear that the Sikh army fared little better. A Sikh deserter reported that their army was also so shaken that they would have undoubtedly broken in the face of a further attack. On both sides the men were exhausted, ammunition was scarce and baggage was scattered.

The rain lasted for three melancholy days, which the British spent in Chillianwalla treating the many wounded and burying the dead.<sup>10</sup> By the time the weather cleared, the Sikh army had re-established itself in some semblance of order in their original entrenched positions around Rasul, some 3 miles to the north. It was clear that the British no longer had the strength to dislodge them, so they were forced to wait the arrival of reinforcements released from the successful conclusion of the siege of Multan.

The news of the battle, in which the British had suffered 2331 casualties as well as losing six guns and several Colours without securing a clear victory, was badly received in both India and England, the collapse of Pope's cavalry brigade being considered particularly disgraceful.<sup>11</sup> The blame was felt to rest with Gough, who once again, in a display of 'Tipperary tactics', had thrown his unfortunate infantry into a frontal assault against a well-prepared enemy position. Lord Dalhousie, probably the real instigator of the battle in the first place, described it as 'one of the most sanguinary ever fought by the British in India and the nearest approximation to a defeat of any of the great conflicts of that power in the East.' Privately he wrote, 'The conduct of the battle was beneath contempt, even to a militiaman like myself.' Many of the soldiers privately agreed. Sita Ram's judgement was that: 'The battle was not managed with the usual splendid arrangements of the *Sirkar*, but was fought in haste and before the orders could be properly explained to our whole force.' There is some validity in these criticisms. Gough did nearly walk into a trap at Chillianwalla and his tactical handling of the

battle was uninspired.<sup>12</sup> However, complex manoeuvres were probably beyond the capacity of his army and, despite this setback, he retained the confidence and affection of his men, who readily understood the practical difficulties he was labouring under and his genuine if rough-and-ready concern for their welfare. Nevertheless, it was decided in London that Gough should go, to be replaced by Sir Charles Napier. But only a month later, before this decision could be put into effect, Gough cornered Sher Singh at Gujrat. This time he made no mistake, and fought the battle with skill to annihilate the Sikh army and bring the war (and indeed his own long military career) to a victorious conclusion.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Little has changed on the battlefield, which is still easy to recognize. The roads and canals did not exist then, but the British approach to Chillianwalla followed the line of the modern road from Dinga. Chillianwalla village was smaller then it is now and lay to the south-west of the mound where the memorials now are, from where Gough commanded the battle. The British artillery probably deployed just west of the modern village, with the infantry forming up just behind the guns. The British camp after the battle was established in the fields between the memorial hill and the village itself. The Sikh positions were on the low ridge about 2 kilometres further to the west. Nowadays the ridge itself is barely discernable, but its alignment is marked by a small canal that flows from Rasul.

The unmetalled road that runs west from Chillianwalla to Moong marks the approximate axis of advance of the 24th Foot. About 1 kilometre down this road are the three field graves of soldiers of this regiment. The bodies of these men were collected and buried on 15 January close to where they fell, directly in front of the Sikh guns. The first (eastern-most) field grave probably marks where the regiment broke out from the jungle into the fire of the guns, and the second two, which are low-lying, probably mark the ponds in front of the Sikh positions where the majority of the men were killed. These graves are amongst the oldest surviving marked graves of soldiers killed in action in the history of the British Army.

Mountain's brigade probably advanced roughly along the line of the main road to Rasul, and the stand of the 2nd Europeans took place to a bit north of this. The rout of Pope's brigade took place further north, roughly at the spot where the small road from Chillianwalla to Rasul crosses the canal.

The prominent memorial on the mound at Chillianwalla and the nearby Celtic cross (erected in 1871 by Lord Mayo, the then viceroy) are in good condition, thanks to conservation work in 1998 by the Archaeological Survey Department of Pakistan and the Government of the Punjab. Four graves surround the memorial. Their inscriptions have been lost, but we know from old records that the triangular shaped grave to the right of the monument is the shared tomb of Brigadier John Pennycuick and his son Alexander. Another belongs to Major Charles Ekins, Deputy Adjutant-General on Gough's staff, who was wounded whilst carrying a message to Godby's retreating brigade. A friend hastened to his assistance, but Ekins begged him to leave him to his fate and was soon overrun and hacked to pieces by the ghorchurras. The other graves are of Ensign Alphonse de Morel of the 30th Native Infantry (who fell whilst spiking a gun) and Lieutenant Aurelian Money of the 25th Native Infantry. The concrete strips mark the mass graves of many of the British dead—the shorter one for the officers, the longer for the soldiers (with the exception of Major Christie of the horse artillery, who was buried alongside his men). The bodies of the sepoy from the native infantry regiments, being Hindus, were presumably cremated.

About 2 kilometres west of the village, about 300 metres north of the main road, on the bank of the canal, almost exactly in the centre-point of the Sikh line during the battle, is an old banyan tree in a small compound. It is believed locally to have been planted by the Sikhs and its size, location and setting suggest that this is probably so—a modest and poignant memorial to the Sikhs killed in the battle that contrasts with the more prominent British monuments.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Drive down the Grand Trunk Road, turning right (west) at Serai Alamgir, immediately after crossing the River Jhelum. Follow this road along the bank of the Upper Jhelum Canal, with the Jhelum River on your right. After about 30 kilometres, the road swings left and over a canal bridge into Rasul. About 3 kilometres beyond Rasul turn left at a crossroads onto the road to Dinga. Five kilometres down this road brings you to the Chillianwalla Memorial.

Alternatively, you can come down the Motorway, turning off at Lilla. Drive up the north bank of the Jhelum through Pind Dadan Khan and Jalalpur Sharif to the Rasul barrage, from where it is only a short drive to Chillianwalla. Either way, the journey from Islamabad will take about two and a half hours.

## NOTES

1. Although, as Durand commented, with some justification, 'It was evident that the enemy occupied a position too extended for his numbers.'
2. According to Sergeant Pearman, one of the first shots fell amongst Gough's entourage, killing an officer on his staff, and this 'got the old man's Irish out.'
3. McMunn claims that Hoggan was 'As blind as a bat and could not even tell which way his men faced and quite unfit thereby for his position'.
4. Campbell was a veteran of the Napoleonic wars, and apparently recalled the 24th doing just this in an incident during the Peninsula Campaign. However, it was disastrous on this occasion (Gough called it 'an act of madness').
5. Some of the survivors had miraculous escapes. Lieutenant Lloyd Williams received twenty-three sword and lance wounds, his hand was cut off and his skull was fractured, but he survived, retired, and lived a further 40 years. Lieutenant Thelwall lay wounded on the ground and was only saved when his horse, which he had recently sold to another officer (who had just been killed) came up and, apparently recognizing his old master, offered his services to carry him from the field.
6. It is noteworthy that at least four senior officers at Chillianwalla had sons serving on the battlefield.
7. A lithograph of Bamfield, surely one of the earliest from the subcontinent, survives in the UK National Army Museum.
8. Gough later said he regretted that he could not 'make him a Brevet Bishop'.
9. An artillery subaltern called Cookworthy went forward at night on his own initiative and saved two of Christie's guns.
10. The bodies of thirteen officers of the 24th Foot having first been laid out in a row on their Officer's Mess table.
11. The commanding officer of the 14th Light Dragoons shot himself some months later, though Hope Grant, commanding the 9th Lancers, went on to a distinguished career.
12. Chillianwalla triggered one minor but significant tactical innovation. Following the disaster that befell the 24th Regiment, troops of the Indian Army were from this time onwards exercised in advancing and firing in loose order, a tactic that was eventually adopted throughout the British Army.

# 13

## BATTLE OF GUJRAT, 1849

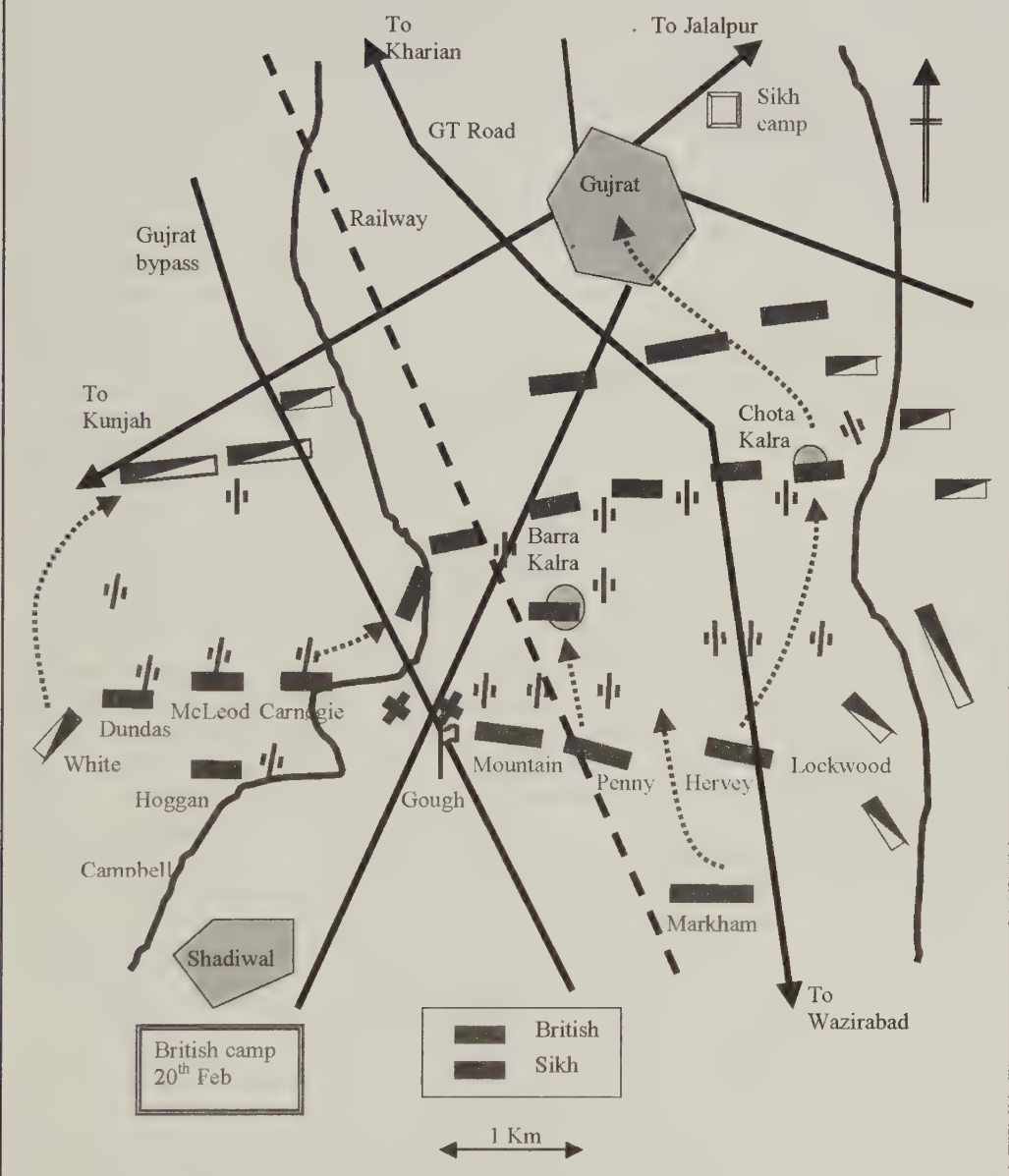
After the bloody but inconclusive battle of Chillanwalla on 13 January 1849, both the Sikh army under Raja Sher Singh and the British under Lord Gough withdrew to lick their wounds. Sher Singh reoccupied his strongly defended position on the barren hills around Rasul. Here his father, Chuttar Singh, soon joined him, but with his back to the River Jhelum and the British to his front, he was finding it increasingly difficult to feed and re-supply his troops. Gough, under increasing political pressure at home from his perceived failure and heavy casualties at Chillianwalla, did not feel himself strong enough to attack again until he had received the promised reinforcements now making their way from the recently concluded siege of Multan. So, for three weeks there was stalemate.

On 4 February, the British awoke to find that the Sikh army had gone and, after some uncertainty, it appeared that they were heading for Gujrat. Whether Sher Singh was intending to cross the Chenab and threaten Lahore, or whether he was merely trying to feed his army, is not clear. However, Gough managed to protect Lahore by blocking the crossing of the Chenab at Wazirabad, leaving Sher Singh with only two options: either to withdraw back across the Jhelum (thus surrendering the Punjab to the British) or to fight it out near Gujrat. Perhaps influenced by religious and cultural considerations (the Sikhs had traditionally never lost a battle near Gujrat), and mindful of the approaching British reinforcements, he chose the latter course.

Gough moved slowly towards Gujrat, but it was not until 16 February when his Army of the Punjab was reinforced by a substantial contingent from Multan (who had marched the 235 miles in only eighteen days) that he was ready to take the offensive. Gough was still outnumbered overall, but with ninety-six guns he was for the first time superior to the Sikhs in artillery; an advantage he intended to use to the full in the coming battle. To slim down his bloated baggage train, he sent some 8000 camels, with all the spare tentage and camp followers, back to Ramnuggar, himself 'setting a praiseworthy example by contenting himself with one tent'. On 20 February he moved up to Shadiwal, only 3 miles from the Sikh positions, and at half past seven the next morning the army advanced in battle order along the Gujrat road towards the Sikh positions. On the left, west of the Dwara Nulla, was Sir Colin Campbell's division, supported by Dundas's brigade from the Bombay Presidency Army. Gilbert's division was in the centre and General Whish's division was on the right flank. Each division had its own supporting artillery and Gough himself was with the heavy elephant-drawn guns on the centreline astride the road. As usual, the cavalry guarded the flanks, with General Thackwell commanding on the left and Brigadier Lockwood on the right, up against the banks of the Halsi Nulla. Morale was high and the sun was shining. Lieutenant Thackwell (the general's son, who was on his father's staff), describes the scene:

The army advanced over a beautiful plain, occasionally cultivated and adorned with foliage. The larks were singing merrily and the extensive line of bayonets and sabres glistened—even dazzled—radiated

# Battle of Gujrat 1849





by the sun. As we approached Goojerat, the drums of the Sikhs, beating to arms, were distinctly heard. Here and there, a body of Ghorchurras, dressed in white, with their accoutrements sparkling lustre, were visible in the distance.

At about nine o'clock, the Sikh artillery opened fire, at rather long range, thus prematurely disclosing their locations. Sher Singh's position at Gujrat, though a good one, was far less strong than at Rasul. His army was drawn up about a mile south-west of the old walled city, on an open, flat plain between two deep nullahs which ran roughly parallel from north-east to south-west; the one in the east, called Halsi Nullah, was water-filled, but the westerly one, the Dwara Nullah, was dry. The defence was built around two villages called respectively Bara (Big) and Chota (Little) Kalra. The villages (the former built round a substantial fort) were fortified as strong points, with infantry and supporting guns. A second line of infantry was deployed in depth, but there seems to have been no attempt to dig entrenchments or breastworks for these, such as had so impressed the British at Rasul. There were some ghorchurras behind Chota Kalra, but most were deployed on the flanks, outside the nullahs, and those on the western flank were reinforced by a large body of Afghan horsemen recently arrived from the Frontier under the command of Akram Khan.

Gough halted the infantry and, taking up his own position on a small knoll near the elephant artillery from where he could see the whole battlefield, he pushed forward his own guns. The artillery duel lasted some three hours. At first honours seemed to be roughly equal. The Sikh guns were as usual resolutely served and there were heavy casualties on both sides. However, the British artillery slowly prevailed and by eleven o'clock most of the Sikh guns had been silenced or had withdrawn to the village strong-points, so Gough gave the order for the infantry to advance with the field artillery moving in support.

The key fight was for Bara Kalra. This was a heavily fortified, walled and moated village built around a substantial fort.<sup>1</sup> It was a little ahead of the main Sikh line, but strongly held by infantry, flanked by two well-protected batteries of heavy guns. The village was assaulted by the 2nd Europeans and 70th Bengal Native Infantry of Penny's brigade. As they approached they came under heavy fire, first from round shot, and then grape and musketry. However, the men pressed forward, dashed across the moat, then 'gave one rattling volley and poured into the village at every point'. Many of the Sikh garrison fled, but some stayed behind and there was fierce hand-to-hand fighting in the alleys and courtyards of the village, before they were overcome.<sup>2</sup> The 2nd Europeans captured three standards but as they emerged from the far side, they found themselves pinned down by heavy and accurate fire from one of the Sikh flanking batteries that was still in position. However, the 31st Bengal Native Infantry, the reserve battalion of the brigade, supported by a troop of horse artillery, swept forward and, despite taking over 140 casualties, overran the guns, the crews fleeing for their lives. As soon as the brigade was established in Bara Kalra, its supporting horse artillery battery was withdrawn to replenish ammunition. Shortly afterwards, the Sikhs were seen forming up for a counter-attack, but the battery galloped back just in time to break up the attack.

On the left, Sir Colin Campbell's brigades met with little resistance, the ghorchurras withdrawing in front of them as they advanced. A battery of Sikh guns was induced to pull forward in order to engage the 3rd Light Dragoons, and was immediately swept away by volley fire from the 60th Regiment of Foot from a concealed position. Then a substantial contingent of Sikh infantry was spotted in the Dwara Nullah and broken up by Campbell's guns.<sup>3</sup> However, the main body of the Sikh and Afghan cavalry stayed out of range of the advancing British infantry. Brigadier White therefore launched a flanking attack by the Scinde Horse and a squadron of the 9th Lancers. Their charge crashed into a large mass of mail-clad Afghan

horsemen and for about two minutes there was a fierce *melée* until the Afghans broke and, sweeping up the main body of Sikh cavalry, galloped off the field. The Scinde Horse and 9th Lancers each captured two standards, as well as one of the guns lost at Chillianwalla.

On the right, Whish's division, led by Hervey's brigade and its supporting artillery, advanced towards Chota Kalra, which was also strongly held. As Whish's line of advance diverged from that of Gilbert's division on his left, a gap opened up between the leading brigades. The Sikhs, seeing a chance to break through the centre of the British line, started to press forward into this gap. However, a reserve brigade was moved up to fill the gap and the threat was averted. There was a stiff battle for Chota Kalra; the horse artillery in particular suffered heavily in the attack, and had so many horses killed that they had to send to the rear for more. Despite taking over 150 casualties from a galling fire of musketry from the loop-holed walls of Chota Kalra, Hervey's brigade stormed the village and the supporting guns were able to engage the Sikh infantry as it withdrew from the village.

Throughout the advance, the *ghorchurras* across the Halsi Nulla on Whish's right made repeated attempts to outflank the British infantry, or to break through to attack the commanders and commissariat behind, but these were frustrated by Lockwood's cavalry brigade and his supporting guns. At one stage a lone dismounted Sikh attempted to engage Lord Gough in single combat, but was killed after a severe struggle by Mr Cocks, a civil servant attached to the general's staff.

Around half past twelve, the Sikh drums, which had been beating incessantly since the start of the battle, suddenly ceased and a dense cloud of reddish dust arose as the whole Sikh line was seen to be retreating, initially at least in fairly good order, but soon in increasing disarray. The British infantry followed up and there was some resistance in Gujrat, but the town was cleared by Hervey's brigade and the small garrison in the fort surrendered. The British divisions halted shortly beyond Gujrat, leaving the cavalry regiments to continue the pursuit. Sweeping round the town, the troopers overran the Sikh camp of red and white striped tents near Barra Durree, 'a kind of pleasure house in an orange grove to the right of Gujerat', and pausing only to help themselves to the plentiful alcohol, pushed on, breaking up large bodies of Sikh infantry and guns withdrawing up the Jhelum and Bhimber roads. The pursuit was carried for up to 15 miles until it began to get dark and they were recalled by Gough. The rest of the army, and especially the camp followers, gave themselves up to looting.<sup>4</sup> An unfortunate accident occurred when several men of the 2nd Europeans were killed and others badly burned when they sat down for a smoke near an abandoned powder wagon. As a result, some troops were detailed to destroy the many ammunition trailers and magazines lying around, and for days afterwards frequent loud explosions could be heard from all parts of the field.

The day after the battle, a reinforced infantry division under General Gilbert set off to pursue the main Sikh army, but was too late to intercept them crossing the Jhelum. Because the river was high, Gilbert did not complete the crossing of the Jhelum until 28 February and, pressing on, he reached Rawalpindi on 8 March. Here, the Khalsa, the Sikh army, desperately short of supplies and harassed by the local Muslim villagers, finally surrendered. On 21 March the British entered Peshawar, ending the Second Sikh War and inaugurating the period of British rule over the Punjab and the Frontier.

Sher Singh had few options at Gujrat. Forced out of his prepared positions in Rasul by shortages of food and ammunition, the site he chose was a good one, with a strong front and secure flanks. The Sikhs were hungry and dispirited, but the infantry and (especially) the artillery again fought with remarkable tenacity.<sup>5</sup> However, Sher Singh's failure to entrench the infantry positions is surprising and may have cost him the battle. The *ghorchurras*, though the social elite of the Sikh army, were again shown to be quite lacking in discipline and



determination. Sikh casualties are not known, but must have been high. They lost fifty-three guns on the battlefield, and a further fifty-two in the subsequent retreat.

Gough described Gujrat as his 'last and best battle', and indeed he fought it well. The battle was principally an affair of artillery, and he sensibly exploited the British superiority in both numbers, calibre and ammunition supplies. Many of the Sikh guns were destroyed in the initial artillery duel, and the rest were unable to match the effective close support provided by the British field and horse artillery to their advancing brigades. Total British casualties were 766 killed and wounded, eighty-two of these being gunners—an usually high proportion for that time.

The purple prose of Gough's report on the battle to Dalhousie ('a result my Lord, glorious indeed for the ever-victorious army of India') reflects his delight at reprieving his reputation so sorely damaged at Chillianwalla, and his rewards were generous. He was made a Viscount, given a pension of £2000 and returned to England a hero, celebrated in a laudatory poem by William MacGonagall, 'Scotland's worst poet'.<sup>6</sup> However, he was well aware how close he had come to ruin after Chillianwala. He wrote to Sir John Macdonald of 'a victory, not only over my enemies, but over my Country!' Queen Victoria graciously accepted his gift of the famous Koh-i-Noor diamond, which was recovered from the Sikhs—it remains in the British Crown Jewels today. At the other end of the spectrum, Sergeant Pearman was awarded prize money of £3 16s 0d, in addition to his loot from the Sikh camp.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The Battle of Gujrat took place over an extended area south-west of the town. It is flat country, which has become much built-up in the last few years as the Gujrat suburbs expanded, so that it is not easy to get an impression of the battlefield and there is no single spot from where one can see it all. The centre line of the British advance was roughly along the line of the present Shadiwal-Gujrat road. The heavy guns of the elephant batteries passed this way, as did Gough himself, though there is no trace of the 'large mound' from which he controlled the battle. There are really only two sites on the battlefield that merit a visit—Bara Kalra village, which was in the centre of the Sikh line, and Shahjehangir, where some of the British casualties of the battle are buried.

The village of Bara Kalra is now known as Kalra Diwan Singh (Sikhs' audience-house), which supports the suggestion that this area had special significance for the Sikhs. There used to be a wall around the village, and a moat (which is probably the 'nullah' referred to in some accounts of the attack). The centre of the village was dominated by a fort, which can be seen in some of the old prints of the battle. This was demolished in the 1960s, but the shape of the walls can still be discerned in the pattern of alleys in the old part of the village. There is a low ridge, now much built up, about 1 kilometre south-west of the village, which was probably where the British guns deployed for their initial bombardment. The assault by the 2nd Europeans and the 70th Bengal Native Infantry came in across the fields from this ridge, across the modern railway line. They entered the village by a gate just opposite where the railway level-crossing now is (there is still an alleyway into the village at this spot). The site of the other gate, on the eastern side, is also still there. It was here that the soldiers of the 2nd Europeans came under fire from a Sikh battery in depth as they emerged from the village. The attack of the 31st Bengal Native Infantry to clear this battery probably swept round the open ground to the east side of the village.

The only surviving British graves from the battle are in a small cemetery at Shahjehangir on the north-eastern outskirts of Gujrat. Shahjehangir is probably the same site as Barra Durree,

the 'pleasure house' that was used as the Sikh camp before the battle. The site still has something of a fairground feel; it has an old mosque, and a popular *urs* is still held annually in an adjacent field. The British regiments camped at Barra Durree after the battle and it would have made sense for casualties to be brought there for burial. The graves themselves are now in poor condition and only one is still marked—that of Captain John Anderson. Anderson commanded a battery of Bengal Artillery through the siege of Multan and accompanied Whish in his long march back up the Chenab. Ordered to push ahead of the main force to rejoin Gough as quickly as possible, his battery covered the last 60 miles in only forty-eight hours. He was killed by a cannon ball whilst personally laying a gun in support of Hervey's attack on Chota Kalra. The inscription on his grave makes it clear that he is buried 'on the field of battle'. Old British Army records list the other graves at this site as belonging to 2nd Lieutenant Edward William Day, Bengal Artillery; Lieutenant Ambrose Lloyd, 14th Light Dragoons; Lieutenant George Hill Sprot, 2nd Bengal Europeans; Lieutenant Robert Cox, Bengal Native Infantry; and 2nd Lieutenant Benjamin Marin Hutchison, Bengal Engineers. Which grave belongs to whom is not known, though the second plot in Anderson's memorial is probably that of Edward Day, his brother regimental officer.

## HOW TO GET THERE

To get to Bara Kalra (modern Kalra Diwan Singh) you should take the Grand Trunk Road to Gujrat. About 5 kilometres north of the town, just south of the Bhimber River Nullah, the Grand Trunk Road splits. Take the right fork onto the new Gujrat bypass. This passes under the railway line and, about 6 kilometre further on, goes over the Dwara Nullah. About 1 kilometre further on is a crossroads where it crosses the Shadiwal-Gujrat road. Turn left here, towards Gujrat. About 2 kilometres towards Gujrat you again cross the railway line. Turn immediately right here along a small road beside the railway line. A few hundred metres brings you to Kalra Diwan Singh.

To get to Shahjehangir, you go into the centre of Gujrat, and turn right onto the Jalalpur Jattan road, past the sports stadium. About 2 kilometres past the stadium, just before a small bridge over a ditch, there is a small turning to the right,. A few hundred metres down there are the Shahjehangir memorials.

Chota Kalra, now more normally called Kalra Punal, is an undistinguished village on a small mound overlooking the Halsi Nullah, about 1 kilometre from Gujrat. There is little to see, but to get there you follow the old Grand Trunk Road that cuts through the edge of Gujrat. About half a mile after the main Gujrat roundabout, you turn left down a narrow, unmetalled road that takes you straight to Kalra Punal.

## NOTES

1. There is a story that Gough was induced to mount a tower, and the ladder was removed, after which his staff conducted the battle by themselves. Although not true, it is indicative of some officers' opinions of their commander.
2. Major McCausland, commanding the 70th BNI was severely wounded. As he was being carried to the rear in a *dooli* (native litter) a cannon ball entered at one end, skimmed his head and went out of the other.
3. Sher Singh probably intended to launch a counter-attack from this area.
4. The whole battlefield was strewn with the debris of battle, with particularly rich pickings in the Sikh camp. So wholesale was the plunder that 'the camels were laden with Sikh swords, muskets, carpets, tents without end, in addition to the usual baggage.'

5. There are recorded instances of Sikh soldiers catching hold of the bayonets of their assailants with their left hand, whilst striking out at them with their right. In another example, a lone Sikh gun was engaged by a line of British artillery. Soon all but two Sikh gunners were disabled, but these continued to serve the gun. When one of these fell, the last man managed to fire two more rounds unaided before he ran off in the face of the advancing infantry.
6. Including, amongst many other verses in similar vein, the following:

The Sikhs began to fight with their artillery,  
but their firing didn't work very effectively  
Then the British lines advanced on them right steadily  
Which was a most inspiring sight to see.



SECTION VI



BRITISH FRONTIER WARS

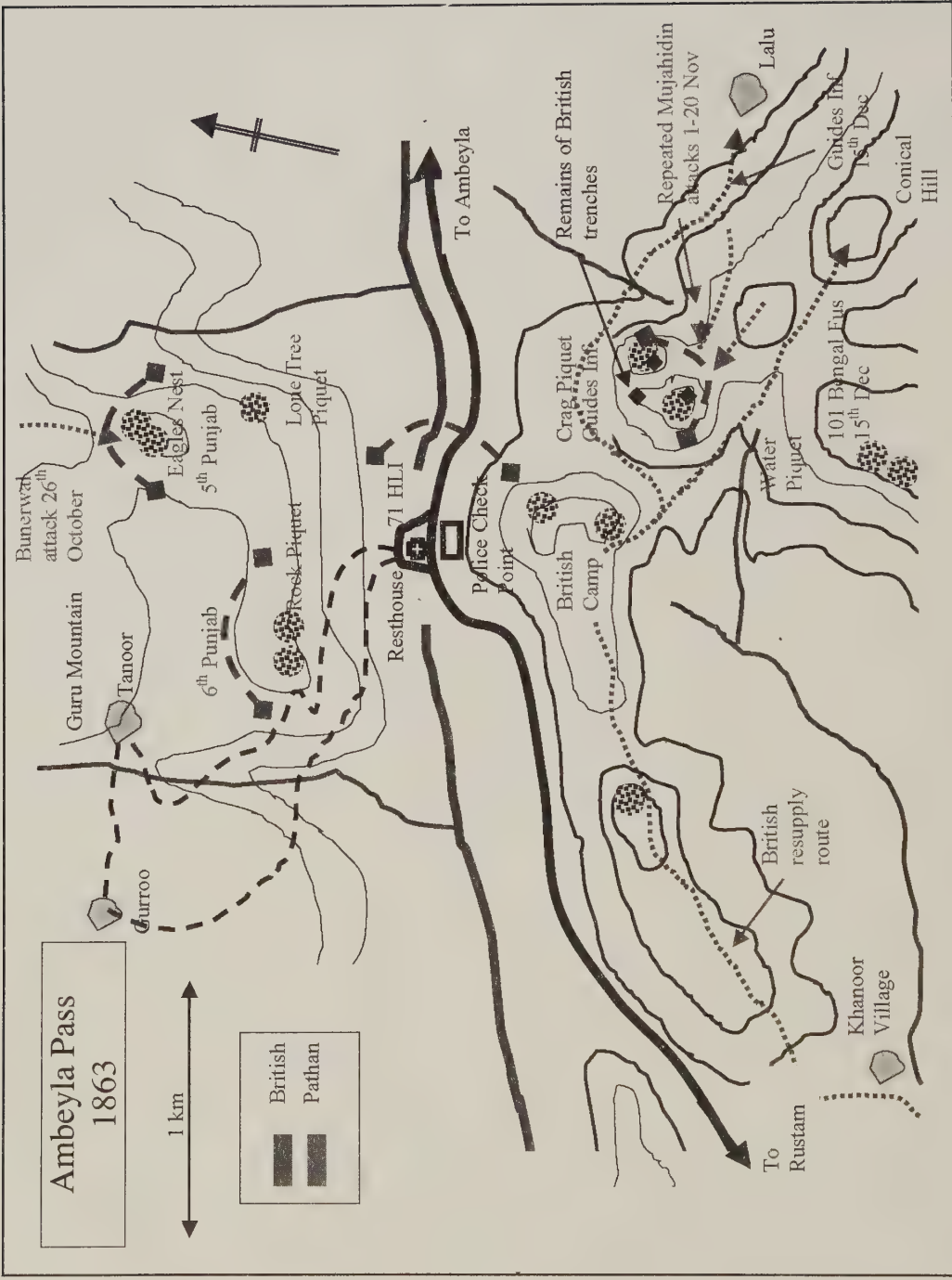




# Ambeyla Pass 1863

1 km

	British
	Pathan





## AMBEYLA CAMPAIGN, 1863

Following the upheavals of the Indian Revolt in 1857, the British spent the next few years trying to consolidate their hold over the turbulent Frontier regions. A particular thorn in their side was a small but fanatical group, which the British called the Hindustani Fanatics, but who were known to the local Pushtun people as Mujahideen. The Mujahideen were from the Deobandi tradition, an Islamic sect opposed to British expansionism. They originally came from the Yusufzai tribal area north of Peshawar, were strengthened and radicalized by an influx of mutineers from native infantry regiments forcibly disbanded by the British in 1857. Successive British expeditions had driven them into the hills, but by the early 1860s, under Amir Abdullah, they had re-established themselves in the village of Malka in modern Buner, from whence, according to General Sir John Adye, 'Their ordinary occupation consisted of incursions into the plains and in robbing and murdering peaceful traders in our territories.'

By 1863 British patience was exhausted and it was determined that the Hindustani Fanatics should be destroyed root and branch. By mid-October an army of 6000 men (a large force on the Frontier for that time), called the Yusufzai Field Force, had been assembled in Mardan. It had only one British battalion, the 71st Highlanders, but it included some of the cream of the British Indian Army—the Corps of Guides, 4th and 5th Gurkhas, 101st Royal Bengal Fusiliers (previously a European regiment in the old East India Company Army) and five battalions of native infantry. Probyn's Horse and a squadron of The Guides provided the only cavalry, but as this was clearly going to be an infantry operation this was considered acceptable.

Sir Neville Chamberlain was selected as commander. Though he had few academic pretensions, he was a superb practical soldier with vast experience, having spent most of his life on the Frontier, and most of that campaigning. Having failed to pass out of Woolwich, he had been commissioned in the Bengal Native Infantry in 1837. He was wounded six times in the First Afghan War and fought with distinction in the Second Afghan War, the Gwalior Campaign and both Sikh Wars. In 1853, though officially only a captain, he was given the local rank of brigadier and command of 11,000 Punjabi levies tasked with guarding 700 miles of the Frontier. He fought throughout the Mutiny and was again wounded at the Siege of Delhi, where he received a musket ball in the shoulder whilst leaping his horse over a wall lined with musketeers. Returning to the Frontier, he led several punitive expeditions against the Pathan tribes. His peers considered him something of a paragon. Sir Henry Daly, who knew him well (and, as the commanding officer of the Guides was himself no mean judge of character) described him as 'neither punctilious nor pedantic; a resolute, thoughtful soldier neither brilliant nor cultivated, but sensible, grave and solid'. To many he was simply 'the bravest of the brave' and 'the very soul of chivalry'.

Chamberlain's appointment was widely applauded, but he himself was reluctant to take on the job. Though only 43, he was worn out by campaigning and disease and increasingly disillusioned by the brutality of his profession. He wrote to his brother 'If duty really requires the sacrifice, I cannot repine, but I have no wish for active Service.' He also had strong

reservations about the plan, which he thought foolhardy and unnecessary. Malka lay deep in the largely unknown and roadless hills, controlled by independent (and not necessarily friendly) tribes. The village itself belonged to the Amazai, but to get there the British would have first to pass through the territory of the Bunerwals, a large and powerful tribe of which little was known except that they were comparatively honest traders and (it was thought) they were not sympathetic towards the Mujahideen, who were of a different Muslim sect. The British hoped that they would be able to persuade the Buner chieftains to let them pass peacefully through their territory on their way to attack the Mujahideen. However, they did not trust them sufficiently to either consult or inform them of their plans in advance. In order 'not to alarm the tribesmen', the British let it be known that would enter the mountains by the Darran Pass, avoiding Bunerwal territory as they had in the previous campaign against the Mujahideen in 1858.

It was October and winter was closing in. Chamberlain was concerned about the quality of some of the troops and the engineering and logistic support was quite inadequate—the baggage train of more than 4000 mules, ponies and camels included many weak and untrained animals. He wrote again to his brother:

I never before had such trouble or things in so unsatisfactory a state. Carriage, supplies, grain-bags all deficient. Some of our guns and the five and a half inch mortars had to be sent back as useless, after having taken the pick of men and animals to equip a half-inch battery of Royal Artillery.

Nevertheless, on 19 October the army struck out for the Ambeyla Pass. This was the first time since the time of Akbar that a serious incursion had been made into the mountains of the Yusufzai Pathans. The tribesmen, having been warned by the Mujahideen of the impending advance, were deeply suspicious of the British motives and their clumsy attempts at deception. A letter from Amir Abdullah to the Bunerwal chiefs that was later found on a dead tribesman, said:

Immediately on receipt of this letter, gird your waist and proceed to Chamla. If you delay, the evil-doing infidels will plunder and devastate the whole of Chamla, Buner and Swat and annexe these countries to their dominions. The infidels are extremely deceitful and treacherous, and they will tempt the people with wealth, but if you give in to their deceit, they will entirely ruin and torment you.

The British issued a proclamation saying that they meant the Bunerwals no harm and merely meant to pass peaceably through their territory. However, as Major James, political officer to the expedition pointed out:

Even supposing that the proclamations reached their destinations, was it likely that a brave race of ignorant men would pause to consider the purport of a paper they could not read, when the arms of a supposed invader were glistening at their door?

After a long and tiring night march, the advance party under Lieutenant-Colonel Wilde, CB entered the pass at sunrise on the 20th, led by the Guides Infantry. The valley was steep-sided, thickly wooded and strewn with enormous boulders. Villagers warned of armed tribesmen gathering and within an hour a desultory fire began from the hillsides. However, the Guides Infantry were pushed up to secure the crest on the right, while 1st Punjab continued up the river, and by two o'clock the advance party had established a camp at the top of the pass. The whole of the cavalry had been sent with the advance guard, in the expectation that they could be pushed forward from the pass to secure the road to Chamla. However, in the event, Wilde's

force was barely strong enough to piquet the key hills around the camp and further advance was impossible. The only available water was the stream, which entailed a precipitous climb to the bottom of the nulla, but apart from this, as long as piquets held their posts, the camp was relatively secure.

The main body of the army entered the pass late in the morning, but made slow progress. The narrow and tortuous one-way track running along the stream bed was strewn with boulders and overgrown with low trees, and as more and more troops entered the narrow pass it became a scene of chaos and confusion. The transport consisted of a medley of bullocks, ponies and mules, many unfit for their loads and with raw undisciplined drivers. The battalions of the advance guard had taken only their ammunition mules with them, but when the rest of their baggage and ration parties tried to follow, they were ordered back to make way for the baggage of the following British regiments. Mixed up with these were the guns, which had to be transferred to elephants because the path was too precipitous for horses. It was not until late in the afternoon that the first troops of the main body struggled into the camp at the top of the pass. However, no supply mules made it into the camp that night, and only a few came in next day—the advance guard received no food for the first three days.<sup>1</sup> Luckily there were plenty of trees for firewood, so the troops were able to keep warm.

For three critical days the British halted whilst they built up their forces at the top of the pass. It was not until the 22nd that they felt strong enough to make a reconnaissance in force with a cavalry contingent under Colonel Dighton Macnaughten Probyn, VC. Probyn, like Chamberlain, was one of the 'young thrusters', the group of exceptionally able and intrepid young officers who had made their names commanding regiments of the Punjab Irregular Force ('Piffers') in the early days of the Frontier in the 1840s and 50s. He had fought throughout the Mutiny, won a Victoria Cross at Agra, and had recently returned from commanding the 1st Sikh Irregular Cavalry in the Third China War. He was a natural commander of irregular horse, but had little of the arrogance that was often found in cavalry officers of his day. Osborn Wilkinson said of him: 'With all his reckless dash and daring, there was no swagger about him. He was singularly courteous, soft and gentle in his address to all.'

The cavalry pushed forward into the Chamla Valley, which they found deserted. It was hoped that by keeping to the south side of the valley, avoiding Buner territory, a confrontation with the Bunerwals could be avoided, but on the way back Probyn's force found itself nearly cut off by tribesmen gathered at the foot of the pass and they were obliged to fight their way back to the camp, which was not reached until well after dark. That night there was a determined attack on the camp itself, which was beaten off. However, next day more and more tribesmen were seen to be assembling and it became clear to the British that armed resistance was inevitable. Chamberlain wrote in his dispatch: 'The Bonair people having taken a hostile part against us is extremely serious, and has altered our whole position and probably our plan of operations.' This was not an understatement. With the Bunerwals openly hostile, the Yusufzai Field Force was unable to go forward without substantial additional forces and withdrawal was out of the question—quite apart from the practical problems of pulling back down the single narrow track down the pass, the loss of prestige would have been quite unacceptable.

Chamberlain called for immediate reinforcements and set about securing his position until these arrived. The sick were sent to the rear with the unnecessary baggage and efforts made to ease the problem of resupply by improving the track up the pass. A breastwork was erected around the camp, and the outlying piquets improved with *sangars*, loopholed stone walls and *abbatis*. The defence was organized in three sectors. On the left, the Eagle's Nest ridge on the lower slopes of Guru Mountain was piqueted by the 5th Punjab. The 71st Highland Light

Infantry held the low ground in the centre looking down into the Chamla Valley, and the Guides Infantry occupied the right (southern) sector, including Crag Piquet, the key to the whole position. Further troops guarded the supply lines and the base camp back in Surkhawai, down on the plains to the rear.

However, the inaction of the British only encouraged the tribesmen, who daily gathered in ever-greater numbers. Chamberlain wrote:

There appears to be reason to believe that the Bonair people have applied to the Akhund of Swat for aid, and should they succeed in enlisting him in their cause—which is not improbable, as they are his spiritual followers—the object with which this force took the road to the Chumla Valley would be still more difficult of attainment.

Chamberlain's fears were well founded. Saidu Baba, the Akhund of Swat, originally called Abdul Ghafur, was born in 1794, the son of a Swati shepherd. After an early religious education in the *madrasas* of Peshawar, he spent 12 years living the life of asceticism on the banks of the River Indus. As his fame spread, he acquired the title of Akhund (a senior and respected mullah) and gained many disciples. In 1845 he returned to Swat and established himself in Saidu Sharif. Despite his reputation for piety and poverty, he was not lacking in wisdom or strength of character and by 1863 he had gained enormous influence over the Frontier tribes. The British respected him, in particular for his role in restraining the Swati tribes from joining the general uprising during the Mutiny in 1857. Elliot says of him:

He seems to have been inspired by genuine religious fervour, and it is perhaps no coincidence that, save in 1863, when his whole position was at stake, he exercised a moderating influence on those who strove to make trouble along the border.<sup>2</sup>

Though weak and age-worn, he immediately set out for Ambeyla. The news that Saidu Baba was going for jihad spread like wildfire through the hills, and thousands flocked to his banner. When he reached the battlefield on 26 October, he was accompanied by 4000 tribesmen on foot and twenty-five horsemen. He built a small mosque near the top of the nearby Buner pass and pitched his camp on Guru Mountain, where Abdullah and his 900 Mujahideen joined him. Fired by the Akhund's example, the tribal chiefs of Dir, Swat and Bajaur continued to gather with their retainees, their age-old blood feuds set aside in mutual determination to evict the infidel *feringhee*.

The Akhund's arrival was the trigger for the first major attack by the tribesmen. Seeing the Bunerwals gathering on Guru Mountain, the British reinforced the piquets on that side. At about noon, some 2000 swordsmen and matchlockmen swarmed down the hills towards the Eagle's Nest and, despite supporting fire from the British artillery, got right up to the breastwork surrounding the post. An English officer commented that:

...it was very wonderful to see how they seemed to invite death. They were insignificant looking men.... with the physique of undersized girls. Yet they did not hesitate to charge and meet the Sikhs, their object being to die after doing all the injury they could to their enemies.

The tribesmen clung on for some time, with their standards planted under the very walls of the British *sangars*, before they were driven off by musket and artillery fire. A counter-attack by the 6th Punjab Infantry from the left of the Eagle's Nest was initially successful, but was carried too far and was beaten back with over fifty casualties.

The next three days were fairly quiet except for sniping and the welcome arrival of the first British reinforcements—14th Native Infantry, 5th Gurkhas and two light field guns. However, before dawn on the 30th, Crag Piquet, which overlooked the south of the camp (and at this time held by only twelve men), was overrun. Major Keyes, the sector commander, realizing that it was essential to recapture the post quickly before the tribesmen could consolidate their position, hastily assembled twenty men and made an immediate counter-attack. He got to within a few feet of the summit before he was forced to take cover under some overhanging rocks. However, at first light he made another attempt. Clambering up the rocks, the British recaptured the post in fierce hand-to-hand fighting, for which both Keyes and Lieutenant Fosberry<sup>3</sup> were awarded the Victoria Cross. Work was immediately put in hand to strengthen the Crag Piquet position, which was gradually expanded until it held 160 men and two guns. It became the focus of the fighting at Ambeyla, and it was to change hands a further four times in six weeks of incessant and bloody fighting, with quarter neither expected nor given. One British soldier relieving a post on Crag Piquet asked what his orders were, and was told: 'The orders is, you're never to leave it till you're killed and if you see another man leaving it, you're to kill him.'

The tribesmen were quite at home in the barren, rock-strewn hills. They were inured to deprivation and hardship and, dressed in homespun cloth, they were masters of camouflage, capable of hiding immobile in some crack or crevice for hours, waiting for a chance for a good shot or a sudden murderous rush with sword and knife. Lady Sale, who had spent nine months as a prisoner of the Afghan Pathans in 1842, wrote that:

Here every man is born a soldier, every child has a knife. Every one is armed complete with three or four of these knives of different sizes—from as long as a sword to a small dagger—pistols and a *jezail*.

On the other hand, the British were ill-organized and poorly equipped for this form of warfare. Many regiments were still dressed in scarlet, though the changeover to khaki, started by the Guides, was just beginning. Most of the native infantry regiments were armed with old Brunswick rifles. Sighted at 250 yards, these were good for volley fire, but were no match for the long-barreled *jezails* in accurate, long-range shooting in the mountains. To supplement their weaponry, the British soldiers developed an early form of grenade—soda bottles filled with gunpowder, which they called 'Ambeyla Pegs'. However, the British had one great advantage—their artillery. Shrapnel, grape and canister shot were available, and, if well deployed, could inflict terrible casualties on the unprotected Pathans.

The next few days were quiet, and the British used the time to build a new resupply route to the camp through Khanpur village, which was protected from the fire of the tribesmen on Guru Mountain. Attempts were also made to improve the road forward towards Ambeyla, in anticipation of a future advance. On 6 November a large working party was sent out, protected by piquets, for this task. However, their withdrawal at the end of the day was badly co-ordinated. One of the piquet parties was cut off, and seventy-eight men, including the commanding officer, were killed in a running fight before they could get back to the camp.

On 12 November, the tribesmen were seen to be massing for another attempt on Crag Piquet. Two more guns were brought up, and the defenders, under the command of the experienced Major Brownlow, prepared for a night attack. At around 10 p.m., an estimated 2000 tribesmen moved down into the hollow in front of Crag Piquet. Their suppressed voices soon broke into yells of defiance as they swarmed up the hill towards the breastworks of the defenders. A series of assaults were driven off, supported by fire from a mountain battery, whose guns were firing

blind, guided only by verbal instructions shouted down from officers in the piquet above. The crisis came around midnight, when the tribesmen broke into the left of the British position. The defenders started to waver and the situation was only restored when Major Brownlow was able to rally five men from 20th Punjab to hurl rocks from the crumbling parapet onto the attackers crouching below.

The attacks died away at around 4 a.m., and Major Brownlow's exhausted men, who had been on continuous duty for forty-eight hours, were relieved at first light by a detachment of the 1st Punjab, commanded by Lieutenant Davidson. Hardly had the relieving detachment taken over than the firing intensified again and an urgent message for reinforcements came from Davidson. Major Keyes, commanding the lower piquet, dispatched a platoon under a native officer, but no sooner had they set off than the tribesmen overran the Crag, and the remnants of the 1st Punjab detachment and the reinforcements came rushing together back down the hill together 'seized with an uncontrollable panic'. Keyes managed to check them at the lower piquet, but the Crag was lost. Two counter-attacks failed and the Pathans launched a furious assault on the lower piquet, which Keyes was still holding with a handful of men. Alarm quickly spread to the crowds of servants, camp-followers and hangers-on in the camp, many of whom took to their heels. Chamberlain himself, seeing the confusion, guessed what had happened and ordered the 101st Royal Bengal Fusiliers, who were luckily already mustered for another purpose, to retake the Crag at any cost. Supported by artillery and a flanking attack by the Guides, the Fusiliers, led by their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Salisbury, drove up the narrow and precipitous path to the Crag in a hail of fire, neither halting nor breaking ranks until they had stormed the heights. Young Lieutenant Davidson was found dead at his post, and was quite exonerated in the official report, which found that he had 'behaved in a most heroic manner and tried in every way to recall his men to their sense of duty'. After this attack, a truce was called for the tribesmen to carry away their dead. Chamberlain used the opportunity to try to persuade them to disperse. The *maliks* heard him out with the utmost courtesy, but made it clear that they intended to fight to the end for a freedom they had never yet lost.

On 18 November, in an effort to shorten the perimeter, the piquets on the north of the pass, including Eagle's Nest, were abandoned and the whole force concentrated on the hill around the camp. This triggered a series of attacks by the Pathans, which were driven off. However, another crisis came on 20 November, when the tribesmen launched another assault on the Crag. Throughout the day, they gradually advanced their standards to within a few yards of the breastwork, but there was little sense of alarm in the camp below. However, and at about 3 p.m. 'due to the unaccountable conduct of an officer on the left of the piquet, who suddenly ordered the troops on his part of the position to retire', the Crag fell to the Pathans for the third time. This time Chamberlain himself led the counterattack by the 71st (Highland Light Infantry) and the 5th Gurkhas, recapturing the feature at a cost of twenty-seven killed and 110 wounded. Among the latter was Chamberlain himself, who was shot in the right arm: his ninth and last wound. It quickly became clear that he was too ill to continue and he was evacuated to a military hospital.

Command at Ambeyla passed temporarily to Major-General John Garvock, pending the arrival of General Hugh Rose. Though Garvock had served in staff positions in several previous campaigns, this was his first experience of operational command and he was instructed not to attack until his replacement arrived. In the event however, the situation on the ground was slowly improving for the British. More reinforcements arrived, including four first-rate infantry battalions—7th Fusiliers, 93rd Sutherland Highlanders, 3rd Sikhs and 23rd Punjab. The morale of the tribesmen was also suffering. Their casualties were mounting and they were suffering

from the cold and shortages of food in the increasingly wintry weather. Major James had been carrying on covert negotiations with some disaffected tribal leaders and after losing control of Crag Piquet for the third time, the Bunerwals, who had borne the brunt of the fighting, had had enough. The next day, their chiefs came into the British camp to seek a negotiated settlement. They were led by Zaidullah Khan, an old man who had lost an arm and an eye in previous wars. He was adamant that the British could not enter his territory in strength but after long negotiations he reluctantly agreed that the Bunerwals would destroy Malka themselves, in the presence of British officers.

This could not be put into immediate effect because the remaining Mujahideen fought doggedly on and the Akhund (who had just received fresh reinforcements from Dir) still had over 15,000 tribesmen in the field. However Garvock, with his own force increased to over 9000 men and the tribesmen wavering, decided to ignore his orders, a decision for which he was subsequently awarded a KCB. In the morning of 15 December two columns broke out of the British camp around either side of the Crag Piquet. The 101st Bengal Fusiliers stormed the first objective, Conical Hill—‘a grand sight’ commented Major (later Field Marshal) Fred Roberts, who had arrived just in time to see the battle. With Conical Hill secure, the route to Lulu Village was clear; it was quickly taken by the Guides Infantry and 23rd Sikhs. A fierce counter-attack by the tribesmen to cut off the British camp was beaten off and by the end of the day the British were in full command of the pass. Losses had been comparatively slight—sixteen killed and sixty-seven wounded; Pathan casualties were estimated at 400.

The next day the advance to Ambeyla village continued. A large number of tribesmen offered battle on the line of low hills protecting the village, but this was the sort of set-piece fighting at which the British excelled. With support from accurate artillery fire, the infantry soon overran the enemy left flank. General Rose, who was now in charge, quickly pushed through Probyn’s Horse, his one cavalry regiment. Breaking through the open flank, the regiment charged down to Ambeyla. The village was quickly fired, and the cavalrymen harried and hunted the fleeing tribesmen across the broad Chamla Valley beyond. With the loss of Ambeyla, resistance collapsed. The Akhund of Swat, aware that the Mujahideen were irreconcilable, but fearing that further resistance would rebound on the tribes, reluctantly agreed to the destruction of Malka. Accordingly, on 19 December, six British officers set off from Ambeyla in the rain, accompanied by a small escort of Guides Cavalry, and Zaidullah Khan with sixty Buner tribesmen.<sup>4</sup> When General Rose found out what had happened, he was furious, believing ‘it is madness, and not one of them will come back alive’.

Rose’s fears were well founded. The Amazai tribe, in whose territory Malka lay, were sympathetic to the Mujahideen cause and do not appear to have been consulted about the plan, to which they were bitterly opposed. The tribesmen made no attempt to conceal their hatred and there were frequent stops while Zaidullah Khan cajoled and harangued his incensed compatriots. When they reached Malka, they found several large buildings, an audience hall, barracks for soldiers, stabling and a powder factory. Nevertheless, the village (or at least a substantial part of it) was burned while the British officers watched from their horses. The situation turned even uglier on the return journey as the small party was followed by a crowd of angry, gesticulating tribesmen, with larger numbers watching menacingly from the surrounding hills. In one narrow defile a wild Amazai, waving his standard, tried to rush down at them but was held back by his comrades. But Zaidullah was adamant—he had given his word, and would not go back on it. Sir Olaf Caroe commented later that:

Among the Afridi or Wazirs a transaction of this sort would have been impossible. The Yusufzais...are men of firmer purpose. It is a fine picture—the old grey-beard, his single eye flashing, waving his one arm—seeing the thing through against all the odds for the sake of the word that had been given.

However, Roberts, who was one of the party, was less sanguine:

If he had succeeded in inciting anyone to fire a single shot, the desire for blood would quickly have spread, and in all probability not one of our party would have escaped.

On Christmas Day, the Yusufzai Field Force marched back from Ambeyla to Peshawar, glad to get out of the rapidly deteriorating winter weather. The campaign had been ultimately successful but expensive for the British. They had lost sixty-seven officers and 899 soldiers killed or wounded but around 3000 Pathans had been killed out of an estimated 25,000 who were involved at one stage or another. The power of the Fanatics was effectively broken. They continued to exist as a small colony, but were no longer a threat to stability in the region. However, unusually for this period, the campaign was not followed by any extension of British hegemony in the region—indeed rather the opposite. The British commanders of the time were concerned that the relative attrition rate of 3:1 that they achieved at Ambeyla compared unfavourably (from their point of view) with what they had come to expect from fighting in the plains.<sup>5</sup> They learned to treat the Pathans of the region with respect, and did not venture back into the area in strength until compelled to during the Chitral Relief Expedition of 1895.

Chamberlain recovered from his wound, but Ambeyla was his last campaign. He was burnt out by war and sought a quieter life. He served on in India for a further eighteen years, invented the game of snooker and ended his career as a field marshal, laden with honours and awards. The Akhund of Swat returned quietly to Saidu Sharif, where his prestige was undiminished. He continued to intrigue against the British and died in 1877, at the advanced age of eighty-four, whilst negotiating with his old ally, Amir Sher Ali, the ruler of Kabul, for a joint attack on Peshawar. Zaidullah Khan, the Bunerwal chief, was assassinated in 1868, in belated reprisal for what many saw as his treachery.<sup>6</sup>

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The battlefield is quite unspoilt, and remains largely as it was in 1863. The road from Rustam to Ambeyla now runs over the pass, where there is a police checkpoint and an unusual star-shaped resthouse, painted pink and yellow, on an island in the middle of the road. It was built by the Wali of Swat and, though a bit noisy and public, it is a good place from which to explore the battlefield. It can now be booked through the Buner District Nazim. Little of consequence can be seen from the road and the best way to get a decent view is to go about 2 kilometres back down the road towards Rustam and stop near a lone tree on the verge-side. From here you can scramble up the hill to your left (there is a path, but it is not obvious), and then make your way along to the left-hand end of the ridge, from where you get an excellent panoramic view of the whole battlefield.

Looking across the valley, the prominent group of boulders on the slope above the resthouse on the opposite side was called Rock Piquet by the British. Above this is a crest with a rocky pinnacle at its right-hand end—this was the Eagle's Nest Piquet. The rocky outcrop below and



to the right of Eagle's Nest was Lone Tree Piquet. This whole sector was held by 5th Punjab Regiment, supported as required by 6th Punjab. The large ridge on the skyline beyond is Guru Mountain, from where most of the early attacks by the tribesmen were launched.

The 71st Highland Light Infantry held a line of breastworks in the valley bottom where the police post now is, looking down towards Ambeyla village. The British camp was on the flattish open space, now largely covered in fields, directly above the police post. To the right of that can be seen the rock-peaked Crag Piquet, and behind it the obviously-named Conical Hill. The British initially drew their water from the stream near the police post, but when the Eagle's Nest ridge was abandoned this became too dangerous and they shifted to a spring in the head of the valley just to the south of the camp, which they protected by another piquet, called Water Piquet, on the hills above. The main resupply route from the rear ran along the ridge on which you are now standing.

It only takes about half an hour to walk to Crag Piquet and is well worth the effort. As you cross the fields where the British camp was, you may come across a shallow, roughly dug pit. The local people believe this is a grave, though of whom they do not know; probably (from the location) a British soldier. There is a surprisingly good path up to Crag Piquet, with a clamber up the last few feet of rocks at the top, but as always it is helpful to engage the services of a local boy who will show you the way for a few rupees. From the top of Crag Piquet you get a wonderful view across the whole battlefield and down to the plains below. Clustered around the rock itself, and on the supporting features, you can still see the remains of the British trenches, some of them still revetted with stones. The local children collect coins, buttons, bullets and other items that can still be found lying around in the area, which they may offer to sell.

Those with more time or stronger legs might like to climb up the northern side of the valley to the Eagle's Nest. There are two paths, both starting amongst the houses behind the resthouse. The right-hand path leads steeply up the hill, past Rock Piquet, to Tanoor village on the ridge, from where it is a short walk to the Eagle's Nest. Alternatively, you can take the longer but easier path that runs further to the west. This path crosses a lovely little waterfall with cool, clear water and leads to Gurroo village, from where you can cut back along the ridge to Tanoor. Allow a couple of hours at least for either route. There are no remains of the battle at Eagle's Nest, but again the view of the valley and the pretty terracing around Tanoor is spectacular.

If you drive down to Ambeyla town, you can see to your left a low pass through the hills, with a small mosque clearly visible beside the road. This is the Buner Pass leading to Swat, where Saidu Baba erected a mosque at the beginning of the campaign. The current mosque was built on the same spot by the last Wali of Swat.

## HOW TO GET THERE

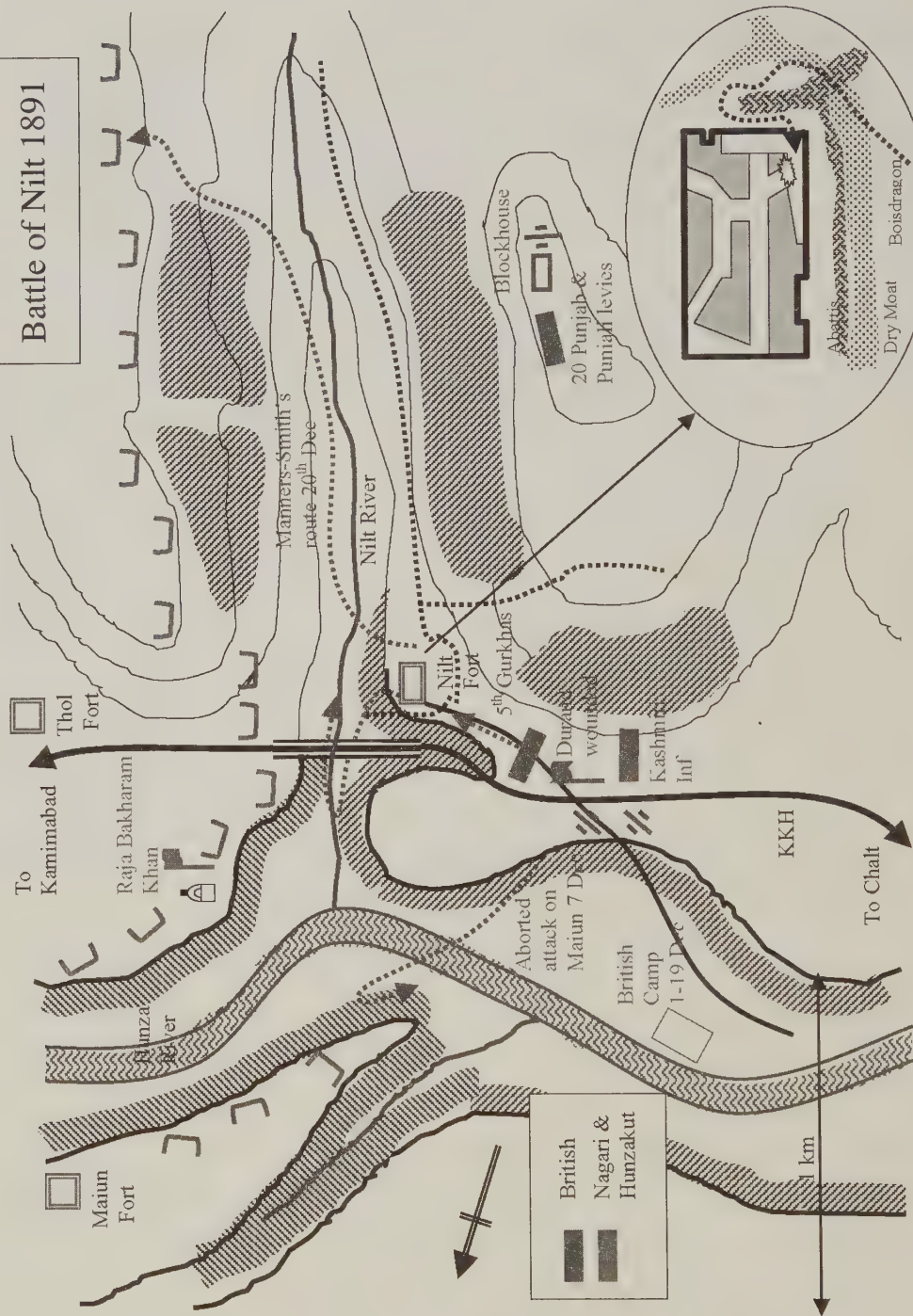
Turn off the Grand Trunk Road at Nowshera as if for Mardan and Swat. In Mardan, go past the Army Golf Course and Punjab Regiment Centre and turn right at Baghdar Chowk onto the Swabi Road. After 10 kilometres, in the village of Shahbaz Garhi, turn left to Rustam, 15 kilometres away. Turn right in the middle of Rustam bazaar for Ambeyla and follow this road a further 15 kilometres to the pass. About 3 kilometres up the pass, on the left below the road, is the village of Surkhawai, which was the initial base camp for the British during the Ambeyla campaign. About 7 kilometres beyond this you reach the top of the pass. The drive from Islamabad currently takes nearly five hours, though the road is being improved.

## NOTES

1. One officers' mess subsisted entirely off one small sack of flour stolen from an elephant that had managed to make it to the top.
2. Though the Akhund had little sympathy with the Deobandism of the Mujahideen, he was a strong proponent of Pathan tribal unity to oppose the growing British presence in the region. He had been instrumental in setting up a short-lived Islamic state in Swat in the 1850s, with the specific aim of resisting British expansionism. On receiving the call from the Bunerwals, the Akhund realized that this probably represented the last chance to prevent the British penetrating into the mountains.
3. Fosberry was a technical officer who had only come to Ambeyla to test a new design of artillery shell, but had been co-opted to assist in the defence.
4. Rather than the 200 that had been promised.
5. It is of interest that thirty-five years later, when the British next fought the tribes of Buner, Swat and Dir during the Malakand campaign in 1897, only 217 British were killed or wounded, compared to an estimated loss of 3700 tribesmen (an attrition rate of 17:1). By the time of the British campaign in Waziristan (1919-20), when the tribesmen also had quick-firing rifles, relative attrition rates had returned to 2.5:1.
6. Pathan tradition has it that he was shot with the same British service revolver that Major James had given him to seal the agreement at Ambeyla.



# Battle of Nilt 1891



Thol Fort

To Kamimabad

Raja Bakharlam Khan

Muzza River

Main Fort

Manners-Smith's route 20th Dec

Nilt River

Nilt Fort

5th Gurkhas

Blockhouse

20 Punjab & Punjiah levies

Duzaged wazirabad

Kashmiri Inf

Aborted attack on Maium 7 Dec

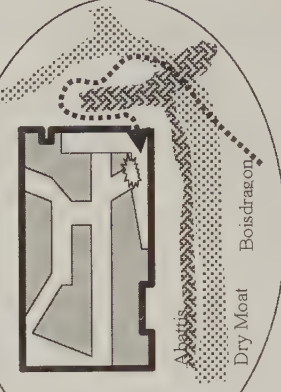
British Camp 1-19 Dec

KKH

To Chalt

1 km

British  
Nagari & Hunzakut



Boisdragon  
Dry Moat

## STORMING OF NILT AND THOL, 1891

Before the 1880s the British took little interest in the patchwork of isolated and backward little kingdoms scattered through the vast and virtually unknown mountain ranges to the north-west of their Indian empire. The only central authority in the region, such as it was, was the corrupt and indolent Dogra Maharaja of Kashmir, who claimed feudal rights over most of the area and maintained a ragged garrison at Gilgit (which was, as it still is, the strategic hub of the region) to enforce this. However in 1889 the British, driven by the imperatives of the 'Great Game', established Colonel Algernon Durand as the Agent in Gilgit, to establish links with the local tribes and keep an eye on the movements of suspected Russian agents. Algy Durand was keen to take the job. He was a strong proponent of the 'forward school', who argued that the only way to make India secure from Russian expansionism was to dominate, and if necessary control, the high passes of the Hindu Kush. In this he was saw eye-to-eye with his brother Mortimer who, as Foreign Secretary to the Governor-General Lord Dufferin, was in a position of considerable influence.

Algy was barely settled in Gilgit before his attention began to focus on the Hunza Valley, which runs from Gilgit over the Khunjerab Pass to China. At this time the valley was divided into two states, Hunza and Nagar, respectively on the west and east banks of the river. The Thums or rulers of these inhospitable mountain fastnesses both paid notional allegiance to the Maharaja of Kashmir, though their combined annual tribute amounted to no more than a few ounces of gold, two horses, two hounds and two baskets of apricots. In practice they spent their time conducting a desultory war between themselves, extorting money from passing caravans and raiding the (comparatively) richer areas around Gilgit. At Durand's suggestion, Delhi authorized a small stipend for the Thums, which it was hoped would be sufficient to dissuade them from pillaging the traders on the Leh-Yarkand road. Durand travelled to Hunza to agree the details in a treaty, but he was not impressed by what he found, describing the Thum of Nagar as 'a paralytic debauchee' and Safdar Ali of Hunza as 'a sad looking figure, twenty-two years old and delicate, with shifty Mongolian eyes and a foxy little red beard'.<sup>1</sup> However, despite his misgivings, Durand completed his negotiations, agreed the level of subsidies and retired gratefully to the marginally more congenial surroundings of Gilgit.

However, from the beginning he seems to have believed (or perhaps hoped) that a military campaign in the valley would be necessary. With this in mind he tried to persuade the British authorities to send more officers and troops to Gilgit and, although the government in Delhi was unpersuaded of the need and cautious of the cost, with Morty's support he met with some success. Within two years there were eighteen British officers at Gilgit, with 200 British Indian troops and a mountain battery.

Indeed, it was not long before the banditry in Hunza recommenced and in May 1891 Durand received intelligence that Uzra Khan, the Crown Prince of Nagar, was marching on Chalt, on the frontier between the kingdoms of Kashmir and Hunza, with a combined Hunza/Nagari force. The ramshackle fort at Chalt was held by a small detachment from the Maharaja of

Kashmir's badly fed, badly led and badly equipped troops, but Durand dispatched 200 men under a lone British officer to reinforce them. Thwarted in their expectation of an easy victory, the invaders withdrew without a fight, despite the Thum of Hunza's complaint that 'the fortress at Chalt is more precious to us than the draw-strings on our wives' pyjamas'. Though unimportant in itself, the affair was significant in that it confirmed the British Government's view that the Thums were not to be trusted. However, it was a chance incident in quite another part of the mountains that provided the impetus for a military campaign against them. Lieutenant Francis Younghusband was scouting in the Pamirs in modern eastern Afghanistan when he was accosted and summarily expelled by a Russian patrol. The British Government's worst fears were confirmed—the Russians were at the gate and an invasion of India might be imminent. In this situation, Hunza must be secured and Durand, the Agent in Gilgit, was the only man who could do it.

Durand was ready—just. Despite his best efforts, he only had a tiny force available. The main contingent was a company of 5th Gurkhas and a battalion of the Maharaja of Kashmir's Imperial Service Infantry who, under their British officers, were considered effective, if hitherto untried. Some local Puniali tribesmen had been co-opted as irregular levies. In addition to their own swords and shields of brass-studded ox hide, they had been issued British Snider carbines, but having received only one day's musketry training their military value was limited so they were stiffened by twenty-eight men of 20th Punjab Infantry (the only regular soldiers in the force). The European civilians in the neighbourhood took service as members of the 1st Punjab Volunteers.<sup>2</sup> Finally, some 200 local Pathans who had been employed as road-building navvies in the Gilgit Valley by a construction company, Messrs Spedding & Co, were 'patriotically offered' to Durand under the command of Mr Spedding himself. There was a complete lack of artillery until with great difficulty and some loss of life, two 7-pounder guns<sup>3</sup> of the 24th Hazara Mountain Battery were brought over the passes from Abbotabad, ostensibly for 'strengthening the Agent's bodyguard'.

The logistic situation was little better. All through the summer Durand had been bringing in supplies from Kashmir but progress had been slow; the route was over 200 miles long over some of the highest and most inhospitable country in the world and two large rivers.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, winter was now closing in—the last contingent of Gurkha porters had been caught by the onset of the winter snows and twenty had frozen to death. The stocks assembled at Gilgit were only sufficient to support a short offensive.

In total, Durand had about 2000 men, but many of these were needed to guard the forts and supply lines, so when the Hunza Nagar Field Force moved out in late November it was only about 1000 strong, with sixteen British officers. The initial move to Chalt went without incident and Durand issued an ultimatum to the Thums. It seems likely that the Thum of Nagar was inclined to come to terms, but he was overruled by his more warlike neighbour. The war-drums in Baltit Fort were beaten throughout the night as a signal for the warriors to gather and the Thum of Hunza sent a response asking why the British had strayed into his country 'like camels without nose-strings' and promised to 'cut off your head, Colonel Durand, and then report you to the British Government'.

On 1 December<sup>5</sup> Durand marched out of Chalt with his little army. Baggage was cut to a minimum, with only one coolie per officer and remarkably, despite the onset of winter, no tents.<sup>6</sup> The British advanced up the track along the east or Nagari side of the river. Progress was slow but unopposed, and they reached Nilt around midday on 2 December. This was more of a fortified village than a castle. The main walls were made of stone and mud, reinforced with timber, about 15 feet high and 12 feet thick, strengthened with taller square towers at the corners. Surrounding this was a lower curtain wall, perhaps 8 feet high, the gap between the

two walls being perhaps 20 feet. Directly in front of the curtain wall was a ditch filled with thorn bushes and branches. The flat roofs of the houses in the fort were covered with stones, making them well-nigh impervious to the 7-pounder shells of the mountain guns. The walls were loopholed for musketry, though the loopholes were so small that they offered little target for the British marksmen. The fort was perched on a terrace between the river and a steep hill. Behind it was a deep and precipitous nullah, down which the River Nilt flowed into the main river, with a line of almost sheer cliffs on the far bank.

On the open terraces beyond the nullah was a second fort called Thol, also manned by Nagar fighters. Across the main Hunza River, almost directly opposite Nilt, was a third fort called Maiun, itself protected by a deep nullah and occupied in strength by the men of Hunza. Between them these three forts held approximately 1000 Hunza and Nagar tribesmen. These were mostly armed with *jezails* and swords—there were probably no more than 100 modern rifles<sup>7</sup> and all the ammunition for these was home-made. Nevertheless the forts were mutually supporting and strongly constructed. Together they completely dominated the entrance to the Hunza Valley and constituted a formidable obstacle.

The British troops had been without water since the morning, so unless they could capture Nilt without delay they would have to retire—a most unpalatable prospect. As they approached the fort, the Nagaris were the first to open fire, at which Durand deployed his 7-pounders. The initial range was too long, so the guns, with his one Gatling gun, pressed forward to within 150 metres of the fort, supported by the Gurkhas who had been leading the advance. Still the artillery was not heavy enough to make an impact on the massive walls. The Gatling gun kept jamming<sup>8</sup> and there were several casualties among the gun crews (Lieutenant Molony had a narrow escape when a bullet passed through the middle of his helmet as he bent down to lay the Gatling). The Puniali levies succeeded in working their way up onto the hill to the right of the fort, from where they could bring down fire into the interior of the building, though it was so well protected that this did little damage. Then Durand, who was standing in full view of the enemy, was hit in the groin.<sup>9</sup> He had to be carried from the field on a stretcher and command devolved on Captain Bradshaw.

The turning point came when a group of about 100 Gurkhas under Lieutenants Boisragon and Badcock managed to rush the outer wall. Under heavy fire, they cut through the thorn-bush thickets and then broke down a wooden gate in the outer wall. Supported by six soldiers, they ran forward to the inner wall, traversing to their right until they came to the main gate of the fort, which was strongly built and barricaded within with heavy stones. They fired at point-blank range into the nearby loopholes—the officers using their pistols—as Captain Aylmer of the Engineers laid a charge of guncotton slabs at the foot of the gate. He was hit in the leg at such short range that his uniform was scorched and his skin singed, but he lit the fuse and retreated to a safe distance along the base of the fort wall. However the charge failed to detonate so he had to return to re-adjust the fuse. His hand was crushed by a rock hurled from the wall but at the third attempt the fuse ignited. A terrific explosion followed and before the stones and debris had stopped falling or the defenders could recover, Aylmer, Boisdragon and six Gurkhas were inside the gate, fighting hand to hand with the defenders. Two were quickly killed and it was plain that the small party would soon be overwhelmed, but the smoke and dust were so thick that the others could not find the breach, so Boisdragon, the only one of the breaching party still unwounded, ran the gauntlet back through the still-heavy fire from the fort to fetch reinforcements. In a few moments the Gurkhas were fanning out inside the fort and hunting down the defenders through the maze of alleys and chambers. For their gallantry on this occasion, both Aylmer and Boisdragon were subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

As soon as the British had established a foothold in the fort resistance crumbled; most of the Nagaris escaped out the back, though several were killed by the fire of the 20th Punjabis from the hill above. Nine prisoners were taken, as well as a small gun, swords, ibex-horn bows and quantities of ammunition and food.<sup>10</sup> The British lost only thirty-three killed and wounded, against an estimated eighty Nagaris,<sup>11</sup> but given the near-impregnable nature of the fort these casualties were considered acceptable.

'And now,' according to Durand in a letter to his brother Morty 'came the mistake of the day.' Instead of following up their victory, the whole force poured into the fort 'taking prisoners and capturing useless flags'. After a while order was restored and, leaving a small garrison to guard the fort, the main force encamped on the *maidan* near the river about half a mile away for 'a quiet night's rest after the exciting day'. It was not until the next morning that the British tried to resume the advance, by which time the nullah behind the fort had been occupied in strength by the Nagar tribesmen. As the British infantry advanced down into the nullah, they came under heavy fire and had to hastily withdraw with the loss of forty men and four officers killed or wounded (including Lieutenant Gorton, the artillery commander).<sup>12</sup>

The British officers paused to consider how this new obstacle might be overcome. Nothing immediately came to mind; this was a far more difficult problem than Nilt. Directly in front of them was a deep, precipitous and extremely unstable nullah, cut by the Nilt stream, which runs down to the main Hunza River at this point. The far crest was now held by perhaps 400 men in a line of *sangars* that stretched from the river almost up to the glaciers on the lower slopes of Rakaposhi. The cliffs near the river, which were somewhat lower, were particularly strongly posted. The Nagari commander Mir Raja Bakharam Khan had set up his flag here, near a small *ziarat* on the cliff edge, and diverted streams which had frozen on the cliff paths into sheets of ice. The road across the nullah had been destroyed and piles of rocks collected to roll down onto the attackers in the nullah bottom, with lighted balls of resinous wood to illuminate the fields of fire at night.

For almost three weeks there was stalemate. Durand, confined to his sickbed, was frantic with frustration, blaming the unfortunate Captain Bradshaw for the lack of progress: 'The game was in our hands ... or rather we had won all but the last trick and my partner threw that away and the rubber.' He later admitted that his nerves were so shattered that he was tempted to blow his brains out, but instead took himself back to Gilgit to recover. The bullet, which was in fact a lead-covered garnet, was extracted and he sent it to his sister, reporting that it had 'threaded half a dozen important passages without injuring one'. He was lucky to be alive and it was more than a year before he could walk without a stick.

Durand's anxiety was somewhat allayed by the thought that his close friend Surgeon-Major George Robertson was with the little army at Thol. Robertson was tall, bald and stern-faced, a calm and mature figure whose 'determination was matched only by his tact' and Durand trusted him implicitly. Robertson, acting as Agent in Durand's absence, wrote reassuringly from the front. 'Still at Nilt,' he reported on 3 December, 'desultory firing; weather fine; troops in good health.' However, by the 15th he could not disguise the lack of progress, writing that: 'All our reconnaissances have failed to find a way of forcing the rebels' position so far. It is of immense strength while they multiply their *sangars* daily. There is nothing for it but patience.' The British mounted frequent patrols, both by day and night, but the tribesmen remained vigilant and, perhaps assisted by information from spies in the British camp, seemed to anticipate their every move. The wounded were sent back to Chalt and tents were brought up for the soldiers which, not surprisingly in the increasingly cold weather, were described as 'very acceptable'. The Puniali levies, still on the hill above Nilt, built themselves a dominating and spacious blockhouse from which fire could be brought down on the *sangars* across the



ravine. Both sides organized sports to relieve the boredom, the Nagaris playing polo and the British (naturally) football, while each tried to harass the others' sporting events with long-range sniper fire. In the evenings the British officers would gather round the camp fire to smoke and listen to renditions from Captain Charlie Townsend, an enthusiastic banjoist.

On 7 December an attempt was made to carry the lower end of the line of *sangars*, nearest the Hunza River. Troops were moved down into the nullah bottom in the dark, but they were quickly spotted and the defences in that sector strongly reinforced. The attack was abandoned before it had started, but the soldiers were unable to get back across the nullah due to the galling fire from Maiun fort across the river, and had to lie out in the gully throughout a long cold day until darkness came again and they could be safely withdrawn. A planned surprise attack on Maiun fort on the 12th was also detected and abandoned without a shot being fired.

With winter closing in and food running out, the situation was becoming critical when a Dogra sepoy named Nagdu succeeded under cover of darkness in finding a tenuous route up the precipitous far slope of the Nilt nullah.<sup>13</sup> Nagdu was described as 'a simple-looking young fellow, to whom no one at first sight would attribute the possession of many brains; but he proved as full of resource as he was brave.' He reported that the gradient was so steep that the ground at the bottom could not be swept by fire from the defenders on the crest. Captain Bradshaw was away in Gilgit conferring with Durand, but the stand-in commander Captain Mackenzie determined to exploit this opportunity immediately. Preparations were made in great secrecy to prevent the tribesmen learning of the plan. Before the moon rose on the night of 19 December, Lieutenant Manners-Smith, who was an experienced mountaineer, led fifty Gurkhas and fifty Kashmiri Dogras with ropes and pickaxes quietly out of camp and, crossing the Nilt River unobserved, halted in the dead ground at the bottom of the cliffs underneath the Nagari *sangars*.

At dawn, while a heavy fire pinned down the unsuspecting Nagaris inside their *sangars*, Manners-Smith and his men began to scale the 1200-foot precipice out of the nullah. The first route up was blocked by a cliff but a second attempt was more successful. The defenders were well aware that something was afoot and beat their tom-toms loudly as they manned the ramparts in strength, but they could not see the small assault party clambering up the ravine. It was not until the leading Gurkhas were within sixty yards of the crest that the tribesmen became aware of what was happening. Rocks were thrown down, but the slope was so steep that most passed safely overhead, and Manners-Smith, reaching the top, rushed the first *sangar* with his men. This was soon cleared, quickly followed by three others. As the defenders fled they provided an easy target for the guns across the ravine: 'it was like potting rabbits'. After a brief pause to let the others come up, the sepoys fanned out to clear bunker after bunker. Those defenders who did not surrender were bayoneted, and several guns were toppled into the ravine. With the left flank of the defence now turned, the tribesman immediately abandoned the whole position, streaming out the back gates of Thol and Maiun forts as they fled back up the valley.

This time, there was no delay. Quickly repairing the road across the nullah, the main British force started in pursuit. There was no further organized resistance and 115 prisoners, with quantities of weapons and ammunition, were soon taken. British casualties during the attack amounting to only four men wounded. 'Brilliant achievement on the 20th,' wrote Robertson. 'Shall be in Nagar tonight.' Durand was delighted, replying from his sick-bed: 'If only you knew how happy and relieved I am. I was heartbroken at the thing failing that should have been a success. It is a brilliant success... and my reputation is saved.' Next day the advance continued, Nagar was captured and the Thum gave himself up. On the 22nd Hunza town itself (now Karimabad) was taken and the Thum of Hunza having escaped to China, his half-brother

was installed as the new ruler. After celebrating Christmas, and having installed the banjo-playing Charlie Townsend and his 'mucker' Curly Stewart as Political Officers in Hunza, the main force returned in triumph to Gilgit on 6 January.

The Russian Foreign Minister, on hearing that the British had captured Hunza, is reported to have remarked that, '*Ils ont fermé la porte au nez.*'<sup>14</sup> In fact, however, it soon became clear that the Hunza Valley posed no threat to British hegemony in India. The officer in charge of surveying the valley reported that 'we have no reason to fear a Russian advance through the passes', a judgement confirmed by the Pamir Boundary Commission of 1893. However, it was too late for second thoughts. Hunza was incorporated into British India, setting the scene for the much more significant Chitral operation two years later, a campaign in which many Hunza men served as irregular levies.

### THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

All three forts, at Nilt, Thol and Maiun, have disappeared but their locations are still well known and the main features of the battlefield are easily discernable. Nilt village is perched on a gently sloping terrace overlooking the Hunza River. The British assault started in the low ground near the river and came up the short track which now runs from there across the Karakorum Highway (KKH) up to the village. The two 7-pounders and the Gatling Gun were probably placed on the crest of the slope to the left of the Karakorum Highway, and Durand was standing under the lee of the cliff a few yards up the track to the village when he was shot. Lieutenant Boisdragon and his Gurkhas stormed up the terraces to the fort along the line of the track or a little to the left of it. In this area, just before you enter the village, is a small old graveyard, in which are buried some of the defenders of the fort (including, I believe, the commander, Wazir Mohammed Shah).

The fort itself was on the northern side of the village—the left-hand side as you approach it up the path. The walls have been removed but their rough outline can be traced from the village paths (the original gate was in the south-west corner of the fort, roughly in the centre of the modern village). The terraced gardens and some of the houses in the area of the old fort look as if they are probably original.<sup>15</sup> You can follow the old path that skirts around the houses at the northern end of the village (where the north wall of the fort would have been) to a spot overlooking the Nilt nullah. From here the old path drops sharply in a series of traverses down into the nullah. The old bridge over the nullah was directly underneath the new KKH bridge—the old footings can still be seen there. This was the path taken by the British soldiers in their first abortive attack on the Thol position on 21 December, the day after Nilt fell.

You can follow the track up through the village (roughly along the line of the old west wall of the old fort) following the water channel that contours along the eastern face of the Nilt nullah. About 300 metres above the village there is an excellent viewing spot from where you can see the whole line of the nullah itself, from the river on your left up to the base of Rakaposhi on the right. There are two 'shoots' or rock-gullies in the opposite cliff. The right hand one, further up the nullah, was the route taken by Manners-Smith and his men at first light on 20 December 1891. There is still a tiny path there, hard to see for the uninitiated but discernable by the locals, who still use it occasionally. It is a stiff and demanding climb that must have been daunting for the heavily-encumbered soldiers.

For the more energetic, a brisk half-hour walk up the hill overlooking Nilt is highly recommended. The path starts beside the water-channel just above the village and climbs steeply to a second water-channel half way up the hill. From here you get an excellent view

down onto the village and can make out the outline of the old fort. Another brisk climb brings you to the top of the spur. This is not for the unfit, but it is worth making the effort. Here, on the crest of the hill, are the remains of the blockhouse built by the soldiers of 20th Punjab and the Puniali levies, crumbling now but still in surprisingly good condition. It is a substantial construction, perhaps fifty feet long overall, with several rooms and sleeping ledges etc. From here you not only get an unparalleled view of Rakaposhi but also a magnificent panorama of the whole battlefield. From here you can see Maiun—the cluster of white houses at the base of the terrace on the other side of the Hunza River—and the green and white *ziarat* on the riverbank cliffs beyond the Nilt nullah where Raja Bakharam Khan set up his standard. The village of Thol is about 2 kilometres up the Karakorum Highway on the right side of the road.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Drive up the Karakorum Highway from Gilgit towards Karimabad. After about an hour you reach Chalt, and about fifteen minutes later the small village of Nilt, with a conspicuous blue sign on the left-hand side of the road saying 'Alpine Club Hunza Compound'. About 30 metres beyond the sign, a track cuts off the road up the hill on the right (before the coming of the KKH, this was a mule track and the main route up the Hunza Valley). Two hundred metres up this track is the centre of old Nilt village.

## NOTES

1. In reality, both descriptions seem to have been gross caricatures. Younghusband, who passed up the valley shortly afterwards, remarked on Safdar Ali's sense of humour and described him as 'almost European in appearance and could have passed for a Greek or an Italian'.
2. Amongst these was Mr E.F. Knight, a journalist who was in Kashmir gathering material for a book, which was subsequently published under the title *Where Three Empires Meet*, which forms the most comprehensive record of the campaign.
3. The famous 'screw guns' which could be dismantled into five sections for carriage on mules. The screw gun was eulogized in a poem of the same name by Rudyard Kipling, which includes the following lines:

We've chivied the Naga and Looshai,  
We've given the Afreedeman fits,  
For we fancied ourself at two thousand,  
We guns that are built in two bits.

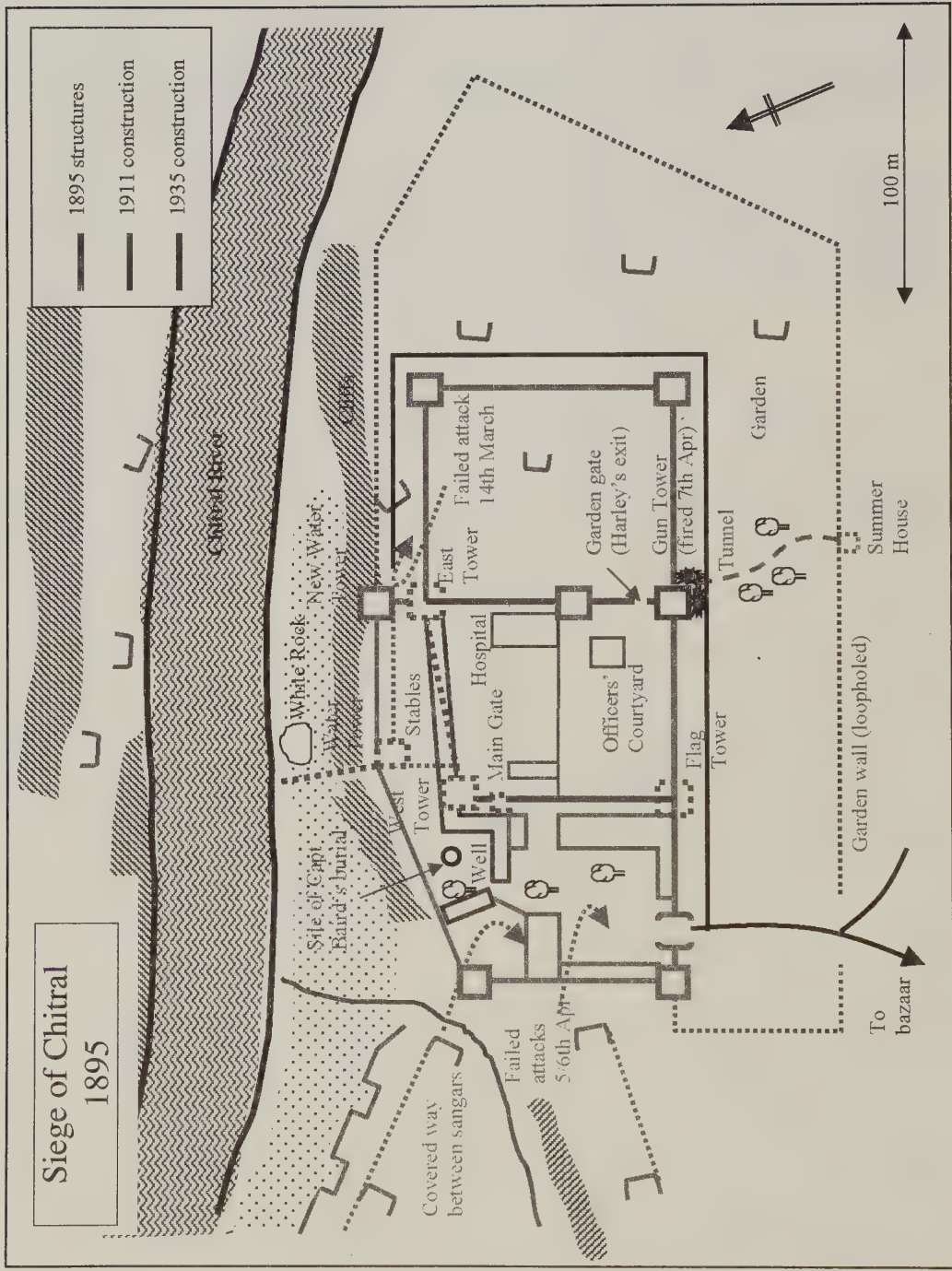
4. It had been estimated that to keep one regiment supplied at Gilgit required the support of 920 porters on the trail from Srinagar. Over the years, so many porters and mules had died on the trail that the route was marked by their bones and one observer likened service on the Gilgit Road to the Siberian salt mines.
5. Just north of the Karakorum Highway is an ancient plane tree under which, local legend has it, Durand breakfasted on the day of the action.
6. Though one officer still found room to bring his golf clubs.
7. Local tradition has it that these included 'Ursi' or Russian muzzle-loading percussion rifles, as well as Winchesters and Martini Henrys. There was also one small cannon, called a 'Sher Bacha', which fired only one round before it exploded.
8. It had been dropped several hundred feet into a ravine on the trail from Kashmir, which cannot have improved its reliability.
9. The gun that was used to shoot Durand is still in the possession of a local family. It has a 'Tower' percussion lock, set in local woodwork. The barrel has a hexagonal Whitworth bore.

10. One woman was discovered in the fort. Her husband had been killed there but by chance both her brother and her uncle happened to be serving with the Puniali levies and she was given into their care.
11. Including the commander of the fort, the redoubtable Wazir Mohammed Shah of Nagar, who was killed fighting in the breach.
12. Durand himself, in his sick-bed near the fort, came under fire and had to be hastily moved into cover.
13. Nagari tradition has it that a local man called Qasim showed the path to the British, marking the trail with flour which he dribbled out of an animal skin. He was killed in the British assault when a defender clasped him to his chest and jumped off the cliff, so that they fell together into the nullah below.
14. 'They have shut the door in our faces.'
15. There is an ancient imambargh very close to the site of the fort; local tradition has it that it was inside the walls. There has been some modern restoration, but it is clearly an old structure. The internal wooden pillars supporting the roof are completely unlike the austere inner decoration of most imambarghs. They are carved with fine vertical striations suggestive of a reed, with a bulbous flare at the top, somewhat similar to the lotus-columns common in Middle-Kingdom Egypt. Some of the timbers are fire-damaged, in a manner which suggests they were taken from an earlier structure. It is possible that the imambargh was constructed from material salvaged from the destroyed fort.



# Siege of Chitral 1895

- 1895 structures
- 1911 construction
- 1935 construction



## SIEGE OF CHITRAL, 1895

Until the 1890s, the British had maintained only loose links with the Kingdom of Chitral, which lay to the west of their newly-acquired dependency of Kashmir. Furthermore, since 1892, when Aman ul Mulk the old Mehtar or ruler of Chitral died, the country had been racked by instability as the surviving members of his family plotted and murdered for control of the kingdom. The British made sporadic attempts to intervene in this dynastic process (if it can be called such), but Chitral was so isolated and its people had such a reputation for deceit, treachery and casual cruelty that it was generally felt best to leave well alone. However, in 1895, a young British officer, Lieutenant B.E.M. Gurdon was dispatched as the temporary political agent in Chitral, as a sort of link between the permanent British Resident in Gilgit and the Boundary Commission then at work in Kunar attempting to delineate the border with Afghanistan. No sooner had Gurdon arrived, with an escort of only eight Sikh soldiers, than the country was again thrown into chaos when the latest, short-lived and murderous Mehtar was assassinated in his turn by his semi-idiot half-brother Amir ul Mulk, who promptly ascended the throne himself.

The new Mehtar, half triumphant and half tremulous about his unexpected success, was however far from secure in his new kingdom. His uncle Sher Afzul, who had already once briefly held the Mehtarship, was lurking in Kabul under the protection of the Afghan king. Perhaps even more dangerous was Amir ul Mulk's active and unscrupulous brother-in-law Umra Khan, Prince of Jandul. Umra Khan acquired the throne of Jandul in 1881 by murdering his brother, since when he had launched a series of wars to annex the territories of his neighbours and now controlled all the hill areas between Malakand and the Lowari Pass.<sup>1</sup> Either or both of these ambitious and devious princes might, it was thought, make a play for the throne of Chitral<sup>2</sup> and Amir seems quickly to have realized that his best chance of keeping his throne, and indeed his head, was to seek the endorsement and thus the protection of the British. Fortunately so it seemed to him, young Lieutenant Gurdon was on hand to provide such a commitment. However, the Government of India was in no hurry to recognize a youth who was not only a fratricide and regicide, but whose capacity for governing, or even behaving sanely, were by no means evident and who might be deposed at any moment by his more powerful rivals. Gurdon was therefore instructed to prevaricate while the Resident at Gilgit, Surgeon-Major George Robertson, quickly assembled whatever troops he could muster and marched to support him.

Robertson crossed the Shandur Pass on 23 January, in temperatures too low for his thermometers to register and with his troops muffled in balaclava caps and blankets and wearing goggles against snow-blindness. On arrival at Mastuj, 'a dismal fort which stands bleakly among saltpetre swamps in wind-swept solitude', he was informed that Umra Khan with 3000 armed men had already entered the Chitral Valley and was besieging the fort at Drosh, only 5 miles below the capital, and threatening to depose the new Mehtar (and by implication, kill Gurdon). Robertson pushed on to Chitral by double marches and was relieved

to find Gurdon safe and sound. For a while it looked as if the situation might stabilize. However, everything depended on Amir ul Mulk's raggle-taggle and increasingly disaffected army, and the British found themselves in an uneasy alliance with a man whom Robertson described as 'a dull, stupid looking youth who every now and then would smile in a heavy absent-minded way while gazing into vacancy.'

Within a few days Drosh had fallen, handed over to Umra Khan by the open treachery of its commander without any pretence of fighting. Amir's forces fell back to a second defence line at Gairat, which Robertson reluctantly agreed to reinforce with a small contingent of his Sikhs. As long as Gairat held there was no immediate danger, but the situation was sufficiently precarious that Robertson discreetly took control of the fort in Chitral, the only substantial defensible building in the area, and quietly set about assembling food and stores against the possibility of a siege. This caused some difficulty with the local Chitrali nobles, not least Amir ul Mulk himself, who had to evacuate his womenfolk, but Robertson pressed ahead regardless.

Then came the most unwelcome news that Sher Afzul had also arrived at Drosh, and was apparently in cahoots with Umra Khan. Under this new threat, Amir ul Mulk's forces at Gairat melted away and the British were forced to abandon the position and pull back to Chitral. This was accomplished in two days of muddle, frustration and discomfort, compounded by incessant rain, but by 1 March Robertson, though racked with dysentery, had the satisfaction of seeing the last of his men and most of his stores safely inside the comparative safety of Chitral fort without a shot being fired. He was also relieved to find that the efficient and imperturbable Gurdon had assembled enough rations to feed the garrison for three months.

In a final effort at diplomacy, Robertson stage-managed a *darbar* in the fort where, in the presence of most of the notables of Chitral, Amir ul Mulk was publicly replaced as Mehtar by his younger brother, the 10-year old Shuja ul Mulk. The next day word came that the road to Mastuj had been broken down in several places and Sher Afzul was approaching with an armed following. Robertson dispatched a column of 200 men of the 4th Kashmir Rifles under Captains Campbell, Townsend and Baird to see whether this report was true. Approaching a small hamlet about 2 miles south of the town, they came under heavy fire from a large group of Sher Afzul's men, who were well armed, numerous and extremely skilful in the use of cover. An attempt was made to charge the village, but this was repulsed with considerable loss. Outflanked on both sides, the inexperienced Kashmiri troops started to fall back and in the gathering gloom control was all but lost. Captain Baird, commanding the flank guard on the right, was mortally wounded and carried off by Dr Whitchurch. The company of 14th Sikhs who had been left to guard Chitral fort were marched out and under the cover of their volley fire, as dusk fell, Campbell (who had been badly hit in the knee) and the remainder of the Kashmiri troops straggled back across the polo ground and the bazaar into the safety of the fort. A hasty roll-call showed that a third of the 150 Kashmiri sepoy deployed, including two good native officers, General Baj Singh and Major Bhikam, had been killed or wounded. Some time later, after dark, Whitchurch came in with a small group of sepoy, having carried the dying Baird back under fire through several miles of hostile territory, a remarkable feat of bravery and endurance for which he later received the Victoria Cross. Baird died shortly afterwards and was buried after dark just outside the fort by a small party of volunteers.

The following day the siege began and for the next forty-nine days the outside world received no news from the beleaguered garrison in Chitral. The fort itself was a square structure about 80 yards across, set close to the river on a low broad terrace and overlooked by high ground on almost every side. The walls were about 25 feet high, made of mud and stone reinforced with layers of coarse, heavy timber, interlocking at the corners and strengthened by



cross-pieces. There was a tower at each corner, about 50 feet high. The south face of the fort, facing the bazaar about 600 yards away, was comparatively open though large *chinar* trees and outbuildings clustered around both the east and west walls. On the river side was another tower, called the Water Tower, free-standing and slightly lower. Under Campbell's direction a rough passage had been constructed from here to the river itself, to provide covered access to the only source of water. From the beginning it was recognized that this was the critical point of the defence, whose loss would quickly render the fort untenable.

There were 550 people inside the fort, of whom around 400 were soldiers, though around one-fifth of these were ineffective though sickness or wounds. Apart from himself, Robertson had only three effective British officers—Townsend, Harley and Gurdon. All were typical young officers in the old Indian Army, who combined great personal bravery and tough professionalism with a partiality for music-hall entertainment. 'Charley' Townshend, who was the senior, with experience from the Kitchener's River Campaign, was in military command. He was wont to plaster the walls of his room with pictures of fashionable London actresses and both he and Harley, a gregarious and companionable Irishman, played the banjo.<sup>3</sup> Campbell lay out the siege with his smashed knee,<sup>4</sup> guarding the precious supplies of food and drink in the Officers' Mess storeroom from his bed, and Whitchurch the doctor, though he had no military training, manned the walls during crises armed with his personal double-barrelled rifle.

The core of Robertson's force was eighty men of the 14th Sikhs, reliable soldiers, equipped with new Martini-Henry rifles. The 300 sepoy of the 4th Kashmir Rifles were less effective. Robertson describes their shooting as: 'Terribly wild—atrociously bad. They fumbled with their rifles, let them off at all manner of unexpected times, dropped their ammunition about and behaved, many of them, as if they had never before fired a shot.' To be fair, the Kashmiris were despondent after their defeat on 2 March and they were armed with old Snider rifles, an awkward weapon at the best of times but now with barrels so worn out that they were little better than muskets. Strict fire discipline was needed to conserve ammunition (only 300 rounds per man was available) and only volley fire was allowed at night. Around 170 men were on duty manning the walls at any time, so throughout the siege the men were required to do twelve-hour shifts, along the lines of naval watches. The Sikhs under Harley held the north side of the fort, including the all-important water passage, while Gurdon was given temporary command of the Kashmiri sepoy manning the south wall.

A contingent of Punialis under Sifat Bahadur was co-opted into an *ad hoc* corps of Pioneers and used for all manner of construction and digging tasks. Towards the end of the siege they were formally enrolled as levies and armed with Sniders. The garrison also included fifty-two Chitrali civilians, some members of Shuja ul Mulk's family and retinue, but others were hangers-on whose sympathies lay with their compatriots outside the walls. These were never fully trusted, and were kept under guard during attacks.<sup>5</sup>

The main problem was the maintenance of morale. The fort was overcrowded and food was extremely monotonous and in short supply, so everyone was on half rations from the beginning. Because there were no proper millstones for grinding the corn, the flour was rough and full of stone chips, causing severe stomach problems, particularly for the Hindu sepoy, who would eat no meat (the few sheep and geese available were kept for those in the hospital). Towards the end of March, the first horse was killed and from then on there was a regular supply of horse meat, though the Hindus would not eat it. A limited supply of tea was also available, and also some rum, which was rationed out to the Sikhs and Gurkhas. The officers dined every night on pea soup, of which there was a depressingly large supply, augmented with some stony bread and a little rice, supplemented by the occasional ornamental bird from the deposed

Mehtar's aviary. Medical supplies were limited and the sanitation arrangements were primitive in the extreme, creating 'foetid smells and really bad stinks'.

Although there were only intermittent outbursts of serious fighting, the defenders were in constant danger from snipers. The Chitralis were excellent shots and very skilful in the use of cover. Their *sangars* were well concealed and constructed without obvious loop-holes—their presence usually only betrayed by a puff of smoke from a rifle—and the defenders seldom saw more than a glimpse of a figure darting through the trees. Even after three weeks of the siege, when the defenders had suffered nineteen casualties, they were not certain of having hit a single one of the besiegers in return. Throughout the siege the officers were continually at work improving the defences, making loop-holes and putting up screens and barricades to prevent sniping. Working only at night, Sifat Bahadur's men demolished most of the outbuildings and houses close to the fort walls, bringing in the wood from the roofs to be used inside the fort. Several attempts were made to illuminate the exterior of the fort by night using fires or balls of paraffin-soaked wood chips, but the best method (recommended by a loyal Chitrali) was to kindle small piles of pine-needles on little ledges cut through the walls of the fort. This system was soon adopted by all, except on windy nights when there was a danger of setting the wooden walls of the fort alight.

Two days after the siege started, letters came from Sher Afzul and Umra Khan under the protection of a white flag. The thrust of these was identical, that Sher Afzul should be recognized as Mehtar and the British should at once march back to Gilgit under a guarantee of safety. Robertson rejected these proposals outright. He would not depose Shuja ul Mulik under duress and he roundly mistrusted the guarantee of safety—from the time of the First Afghan War in 1838 the British had learned that, on the Frontier, to abandon a position of strength and retreat through mountainous defiles was to court disaster. Interminable negotiations were conducted along these lines throughout the siege, by letter or increasingly improbable emissaries, with neither party moving significantly from their original positions.

On 14 March, the Chitralis launched an assault on the East Tower, but this quickly fizzled out in the face of determined volley fire from the walls. However over the next few nights the firing increased and there were regular alarms as the Chitralis threw up fresh *sangars* closer to the walls, a development the defenders were powerless to prevent. Townshend tried to break down the *sangars* using the two old 7-pounder guns that were in the fort, but the attempt had to be abandoned because there were no qualified artillerymen amongst the defenders and the *ad hoc* gun crews suffered several casualties from Chitrali snipers.

During the second week of the siege, groups of Chitrali fighters were seen heading north, and a few days later the first rumours reached the defenders that a British contingent from Mastuj had been defeated, with many casualties and two British officers captured. These stories were at first discounted, but slowly it became clear that they were all too accurate. Two separate detachments had been ambushed, one at Reshun and the other in the Koragh defiles south of Mastuj, and over a 100 men had been killed or captured. Many modern rifles, over sixty boxes of ammunition and a large quantity of guncotton had been taken—a thought that did nothing to improve morale in the fort. In due course letters arrived from the captured officers, Lieutenants Edwardes and Fowler, and later they were brought to Chitral in person as bargaining chips in the Khans' negotiations. For the first time Robertson now began to negotiate in earnest with the aim of securing the lives, if not the release, of the prisoners. But it was to no avail. A ceasefire was agreed which held for six days while the parleys went on, but the negotiations came to nothing. Frustrated, Umra Khan's emissary asked Robertson, 'What is to prevent us from taking the two British officers down to the river and killing them?'

To which he replied, 'What is to prevent me from ordering you into the courtyard right now to be shot?'

Shortly after this the Chitralis hauled down their flag of truce, and the siege resumed. It began to rain, and for seventy-two hours everyone was wet and miserable, with great anxiety among the British officers about their comrades' fate. Robertson noted in his diary at the end of the third week of the siege:

The men can hardly get dry in the day before being drenched again in the evening, when they have to stay near their alarm posts. All night long they are sickening with fever and dysentery, for the cold wind blowing off their saturated clothes chills them blue.

It was the low point. On the 28th, the day of Eid, the British were again expecting an attack, but none came. Roberson had a Union Flag made up out of old material lying around the fort and that night it was mounted on a flagpole on the South-west Tower, where it stayed for the rest of the siege; marking, he felt, the turning point in the fortunes of the garrison.

By the beginning of April there was a growing feeling that the siege was entering its last phase. An old woman who had been used as a messenger by Sher Afzul had slyly remarked that no British troops were advancing from Gilgit, which the defenders took to mean exactly the opposite. There were indications that the Chitralis were preparing to assault the fort and rumours that scaling ladders were being prepared. On the night of 5 April and again on the 6th, there was much firing, yells, bugle calls and mock rushes against the fort, with new and ever-closer *sangars* coming up overnight opposite the north and west walls. There was also a lot of activity around the summer-house opposite the Gun Tower, though for what reason the defenders could not determine. This change in tempo was caused by events outside Chitral of which the beleaguered garrison had no knowledge. From both north and south, British relief columns were on the move. Colonel Kelly with a single battalion of Pioneers and two guns had crossed the Shandur Pass from Gilgit on 4 April, and on the same day a large force under General Low had stormed the Malakand Pass; a week later Kelly was in Mastuj and Low was entering Dir. The net was closing, and Umra Khan no longer had the luxury of waiting until starvation forced the garrison of Chitral into submission—he had to take the initiative.

In the evening of 7 April, some fifty tribesmen were seen moving from the bazaar towards the fort and later that night there was a strong demonstration opposite the North Tower, to which the Sikhs responded with heavy volley fire. It seemed an attack on the north wall was imminent when flames suddenly shot up from the opposite corner. Under cover of darkness the Chitralis had piled up and set alight piles of faggots against both sides of the Gun Tower. Inside the fort, chains of men were quickly formed to throw water and earth on the flames, but the fires caught quickly. The noise was appalling, with the flames 'roaring like a furnace', the crash of bullets smashing into the woodwork of the towers, volleys from the defenders and the yells of the tribesmen. Sultan Shah, one of Campbell's servants, balanced himself on a beam above the western face of the tower, from where he poured down water and earth on the flames below until he was hit, twice, in the hip and arm, and had to be pulled down. The fire on the southern face of the tower was more serious, but water was thrown over the ramparts and after some time, and further losses, this too was subdued.

However, the flames had spread to the south wall, which could not be accessed from above without suicidally exposing oneself. A hole was hastily cut through the lower part of the wall, from where water could be spooned through onto the burning beams on the outer face. There was only room for one man at a time to work at the hole, but it was now daylight and the Chitrali snipers were only 30 yards away, so it was only a matter of time before someone was

hit. The first casualty was Roberson himself, who was struck by a Snider bullet in the shoulder. The wound was large and deep and carried away a good deal of muscle, but to Robertson's relief no bones were hit. He was bound up and put to bed and command devolved on Townshend. It was a further two hours before this fire was subdued and despite the regular volley fire from the defenders a further four soldiers working at the hole were wounded. Just as the fire was finally extinguished, and the hole was being re-blocked, a single shot through the remaining crevice killed Campbell's orderly.

The next day was spent making preparations against another fire attack, improving the defences on the south wall and demolishing the enclosure on the west wall to give better fields of fire in that direction. Robertson dragged himself up from his sickbed, visited the hospital (which now had eighty-five inmates) and announced gallantry awards for several sepoy. Though he himself was dejected, most of the soldiers were increasingly confident. There was little firing from the Chitralis and despite rumours of an imminent attack the next few nights were quiet—it was supposed (probably correctly) that many of the tribesmen had moved off up the valley to oppose the relief expedition coming down from Mastuj.

From about 11 April onwards the nights were increasingly broken by incessant tom-toms, shouts and music, though no serious attacks were made. However, on the morning of the 17th, a sentry in the Gun Tower reported hearing distinct sounds of digging. This was quickly confirmed by Townshend and Robertson. Umra Khan's men were mining and the tunnel was probably already within 10 or 12 feet of the walls. It was quickly decided that a counter-mine was not possible—they had to mount a sortie to destroy the mine-head. Only one Englishman could be spared for this very risky task and Harley was chosen, with forty Sikhs and sixty Kashmiri sepoy. Improvised charges were made up with a length of gunpowder-filled hose for a fuse, and the big stones blocking the garden door were quietly removed. At the appointed hour, the parapets were stealthily manned and Harley's men assembled at the garden gate. At four o'clock the garden door swung open and Harley rushed out, paused for a moment to assemble his men, and charged the short distance across the garden to the summer-house. Amazingly, the mine was only lightly held and the entrance was secured with the loss of only three men. However, the resistance of the tribesmen quickly stiffened, with an increasingly heavy and accurate fire coming from the loopholes along the garden wall. There was confusion as Harley tried to get his Sikhs to enter the mine, but instead the soldiers preferred to wait by the shaft entrance, killing the Chitrali miners as they started to emerge in ones and twos.<sup>6</sup>

When he thought the tunnel was clear, Harley entered and set his charges. As he was tamping them down, a couple more Chitralis fought their way past in the semi-darkness and in the confusion the fuse hoses got trampled. Harley came back up to find some spare hose and, as he did so, the first charge went off, knocking him down and burning the turbans of the Sikhs. Harley and his men raced back to the safety of the fort through a blaze of rifle fire but amazingly none were hit. However, initial euphoria quickly turned to despair, as Harley reported that the charges had exploded prematurely and most of the mine was still intact. The weight of fire from the tribesmen was such that a further sally was out of the question and a start immediately ordered on a counter-mine. Digging was just beginning when the impeturbable Gurdon sauntered up to report that the enemy tunnel had completely collapsed after all.

The next day was quiet and that night reports came in that Colonel Kelly, having defeated the Chitralis at Nisa Gol, was only two marches away and General Low had reached Dir. The next morning Gurdon marched out with a contingent of Kashmiris and confirmed that the remaining Chitrali forces had melted away, Sher Afzul and Umra Khan had disappeared and the siege was at an end. In celebration, the last cigarettes in the fort were consumed and some 'shocking' rum produced for a grog. The day after that Kelly arrived amid much celebration

and word came that Umra Khan, having handed over his two captives Fowler and Edwardes safe and sound, had fled to Kabul.

The total British losses during the siege were forty-one killed and sixty-two wounded, though the majority of these casualties occurred during the reconnaissance of 3 March. Pathan and Chitrali losses are not known, but were thought to be very few (perhaps only a handful) except for around forty killed during Harley's sortie on 17 April, the majority of whom were Chitralis caught in the mine itself. A few days after the siege was lifted Sher Afzul was captured, and together with the deposed Mehtar Amir ul Mulk was shipped off to prison in Madras, where they both subsequently died. Umra Khan remained in exile in Afghanistan, and died there in 1903. Surgeon-Major Robertson, after a short break, was appointed as the Political Agent in Chitral, where he served for several years, writing what is still the best book on the Kafirs of the Kalash. Shuja ul Mulk reigned quietly in Chitral under British protection for some forty more years, fathering at least fifteen children.

### THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The fort has been substantially altered since the time of the siege, but still retains much of its character and most of the key features can still be identified with confidence. The old fort comprises only the central section of the modern structure. The western section of today's fort, with the large white ornate main gate leading to a straggling courtyard with three fine old *chinar* trees and the two towers on the western side, was built by Shuja ul Mulk in about 1919. In 1895 this whole area lay outside the fort walls. A portion of the original fort wall can be seen on the right-hand (eastern) side of the courtyard, behind the dilapidated barrack block. The old fort itself lies immediately to the east of this and is now the private quarters of the Mehtar's family. East of this again, a portion of the garden has been enclosed by a wall and is also closed to the public.

The northern side of the fort, along the riverfront, has also been substantially changed, with the original wall replaced in 1935 by brick colonnades and buildings.<sup>7</sup> This was the stables area in 1897, used by the garrison as a latrine, which was the source of the 'foetid smells and really bad stinks'. On the river side, the footings of the old Water Tower can still be seen, and the large white marble rock in the riverbed, which marked the end of Campbell's water tunnel. The old West Tower has been lost, but it stood at the north-west corner of the 1935 colonnade. Just to the west of this, beside the well, is the spot where Captain Baird was buried.<sup>8</sup> The remains of the old East Tower can be seen above the carriage gate beside the new Water Tower.

The high wall that now runs around the east side of the fort broadly follows the line of the old garden wall. Both this wall and the towers are new, but the central tower on the front (southern) side is on the site of the old Gun Tower, which was attacked by fire and by mining during the siege. There is no sign remaining of the summer-house which hid the entrance to the mine, or the tunnel itself. However the line of the tunnel ran diagonally away from the Gun Tower through the clump of old *chinar* trees about 40 yards to the south. The original east wall of the old fort is still intact and still has the small garden gate through which Harley and his men emerged to capture the mine, although this is now inside the enclosed garden and cannot be seen by the public.

## HOW TO GET THERE

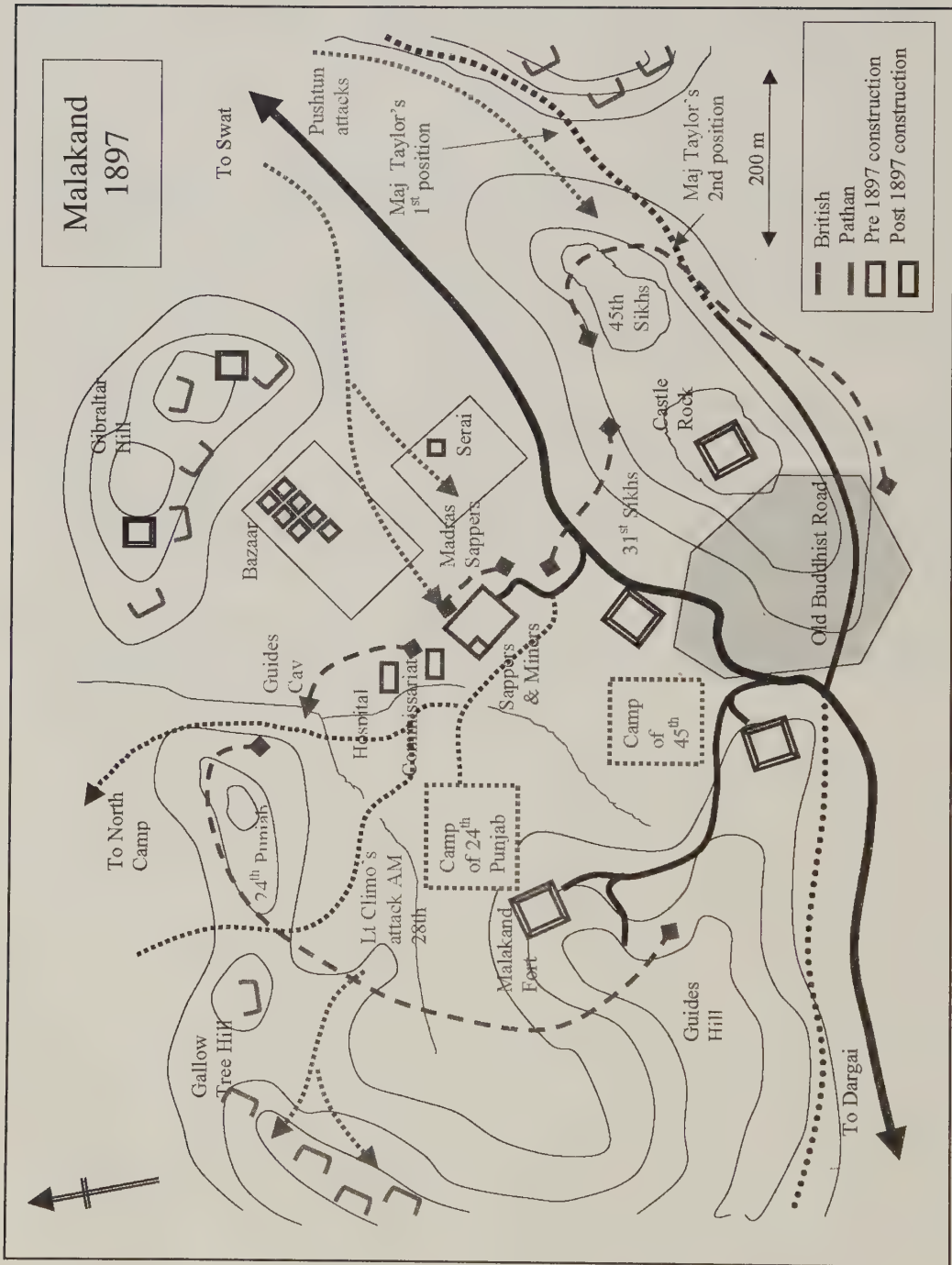
Chitral Fort is in the middle of Chitral town, only five minutes walk from the main bazaar.

### NOTES

1. Umra Khan was described by Younghusband as: 'One of those uncontrollable spirits which feeds upon high adventure and tires of nought but rest.' He is still referred to as the 'Napoleon of the Frontier'.
2. Indeed it subsequently came to light that both had probably been involved in the plot to murder the previous Mehtar.
3. Robertson remarked that 'No subaltern on the Frontier considers his kit complete without a banjo and a fox terrier', but he was unenthusiastic about Harley's attempts to entertain his brother officers during the siege with 'songs and shuffling accompaniment'.
4. In the absence of a doctor, Robertson poured a complete bottle of dilute carbolic acid into Campbell's wound. It caused him great pain, but Campbell made a remarkable recovery and less than two years later played in the winning team of the Indian cavalry polo competition.
5. The fort also had a number of dogs (one of whom was wounded twice and carried a spent bullet lodged under his skin) and a mischievous pet monkey, which so ransacked Robertson's office and personal effects that it had to be put under 'close arrest'.
6. It later transpired that Umra Khan's Pathans had been given the responsibility of protecting the mine, though local Chitrali farmers did the actual digging. This fact was somehow known to the Chitralis in the fort who, in the midst of the general celebrations, were found to be grieving for their countrymen killed in the tunnel. Colonel (Retd) Khushwaqt ul Mulk, the eldest surviving son of Shuja ul Mulk, recalls as a boy being introduced to an old man who had been in the mine but survived by feigning dead until the British had withdrawn into the fort.
7. The larger guns on display here were captured at Birot during the Third Afghan War. The smaller guns were donated to the Mehtar by the Governor of the North-West Frontier Province, Roos-Keppel, in about 1919.
8. Baird's body was subsequently moved to the small but attractive Christian cemetery to the south of the town. All the gravestones there have been lost in the last few years.



# Malakand 1897





## SIEGE OF MALAKAND, 1897

From the 1850s, the British had ruled the plains of the Punjab as far west as Peshawar. However, they were reluctant to penetrate too deeply into the wild hill regions of the Frontier—the Hindu Kush and Karakorums. There was little commercial advantage in these barren hills, freezing in winter and baking in summer, sparsely populated by fiercely independent, bloodthirsty and treacherous Pathan tribesmen. Like the Mughals before them, the British were generally content to leave the Frontier tribes alone as long as they kept the main trade routes open and desisted from raiding the more prosperous plains folk. British control, such as it was, was based on a combination of stipends to the local tribal chieftains, backed up by the threat of force if things got out of hand. In general this system worked well, though the British Army regularly had to mount punitive expeditions to deal with recalcitrant tribes, and alarms, rapid marches and minor skirmishes were common. However, the British had never been faced by a concerted Pathan revolt such as broke out across the whole length of the Frontier, without warning, in the summer of 1897.

The underlying reasons for the revolt are obscure. There was resentment about the growing presence of an infidel foreign power so close to their homes and the increasing visibility of British activity in the hills—explorers, surveyors, political agents, game-shooting expeditions and, of course, spies (this was the height of the Great Game period) were increasingly venturing into the mountains.<sup>1</sup> However, the immediate cause of the trouble was more obvious. From 1895, the British had maintained a small garrison in Chitral, to support the loyal young Mehtar and protect their interests there. In order to support the garrison it was necessary to establish a resupply route from Nowshera through Swat, Dir and Bajaur, which itself required the construction of an extended chain of forts, bridges and signal towers through the mountains to protect it. Two key points on the chain were the large fort at the top of the Malakand Pass, built to dominate the approaches to Swat, and the smaller post at Chakdara some 20 miles upstream, which controlled the bridge over the Swat River and the entrance to the Dir Valley.

Initially there seemed to be been no sustained opposition to this military occupation and the situation in Swat seemed remarkably stable, with the local tribesmen apparently reconciled to the presence of British soldiers in their midst and enjoying the improvements in communications and commerce that flowed from this. Indeed, the British congratulated themselves that the annual reliefs for Chitral had been carried out in 1896 without a single shot being fired throughout the lower Swat Valley. However it is clear that under the surface passions were stirring. As Churchill wrote:

A vast, but silent, agitation was begun. Messengers passed to and fro amongst the tribes. Whispers of war, a holy war, were breathed to a race intensely passionate and fanatical. Something was coming. A great day for their race and faith was at hand. They must watch and be ready.

It required only a spark to set it off, and that spark was provided, as so often in the history of the Pathans, by a mullah. In 1897, the British received reports that a 'Mad Fakir' was at large in Swat, 'a wild enthusiast, convinced alike of his divine mission and his miraculous powers, preaching a crusade, or jihad, against the infidel'. Almost nothing is known of this man. His name was Saidullah, but he was known more familiarly as Mullah Mastun. He was thought to be a native of Swat, who had travelled in Central Asia and Afghanistan. He appeared in upper Swat in early July, and worked his way down the valley with a growing band of fanatical supporters, one of whom he proclaimed as the King of Delhi. He claimed to work miracles, that wherever he went British bullets would be turned to water and that he would sweep the unbelievers from Swat before the new moon.<sup>2</sup>

The British garrison at Malakand discounted these stories as no more than common bazaar rumours. The British camp lay in a sheltered spot in a natural steep-sided bowl, cut into the hills right at the top of the pass. The floor of the bowl is fairly flat, with grass and rocky outcrops, though overlooked on all sides by a series of hills rising perhaps 1000 feet above the floor that constitute the rim of the bowl. There are three deep, almost evenly spaced cuts in the rim. To the south, over a low crest, runs the road down to Mardan and the plains. Almost opposite this, to the north-east, a broad nullah runs down to the main Swat Valley. Down this nullah ran the resupply road to Chakdara and, eventually, Chitral. Contouring around the hills above the road is an old Buddhist stone-laid path also leading to Swat. On the north-west side of the bowl a small stream cuts a narrow, deep gorge that falls sharply into lower Swat.

A recently-completed fort perched on a steep ridge on the hills to the west, overlooking the small cluster of permanent buildings in the bottom of the bowl: the Sappers & Miners enclosure, the Commissariat buildings and the hospital. The garrison comprised three regiments of native infantry (24th and 31st Punjab and 45th Sikhs), a squadron of the 11th Bengal Lancers, No. 8 Mountain Battery and a company of Madras Sappers; in all some 3000 men, the majority of whom were camped in tents on the gentle slopes below the fort. A second tented camp lay about half a mile away to the north, on the flat, open ground beside the Swat River.

The weekly garrison polo game at the North Camp went ahead on 26 July as usual. Nothing was amiss, though it was noticed that the grooms took the ponies away with unusual speed after the game. That evening, it was reported that a body of about 600 Pathans were marching towards Malakand. It was considered that they might attempt to mount an attack at dawn next day (the normal tactic of the tribesmen), but this would probably only be a small affair so orders were given that a column from the garrison would move out at midnight. Preparations were made, and at 10 p.m. the officers of the garrison were having a late dinner when the alarm was sounded in the camp and firing was heard. The first man to react was Major Taylor of 45th Sikhs. Running out from dinner he hastily collected eight men and hurried forward to the old Buddhist Road. Coming round a sharp corner in the narrow defile on the crest of the road they met a mass of several hundred Pathans creeping stealthily up the gorge towards them. The whole road was crowded with wild figures and Taylor opened fire at once, firing several volleys before falling back, firing incessantly, to a cutting about 50 yards back where they were joined by Lieutenant-Colonel McRae with a further dozen men. With these they were able to keep the road clear, but soon the Pathans were climbing the hill to their left, and raining down rocks on the small band below. In the dark, all was confusion and noise. Many of the Sikhs fell and Taylor was mortally wounded. After twenty minutes of desperate fighting, reinforcements started to come up and McRae, though covered in blood from an accidental bayonet wound, was able to clear the hillside above him and stabilize his line, repulsing continuous attacks until around 2 a.m., when the tribesmen drew off.

Another large body of tribesmen armed with swords and knives swarmed up the nullah from Swat into the camp. A detachment of the 24th Punjab was driven back and the tribesmen quickly occupied the lower end of the camp. A counter-attack by a company of the 24th Punjab, led by Lieutenant Climo, briefly recaptured the bazaar, but the left flank of the company was turned and the pressure became so severe that they had to be withdrawn to a more defensible line based on the hospital and Sappers & Miners enclosure. The football ground between this and the bazaar now became a sort of no man's land, across which both sides mounted repeated attacks. For about four hours Sikhs, British and Pathans fought and died in desperate confusion for control of the camp area while sharpshooters kept up a hail of accurate dropping fire from the surrounding hills. A wounded havildar of 24th Punjab, having been shot in the shoulder and received three deep sword cuts, had been left for dead on the football ground by the tribesmen. During a lull in the firing, his cries were heard. In spite of the heavy cross-fire on the football pitch, Lieutenant Costello, taking two sepoy, ran out and dragged back the wounded man, an act for which he was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross.

At around 1 a.m. the Sappers & Miners enclosure was overrun and about thirty to forty tribesmen broke into the adjacent Commissariat building. Lieutenant Manley the Commissariat Officer was immediately cut down and his assistant Sergeant Harrington pinioned. However in the confusion the only lamp in the hut was smashed. Harrington struggled free and crouched silently in the darkness in the corner of the hut while the tribesmen groped along the walls for him with their hands. Failing to find him, they returned to the fight and Harrington lurked undetected in the hut until it was retaken by a British counter-attack some three hours later. The Pathans made another furious attack and captured the Quarterguard building in the corner of the Sappers & Miners enclosure, where all the spare ammunition was stored. The British, led by the Garrison Commander Brigadier-General Meiklejohn, made repeated efforts to recapture the building, but it was only at the third attempt, after considerable loss, that Lieutenant Climo was successful and by then all the precious ammunition had been removed.

At length around 3.30 a.m. the attacks lessened, though the sniping continued. At first light, two companies of the 24th Punjab finally retook the football field and bazaar, which had by then been pretty well abandoned by the Pathans. The bodies of some thirty tribesmen lay in the narrow space in front of the Quarterguard—testament to the ferocity of the fighting in this small area. Meiklejohn dispatched a strong force of two infantry battalions supported by four guns and a squadron of Lancers to reconnoitre towards Chakdara and if possible break through to the beleaguered fort there. The cavalry did reach Chakdara and remained there for the rest of the siege, but the infantry were unable to proceed up the valley with thousands of tribesmen sniping from the flanks and had to conduct a fighting withdrawal back to Malakand. The troops and supplies billeted in the North Camp were called in (amazingly, the North Camp had not been attacked, though it was only half a mile from the scene of the heaviest fighting). This evacuation went slowly, and around 4 p.m. the camp had to be abandoned with the loss of a great deal of baggage and stores in the face of growing numbers of tribesmen. That evening the first reinforcements, the Guides Cavalry arrived (having marched the 32 miles from Mardan in only eight hours) and were immediately sent down to reinforce the tired men holding the bazaar.

The British forces in Malakand were now deployed as follows. The 45th Sikhs still held the old Buddhist Road, and the spur above it. To their left, in the bazaar, was 31st Punjab, with a detachment thrown forward to hold a small *serai* about 100 yards ahead of the main line. No. 5 Company Sappers & Miners were in the Sappers & Miners compound, with the Guides Cavalry holding the Commissariat and hospital to their left. On their left the 24th

Punjab were holding Gibraltar Rock and the nullah that led down to the now-abandoned North Camp, with a company on Maxim Point and the remainder of the battalion in reserve in the fort. As night fell, the Pathans started to come down off the hills and large parties were seen coming up the road from the direction of Chakdara. The attacks began again in earnest around 8.30 p.m., with the heaviest fighting again being around the Sappers & Miners compound. The small detachment under Subedar Saiyid Ahmad Shah holding the *serai* came under heavy and repeated attack, but in the confusion it was not realized how desperate the situation there was. At around 3 a.m. the *serai* caught fire and had to be abandoned—only four of the twenty-five men posted there escaped unscathed.

Both the flanking battalions also came under sustained fire and were forced to mount sorties to clear the tribesmen from their front. At around 5.30 a.m., with the dawn, a large body of around 1000 tribesmen was seen assembling on Gallows Tree Hill and the spur in front of it. These kept up a very galling fire on the 24th Punjab clinging to makeshift positions on the slope below. The ubiquitous Lieutenant Climo, who was now in command of the battalion (the commanding officer having been fatally wounded), dispatched a company under Lieutenant Rawlins to take the ridge and then followed up himself with a second company, leaving only a small reserve to hold the main position. Supported by the guns of 8 Bombay Mountain Regiment, the two companies, who together numbered no more than 100 men, pressed forward to the ridge with the tribesmen retreating up the hill in front of them. Rawlins turned left to link up with a party making its way down from the fort while Climo pushed on to the crest. From this vantage point he saw large groups of tribesmen congregating around the village of Jalalkot below. The guns were brought up to the crest of the hill and fired ten rounds, eight of which fell square into the village, which the tribesmen then quickly evacuated. The result of this counter-attack was that for the remainder of the siege the tribesmen occupied these hills after dark, but evacuated them again at first light.

The morning of 28 July soon showed that the garrison at Malakand was, to all intents and purposes besieged, with sharpshooters occupying the heights all round the camp and sniping all day long at any sign of activity in the camp below. The garrison spent the day improving the defences, laying barbed wire, building *sangars* and clearing fields of fire under an incessant harassing fire. The Guides Infantry arrived at 7 p.m., having started from Mardan just after midnight the night before, and were immediately dispatched without food or rest to fill the gap between 45th Sikhs and the 31st Punjab. No sooner had they arrived than night fell and the attacks on the Sappers & Miners compound started again. British casualties were again heavy, with thirty-five killed and wounded in this sector alone during the night.<sup>3</sup>

The next day was quiet but nervous, with several alarms. Tension was rising, as this was the night of the new moon, which the Mullah Mastun had declared would mark the final demise of the Malakand garrison. The sniping started to build up from about five-thirty. Bonfires had been prepared in front of the positions in the bazaar that helped to keep the tribesmen at bay in this sector, and the main attack again came against the 24th Punjab. From eight-thirty to one-thirty in the morning there were a series of determined rushes, some of them reaching to the very walls of the *sangars* before they were beaten off in hand-to-hand fighting; but the line held.

The pattern continued for three more days. Each day the defences were improved and more British reinforcements arrived (on 29 July a squadron of Bengal Lancers came in with 12,000 rounds of badly needed ammunition).<sup>4</sup> Each night, as dusk fell, the firing from the snipers in the surrounding hills would start to swell. The garrison would light the freshly-laid bonfires and stand ready. Soon would come the attacks—wild, screaming, banner-waving charges in the night, half-illuminated by the burning fires and the flashes of musketry. At around 2 a.m.

on the 30th the 24th Punjab was assailed by a particularly fanatical attack in which the tribesmen succeeded in cutting through the wire entanglements in several places and tearing down some portions of the *sangars*. They were repulsed with considerable loss and after half an hour they suddenly ceased and the tribesmen dispersed; it was reported that the Mad Fakir had led this attack personally but had retired after he was wounded in the hand and his second-in-command killed.

After this the scale and ferocity of the attacks began to wane. On 31 July a small cavalry reconnaissance was mounted to the North Camp and the next day a larger expedition was made towards Chakdara. That night, for the first time in six days, there were no attacks on the camp except for sniping. The next day, Sir Bindon Blood arrived to take over command of the garrison and a strong force set out to relieve Chakdara fort. Most of the remaining tribesmen slipped away to counter this threat and by 2 August the siege of Malakand was effectively over.

The British lost 178 soldiers killed or wounded during the siege, the majority of casualties occurring on the first two nights. The tribal casualties were estimated at 3000. With the breaking of the siege and the subsequent relief of Chakdara, the British began to believe that the back of the revolt had been broken and a heavy column under Sir Bindon Blood was dispatched to harass and punish the tribesmen remaining under arms in Upper Swat and Dir. However this was to be just the opening scene of what came to be known as the Great Pathan Revolt. Swat remained quiet but within weeks the Mohmands near Peshawar had risen, with reports of *laskars* forming across the border districts of Khyber, Waziristan and Kurram. British reinforcements were hurried in from all parts of India, and there was soon fighting in a dozen places along the Frontier. The majority of these were small actions (only at Shabkadar and on the Samana Ridge was the fighting on a comparable scale to Malakand), but it took the British until the end of September to regain a semblance of control over the region.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The area is still easily recognizable, though now much more built-up than it was in 1897. The easiest way to get a general view of the area is to drive down through the village of Malakand and stop on the side of the road a few hundred metres beyond, overlooking the football pitches. Behind you are Castle Rock Hill and the old Buddhist Road that was held throughout the siege by 45th Sikhs. To your right is the nullah and road running down towards Swat, up which the main Pathan attack came on the first night. The large hill to your half-right across the nullah, with the obvious remains of the British signalling towers, is Gibraltar Hill; it is easy to see why the Pathan snipers on this hill were particularly galling to the British. To the left of Gibraltar Hill, directly across the football pitches, is the gorge leading to the North Camp. To the left of that is the spur of Gallows Tree Hill, leading up to Guides Hill, the long ridge that dominates the southern end of the bowl to your half-left. The original British fort is on the right-hand spur of Guides Hill. Today there are old forts and towers, some still occupied, on almost every dominating feature, but all the others were built after 1897. The sports pitches are still much as they were at the time of the siege, with the bazaar located to their right at the foot of Gibraltar Rock. The Commissariat building and Sappers & Miners enclosure were to the left of the football pitches, in the middle of the bowl, roughly where the modern soldiers' accommodation blocks now are, with the hospital beyond them in the trees.<sup>5</sup> Some of the buildings still standing in the area where the Sappers & Miners enclosure was are quite old, but none I think were there in 1897.

You can easily follow the old Buddhist Road down to where Major Taylor and his small band of 45th Sikhs made their stand on the first night of the siege. The Old Buddhist Road crosses the modern main road right at the top of the pass and winds up from there through the village. The first section is narrow but you can get a car down about 1 kilometre until the tarmac ends. A few hundred metres beyond this, where the path crosses a small nullah, was Major Taylor's first position, when he encountered the approaching tribesmen at the beginning of the battle. His second position, where he was mortally wounded, is back up the path, at the point where the hill on the left of the track is steepest. It is worth making the short scramble up this (the back side of Castle Rock Hill), to get an excellent panoramic view of the battlefield. At the western end of the hill near the village is an imposing fort, built in 1899 (after the siege). It has a plaque near the main gate on the western side with the inscription 'Major W.W. Taylor 45th Sikhs was mortally wounded at this spot 26th July 1897'.<sup>6</sup>

It is also worth having a look round the original Malakand fort on Guides Hill. It is disused now and semi-ruined, but an impressive structure nevertheless. To get there take the side road at the top of the pass, which starts almost opposite the start of the old Buddhist Road and runs past the new fort (which is still occupied by the Pakistan Army). For the more energetic, a scramble up Gibraltar Hill gives an excellent view over the battlefield, and up the lower Swat Valley.

## HOW TO GET THERE

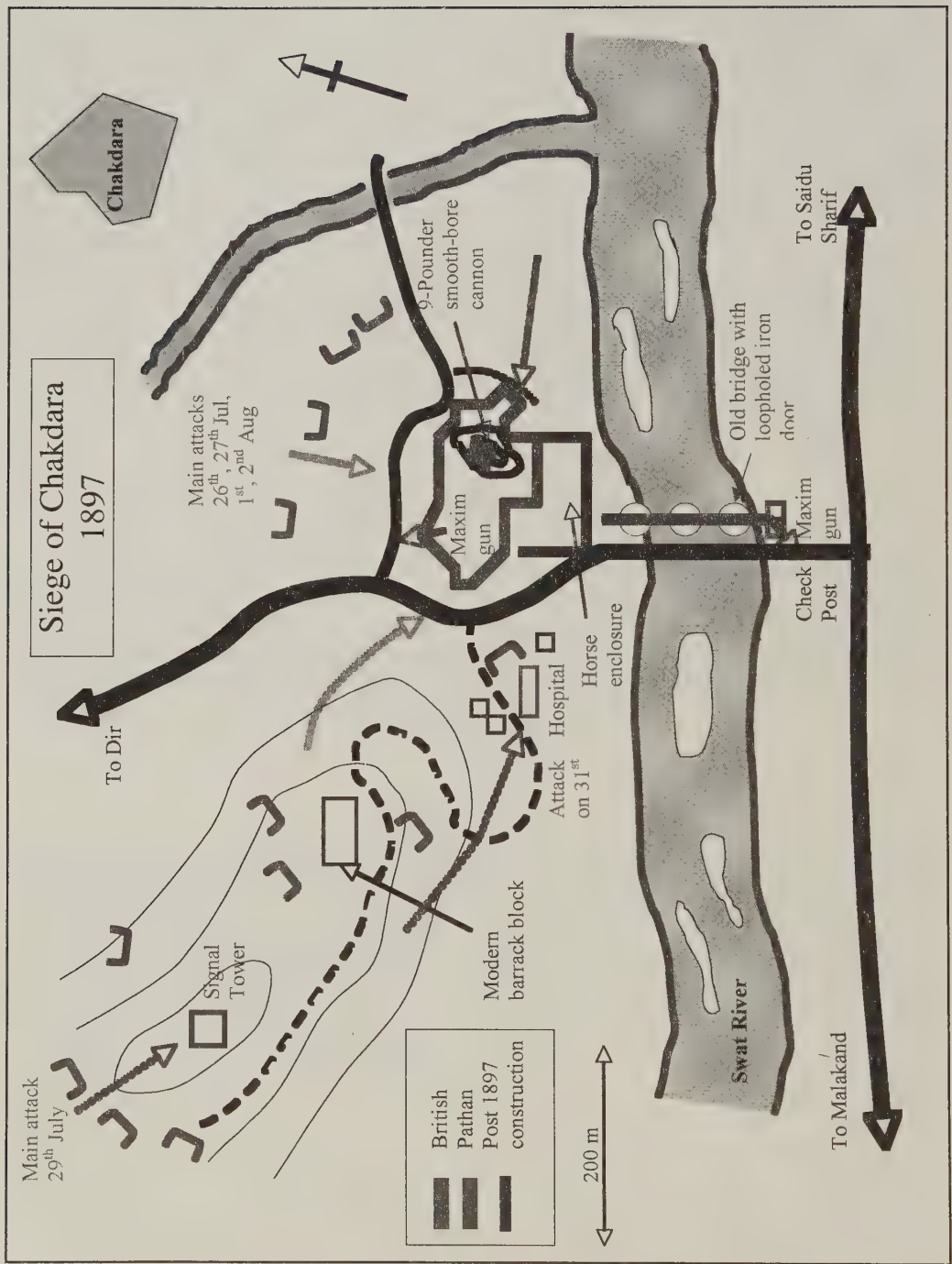
Take the normal tourist route to Swat, via the Grand Trunk Road, Nowshera and Mardan. The bottom of the Malakand Pass is marked by the old British fort at Dargai, built after 1897. From a viewpoint about 1 kilometre below the top of the pass you can see the line of the old Buddhist Road about 50 feet above you; the two roads cross at the top of the pass. As soon as you cross over the pass, the Malakand bowl and the site of the battle in 1897 is immediately obvious on the left of the road. It takes about four hours from Islamabad.

## NOTES

1. The problem was probably exacerbated by Abdur Rehman, the wily Amir of Kabul, who was believed to be fomenting trouble amongst the tribes in order to undermine British influence on the Frontier.
2. There are some suggestions that Saidullah's hatred of the British was the result of an accident involving an Englishman in which he lost his only son.
3. Lieutenant Lindlay of the 31st Punjab was hit in the thigh. His life was saved by the regimental doctor, who held his severed artery for several hours in the dark until he could be evacuated and treated.
4. On 30 July the 35th Sikhs came in, having lost twenty-one men from heatstroke during their forced march through the fearful summer heat.
5. There was a fever hospital on this spot until quite recently.
6. I think 'near this spot' would have been more accurate.



# Siege of Chakdara 1897





## SIEGE OF CHAKDARA, 1897

The small fort at Chakdara was built by the British in 1896 to guard their new bridge over the Swat River, a critical link in the tenuous resupply route that ran from Nowshera over the Malakand Pass and through the mountains of Swat, Dir and Bajaur up to the isolated British garrison in Chitral.

The fort itself stood on a small knoll above the river on the site of a sixteenth-century fort built in the time of the Mughal Emperor Akbar.<sup>1</sup> It was a solid structure covering perhaps half an acre, with stone-faced walls about 20 feet high, loopholed for rifles. A Maxim gun was mounted in the wall in the north-west corner of the fort and a single 9-pounder gun was positioned on top of the small hill at its eastern end. The bridge was at that time a narrow, swinging wire suspension design of a type still found all over the Northern Areas. The southern end of the bridge was closed by a blockhouse with an iron door and two stone towers, loopholed for musketry, which held a second Maxim gun. Between the bridge and the fort were the cavalry lines, where the horses were stabled. On the peak of a prominent hill 400 yards to the west of the fort was a signal tower from where the garrison could communicate by telegraph or heliograph to Malakand. At the foot of the hill between the fort and the signal tower was a small hospital, used principally to treat the local people.

The fort was completely overlooked by the signal tower hill and the ridgeline beyond that and was highly vulnerable to sniping. However it was strongly built and as long as there were sufficient defenders to man the walls, with adequate food and ammunition, it was largely impregnable against an attacking force without artillery. Furthermore, it was only three hours' ride from Malakand, where the main British reserves in Swat were concentrated. The garrison consisted of two weak companies of 45th Sikhs under the command of Lieutenant Rattray,<sup>2</sup> twenty troopers of 11th Bengal Lancers and a handful of telegraphy, medical and administrative staff—about 200 men in all, drawn from the main Malakand garrison.

On 26 July 1897, despite some rumours of impending trouble,<sup>3</sup> life seemed very much as normal and most of the garrison was relaxing. Havildar Gurdit Singh of 45th Sikhs was out in the hills nearby, sketching. Rattray had gone down to Malakand to join in the weekly officers' polo match there. As he was heading back after the game he met two troopers of the 11th Bengal Lancers with a letter from Lieutenant Wheatly, the duty officer in Chakdara, reporting that large numbers of Pathans with standards had been seen advancing on Malakand. Rattray immediately hurried back to Chakdara and arrived safely, though the valley was teeming with hostile tribesmen. Gurdit Singh returned at much the same time, having been accosted and robbed by the Pathans, and corroborated his story. No sooner had Rattray reported the situation by telegraph to Malakand than the wire was cut and the little garrison prepared for an attack.

At around 10.15 p.m. that night the alarm was sounded and out of the darkness began a fusillade that did not stop until 2 August, a week later. Soon afterwards came the first attack, against the west wall of the fort, followed by another against the north wall and a third from

the south against the cavalry enclosure,<sup>4</sup> using ladders taken from the hospital compound; all were with difficulty beaten off. The next morning a squadron of 11th Bengal Lancers under Captain Wright came in, having fought their way up the valley from Malakand through large numbers of tribesmen. The troopers twice had to swim the river to get away from their pursuers, who did not finally fall back until the small party reached the covering fire of the Maxim guns in the fort. No sooner were the Lancers safely inside the fort than about 2000 tribesmen with 200 standards made another major effort to overwhelm the garrison. Under cover of heavy fire from the snipers on the surrounding hills, successive parties (and on one occasion a single banner man) charged recklessly up to the very walls, to be mown down in a hail of bullets from the fort.

The signal tower was manned by sixteen signallers under the command of Lance Naik Vir Singh. Though it was completely surrounded it was still possible to communicate from the roof to Malakand by heliograph. Every day Sepoy Prem Singh, the heliograph operator, would come out onto the roof of the tower and though under a terrible fire from short range, carefully set up his equipment and flash out the urgent messages to the main camp. This was extremely dangerous, but the communications were too valuable to give up, so the signal tower had to be held. However, it was soon realized that the water tank in the tower had been left empty and the small garrison had little food. Under cover of fire from both Maxim guns and all of the garrison who could be spared, six men scrambled up the hill from the fort to the tower carrying food and water. Despite heavy fire from the tribesmen, this procedure was successfully repeated each day until 1 August, when it became too dangerous.

Meanwhile every spare moment was used to reinforce the defences of the fort. Logs, sandbags and boxes of earth were piled on the walls to improve the protection against the snipers on the hills. The Maxims and the single 9-pounder gun were trained on likely attack points. Twice that night the tribesmen rushed the fort carrying scaling ladders, with shouts, yells and the beating of drums. The guns were fired on their pre-arranged lines and it is said that no fewer than seventy perished before the attack withered away.

Early on the 29th large numbers of tribesmen were seen assembling in Chakdara village and at three o'clock that afternoon the tribesmen made a determined attack on the signal tower, carrying scaling ladders and bundles of grass to lay over the barbed wire. Despite heavy fire from the tower itself and the main fort, they managed to set fire to a thatched hut beside the door of the tower, but fortunately the door itself failed to catch. The foresight of the Maxim gun in the fort was shot away, and a makeshift one had to be quickly cobbled together. The battle raged for about five hours and it was not until after dark that the firing died away. The Pathans worked all night carrying away their dead, but there were still over fifty bodies around the signal tower when the morning came. The next day was relatively quiet, but the attacks began again as soon as darkness fell, despite the heavy rain which added to the discomfort of the defenders, who had by now been fighting almost continually for ninety-six hours and were falling asleep at their posts. The tribesmen, who had at first numbered around 1500 had by now swelled to perhaps 8000, and the scale of the attacks was increasing commensurately. All through the night of the 31st the attacks continued and the tribesmen managed to capture the hospital and establish positions on the hill between the fort and the signal tower.

Despite the best efforts of the engineer officer Captain Baker to put up overhead cover for the sentries on the walls, from 1 August it became almost impossible to move around the fort, such was the weight of fire from the surrounding hills. Further resupply of the signal tower was also out of the question and despite their urgent requests no water reached the men in the tower that day or the next. Lieutenant Rattray's official report states:

Matters now looked so serious that we decided to send an urgent appeal for help, but owing to the difficulties and dangers of signalling, we could not send a long message, and made it as short as possible, merely sending two words 'help us'.

At daybreak the next day (2nd August) the Pathans launched a fresh attack, their largest yet. Carrying scaling ladders and bundles of grass, they rushed down on the fort from all sides. The attacks continued with increasing ferocity until 10 a.m. and several of the defenders were killed and wounded by the intense firing. Then, just as matters seemed to be approaching a crisis, a column of British cavalry was seen coming at speed up the valley from Malakand. As the Lancers reached the southern end of the bridge the attack died away and the tribesmen started to run for the hills. The cavalry was at first checked by the fire of the tribesmen in the *sangars* around the signal tower, so Lieutenant Rattray quickly mounted a sally from the exhausted garrison and recaptured the hospital at the point of the bayonet. As the sally party emerged from the hospital, the first of the Lancers came across the swaying bridge and together they cleared the last remaining *sangar*; the last man to leave the *sangar* shooting and severely wounding Rattray in the neck before he was cut down. Barely had the tribesman fallen back than the garrison of the signal tower rushed down to the river for their first drink in two days.

The British lost twenty killed and wounded in Chakdara Fort—a modest figure given the scale of the attacks, and testament to the value of the Maxim gun and strong walls against an opponent armed only with rifles and swords. However, as experience had shown elsewhere on the Frontier, the defenders were fighting for their lives—had the tribesmen succeeded in breaking into the fort, none would have survived. Losses among the Pathans are not known, but were estimated at the time as around 2000.

## THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

Chakdara Fort is currently occupied by the Pakistan Army, so it is hard to arrange a tour of the inside. However, from the outside it appears largely unchanged from 1897. The steel-faced firing ports in the walls are still functional, with the larger embrasures for the Maxim guns readily identifiable. The small hill where the 9-pounder gun was mounted is clear. The cavalry lines on the river side of the fort, which in 1897 were protected only by a light stockade, are now enclosed by an extension of the fort walls.

The signal tower stands at the top of the small but dominating hill that is now prominently labelled Churchill's Piquet.<sup>5</sup> It only takes fifteen minutes to walk up the rough road from the fort and is well worth the effort, if only for magnificent view of the Lower Swat Valley. The tower can be entered through an unlocked steel door. It is no longer possible to get onto the roof from where Sepoy Prem Singh sent his hazardous daily heliograph message to Malakand, but in the cool, sparse interior you can well imagine the privations of the sixteen soldiers besieged inside here for over a week.

The original bridge over the river was replaced in the early part of the last century by a cast-iron lattice girder structure, which has in turn been superseded by a modern concrete bridge. However, the old iron bridge is still there and the remains of the blockhouse at the southern end that housed the Maxim gun can still be seen, now half collapsed into the river.

Among the cluster of low buildings across the road from the fort at the foot of signal tower hill is a dilapidated block of early British construction. This is probably the hospital building that was captured by the tribesmen on 31 August. It was the only building in this area in 1897;

the long buildings half way up the hill, now used for soldiers' accommodation, are of later construction.

## HOW TO GET THERE

Take the normal route to Swat, along the Grand Trunk Road to Nowshera, then via Risalpur, Mardan and Malakand. About 15 kilometres beyond Malakand on the Saidu Sharif road there is a road turning left towards Dir. A few hundred metres down this road you come to the bridge over the Swat River (the police check point here will sometimes request proof of identity from foreigners). On the other side of the river, on the right hand side of the road, is Chakdara Fort and, prominently on the left, Churchill's Piquet. Just beyond the fort a small road curls off to the right, which leads about 1 kilometre over a small bridge to a most attractive Rest House, set in mature trees with a lawn running right down to the banks of the river—an excellent picnic spot. The drive from Islamabad takes about five hours.

## NOTES

1. Zain Khan, one of Akbar's generals, built it during his abortive expedition to Swat in 1586—see Battle of Malandrai.
2. 45th Sikhs were known as 'Ratrays Sikhs'. Presumably Lieutenant. Rattray was a relation of the man who had raised the regiment.
3. For the background situation, see the chapter on the Siege of Malakand.
4. Despite the very heavy firing, not a single horse in the cavalry lines, which were outside the walls of the fort, was hit throughout the siege. The British believed that this was because the tribesmen intended to appropriate these fine animals for themselves as soon as the fort was captured.
5. Churchill was not involved in the defence of Chakdara or Malakand (he was at the time serving with his regiment in Bangalore). He subsequently got himself attached to Sir Bindon Blood's staff as a war correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, in which capacity he visited Chakdara and subsequently wrote a stirring description of the siege, which forms part of his book on the Malakand Field Force expedition.

# GLOSSARY

- Abbati** Military obstacle made from an interlocking mass of sharpened tree branches—a primitive form of barbed wire.
- Abisares** An ancient Indian tribe, or possibly a chieftain, occupying the area of modern Hazara and Kashmir, on the left bank of the Indus, in Pakistan.
- Agrianians** A Paeonian tribe, from the area of modern Serbia. They were mountain men, noted for their ferocity in hand-to-hand combat, as well as their javelin throwing. They were the elite light infantry in Alexander's army.
- Akali** A radical military order of Sikhs. They wore dark blue turbans and robes with their legs bare below the knees and usually carried spears, swords, daggers and shields. Also known as Nihangs, from the Persian for crocodile.
- Assakenoi** An ancient Indian hill tribe occupying the area of modern Dir, Swat and Buner. Defeated by Alexander the Great in 326 BC.
- Bactrian** The ancient people residing in the country between the Hindu Kush and the Oxus, with the capital Bactra (now Balkh). Today's Tajiks are their descendants.
- Bheesti** Native water-carrier.
- Begum** Princess or titled lady.
- Banyan** Indian Banyan tree, *Ficus Benghalensis*.
- Brunswick Rifle** A muzzle loading, percussion cap rifle of .704 inch calibre, issued to the British Army from 1838 until 1851. It was manufactured by Enfield, and was sighted to 270 metres.
- Chinar** Oriental plane tree, *Platanus Orientalis*.
- Companions** Alexander's prestigious royal household cavalry, recruited from among the Macedonian nobility. They were the heavy shock arm of Alexander's army, designed to charge in a tight wedge formation. They usually carried a heavy thrusting spear, with a sword as a secondary weapon, metal helmets and body armour.

<b>Daudpotra</b>	The clan or tribe of the Nawab of Bahawalpur.
<b>Dewan</b>	Oriental term for finance minister. The word is derived from the Arabian diwan, and was commonly used on the Indian subcontinent to denote a minister of the Mughal government.
<b>Dooli</b>	Light palanquin or sedan chair, normally carried by four bearers.
<b>Durbar</b>	The court of an Indian prince.
<b>Eid</b>	Muslim festival marking the end of the holy month of Ramazan.
<b>Feringhee</b>	An offensive term for a European in the Middle East, India and parts of East Asia. Originated in the early seventeenth century from Urdu/Persian <i>firangi</i> 'Frankish, Western'.
<b>Gatling Gun</b>	Invented by the American Dr Richard Gatling in the 1860s, this was an early type of hand-cranked machine gun, with six barrels rotating around a central shaft. It was capable of firing 600 rounds per minute, but the early models were delicate and prone to breakdown
<b>Ghazi</b>	A Muslim warrior who has fought successfully against the infidels.
<b>Ghorchurra</b>	Sikh irregular cavalry, normally of aristocratic background.
<b>Hypaspist</b>	Literally 'shield-bearers', the hypaspist was an elite body of Alexander's army, consisting of the very best soldiers from each phalanx, formed into three 1000-man units. Some scholars think that they were armed the same as the rest of the phalanx with a long two-handed pike, while others think that they were lighter armed. Probably the latter, because they are always mentioned whenever Alexander needed fast light troops for his many rapid flank marches.
<b>Jezail</b>	Long-barrelled muzzle-loading rifle, fired from a forked rest. Locally made by the Pathan and Afghan tribesmen, they were awkward and slow to fire, but in good hands accurate up to about 400 yards and admirably suited to sniping.
<b>Jageer</b>	Land grant.
<b>Jihad</b>	Muslim religious struggle or crusade.
<b>Khalsa</b>	Originally a term denoting a 'pure' Sikh (one who had completed the initiation rites), this came to mean, in the nineteenth century, the Sikh standing army. Though tightly disciplined during Ranjit Singh's reign, during the subsequent Durbar period, the Khalsa became increasingly corrupt and insubordinate.

<b>Kirpan</b>	A curved iron-bladed ceremonial sword, one of the five 'Ks' that a devout Sikh is required to wear.
<b>Kutcha</b>	Rough, unfinished.
<b>Lakh</b>	One hundred thousand.
<b>Lance-Naik</b>	Lance-Corporal.
<b>Laskar</b>	Tribal army.
<b>Mahout</b>	Elephant driver. From Hindi <i>mahawat</i> , <i>mahaut</i> .
<b>Maidan</b>	Flat area, parade ground.
<b>Malik</b>	Tribal headman.
<b>Martini-Henry</b>	A single-shot, breech-loading rifle adopted by the British Army in 1871. It used a similar cartridge to that used with the Snider, but at a slightly reduced calibre. Hence the rather strange calibre designation of .577/.450 inches. This rifle could be fitted with a bayonet.
<b>Maxim Gun</b>	The world's first automatic, portable machine-gun. It could fire 500 rounds per minute, using the energy of each bullet's recoil force to eject the spent cartridge and insert the next bullet. It was invented by the American Hiram Maxim in 1885 and adopted by the British Army in 1889.
<b>Mehtar</b>	Ruler of Chitrali kingdom.
<b>Nine-pounder Gun</b>	The 9-pounder was a rifled, muzzle-loading artillery piece firing a projectile of 9 lbs 12 oz to a maximum range of 4000 yards. The weight of the gun and limber was about 35cwt. This meant that the gun could if necessary be manhandled by its detachment over difficult terrain. By the time of the siege of Chakdara in 1897, it was obsolete.
<b>Nullah</b>	A narrow valley or stream bed, usually dry.
<b>Peepul</b>	Indian fig tree, said to be the tree under which the Buddha became enlightened. ( <i>Ficus religiosa</i> , family Moraceae).
<b>Phalanx</b>	The principal infantry formation of the Greek army, configured for hand-to-hand shock combat. A typical phalanx unit was ten men across the front rank and ten men deep, but many such units were combined into one larger unit. The soldiers carried long spears, or pikes, and swords. They wore metal armour on their chests, forearms, and shins, plus a metal helmet and a round shield.

<b>Pucca</b>	Well made, good quality.
<b>Qila</b>	Fort.
<b>Royal Road</b>	In ancient times this was the main route from Peshawar to Lahore. It crossed the Indus at Hund and ran through Taxila and Chakwal, dropping out of the Salt Range at Nandana and crossing the Jhelum at the ford at Jalalpur Sharif. Alexander the Great came this way when he entered India in 326 BC, but it was not until the road was substantially improved by Chandragupta Maurya that it became known as the 'Royal Road'. It fell into disuse when Sher Shah Suri built the Grand Trunk Road, but remnants of the old road can still be found, particularly in the Salt Range near Nandana.
<b>Sangars</b>	Defensive breastwork, usually of stone or earth.
<b>Sardar</b>	A knight or leader.
<b>Sepoy</b>	Native Indian soldier serving in the British East Indian Company regiments.
<b>Serai</b>	An inn built around a courtyard for accommodating travellers along trade routes in central and western Asia.
<b>Seven-pounder Gun</b>	This is the famous 'screw gun' used by the British Mountain Artillery. It was invented in 1877 by Colonel le Mesurier, RA and broke down into five sections to be carried by mules. It could fire a 7-lb shell to an effective range of around 2000 metres.
<b>Scythian</b>	An ancient tribe, residing in the steppe region between the Dnieper and Don rivers.
<b>Shahiya</b>	A powerful Hindu dynasty that ruled the Punjab and Potohar regions from the late ninth century until their overthrow by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026.
<b>Shamiana</b>	Awning or tent.
<b>Shikargagh</b>	Hunting forest.
<b>Sirkar</b>	The British Government in India.
<b>Snider</b>	The first breech-loading rifle issued to the British Army. It was introduced in 1864, to be replaced in front-line units by the Martini-Henry in the early 1870s. The Snider was an awkward weapon. It weighed 9 lbs, and had a calibre of .577. It had no ejector, and had to be rolled on its back to allow the spent cartridge case to drop out.



<b>Stadia</b>	An ancient Greek unit of distance, equivalent to 607 feet. It is derived from the length of the stadium in ancient Athens.
<b>Sufi</b>	A Muslim ascetic and mystic.
<b>Thum</b>	Hereditary ruler of the mountain kingdoms of Hunza and Nagar, in the Hunza Valley.
<b>Tulwar</b>	Large curved sword.
<b>Tuman</b>	A division of the Mongol army comprising 10,000 men.
<b>Transoxiana</b>	Modern Uzbekistan.
<b>Urs</b>	Hindu or Sufi Muslim festival, usually held annually at the shrine of a specific Pir or saint.
<b>Wazir</b>	Prime minister or chief minister.
<b>Zenana</b>	Women's quarters, harem.
<b>Ziarat</b>	Muslim shrine.
<b>Zumboorah</b>	A small cannon supported by a swivelled rest on the back of a camel, whence it is fired.



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# HISTORIC BATTLEFIELDS OF PAKISTAN

**Johnny Torrens-Spence**

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