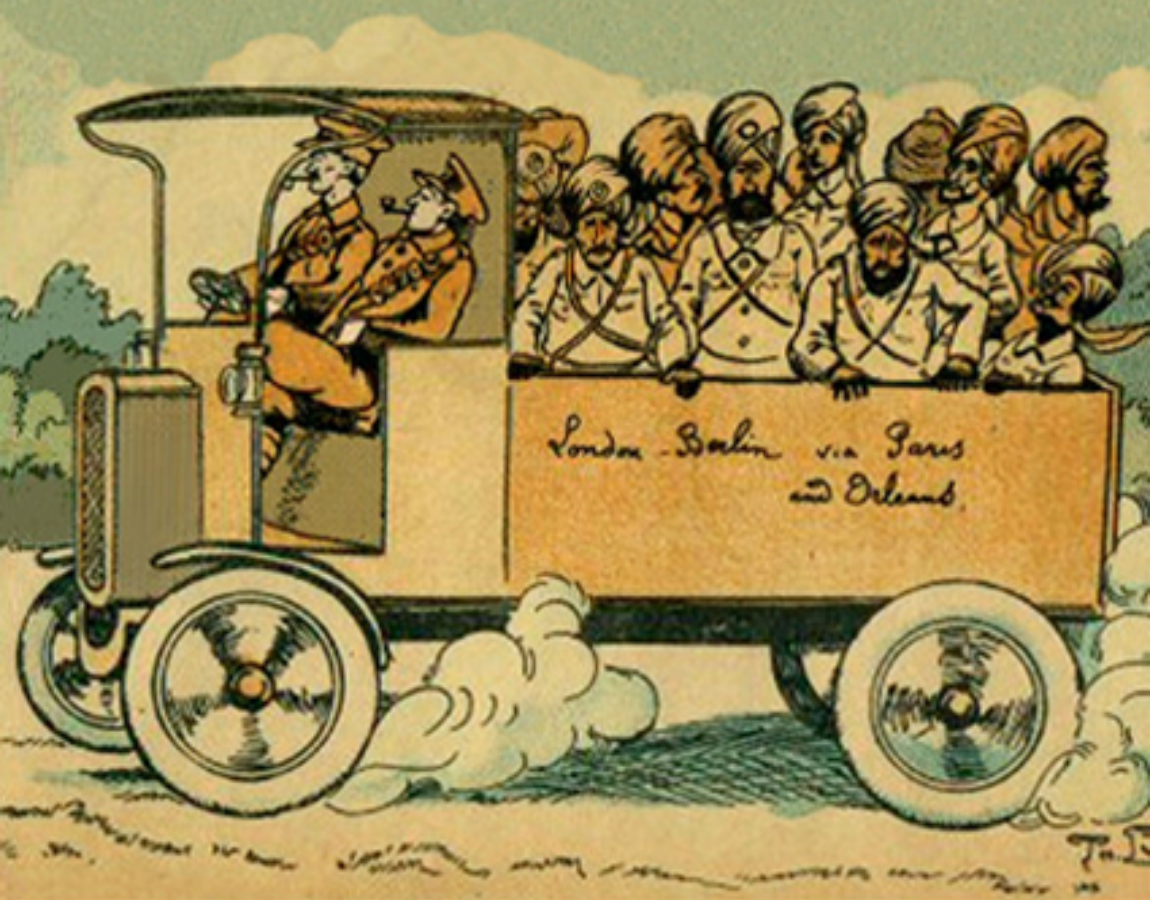


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The Indian Army on the Western Front

India's Expeditionary Force to France
and Belgium in the First World War

George Morton-Jack

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The Indian Army on the Western Front

The Indian army fought on the western front with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) from 1914 to 1918. The traditional interpretations of its performance have been dominated by ideas that it was a failure. This book offers a radical reconsideration by revealing new answers to the debate's central questions, such as whether the Indian army 'saved' the BEF from defeat in 1914, or whether Indian troops were particularly prone to self-inflicting wounds and fleeing the trenches. It looks at the Indian army from top to bottom, from generals at headquarters to snipers in no man's land. It takes a global approach, exploring the links between the Indian army's 1914–18 campaigning in France and Belgium and its pre-1914 small wars in Asia and Africa, and comparing the performance of the Indian regiments on the western front to those in China, East Africa, Mesopotamia and elsewhere.

George Morton-Jack studied history at the University of Oxford before becoming a barrister. He lives in London, and this is his first book.

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*India's Expeditionary Force to France and
Belgium in the First World War*

George Morton-Jack

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Note on Names and Places

I have used the names of cities and countries that were current in English in 1914 – Calcutta (not Kolkata), Peking (not Beijing), Persia (not Iran), and so on. In dealing with British India's North-West Frontier Province, I have generally used 'NWFP' to refer to the British-administered or Indian 'settled' districts of the province that were under direct Indian government rule. For the Indian regiments between the 1890s and 1918, I have used their titles from the reformed regimental lists of 1903. Further, I have abbreviated the titles of the Indian and British regiments that had more than one battalion each, for instance referring to the 1st Battalion, 39th Royal Garhwal Rifles as the 1st/39th Garhwals, or the 1st Battalion, The Northamptonshire Regiment as the 1st/Northampton.

Introduction

Indian Expeditionary Force A

The thirty-six red London buses bore advertisements for Buchanan's 'Black & White' Scotch whisky, Carter's Little Liver Pills and Glaxo baby food. They were trundling along an unpaved road in Belgian Flanders, in the late morning of 22 October 1914. They carried two regiments of the British imperial Indian army, the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) and the 129th Baluchis; in their wake were several small Indian carts, drawn by mules with Punjabi drivers, and laden with rifle ammunition, cooking pots and other supplies.¹ By the day's end, Wilde's Rifles, the 129th and other Indian regiments had joined the Allied line at the First Battle of Ypres. Having sailed from Karachi eight weeks earlier, they were the vanguard of Indian Expeditionary Force A (IEFA). This had been summoned by the Cabinet at 10 Downing Street to bolster the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and it was to fight on the western front up to February 1918.

India in fact provided seven overseas expeditionary forces for the British war effort.² Besides IEFA, there were IEFs B and C to East Africa, D to Mesopotamia, E and F to Egypt, and G to Gallipoli. They were all originally made up of pre-war Indian and British army units of the Army in India, the imperial garrison of the subcontinent. IEFA blended into the BEF, and did not fight as a discrete entity. Of its combatant units, the Indian contained a total of 85,000 Indian troops under 1,500 British officers, and the British 17,000 officers and men; in direct support of both it had 26,000 Indian non-combatants.³ This book is a military

¹ G. Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), pp. 54–55; J. Edmonds (ed.), *Military Operations, France and Belgium*, 14 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1922–48), 1915, vol. 1, p. 182; A. Home, *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* (Tunbridge Wells: Costello, 1985), p. 32.

² 'India' as in British India, covering what became independent India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma.

³ War Office (ed.), *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914–1920* (London: HMSO, 1922), p. 777.

history of IEFA, with a focus on the Indian army. Its chief concerns are threefold. First, tactics: the fighting ways of lower-level formations including battalions, companies and platoons. Second, operations: the battle-handling of higher-level fighting formations, such as divisions and army corps, by senior commanders and their staffs. And third, administration: the activities of transport, medical and other non-combatant support services that help to put fighting forces in the field and maintain them there.

On the eve of war in 1914, the Indian army had a grand total of 190,140 combatants, accounting for three-quarters of the Army in India. It was led by its own British officer corps of 2,600 active members and 40 reservists. The majority of them had been born in the British Isles, into middle-class families of English clergymen, Scottish small businessmen or minor Anglo-Irish landlords. Most of the others had been born in India, into similar families, albeit ones likelier to have traditions of serving the imperial mission there. They were all attracted to the subcontinent as a land of career opportunities and living standards that their family backgrounds, for want of money or connections, denied them in Britain. Further, they took it for granted that they should serve in India because they possessed an inherent ability to lead 'native' soldiers better than any 'native' could. They perceived in themselves a certain character – a supreme combination of incorruptibility, intelligence, fairness and other leadership traits – supposedly unique to their Anglo-Saxon race. To preserve their officer corps' 'natural' qualities, membership was limited to men of British and all-white family; 'Anglo-Indians', who had one white European parent and one Indian parent or grandparent, were not welcome.⁴

The Indian army's active Indian soldiers totalled 152,500, and its Indian reservists 35,000.⁵ They were not ethnically 'Indian' so much as south Asian, but were commonly known as 'Indian' (as this book refers to them) after the army they served. They were volunteers and professionals, and generally illiterate. They came mostly from peasant farming villages that were dotted about northern British India, now covering Pakistan, its Federally Autonomous Tribal Areas (FATA) and several Indian states adjoining the Himalayas. They also came from central India, and from independent Nepal and Afghanistan. Around 40 per cent of them were Muslim, nearly as many were Hindu, and 19 per cent were Sikh.⁶ Having

⁴ G. MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson Low, 1933), pp. 270–71.

⁵ Government of India (ed.), *The Army in India and Its Evolution* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1924), p. 219.

⁶ D. Ellinwood, 'The Indian Soldier, the Indian Army, and Change, 1914–1918', in D. Ellinwood and S. Pradhan (eds.), *India and World War I* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1978), p. 186.

joined up in their late teens, they tended to be long-serving in return for a monthly wage, a pension and a land grant.

Indian recruitment was restricted to a thin range of rural communities identified by the British as 'martial races'. Among these were Pathan (pronounced Pat'han) tribes – from the Afridis and Orakzais to the Mahsuds and Waziris – of the Pathan tribal areas, a strip of independent Muslim territory lying between Afghanistan and the annexed, British-administered districts of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).⁷ Other Muslim martial races included the Khattaks and the Yusufzais, both Pathan tribes of NWFP; the Hazaras, refugees from central Afghanistan who had settled in the Indian province of Baluchistan; and Punjabi Muslims, such as the Gakkhar and other northern Punjabi clans of the desolate Salt Range between the Indus and Jhelum rivers. Among their Hindu counterparts were Dogras of Kangra and Jats of Rohtak, both Punjabi, and Garhwalis from the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. The Sikh martial races included Jats and Muzbees of the Gujranwala and Lyallpur districts of central Punjab. From Nepal came Magars, Gurungs and other Gurkha tribesmen, of Hindu-Buddhist heritage.

Of the British army's total strength of 247,000 active regulars, 74,500 were temporarily posted to India. They had been released from the Home Army, the garrison of the British Isles and the Army in India's counterpoint in imperial defence.⁸ The British service's officers were a caste apart from their Indian army peers. They tended to have been born in Britain into more upper-class, richer and better-connected families, and not to aspire to a life in India. They lacked family traditions of carving out subcontinental careers, could better afford the higher costs of living in Britain, and more keenly felt the pull of the royal social orbit. They commonly regarded the Indian army's British officers as their social inferiors, disparaging them as 'Hindus', and frowning upon marriage between one of their own and a 'Hindu daughter'.

The Army in India's senior commanders and staff officers were selected from both the Indian and the British armies; to distinguish them from the higher ranks of the Home Army, they were known as 'Indian'. At

⁷ 'Pathan', an Urdu and a Hindi term, was usually used by the British when speaking in English. They preferred it to 'Pashtun', 'Pashtoon', 'Pakhtun' or 'Pukhtun', all Pashtu versions of the same word, which the frontier tribesmen would have used when speaking of themselves in their own Pashtu dialects. 'Pathan' is used here in order to help distinguish the border tribes as a people more associated with the British imperial sphere than were their Pashtun neighbours of Afghanistan; only the latter were formally thought of as Afghans in the British official mind – they lived behind the Durand Line, which demarcated sovereign Afghan territory from the independent tribal areas, later FATA.

⁸ Government of India, *The Army in India*, pp. 63 and 219.

the bottom of the Army in India were 45,500 Indian non-combatants. Of these, 32,000 belonged to the Indian army, and the remainder to the British.⁹ They came from rural communities – Punjabi, Bengali and Nepali – that were officially recognised as non-martial.

In August 1914, in response to Germany's use of Belgium as a corridor of conquest into France, the British government created the BEF out of the Home Army. It also decided that imperial contingents from around the globe should be reeled in as reinforcements. 'We are unsheathing our swords in a just cause and in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world', Herbert Asquith, the Liberal prime minister, explained to the House of Commons. 'If we are entering into the struggle, let us now make sure that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale.'¹⁰ IEFA was shipped to France via the Arabian Sea and Suez, and its first convoy landed at Marseilles on 26 September.

By October, IEFA contained two infantry divisions and six cavalry brigades.¹¹ For BEF service, they became parts of army corps, a type of higher formation that had existed in peacetime England, but not in India. IEFA's two infantry divisions went into the Indian Corps. One of them was the Lahore Division, commanded by Henry Watkis (Indian army), with Andrew Cobbe (Indian army) as his chief staff officer. Its brigades were:

1. *Ferozepore Brigade*. Commander: Raleigh Egerton (Indian army). 1st/Connaught Rangers, 9th Bhopals, 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force), 129th Baluchis.
2. *Jullundur Brigade*. Commander: Philip Carnegy (Indian army). 1st/Manchesters, 15th Sikhs, 47th Sikhs, 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force).
3. *Sirhind Brigade*. Commander: James Bruncker (British army). 1st/Highland Light Infantry, 125th Napier's Rifles, 1st/1st Gurkhas, 1st/4th Gurkhas.
4. *Attached 'divisional' troops*. Technical units: 34th Sikh Pioneers; 20th and 21st companies of the 3rd Sappers and Miners; one Indian signal company. Cavalry: 15th (Indian) Lancers.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 230–35; and War Office (ed.), *Statistics*, p. 777.

¹⁰ Asquith's Commons address of 6 August, quoted in J. Spender and C. Asquith, *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1932), vol. 2, pp. 114–15.

¹¹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3088: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, October 1914), p. 136.

The Indian Corps' other division was the Meerut, commanded by Charles Anderson (British army). His chief staff officer was Claud Jacob (Indian army). The Meerut Division's brigades were:

1. *Dehra Dun Brigade*. Commander: Charles Johnson (Indian army). 1st/Seaforth Highlanders, 6th Jats, 1st/9th Gurkhas, 2nd/2nd Gurkhas.
2. *Garhwal Brigade*. Commander: Henry Keary (Indian army). 2nd/Leicesters, 1st/39th Garhwals, 2nd/39th Garhwals, 2nd/3rd Gurkhas.
3. *Bareilly Brigade*. Commander: Forbes Macbean (British army). 2nd/Black Watch, 41st Dogras, 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force), 2nd/8th Gurkhas.
4. *Attached 'divisional' troops*. Technical units: 107th Pioneers; 3rd and 4th companies of the 1st Sappers and Miners; one Indian signal company. Cavalry: 4th (Indian) Cavalry.

James Willcocks, a British army officer, was the Indian Corps' commander. He had fought in fourteen campaigns from Afghanistan to Ashanti (later Ghana), leading Indian troops in twelve of them, including the Third Burmese War of 1885–87, in which leech bites left him with a limp for life in his right leg. 'A pretty tough character, who stood up for his subordinates', recalled one of his junior officers, 'we knew him as James "by the grace of God"'.¹² Willcocks was in fact the British army's most decorated soldier for active service, and the BEF's third-most senior officer.¹³ Havelock Hudson (Indian army) was his chief staff officer. A dozen or so Indian princes and landed nobles with military training held honorary staff posts within the Indian Corps. For instance, the Punjabi landowner Umar Hayat Khan was attached to the Ferozepore Brigade's headquarters, and the Maharaja of Bikaner to the Meerut Division's.¹⁴

IEFA's six cavalry brigades went into the Indian Cavalry Corps. Three of them formed the 1st Indian Cavalry Division, under Hew Fanshawe (British army):

1. *Sialkot Brigade*. Commander: Henry Leader (British army). 17th (British) Lancers, 6th (Indian) Cavalry, 19th Fane's Horse.

¹² B. Blacker (ed.), *The Adventures & Inventions of Stewart Blacker* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2006), p. 26.

¹³ J. Merewether and F. E. Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, second edition (London: John Murray, 1919), p. 18.

¹⁴ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds: A Rajput Officer in the Indian Army, 1905–1921, Based on the Diary of Amar Singh of Jaipur* (Lanham: Hamilton, 2005), p. 399.

2. *Ambala Brigade*. Commander: Charles Pirie (Indian army). 8th Hussars, 9th Hodson's Horse, 30th (Indian) Lancers.
3. *Lucknow Brigade*. Commander: William Fasken (Indian army). 1st Dragoon Guards, 29th (Indian) Lancers, 36th Jacob's Horse.

IEFA's three other cavalry brigades were in the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division, under George Cookson (Indian army):

1. *Mhow Brigade*. Commander: George Barrow (Indian army). 6th Dragoons, 2nd (Indian) Lancers, 38th Central India Horse.
2. *Meerut Brigade*. Commander: Fitz-James Edwards (Indian army). 13th Hussars, 3rd Skinner's Horse, 18th (Indian) Lancers.
3. *Secunderabad Brigade*. Commander: Frederick Wadeson (Indian army). 7th Dragoon Guards, 20th Deccan Horse, 34th Poona Horse. Also with the brigade were the Jodhpur Lancers, led by Pratap Singh, the prince regent of Jodhpur.

Michael Rimington (British army) was the Indian Cavalry Corps' commander. He was best known for leading his 'Tigers', an irregular mounted troop, in the South African War of 1899 to 1902. 'He ought', wrote one Tiger, 'to have lived 500 years ago and dressed in chain mail, and led out his lances to plunder and foray. Picturesque is the word that best describes him'.¹⁵ The Indian Cavalry Corps' chief staff officer was Henry Macandrew (Indian army), another veteran of South Africa. The corps also had Indian princes and landed nobles in honorary staff posts.¹⁶

The Indian non-combatants in direct support of IEFA's infantry and cavalry belonged largely to Indian army administrative units. Some served with animal transport including mule packs, and others with medical units such as field ambulances, stretcher-bearer companies and stationary hospitals.¹⁷ 'We of Headquarters Mule Transport', wrote one of its staff officers, 'recognised that our part was but a modest one, but we were prepared to play it to the full, and to do all in our humble power to further the good cause.'¹⁸

¹⁵ *The Times*, 20 December 1928: 'Obituary: General Sir M. Rimington'.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 March 1930: 'Obituary: Afsur-ul-Mulk'. G. S. Sandhu, *The Indian Cavalry: History of the Indian Armoured Corps*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 294–98.

¹⁷ H. Alexander, *On Two Fronts, being the Adventures of an Indian Mule Corps in France and Gallipoli* (New York: Dutton, 1917), pp. 3 and 29; and M. Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 52–58.

¹⁸ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 51.

The duties of IEFA's fighting formations and Indian administrative units were spread over three phases. The first was IEFA's delivery to Flanders from India – the force had to mobilise on the subcontinent, move to Indian ports, get on and off its transport ships that sailed to Marseilles via Egypt, and then get to Flanders. The second phase was IEFA's active part in First Ypres from 23 October to 5 November 1914. The Indian Corps, with the Secunderabad (Cavalry) Brigade attached, was fragmented into small parts to defend BEF front trenches. Its Indian administrative support, meanwhile, had to keep pace with many battalion movements while developing contact with the BEF's Home Army administrative network. 'The dovetailing into one another of the British and Indian systems of Supply and Transport was far from simple', commented the British captain of one Indian mule pack. 'The [Home Army] officers on the Staff of the Lines of Communication did not understand the Indian system, and we knew little of the British.'¹⁹

During phase three, which ran from mid-November 1914 to February 1918, the Indian infantry's fighting duties were mainly defensive. For the seven weeks up to Christmas 1914, the Indian Corps held its own sector at the southern end of the BEF line, by the village of Neuve Chapelle. In that time, it was directly under the orders of John French, the BEF's Commander-in-Chief at the British General Headquarters in the field (GHQ). Between January and November 1915, the Indian Corps continued to hold trenches by Neuve Chapelle; in April, the Lahore Division marched to the northern end of the BEF line, where it spent a fortnight helping to counter the German advance at the Second Battle of Ypres.

In New Year 1915, the Indian Corps had joined Douglas Haig's new First Army, with which it took the offensive for a total of twelve days, at the battles of Neuve Chapelle (10–12 March), Aubers Ridge (9 May), Festubert (15–25 May) and Loos (25 September to mid-October). At the end of October, the Lahore and Meerut Divisions were ordered to leave for Egypt. By Boxing Day, they had sailed from Marseilles, and the Indian Corps had ceased to exist.²⁰

The Indian Cavalry Corps fought from winter 1914 to spring 1916, when it was disbanded. Its units were then put into new BEF cavalry divisions alongside British and Canadian troops.²¹ The Indian cavalrymen's duties were mostly defensive as they undertook brief but repeated periods of dismounted trench-holding. They initially did this in the Indian Corps' line, before they moved to the Somme valley to hold either their

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁰ TNA, WO 95/1090: *Indian Corps War Diary* (October to December 1914).

²¹ Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, pp. 304–08.

own sectors or parts of British army ones. They went on the offensive in 1916 and 1917, at the battles of the Somme and of Cambrai. In early 1918, the Indian cavalry regiments in France were sent to the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) in Palestine.

All the while, the Indian non-combatants attached to IEFA's fighting formations did their routine jobs. For example, the mule packs in the first line of transport – linking supply depots near railheads and the trenches – carried supplies over short distances between the same fixed points. In addition, the Indian non-combatants co-operated with the administrative services of the British army and of India, both of which gave them supplies and other support.

The Indian troops' thoughts on the western front survive mainly through their wartime letters home. The letters were dictated to scribes, at the front or in hospital; they remain with us in the form of translations by British and Indian censors. Indian voices also survive in sources from Germany, including transcripts of Indian prisoner interrogations by German military intelligence. Trench diaries or notebooks by the Indian ranks were few and far between. Just one, by a Muslim soldier (who deserted to the Germans), is known to survive. Its author, however, seems to have written not so much to describe his frontline experiences as to learn words in Urdu and English, composing long lists of them, from 'haversack', 'blanket' and 'please' to 'honeymoon', 'testacles' [*sic*] and 'brests' [*sic*].²² More revealing are the letters and reports of Walter Lawrence, of the Indian Civil Service. In light of his ability to speak to the Indian troops in several of their own languages, he was appointed in 1914 as a special British government commissioner to monitor the Indian wounded and sick in France and England. Day after day he went from hospital to hospital, chatting to the Indian patients for hours on end. 'I gained a new knowledge of the mentality of Indians, sitting with them and listening to their strange impressions of this wonderful new world into which they had tumbled.'²³ As we shall see, they told him many things.

Not sharing in the Western soldier's tradition of writing military reminiscences and commentaries, the Indian troops produced no memoirists of regimental life like Ernst Jünger or Robert Graves, let alone soldier-scholars like those of the British and German armies who wrote official war histories. The members of IEFA who did publish their views

²² S. Das, 'Introduction', in S. Das (ed.) *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 1.

²³ W. Lawrence, *The India We Served* (London: Cassell, 1928), p. 271.

on it were invariably British officers. Their writings have recently been joined in print by the war diaries of Thakur Amar Singh, a Hindu aristocrat and aide-de-camp at the Sirhind Brigade's headquarters.²⁴ In France for a year from December 1914, Amar Singh had no fighting role and was kept comfortably behind the front line. Nonetheless, he wrote in detail on military business and gossip, and his diaries offer an eloquent response to the biases and injustices suffered by his colonial generation.²⁵

How Has IEFA's Indian Army Tactical Performance Been Judged?

Here tactical performance encompasses not only fighting techniques among lower-level units, but also various other things that directly shaped units' fighting efficiency, for instance the replacement of casualties. What has been written hitherto may be divided into positive and negative ideas. Among the positive ideas, the first is that before the war, IEFA's Indian battalions were well trained. These were welcomed as such in autumn 1914 in GHQ press releases and British newspapers.²⁶ James Willcocks, in his *With the Indians in France* (1920), looked back on the Indian infantry's pre-war training as having 'reached a far higher scale of efficiency than had ever previously been the case'.²⁷ He gave no real explanation of quite how this was so; he only implied that it was related to a type of warfare not to be found in Flanders:

The Indian troops . . . were unfortunate in the choice of ground assigned to them. Its very nature left no scope for indulging in the particular tactics in which many of them were adepts. . . . Oh! if some one who knew what many of our Indian battalions could do (outside of eternal mire) had given us a chance in France, even for a short spell, what an opportunity it would have been of proving once for all that the hillmen of India with British officers cannot be beaten in hilly country no matter who the foe.²⁸

²⁴ An edited version of Amar Singh's war diaries has been published in Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*. Also see S. Hoeber Rudolph and L. I. Rudolph with M. S. Kanota (eds.), *Reversing the Gaze, Amar Singh's Diary, A Colonial Subject's Narrative of Imperial India* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002).

²⁵ See Das, 'Indians at Home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914–1918', in Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, pp. 75–77.

²⁶ *The Times*, 28 October 1914, p. 7. Press Bureau, *Eye-witness's Narrative of the War, from the Marne to Neuve Chapelle, September 1915–March 1915* (London: Edward Arnold, 1915), p. 75.

²⁷ J. Willcocks, *With the Indians in France* (London: Constable, 1920), p. 9.

²⁸ Willcocks, 'The Indian Army Corps in France', *Blackwoods Magazine* MCCXXI (1917), p. 7, and *With the Indians*, p. 263.

James Edmonds (Royal Engineers) served with the BEF from 1914 to 1918, primarily as a staff officer at GHQ. His intellectual reputation had already gained him the nickname 'Archimedes', and in 1919 it earned him the directorship of the British government's Historical Section charged with producing the BEF's multi-volume official history, *Military Operations, France and Belgium* (1922-48), of which he was the author-in-chief. Of Edmonds' contemporaries, foremost among the many less scholarly but better known minds was F. E. Smith, a King's Counsel at the London Bar and a Conservative Member of Parliament for Liverpool. 'The Right Hon. Frederick Edwin Smith', *The New York Times* reported in September 1914, 'has been described as the cleverest man in England. . . . His present income is said to be larger than that of any other English barrister.' 'He is only 42 years old', the newspaper continued, 'and has already achieved such prominence in the ranks of the Opposition that it is taken for granted that he will have Cabinet rank. . . . Though bitter political enemies, Mr. Smith and the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, are close personal friends.'²⁹ That September, Smith left London, where he had been Director of the Official Press Bureau, for France, to become the Indian Corps' 'Recording Officer'. As such, he was responsible for writing eye-witness press releases on the BEF's Indian infantry, and for gathering evidence for a future book about them. He did both things at the front for six months until April 1915, when he quit the Indian Corps to resume his legal and political career at home, first as the Solicitor General, and from October in Cabinet as the Attorney-General.³⁰

Smith's replacement as the Indian Corps' Recording Officer was John Merewether, an Indian service officer. 'Merewether', wrote James Willcocks, 'remained with the Corps till it left France':

He was an old regimental comrade and a man full of energy and wit: a clever writer and a very entertaining companion; his presence at our Headquarters was much appreciated. He was constantly with me when I visited billets, trenches, etc., and he acquired a very detailed knowledge of all that went on in the Corps. He devoted his whole time to visiting officers and men of every unit and collecting all the information he could gain. The results have been embodied in the book, *The Indian Corps in France*, compiled by him and Sir Frederick Smith, dedicated to His Majesty the King-Emperor, and published under the authority of His Majesty's Secretary of State for India.³¹

²⁹ *The New York Times*, 25 September 1914.

³⁰ J. Campbell, *F. E. Smith, First Earl of Birkenhead* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983), pp. 372-94.

³¹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 55.

Merewether and Smith's *The Indian Corps in France* first appeared in December 1917; a revised second edition came out in January 1919. Most of the history's statements of opinion are Smith's. 'No pains have been spared in the examination of the available material', he avowed in the second edition's preface, 'or in interviewing surviving officers upon incidents in which they bore apart.' 'The authors', he went on,

are bold enough to believe that they have in the main overcome the extreme difficulty of disentangling the narrative. Unless they are too sanguine, the account which follows of the principal actions in which the Corps was engaged will in its main features be found to be accurate, and they do not believe that it will be discredited, or very much modified, by later research.³²

Edmonds, Merewether and Smith, along with several other writers who spent time with the BEF, praised its Indian infantrymen of 1914 as professionals who that year fought determinedly and skilfully. They wrote of Indian bravery under German attack, and of forward defensive Indian forays using companies and smaller groups that advanced with disciplined flair.³³ The Indian losses of ground in 1914 have often been presented as relatively unremarkable parts of the to and fro of trench warfare. According to this view's promoters – including Winston Churchill, who visited the Indian Corps as F. E. Smith's guest – all armies occasionally gave up trenches after sharp local attacks, and the Indian army, during its spell of nine consecutive weeks in the front line up to Christmas, was generally steadfast.³⁴ 'There is no doubt', Thakur Amar Singh wrote in his diary in early 1915, 'that the Indian troops have done very well indeed in this war so far.'³⁵

Willcocks lauded the Indian battalions for their role on the first day of the Neuve Chapelle offensive, on 10 March 1915. He said they helped to take the village in short order, by means of small, flexible and grenade-throwing groups amply supported by artillery.³⁶ He has not been alone in highlighting a far lower grade of artillery support in the Indian Corps'

³² Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. xxiii.

³³ *The Times*, 28 October 1914, p. 5, and 6 November 1914, p. 5. Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1914, vol. 2, pp. 216–32, 292–93 and 303; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, see p. vii and Chapters 2 to 14.

³⁴ *The Times*, 6 November 1914, p. 5. J. Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, 24 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1915–19), vol. 4, pp. 71–76; C. Chenevix Trench, *The Indian Army and the King's Enemies, 1900–1947* (GDR: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 43; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 84–90; W. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), p. 6; E. Hamilton, *The First Seven Divisions* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), pp. v–vi and 188–89; and Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 7, 15 and 23.

³⁵ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 388.

³⁶ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 210–16.

subsequent offensive work at Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge and Festubert, telling of the Indian troops' sheer heroism as they struggled to cross open ground against German machine gunners untouched by British shells.³⁷

On New Year's Eve 1915, *The Manchester Guardian* carried an official announcement on the Indian Corps, entitled 'The Withdrawal of the Indians – Facts About Their Service in France'. 'They have left France with a record of which they may well be proud', the announcement read. 'The truth is [they] did as well as could have been reasonably expected, [and] they proved themselves to be first-line troops in the fullest meaning of the term.'³⁸ A handful of historians, with John Buchan at the forefront in his *Nelson's History of the War*, have said much the same.³⁹

Wartime British newspapers and popular histories celebrated IEFA's Indian cavalry regiments. They did so especially for offensive actions in which Indian squadrons, in co-operation with aeroplanes, armoured cars and tanks, charged on horseback to win ground before dismounting to secure their gains.⁴⁰ James Edmonds and John Seely – the British cavalrymen-turned-politician – gave further credit for such work.⁴¹ So too did Gurcharn Singh Sandhu, an officer of the pre- and post-independence Indian armies, who portrayed the Indian cavalrymen as the fighting equals of the German troops.⁴²

'My splendid Indian soldiers need have no fear of the verdict which the historian will record', Willcocks was confident in 1917.⁴³ Unfortunately, historians have preferred to take a dim view of IEFA's tactical

³⁷ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 146–71 and 204–23; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, see chapters 20 to 23; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, see chapters 20 to 21.

³⁸ *The Manchester Guardian*, 31 December 1915, p. 4.

³⁹ Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. 12, pp. 98–99; R. Callahan, 'Were the 'Sepoy Generals' Any Good? A Reappraisal of the British-Indian Army's High Command in the Second World War', in K. Roy (ed.), *War and Society in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 307; S. Cohen, *The Indian Army* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 69; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 253; and H. Dodwell and ors. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of India*, 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922–32), vol. 6, pp. 401 and 479.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 16 March 1918, p. 5. *The Times History of the War*, 21 vols. (London: 1914–19), vol. 10, pp. 98–99, and vol. 17, p. 92.

⁴¹ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1917, vol. 1, p. 136; and J. Seely, *Adventure* (London: Heinemann, 1930), pp. 284–87.

⁴² Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, pp. 312–14. For similar positive views, see Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock* (London: Cassell, 2004), pp. 139–60; and D. Kenyon, *Horsemen in No Man's Land: British Cavalry and Trench Warfare, 1914–18* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2011), pp. 34 and 231–45, and 'The Indian Cavalry Divisions in Somme: 1916', in K. Roy (ed.), *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 33–62.

⁴³ Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 23.

performance, especially where the Indian Corps' Indian battalions are concerned. John Terraine judged that these 'did not turn out to be a great success',⁴⁴ David Omissi that they were 'poor',⁴⁵ the *Oxford History of the British Empire* that they were 'often considered wanting',⁴⁶ Nikolas Gardner that they demonstrated 'chronic ineffectiveness',⁴⁷ and E. J. Erickson that they were 'lack-lustre [and] undistinguished'.⁴⁸ Their severest critic has been Jeffrey Greenhut, an American historian and Vietnam War veteran. 'From the first shock of combat in late 1914', he argued, 'they proved unequal to [western front duty]'; they were 'militarily far less effective' than British and German troops; in short, they were 'failures'.⁴⁹

What exactly are the ideas underpinning these conclusions? The starting point for a number of historians has been that the Indian army of 1914 was poorly trained because it was prepared merely for low-intensity 'colonial' wars. 'The [Indian] battalions . . . shipped to France', Douglas Peers has written, 'had been trained [for] conditions that were about as far from the western front as one could get'.⁵⁰ For Nikolas Gardner, their pre-war training left them 'unfamiliar with such basic rules of conduct as seeking cover under fire'. E. J. Erickson has gone further: they had not had 'any kind of realistic tactical field training'.⁵¹

British regiments' pre-war training has been presented as superior. Gardner has said that these 'proved reasonably well prepared for war in 1914', and Tan Tai Yong that 'the Indian soldier was far behind his European counterpart'.⁵² Raymond Callahan has agreed, arguing that from the 1890s to 1914, the British army's training was modernised for European warfare but the Indian army's was not – partly as the British government sanctioned British army training for a European conflict,

⁴⁴ J. Terraine, *Douglas Haig* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 48–49.

⁴⁵ D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p. 38.

⁴⁶ J. M. Brown and W. M. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), vol. 4, p. 122.

⁴⁷ N. Gardner, *Trial by Fire: Command and the British Expeditionary Force in 1914* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2003), p. 199.

⁴⁸ E. J. Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 73–74 and 85.

⁴⁹ J. Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914–15', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 12 (1983), pp. 68 and 70.

⁵⁰ D. Peers, 'South Asia', in J. Black (ed.), *War in the Modern World* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003), pp. 58–59.

⁵¹ Erickson, *Ottoman Army*, pp. 73–74; E. Latter, 'The Indian Army in Mesopotamia, 1914–18', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 72 (1994), 173–74; and N. Gardner, *Trial*, p. 191.

⁵² N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 36 and 175; and Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State* (New Delhi: Sage, 2005), p. 106.

and partly as a result of ‘the jolt administered to the British service by the South African War’.⁵³

The Indian army’s fighting experiences up to 1914 have been treated as inconsequential. ‘Indian units fought only ill-armed tribesmen’, Jeffrey Greenhut reflected, ‘surely not an adequate test.’ Tan Tai Yong has maintained that the Indian army’s pre-1914 campaigns involved ‘little fighting, not much hardship’, and were ‘hardly . . . battle experience’. Indeed he has likened the Indian army of the late Victorian and the Edwardian eras to an imperial ‘fire-brigade’ that did ‘not [wage] actual warfare’.⁵⁴

It has been conventional to remark that when the Indian army arrived on the western front, its pre-war rifles and machine guns were exposed as obsolete British army cast-offs. In Gardner’s words, they were ‘clearly inadequate [and] had to be replaced’. New rifles were issued; however, Ian Beckett and David Omissi have argued, the Indian units were unfamiliar with these, and unsure how to use them. As for machine guns, Gardner has said, only a few new ones were available, so most Indian units had to rely on their pre-war models that were ‘heavy, prone to malfunction, and generally useless in the field’.⁵⁵

Another pressing problem, apparently, was climactic. The idea here is based on the premise that the Indian troops, because they were from the sun-baked subcontinent, were bitten harder by the Flemish winter of 1914–15 than white troops who came from less-sunny European climes. Therefore, the idea goes, they were especially debilitated or made physically ill by the cold, wind, rain, frost and snow of Flanders, spoiling their fighting efficiency in a way that was not seen with white battalions. An early advocate of this was Arthur Conan Doyle. He took pity on the Indian ranks for fighting ‘at an enormous disadvantage’; unlike white British, French and German soldiers, he explained, they were ‘children of the sun, dependent on warmth for their vitality and numbed by the cold wet life of the trenches. . . . As well turn a tiger loose upon an

⁵³ Callahan, ‘Sepoy Generals’, p. 307.

⁵⁴ Greenhut, ‘Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army’, *Military Affairs* 48 (1984), pp. 16–17, and ‘Imperial Reserve’, p. 55; and Tan, ‘An Imperial Home-Front: Punjab and the First World War’, *Journal of Military History* 64 (2000), p. 382.

⁵⁵ R. Ahuja, ‘Lost Engagements? Traces of South Asia Soldiers in German Captivity, 1915–1918’, in F. Roy, H. Liebau and R. Ahuja (eds.), *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (New Delhi: Social Science Press, 2011), p. 21; I. Beckett, *Ypres: The First Battle* (Harlow: Pearson, 2004), p. 35; Ellinwood, ‘Indian Soldier’, p. 193; N. Gardner, *Trial*, p. 185; Greenhut, ‘Imperial Reserve’, p. 55; Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 2; and Tan, *Garrison State*, p. 106.

ice-flow and expect that he will show all his fierceness and activity'.⁵⁶ John Buchan followed suit: 'the climate was their chief enemy. . . . They suffered terribly from the unfamiliar weather, and physical stamina gave way in many.'⁵⁷ The others who have taken a similar view have ranged from James Edmonds, Cyril Falls and the authors of the German official history, *Der Weltkrieg*, to A. J. P. Taylor, Sir Michael Howard and Sir Hew Strachan.⁵⁸

It has often been said that on entering western front battle, the Indian infantrymen were so shocked by German firepower – shellfire in particular – that they were blighted by self-inflicted wounds. Rather than endure or retaliate against German pressure, so the argument goes, they frequently opted to shoot themselves in the hand, calf or foot to be invalidated out. '[In] most of the Indian units engaged', wrote Jeffrey Greenhut, 'self-inflicted wounds . . . accounted for over 50 per cent of all wounds suffered in the first months of the war.' He stated that in the Indian Corps' first ten days of combat, of its 1,848 Indian troops admitted to hospital, 57 per cent had self-inflicted hand wounds, amounting to a 'dangerous breakdown' in their fighting efficiency, while British troops 'had very few such wounds'. Nikolas Gardner, also referring to that period, has suggested worse: 'as many as 65 per cent of wounds to Indian soldiers were self-inflicted.' He concluded that although self-inflicted wounds were a major problem among the Indian battalions, they 'did not occur on any discernable scale in other formations of the BEF.'⁵⁹

⁵⁶ A. Conan Doyle, *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, 5 vols. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916–19), vol. 1, pp. 329–33.

⁵⁷ Buchan, *Nelson's History of the War*, vol. 4, pp. 75–76.

⁵⁸ To name only a few: see A. Horne, *Death of a Generation: From Neuve Chapelle to Verdun and the Somme* (Paulton: Purnell, 1970), p. 45; Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 2, pp. 403–04; C. Falls, *The Great War* (New York: Putnam's, 1959), p. xxi; J. French, *1914* (London: Constable, 1919), pp. 196 and 340; J. Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 141; C. Lucas, *The Empire at War*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921–26), vol. 5, p. 206; D. Lloyd George, *War Memories*, 2 vols. (London: Odhams Press, 1938), vol. 2, pp. 2005–06; M. Howard, *The First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 51; M. Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme*, new edition (London: Penguin, 2001), p. xviii; Reichsarchiv, *Der Weltkrieg, 1914 bis 1918*, 14 vols. (Berlin: E. Mittler, 1925–44), vol. 9, p. 128; H. Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p. 91; and A. Taylor, *The First World War* (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 35.

⁵⁹ Beckett, *Ypres*, p. 109; B. Waites, 'People of the Undeveloped World', in H. Cecil and P. Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon* (London: Leo Cooper, 1996), p. 600; A. Ekins and E. Stewart (eds.), *War Wounds* (Wollombi: Exisle Publishing, 2011), p. 54; N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 195–97; Greenhut, 'Sahib and Sepoy', pp. 16–17, and 'Imperial Reserve', p. 57; V. Huguet, *Britain and the War* (London: Cassell, 1928), p. 152; C. Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their Deployment in Europe during the First World War', *Immigrants & Minorities* 26 (2008), p. 118; Omissi, *Sepoy*, pp. 114 and 119.

Greenhut and Gardner have also argued that Indian companies broke down in battle if they lost their British officers, in essence because the Indians were not prepared to fight alone. A large part of the standard reasoning here concerns an ostensible flaw in Indian training. In pre-war India, it has been said, the Indian soldiers, because they were officially regarded as a racial underclass lacking in leadership skills, had been trained to depend on their British officers' guidance at all times; by 1914, therefore, they had not developed the confidence or the skills to lead themselves. In Flanders, the argument continues, most of their British officers were shot down while leading from the front, suddenly severing them from the white leadership they had been trained to depend on; they became rudderless, and if pressed, especially by artillery bombardment, they fled in disarray. 'Indian unit after unit broke and fled the horror of the trenches', Pradeep Barua has written.⁶⁰ 'It is necessary to remember', added Greenhut, 'that the First World War was the first fully industrialized war, whereas the Indian soldier was the product of a pre-industrial culture [and] an illiterate peasant':

The essence of modern war is that a highly bureaucratized leadership impersonally controls a technologically sophisticated military force dedicated to mass destruction. [However the Indian soldiers were not] familiar with the infrastructure of the industrial world. . . . It is not too much to say that what destroyed the Indians in France was the most severe imaginable form of culture shock. This [helps to explain] the dependence of the Indians on their white officers, and the inability of Indians to take over their functions when the white officers became casualties. These officers were more than leaders. They were the interpreters of a totally unfamiliar environment, of a military system so completely foreign that Indian soldiers could not function without them. Coming from a modern industrial society, British officers intuitively understood its military component. They thus filled a role no uneducated peasant could hope to emulate. . . . The system of martial race recruiting brought into the army men whose backgrounds made them a poor choice to fight a modern war.⁶¹

An offshoot of such thinking is that British battalions did not disintegrate under pressure like Indian because their men were more attuned to the modern battlefield. Greenhut has argued that British troops alongside Indians in the BEF line were 'hit just as hard', but they alone held their

⁶⁰ P. Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), pp. 14–16; Beckett, *Ypres*, p. 34; Waites, 'People of the Undeveloped World', p. 600; N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 174–75 and 193–98; Greenhut, 'Sahib and Sepoy', pp. 16–17, and 'Imperial Reserve', p. 61; Omissi, *Sepoy*, pp. 38 and 160–61; and K. Roy, 'The Indian Army in Mesopotamia from 1916 to 1918: Tactics, Technology and Logistics Reconsidered', in Beckett (ed.), *Beyond the Western Front* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 142.

⁶¹ Greenhut, 'Imperial Reserve', pp. 69–70.

ground. In Gardner's view, British regiments of the BEF's II, IV and Cavalry Corps were able 'to withstand the strain' of shellfire and 'remained steady' under it, unlike 'less resolute' Indian units. Equally, William Philpott has noted a 'contrast in . . . achievement' between British and Indian battalions.⁶²

Up to the 1950s, Indian companies were said to have broken down if they lost their British officers simply because they were reliant on them as racial superiors. This idea appeared most severely in British army writings. Beatrix Brice, a British author who worked in association with the British army, described Indian soldiers without their white officers as 'like sheep without a shepherd'.⁶³ John Charteris, a staff officer of the British service, claimed that Indians without their British officers were 'valueless'.⁶⁴ In any event, Charteris assumed, as a matter of racial fact the Indians were among the dregs of the western front's fighting material: they were 'not, of course, as good or nearly as good as British troops. How could they be?'⁶⁵ Frank Richards, a private of the 2nd/Royal Welch Fusiliers, was of the same opinion. 'Native infantry were no good in France', Richards was sure, 'they suffered from cold feet, and a few enemy shells exploding round their trenches were enough to demoralise the majority of them. . . . The bloody niggers were no good at fighting.'⁶⁶

In their official history of the Indian Corps, Merewether and Smith were emphatic that the corps' Indian battalions never received casualty replacements of sufficient quality. They said that its original Indian battalions were 'generally speaking, of the very best class', and that by 1 November 1915 those battalions, after a year's fighting that had cost them casualties totalling 18,500 officers and men, each had only between 30 and 100 of their original members still on active service. By autumn 1915, Merewether and Smith went on, the Indian Corps had received over 30,000 new Indian drafts, but these were of much lower quality than the officers and men they replaced – for two reasons. First, British officers and Indian troops sent from the Indian army's reserve lacked training and physical fitness; second, the Indian government, due to 'the war's innumerable calls on the Indian army', could only siphon off as

⁶² N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 174–75 and 193–98; Greenhut, 'Sahib and Sepoy', pp. 16–17, and 'Imperial Reserve', p. 61; W. Philpott, Review of Nikolas Gardner's *Trial by Fire*, *War in History* 12 (2005), 468.

⁶³ B. Brice and W. Pulteney, *The Battle Book of Ypres* (London: John Murray, 1927), pp. 102–03. Also see H. Evans, *The 4th (Queen's Own) Hussars in the Great War* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1920), p. 39; and D. Scott, *Fourth Hussar* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1959), p. 252.

⁶⁴ J. Charteris, *At G.H.Q.* (London: Cassell, 1931), p. 66.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

⁶⁶ F. Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), pp. 38–39.

reinforcements for France a limited number of high-quality pre-war officers and men from Indian regiments elsewhere. By autumn 1915, Merewether and Smith concluded, the Indian Corps' Indian battalions, in light of their numbers of original regulars, had become 'mere frameworks, skeletons of their former selves'.⁶⁷

An alternative case has it that the Indian infantry in Flanders had casualty-replacement problems not of quality, but of quantity. F. W. Perry has argued that for fresh drafts, the Indian battalions depended on recruitment by their own regimental depots, yet these recruited individually in pre-war fashion from a small collection of martial race villages that were unequal to western front demand.⁶⁸ For Gordon Corrigan, India's recruitment system, largely for want of reform to its peacetime practices, 'could not in any way keep pace' with the numbers required to replace the Indian Corps' Indian casualties, and the Indian drafts sent to France 'were never enough'.⁶⁹

The crowning criticism of the Indian battalions is that they were removed from the western front in late 1915 because they were too weak to remain. Merewether and Smith were sure that their exit was down to inadequate casualty replacements: 'had it been possible to maintain them at their original level with a satisfactory supply of British officers, they could have continued indefinitely to play their part in Europe'.⁷⁰ James Edmonds airily attributed their departure to 'the winter climate and hardships of the Western theatre of war [that] had been particularly trying to the Indian soldier'. Ultimately, he wrote, 'it was felt deterioration had set in [to the Indian infantry], and [they] could be better employed in a theatre . . . where conditions were less severe'.⁷¹ Since the 1970s, historians have taken their pick of the traditional criticisms to account for the Indian battalions' redeployment – the Flemish climate,⁷² a lack of adequate casualty replacements from India, either in quality or

⁶⁷ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 462–89; and Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 2, pp. 403–04.

⁶⁸ F. W. Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 82–98.

⁶⁹ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 236–38. Also see Beckett, *The Great War* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007), p. 94; and R. McLain, 'The Indian Corps on the Western Front', in G. Jensen and A. Wiest (eds.), *War in the Age of Technology* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 181 and 189.

⁷⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 463.

⁷¹ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 2, pp. 403–04. For a similar view, see E. Benians and ors. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, 9 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929–61), vol. 3, p. 616.

⁷² Koller, *Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2001), p. 87; and C. Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front', in H. Liebau, K. Bromber, K. Lange, D. Hamzah and R. Ahuja (eds.), *The World in Wars, Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 33.

in quantity;⁷³ or Indian self-inflicted wounds and company breakdowns in battle without British officers.⁷⁴

IEFA's Indian cavalry regiments have also been viewed as unsuited to BEF service. Philip Gibbs, an English journalist, considered an Indian cavalry charge through cornfields on 14 July 1916 at the Battle of the Somme as 'nothing more than a beau geste. It was as futile and absurd as Don Quixote's charge of the windmill. They were brought to a dead halt by the nature of the ground and machine gun fire which killed their horses'.⁷⁵ That mounted charge has been described by Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson as 'certainly one of the strangest episodes in all the fighting on the western front'; for them, the Indian cavalry remained an anachronistic presence.⁷⁶ 'In the trench warfare of western Europe', DeWitt Ellinwood concluded, 'the Indian cavalry never operated with consistent effectiveness.'⁷⁷

The Indian cavalymen have not escaped German criticisms that the Indian army on the western front fought in an 'uncivilised' fashion. From 1918 to the 1930s, several German writers condemned IEFA's Indian soldiers as 'beasts in human form', accusing them of 'atrocities' such as using knives to cut off the ears and heads of German troops.⁷⁸ Christian Koller has suggested that the Indians might indeed have cut off German ears or heads, if such acts 'had been an important element of [their] traditional warfare', perhaps as a means of trophy collecting.⁷⁹

How Has IEFA's Operational Performance Been Seen?

The previous writing on IEFA's operational performance may also be divided into positive and negative ideas. The leading positive idea is that in 1914 the Indian Corps rescued the BEF, and by extension the Allied

⁷³ Beckett, *Great War*, p. 94; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 236–38; P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 215 and 218; Keegan, *First World War*, p. 213; V. Longer, *A History of the Indian Army, 1600–1974* (New Delhi: Allied, 1974), p. 159; McLain, 'Indian Corps', p. 189; S. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 247–48; and T. Winegard, *Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 73.

⁷⁴ Greenhut, 'Imperial Reserve', p. 68; Omissi, *Sepoy*, p. 150–51; and Waites, 'People of the Undeveloped World', p. 600.

⁷⁵ P. Gibbs, *Now It Can Be Told* (New York: Harper, 1920), p. 379.

⁷⁶ R. Prior and T. Wilson, *The Somme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 139.

⁷⁷ Ellinwood, 'Indian Soldier', p. 191. Also see C. Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences', p. 33.

⁷⁸ A. Gallinger, *Countercharge* (Munich: Suedutsche Monatshefte, 1922), pp. 44–45; H. Jones, 'Imperial Captivities: Colonial Prisoners of War in Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1918', in S. Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, p. 181; and O. Schwink, *Ypres, 1914*, translated by G. Wynne (London: Constable, 1919), p. 84.

⁷⁹ Koller, 'Colonial Troops', p. 122.

line, from a decisive defeat. ‘That the Indian Expeditionary Force arrived in the nick of time’, Lord Curzon declared, ‘that it helped to save the cause both of the Allies and of civilization, after the sanguinary tumult of the opening weeks of the War, has been openly acknowledged by the highest in the land, from the Sovereign downwards. I recall that it was emphatically stated to me by Lord French himself.’⁸⁰ The Indian Corps, Havelock Hudson explained, ‘indirectly . . . saved the day’ at First Ypres by relieving the British II Corps at the southern end of the BEF line. Had it not done so, Hudson argued, not enough British troops would have been available to prevent the German offensive from succeeding at the line’s northern end, where Douglas Haig’s I Corps and Henry Rawlinson’s IV Corps bore the brunt.⁸¹

The Indian Corps’ senior commanders and their staff officers have been praised for their performance from First Ypres to early December 1914. John Buchan applauded Charles Anderson, as the Meerut Division’s commander, for organising a successful counter-attack on 23–24 November 1914 to recapture 800 yards of freshly lost Indian Corps trenches.⁸² James Willcocks uncritically recalled his staff officers’ efforts that month at Indian Corps headquarters: ‘I very soon found that notwithstanding the fact that we were all new to the peculiar warfare and unversed in the details of Army Corps organisation, the common-sense training which India gives men enabled us to quickly gather up the threads of the work.’⁸³ Gordon Corrigan has argued that the Indian Corps’ senior commanders and their staff officers responded adequately to their unfamiliar defensive duties of 1914, exercising loose control over their trench sectors, spreading orders by word of mouth, and leaving the direction of fighting to officers on the spot. This worked well enough, he has said, because they frequently visited the frontline and its environs to stay in close touch with their units, and they co-operated with fellow officers up and down the chain of command through a close familiarity carried over from pre-war India.⁸⁴

In January 1915, three of the Lahore Division’s senior commanders – Henry Watkis (the divisional commander), Philip Carnegy (Jullundur Brigade) and James Bruncker (Sirhind Brigade) – and two of the Meerut Division’s brigade commanders – Charles Johnson (Dehra Dun Brigade)

⁸⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. xi.

⁸¹ H. Hudson, *History of the 19th King George’s Own Lancers (Fane’s Horse)* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1937), pp. 141–42.

⁸² Buchan, *Nelson’s History of the War*, vol. 5, pp. 11–12.

⁸³ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 18.

⁸⁴ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 98.

and Forbes Macbean (Bareilly Brigade) – were relieved of their commands. They were replaced by younger officers from within the Indian Corps. Willcocks ascribed their removal not to any faults of their own, but to the Army in India's pre-war promotion system. This, he stated, had promoted officers primarily on seniority, in contrast to Home Army. In 1914, he went on, the BEF's divisional and brigade commanders within British corps drawn from the Home Army were junior in rank or age to those of the Indian Corps; consequently, in January 1915, the five senior Indian commanders were dropped to help regularise the BEF's chain of command.⁸⁵

In March 1915, after the Indian Corps had made gains on the first day of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, Charles Repington, *The Times*' military correspondent, congratulated Willcocks and the Indian Corps for skilful staff work during the pre-battle planning.⁸⁶ Willcocks himself later paid tribute to his chief of staff's contribution in particular: 'Hudson had worked out all plans and orders with such scrupulous care that when the battle commenced I felt it was already half over, for each and all knew what was to be their share in it.'⁸⁷ The First Army's attacks on the second and third days of Neuve Chapelle were repeatedly unsuccessful. James Edmonds described the Indian commanders' performances in forgiving terms, contending they tried to provide the artillery support for a sustained infantry advance, but failed in that as enemy shelling cut telephone communications across the battlefield, and as British guns were denied the time to register their targets.⁸⁸

In the next two offensives, in May at Aubers Ridge and Festubert, the Indian Corps failed to capture appreciable ground. Willcocks and Edmonds identified BEF artillery shortages and strengthened German defences as the key reasons; what they did not blame was the planning of Indian Corps commanders and their staffs.⁸⁹ Gordon Corrigan has sympathised with the senior Indian officers for the same reasons. In summing up the Indian Corps' offensive performance, he reckoned that 'the staff officers of the Indian army came out . . . with their reputations unsullied'.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ *The Times*, 12 March 1915, p. 6, and 18 March, p. 8.

⁸⁷ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 204.

⁸⁸ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 1, pp. 99–144.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 21–41 and 57–78; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 270.

⁹⁰ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 170 and 249. For comparable views, see G. Bridger, *The Battle of Neuve Chapelle* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), p. 70; E. Hancock, *The Battle of Aubers Ridge* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2005), pp. 77–81; and P. Warner, *The Battle of Loos* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1976), p. 17.

At Second Ypres in April, the Lahore Division's senior commanders oversaw a series of abortive Indian counter-attacks. They were barely blameworthy in the eyes of Willcocks, Edmonds and Colin Ballard, a British army officer and historian – not only were the counter-attacks rushed because of overwhelming pressure from GHQ and the French to make them immediately, but also there was derisory artillery support, so low was the BEF on guns and shells.⁹¹

On 5 September 1915, Willcocks, in his own words, was 'forced to leave the Indian Corps. I had seen the [First] Army Commander and my end had come. I felt I must go without saying a word, lest any spark of ill-feeling be revealed. The enemy was before us; individuals had to go under, rightly or wrongly. . . . I knew the bitter pill must be swallowed.'⁹² That Willcocks had an unhappy relationship with Haig is indicated by the number of times he wrote Haig's name in his 450 pages of published writing on the Indian Corps: just once. Indeed, in his last book, *The Romance of Soldiering and Sport* (1925), he could bring himself to refer to Haig only as 'What's-his-name'.⁹³ Willcocks' supporters depicted him as a good general who had not deserved to lose his corps command. For the journalist Lovat Fraser, 'it was probably a grave mistake to put [Willcocks] on the shelf when the war was only a year old. . . . He was physically fit [and] a skilful commander.'⁹⁴

The negative ideas on IEFA's operational performance are anchored in the criticism that the pre-war Indian senior commanders and staff officers were poorly primed for European operations. Nikolas Gardner has argued this on three counts. First, the senior Indian commanders tended to be aged and lacking in energy because the Indian promotion system rewarded seniority over merit; second, hardly any of them had been to staff college, leaving them with a collective 'lack of advanced military education'; third, they were not oriented towards European warfare, in large part as Army in India training had not involved big German-style manoeuvres. Gardner has criticised the Army in India's staff officers as similarly second-rate.⁹⁵ For him, all these shortcomings created serious problems at First Ypres and shortly after. For example, the Indian commanders and staff 'consistently overloaded the front trenches of their

⁹¹ C. Ballard, *Smith-Dorrien* (London: Constable, 1931), pp. 291–94; Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 1, pp. 354–55; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 266–67.

⁹² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 319–21.

⁹³ Willcocks, *The Romance of Soldiering and Sport* (London: Cassell, 1925), p. 291.

⁹⁴ L. Fraser, 'The Indians in France', *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 December 1920; C. Repington, *The First World War*, 2 vols. (London: Constable, 1920), vol. 1, p. 133; and Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 221.

⁹⁵ N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 177–82.

positions [because they] lacked sufficient knowledge regarding the proper deployment of troops under fire'.⁹⁶

On 20 December 1914, at Givenchy to the south of Neuve Chapelle, the Germans captured around a mile of the Indian Corps' line. The Indian counter-attacks up to the 22nd failed badly. In his memoir *1914*, John French heaped blame on certain Indian divisional and brigade commanders whom he chose not to name; they were at fault for counter-attacking against 'trenches so far away from their own line before ensuring adequate support'.⁹⁷ Jeffrey Greenhut has treated the January 1915 removal of five senior commanders from the Indian Corps as symptomatic of Indian commanders' general incompetence. 'A more severe criticism of the pre-war promotion and command selection process of the [Army in India]', he proclaimed, 'would be hard to find.'⁹⁸

John Buchan criticised the commanders of IV Corps and the Indian Corps for making 'many grave blunders' at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. 'The artillery preparation was patchy, the staff work as a whole was imperfect. . . It was our first attempt at the new tactics, and inevitably we fumbled.'⁹⁹ Buchan did not think the Indian commanders and staff did much better at the Battle of Loos, where the Indian Corps made a subsidiary attack at the Moulin de Piètre, near Neuve Chapelle. The corps' assault battalions captured some German trenches only to find that the ground they had crossed was left empty; counter-attacks soon hit them from all sides, forcing them into an improvised fighting retreat. 'There must have been some defect in the co-ordination of the movement to make so whole-sale a confusion possible', Buchan sensed.¹⁰⁰

Several historians have treated suspicions in Indian soldiers' letters that the BEF's Indian battalions were put into the most hazardous battlefield positions ahead of British units, in order to spare the latter, as evidence of a sinister policy. 'The British misused Indian troops [through] deliberate sacrificing [of them ahead of British troops]', Joe Lunn has claimed. '[The] proportion of [Indian] casualties was even higher than those of French West Africans [who were similarly sacrificed on the western front] over a shorter period of time.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–99.

⁹⁷ J. French, *1914*, p. 340.

⁹⁸ Greenhut, 'Imperial Reserve', p. 62.

⁹⁹ Buchan, *A History of the Great War*, 4 vols., (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1923), vol. 1, pp. 540–49.

¹⁰⁰ Buchan, *Great War*, vol. 2, p. 306. For further criticism along these lines, see Callahan, 'Sepoy Generals', p. 307; and G. Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), p. 291.

¹⁰¹ J. Lunn, *Memoirs of the Maelstrom: A Senegalese Oral History of the First World War* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1999), p. 156. Also see D. Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger*:

Assessments of the Indian Cavalry Corps' senior officers have been traditionally harsh. For George Barrow – the commander of the Indian Cavalry Corps' Mhow Brigade up to June 1915 – Michael Rimington was inept because he dwelled on unrealistic hopes of a sweeping cavalry charge to rout the Germans in open battle, rather than coming up with fresh ideas for how cavalymen might be used within the confines of trench warfare.¹⁰² The British historian Simon Robbins has detected substandard staff work at Rimington's headquarters in 1915, with Henry Macandrew, as the chief of staff, insisting on personally approving all orders sent out to the Indian cavalry divisions, thereby stifling initiative and prompting build-ups of unsent orders in his absence.¹⁰³ According to Anthony Farrar-Hockley, in May 1916 GHQ 'removed ruthlessly eleven [Army in India origin] British officers of the rank of major and above [from the Indian cavalry in France]. [All were] considered unfit to command or to fill staff posts'.¹⁰⁴

How Has IEFA's Administrative Performance Been Seen?

In 1914, *The Times* published a glowing report of IEFA's disembarkation at Marseilles, noting 'the perfection of the transport and commissariat of the various detachments – their endless trains of carts and lorries, mountainously plied with fodder and foodstuffs, with ammunition and camp-gear of every description, all moving from ship to camp with clockwork precision'.¹⁰⁵ In the 1930s, George MacMunn, a British service staff officer who had served at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, recalled that IEFA had sailed to France 'with astounding promptitude', as an embodiment of 'marvellous amphibious power and might'.¹⁰⁶ Quite how this could have come about was suggested by John Terraine in the 1960s. He said that pre-war Indian staff officers had made plans for the sending of an Army in India force to Europe, and those plans were used to get IEFA to Flanders weeks ahead of what otherwise would have been possible.¹⁰⁷ Others have

The Rise and Fall of the British Raj (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 121; and R. K. Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the Making of the Punjab* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), p. 259.

¹⁰² G. Barrow, *The Fire of Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1942), p. 154.

¹⁰³ S. Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front, 1914–18* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ A. Farrar-Hockley, *Goughie* (London: Granada, 1975), p. 183.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 2 October 1914, p. 9, and 17 November, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ MacMunn, *Martial Races*, p. 319.

¹⁰⁷ T. Moreman, 'Lord Kitchener, the General Staff and the Army in India, 1902–1914', in D. French and B. Reid (eds.), *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation, 1890–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 74; and Terraine, *Haig*, pp. 48–49.

not been so sure. 'In 1911, the possibility of Indian troops reinforcing a British Expeditionary Force in France was mentioned', commented S. L. Menezes, a general of the post-independence Indian army, 'but no decision was taken. Consequently no planning was conducted [and by 1914] there had been no contingency planning for [Indian] overseas expeditions.'¹⁰⁸

During the war and up to the 1930s, writers on IEFA's administrative personnel at the front typically had kind things to say. Merewether and Smith eulogised the Indian Corps' officers and men of the Army in India's medical services, telling of unflinching Indian stretcher bearers who laboured through shellfire with 'silent heroism', and of adaptable doctors who kept Indian troops in good health through 'skill and self-sacrificing zeal'.¹⁰⁹ Such writing was barely qualified by criticism. The British official medical history gave a little, for instance that IEFA's medical units, having arrived in France meagrely equipped, required aid from the British army's administrative services and from public charity.¹¹⁰ Further George MacMunn argued that in the pre-war Army in India 'all systems of maintenance were inadequate and amateur', ensuring that the Indian Corps' early first-line transport was 'severely handicapped' and 'fairly inefficient'.¹¹¹ Stronger criticisms have since come from Mark Harrison. He has emphasised the weakness of IEFA's Indian medical units in 1914–15, describing defective Army in India hospitals that by themselves could not treat the high numbers of Indian sick and wounded.¹¹² Moreover, Claude Markovits has maintained that the Indian troops in Flanders were 'woefully short of warm clothing'.¹¹³

The withdrawal of the Lahore and Meerut Divisions from the western front has been connected to problems with their lines of communication. The argument here is that because those divisions were Army in India formations, they were harder to sustain the further from home they were; thus sending them to Mesopotamia provided some welcome relief to their stretched lines of communication between India and Europe. As David Omissi put it in relation to their being pulled out of France, 'it . . . made strategic sense to concentrate the Indian army in the Middle East, where it was easier to send reinforcements and supplies from India.'¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Menezes, *Fidelity*, pp. 242 and 245. Also see Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 358.

¹⁰⁹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 502–09.

¹¹⁰ W. Macpherson, *Medical Services General History*, 2 vols. (London: HMSO, 1921–23), vol. 2, p. 123. Also see Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 4.

¹¹¹ MacMunn, *Martial Races*, pp. 323–25.

¹¹² Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 52–58.

¹¹³ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences', p. 32; and Menezes, *Fidelity*, p. 247.

¹¹⁴ See Omissi, 'India and the Western Front', retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/india_wwone.01.shtml (accessed 29 January 2012).

What Is 'New' About This Book?

The negative ideas on IEFA make up a compelling narrative that the pre-war Indian army was weak and never had much chance of fighting well in a great war in Europe. On the western front, that narrative goes on, the Indian army inevitably came up short of what was required, being remarkable not for what it did, but for what it failed to do, such as adequately reinforce itself, so that as winter loomed in 1915, its infantry were banished from the BEF. In contrast, the BEF's white armies' fighting performances, whether British, Canadian, South African, Australian or New Zealander, have been said to have improved through experience of, and adaptation to, local circumstances – this is the 'learning curve' thesis.¹¹⁵ But if the BEF's white forces did that, might its Indian units have done likewise?

This book radically revises traditional ideas on IEFA by reassessing the Indian army's performance in terms of potential adaptation to trench warfare, and by comparing things that previous considerations of IEFA have not – for instance, comparing how the Indian army fought in pre-war China, Somaliland and Tibet and how it fought in France and Belgium, or comparing IEFA with its sister expeditionary forces. Each of the twelve chapters considers an overall question:

1. How was the pre-war Indian army organised?
2. What types of warfare was it kept for?
3. What were its strengths?
4. What were its weaknesses?
5. Was IEFA efficiently delivered to Flanders?
6. Did the Indian Corps 'save' the BEF in 1914?
7. Did either climactic or casualty replacement problems cause the Indian Corps' disbandment?
8. Were the Indian troops particularly prone to self-inflicting wounds and fleeing the trenches?
9. Did they make use of pre-war tactical training?
10. Did they learn new tactical skills?
11. What characterised the performances of the senior Indian commanders and their staff officers?
12. What characterised the Indian army's administrative performance?

¹¹⁵ See S. Bidwell and D. Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904–45* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982); C. Callwell, *The Dardanelles*, second edition (London: Constable, 1924), pp. 56 and 74, and *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 193–94, 213, 225–26, 246–52, 286–96, and vol. 2, p. 128; Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1918, vol. 5, pp. 580–615; Robbins, *Generalship*, pp. 85–95; and G. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War* (London: Headline, 2002).

‘There is no special incident to report’, Charles Repington informed his readers during a lull at First Ypres, ‘except . . . the excellent behaviour of the Indian army . . . That the Indian army would do well we were all well assured. They are long-service professional soldiers [and] though the country and modern artillery fire are unfamiliar to them, they have at once adapted themselves and are fighting as steadily as the rest of the Army.’¹¹⁶ As we shall see, such acclaim is not misleading; rather, it is due something of a revival.

¹¹⁶ *The Times*, 6 November 1914, p. 5.

1 The Army in India

‘Of the Indian army the average stay-at-home Englishman knows less than nothing’, James Willcocks reflected in 1917. ‘Squadrons of charging Bengal Lancers on fiery Arab steeds, followed by battalions of tall bearded Gurkhas, and diminutive, clean-shaven Sikhs armed with scimitars float past in his vision, and beyond that there is no need to inquire!’¹ He touched on a tendency among European critics to judge the Indian army’s western front performance without much regard for the Army in India’s pre-war organisation. This needs a close look. Broadly speaking, the Indian army was separated from the British army at regimental level, before the two services came together at higher levels.

Brahmans to Baluchis

In August 1914, the Indian army had 126 infantry regiments. Of these, 116 recruited from the British-administered Indian provinces and the Pathan tribal areas. Their active combatants totalled 1,750 British officers and 105,000 Indian soldiers. They were listed from the 1st Brahmans to the 130th Baluchis, but for the Corps of Guides (an unnumbered regiment of infantry with cavalry), and they included eleven pioneer battalions specialising in digging and road building. They were each made up of one battalion, apart from the Guides and 39th Garhwals; the former had one infantry battalion and a cavalry unit, the latter two battalions. The Gurkha infantry regiments, from the 1st to the 10th Gurkha Rifles, were listed separately; each of them had two battalions.²

The Indian infantry regiments’ titles did not necessarily indicate their troops’ provenance. Half of them were arranged as ‘class’ units and half as ‘class-company’. Class battalions recruited from just one martial race. Thus the 6th Jats only took Hindu Jats from Rohtak district in south-east Punjab, the 41st Dogras only Dogras from the Kangra

¹ Willcocks, ‘Indian Army Corps’, 1.

² Government of India, *Army in India*, p. 219.

valley, and the 47th Sikhs only Sikhs from villages outside Amritsar. Class-company battalions recruited from a range of martial races – the 40th Pathans took Afridis, Orakzais, Punjabi Muslims and Dogras, the 129th Baluchis Afridis, Mahsuds and Punjabi Muslims (and only a tiny number of Baluch tribesmen from Baluchistan), and the Guides Afridis, Yusufzais, Hazaras, Punjabi Muslims, Dogras, Sikhs and Gurkhas.

Each of the Indian battalions had 12 combatant British officers and 750 Indian soldiers. They divided into eight companies, which within class-company battalions were usually filled with men from the same villages. Of their British officers, the battalion commandants were colonels with decades of regimental experience; the most junior officers were second lieutenants aged as young as nineteen. They all took a paternalistic and personal approach to command, an Indian army tradition born of the need to earn the trust of their men, to whom they were an alien caste, the ‘sahib log’. ‘To arrive at any result’, wrote one of them of their leadership ethic, ‘I must merge myself into the Oriental as far as possible, absorb his ideas, see with his eyes, and hear with his ears, to the fullest extent possible to one bred in British traditions.’³ ‘Indian soldiers’, said another, ‘will only be efficient and reliable if they know and understand, and are understood and known by, the British officer who is going to employ and reward them – black men serve individuals, not strangers or departments.’⁴

The British officers learned their men’s languages, above all Urdu (or Hindustani), the army’s vernacular, and the dialects appropriate to their units. They were examined in at least seventeen south Asian languages, and many became accomplished linguists.⁵ To accommodate their men’s social and religious ways, they studied these closely, combining their own observations with inherited knowledge from older officers. ‘The collective wisdom of more than a century had been put to the best use in safeguarding the habits, customs, and religious tendencies of the [Indian army’s] divergent races and creeds’, reflected James Willcocks. ‘Indeed, in some respects the word liberality might be used when any of these principles were at stake.’⁶

There were sixteen Indian officers directly beneath each battalion’s British officers. From top to bottom, they were ranked as subadar-majors,

³ N. Bray, *Shifting Sands* (London: Unicorn Press, 1934), p. 14.

⁴ KCL/LHCMA, Papers of Brigadier-General P. Howell: ‘Note on the Frontier Intelligence Corps, 1909’ (1/1/13).

⁵ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Papers of Lieutenant-Colonel K. Henderson (39th Garhwal Rifles), p. 129; B. Blacker, *Adventures*, p. viii.

⁶ Willcocks, ‘Indian Army Corps’, 5.

subadars and jemadars. They were promoted from within their own regiments, on merit after long service. The subadar-majors, one per battalion, were in their late forties or early fifties. 'As the head of the native portion of the Regiment', read a Gurkha standing order, 'the position is a most honourable one and should be looked up to by all inferior ranks with the utmost respect.'⁷ The subadar-major was expected to know everything about his men, and to tell all he knew to his commandant. Beneath the Indian officers, there were non-commissioned officers, from havildar-majors down to havildars, naiks and lance-naiks.

An Indian infantryman's uniform and equipment were supplied by the Indian government. His uniform was commonly made of thin khaki cotton, with a turban, tunic, breeches and puttees, and leather belts, bandoliers and boots. It was designed to be light, loose-fitting and comfortable, and to act as camouflage. Garhwalis and Gurkhas alone wore more close-fitting, greenish uniforms with wide-brimmed hats. The short-magazine Lee Enfield Mark II rifle with bayonet was standard issue, as were Maxim machine guns, of which most battalions had two. For both types of gun, Indian government munitions factories produced smokeless ammunition. Also standard issue was the Sirhind entrenching tool. This had a long wooden handle and a steel head that doubled as a spade and a pick. Only Garhwalis and Gurkhas carried the khukuri, a bone-handled knife with single-edged and curved eleven-inch blade. The British officers of the Indian infantry wore khaki, except those of the Guides, who wore grey, and they all carried a revolver.⁸

Each Indian infantry regiment had a depot as a home station and administrative centre. One British officer per battalion was appointed as its adjutant to oversee administrative duties, such as recruitment, for which each unit was personally responsible. As a rule, a regiment's depot was near its recruiting grounds. Thus the 39th Garhwals' was at Lansdowne, a Himalayan hill station at 5,600 feet in the Garhwal district of the United Provinces; the Guides' was at Mardan, a town in a Yusufzai-dominated area of NWFP. Because each regiment recruited from particular villages, their companies tended to be made up of kinsmen, including fathers and sons. Each battalion also had a British officer as its quartermaster. He had to organise his unit's feeding, which was paid for through a deduction from the men's wages.⁹

⁷ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–31.

⁹ Ellinwood, 'British Policy, War, and the Indian Army, 1914–18', in Ellinwood and C. Enloe (eds.), *Ethnicity and the Military in Asia* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1981), p. 114.

The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Sappers and Miners made up the Indian army's engineering corps. Their active combatants totalled 67 British officers and 4,800 Indians. They specialised in building bridges, repairing railway tracks, making bombs and laying explosive charges. They were organised much like the infantry, into companies of 195 men with British and Indian officers. However, almost all their British officers were drawn from the British army's Royal Engineers. Affiliated to the sappers and miners were the Indian army's communications companies, the signals units. These had 600 officers and men, spread over 4 signals companies and a few wireless signals squadrons.¹⁰

There were thirty-nine Indian cavalry regiments, from the 1st Duke of York's Own Lancers to the 39th Central India Horse. They each had 13 combatant British officers and 600 Indian troopers. Their Indian officers were rissaldar-majors down to rissaldars and jemadars, and their non-commissioned officers were kot-dafadars down to dafadars and lance-dafadars. Thirty-six of the Indian cavalry regiments were substantially self-sufficient in supply through an administrative system known as 'silladar', an ancient Persian term meaning 'bearer of arms'. The Indian government supplied them with Lee-Enfield rifles, Maxim machine guns and smokeless ammunition. Their uniforms, horses and the rest of their equipment they supplied for themselves by means of a regimental fund in which all British officers and Indian recruits were obliged to invest. The silladar regiments also had their own farms, on Punjabi land granted them by the government for horse breeding.¹¹

For decades the silladar units had developed idiosyncrasies in supply through providing for themselves with limited government oversight. Most of them used Australian horses, but some preferred other breeds; they used different sorts of saddlery; some were armed with swords or lances, some were not; some had well-managed regimental funds and were well-off, others did not and were not; some used their farms to breed their own remounts, others turned their land to arable use to generate income to buy horses from abroad.¹² Moreover, their khaki uniforms varied according to British officers' tastes; they had assorted regimental styles of tying turbans – which, unlike in the infantry, were routinely worn by the British officers as well as the men.

The Indian army's artillery was contained largely in the Indian Mountain Artillery. This had 4,000 Indian troops, mostly Sikh, under British

¹⁰ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 32; Government of India, *Army in India*, pp. 77–90; and E. Sandes, *The Indian Sappers and Miners* (Chatham: Institute of Royal Engineers, 1948), p. 446.

¹¹ O. Creagh, *Indian Studies* (London: Hutchinson, 1919), p. 255.

¹² Government of India, *Army in India*, pp. 91–98; and Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 86–92.

officers drawn from the British army's Royal (Regiment of) Artillery. It possessed seventy-two light mountain guns, arranged into twelve batteries of six guns each. Each of the guns had a wheeled carriage and was designed to break into parts that could be carried on mule back over ground impossible for wheels, before being reassembled within minutes. They fired, on a flat or low trajectory, 10-pound smokeless shrapnel shells. The Indian artillery also had some coastal defence units whose guns, although heavier than the mountain artillery's, were immobile and obsolete.¹³

The Army in India's domestic bases, the cantonments, were spread far and wide. The majority lay outside central and northern Indian cities, towns and hill stations. Depending on the vagaries of unit postings, an Indian regiment might be stationed at a cantonment hundreds or even thousands of miles from its home depot. Only the Gurkha battalions could expect to be posted near their depots, which were concentrated near Nepal, in the United Provinces along the southern rim of the Himalayas.¹⁴ The Indian troops had their own cantonment housing known as 'lines'. In the words of one British officer of the 129th Baluchis,

'Lines' . . . consist of a double row of huts, facing one another, with a road between them, for each squadron or company. The houses of the Indian officers are on each flank. . . . The lines . . . have been mostly erected by the labour of the soldiers themselves, [with] Government [providing] a small and totally inadequate sum for building materials and upkeep. Lines were so badly built and so fragile that many of them usually fell down on the first shower of rain. [They] were insanitary, dangerous to life and disgraceful to Government. I have no words to describe the filthy and dilapidated condition of some of them, many had no windows or doors, and the roofs were so low one had to crawl on the hands and knees to get into them.¹⁵

The Indian reservists were typically retired regulars. Up to 250 of them were retained by each regiment. Backing the reserve, there was a system of 'linked' units whereby Indian regiments were grouped in pools of three that recruited from like communities; within each pool, a regiment was liable for transferring troops to another pool.¹⁶

There were fifty-one British infantry battalions in India. They generally belonged to double-battalion regiments named after the UK regions, counties or cities of their home depots. Each had been handed a sixteen-year tour of overseas duty while their sister battalions remained with the

¹³ Pradhan, 'Indian Army and the First World War', in Ellinwood, *India and World War I*, p. 51.

¹⁴ MacMunn, *Martial Races*, pp. 197–99.

¹⁵ Creagh, *Studies*, pp. 261–62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

Home Army. They were larger than the Indian battalions, with 28 officers and 850 men in 8 companies. The Army in India also had nine British cavalry regiments, on a fourteen-year tour. They each had 27 officers and 600 men. Like the British infantry in India, they were armed by the Indian government with the same rifles and machine guns as the Indian army, and they kept up their numbers through drafts sent from home.¹⁷

The Royal Artillery had 12,000 British combatant officers and men on the subcontinent. They had:

1. forty-eight mountain guns, of the same pattern as the Indian army's, and belonging to the Royal Garrison Artillery;
2. horse-drawn field guns – 66 were 13-pounders of the Royal Horse Artillery, and 252 were 18-pounders of the Royal Field Artillery – that fired either shrapnel shells or high explosive ones, which could wreck field fortifications; and
3. eighteen 4.5-inch medium field howitzers. These fired 35-pound shells on a high, plunging trajectory, unlike the field guns that fired flatter.

The Royal Field Artillery in India had no significant number of Indian combatants; only the Royal Garrison Artillery did, with 1,500 Indian ranks. Most of India's British artillery pieces, totalling 384 modern guns, were arranged into 6-gun batteries, in brigades of 3 batteries each.¹⁸

In the cantonments, the British units had large, airy and well-lit modern barracks with their own libraries, coffee houses, swimming pools, billiard rooms and gyms, all clearly set apart from the Indian lines. 'The basic principle of segregating different races', Thakur Amar Singh wrote of the cantonments at Rawalpindi in the Punjab, 'was applied with mathematical precision and lucidity . . . [S]ystematic 'zoning' separated native regiments from their European compeers.'¹⁹ Like the overall organisation of the Army in India at regimental level, this smacked of two British beliefs about the Indian army. The first was that Indian troops' loyalty was questionable. In 1857, Indian troops had mutinied en masse, including artillerymen armed with cannon of a greater variety and number than was the British army in India. In the immediate aftermath, the British viewed Indian servicemen as potential traitors as never before. The Indian government took to arming the Indian regiments with markedly less fire-power than the British, so that any future Indian mutineers would be at

¹⁷ Government of India, *Army in India*, pp. 61 and 91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–76.

¹⁹ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 134; and F. Richards, *Old-Soldier Sahib* (London: Smith and Haas, 1936), pp. 190–92.

a distinct disadvantage. By 1914, British trust in Indian soldiers was far from complete. This helps explain the Indian artillery's allocation of only a small number of mountain guns, while the Royal Artillery in India had around six times as many guns, the bulk of which were more powerful and manned by almost no Indians. As for the segregation of Indian and British troops' cantonment housing, it was a comment on Indian troops' loyalty: should there be another 1857, the British army, housed in its own barracks, would be all the readier to fight back.²⁰

The second belief was that in the hardest of fighting situations, a Briton's Anglo-Saxon genes would give him the moral and physical capacities for endurance as far as was humanly possible, whereas an Indian's genes would not. The official calculation of British soldiers' fighting worth compared to Indian was that one of the former was equal to two and a half of the latter. The numerical balance of British to Indian regulars in India was set precisely to that ratio, on the understanding that thereby enough British troops would be on hand to guarantee imperial interests should there be a repeat of 1857. British soldiers' deemed racial superiority over Indian also accounted for their right to better cantonment housing.²¹

Different sorts of British soldiers rated the supposed racial weakness of Indian troops in different ways. For the British officers of the Indian army, martial race theory was a pet subject. It taught them that an Indian soldier, depending on his martial race, possessed some, but never all, of the fighting characteristics of the Briton. Through its lens, for example, they saw Dogras as particularly unflappable under pressure, Hindu Jats and Garhwalis as capable of great endurance, or Gurkhas as having an especially sporting temperament. Driven by regimental pride, they preferred to think of their men in positive terms of fighting traits possessed.²² This led them routinely to refer to the Indian troops according to the relevant martial race as a mark of respect. Indeed, the British officers of the Gurkhas insisted on calling their men 'riflemen' and not 'sepoys', the standard term for an infantry private recruited in India or the Pathan tribal areas, in order to show their belief that Gurkhas were South Asia's best troops – meaning the Indian ranks whose martial characteristics most closely matched those of the incomparable British soldier.²³

²⁰ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 234.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235; and I. Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap Book* (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), p. 5.

²² IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 121.

²³ MacMunn, *Martial Races*, p. 198; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 491–97; and T. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 113–59.

‘My enthusiasm [for Gurkhas was] but natural when I served with them for over a quarter of a century’, admitted one officer who joined the 7th Gurkhas in the 1890s:

But let it not be thought there are no other races in our Indian Army who have an equally good fighting spirit, and can show a grand and honourable record. There are many, and . . . the number of brave and gallant soldiers of all classes and creeds included in that wonderful force passes comprehension. He should be a proud man who has the good fortune to be associated with them.²⁴

Officers of the British service did not feel such pride. It followed they had no great interest in appreciating the finer points of martial race theory, or in celebrating what those were thought to show. They therefore regarded Indian troops more negatively, spoke far worse of their fighting powers, and were quick to use particularly pejorative terms for them such as ‘niggers’ and ‘golliwogs’.²⁵ The British ranks were similarly inclined.²⁶ Their racial contempt for Indians in general was the least restrained. Recruited from the UK’s poorest areas, 65 per cent of them had not reached the educational standard expected of British eleven year olds, leading one contemporary psychiatrist to describe them as ‘wasters and half-wits’.²⁷ They were notorious for violence towards Indian civilians, ‘to keep the bleeding natives down’, said one Welsh private; rapes and beatings to death, to which their officers turned blind eyes, were not uncommon.²⁸ ‘The two ugliest things in India were the water buffalo and the British private soldier’, one viceroy’s American wife allegedly proclaimed.²⁹

A small collection of British army officers, however, felt something like the sympathy for Indian troops that the Indian service British officers did – James Willcocks was among them. They might have spent part of their childhood in India, or part of their early careers in close contact with Indian troops, perhaps through officering Indian artillerymen. They studied martial race theory, and even wrote books helping to codify it.³⁰

²⁴ N. Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys* (London: Jenkins, 1922), pp. 187–88.

²⁵ IOR, L/MIL/5/727: ‘Minutes of Evidence of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence’ (1907), p. 130, comments of John French; W. Churchill, *My Early Life*, new edition (London: Eland, 2000), p. 140; N. Gardner, *Trial*, p. 183.

²⁶ R. Graves, *Goodbye to all That*, new edition (London: Penguin, 1960), pp. 181 and 197.

²⁷ A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War, Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 146.

²⁸ Richards, *Old-Soldier Sahib*, pp. 74–87, 142–44 and 277.

²⁹ Menezes, *Fidelity*, pp. 222–23.

³⁰ See MacMunn, *The Martial Races*.

The upshot was that they spoke better of Indian troops' fighting value than was customary among British service officers.³¹

The Army in India's non-combatants at regimental level served both the Indian and the British armies. Most were arranged within Indian army administrative units, which were usually led by their own specialist British officers of the Indian army's chief administrative services, the Supply and Transport Corps and the Indian Medical Service (IMS). A few of the Indian administrative units' men were British, but the vast majority were Indians, known as 'followers'. These were designated either as 'higher' followers – meaning they were formally enrolled for having some medical, transport or other skill they had developed as civilians – or as a members of a lower category, the 'menials'. Of the latter, some were 'public' followers, if their tasks, such as cooking or saddling, were deemed essential in peace and war alike; the others had a lesser status as 'private' followers if they did sweeping, water carrying or other unskilled work that did not guarantee them employment in the field.³²

The Supply and Transport Corps' supply or commissariat units had 3,900 officers and men. They were responsible for buying and distributing army supplies, and ordinarily they supplied rations only for the British troops.³³ Their sister animal transport units contained 20,000 officers and men. Some of the transport units were wheeled with small bullock-drawn carts for flat ground or where there were good roads, and some had pack mules from Argentina, China and the Punjab, or camels, for more difficult terrain. They were known as 'corps' if they were kept at full or service-ready strength in peacetime, or as 'cadres' if kept as nucleuses ready for expansion.³⁴

The Indian army's medical units belonged to the two main branches of the IMS, the Army Hospital Corps and the Army Bearer Corps, respectively responsible for treating and for carrying the sick and the wounded. They were led by British and Indian doctors of the IMS alongside a few doctors of the British army's medical service, the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), and they had 7,000 Indian followers. The Army Hospital Corps maintained cantonment station hospitals exclusively for the British army, and other medical units, including field ambulances, to care

³¹ CUL/MD, Papers of Baron Hardinge of Penshurst: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 13 March 1915.

³² R. Singha, 'Front Lines and Status Lines: Sepoy and "Menial" in the Great War, 1916–1920', in H. Liebau, K. Bromber, K. Lange, D. Hamzah and R. Ahuja (eds.), *The World in Wars*, pp. 55–106.

³³ Government of India, *Army in India*, p. 128.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

for British and Indian troops on campaign. The Army Bearer Corps had companies of Indian stretcher bearers, primarily for field service.³⁵

Indian ‘higher’ and ‘menial’ followers were also arranged within the regiments, which recruited them directly. In the Indian army they included not only cooks drawn from the same communities as the troops they cooked for, but also medical personnel. Each Indian regiment had its own peacetime medical support, consisting of one British or Indian doctor of the IMS and under him a regimental hospital. The doctor had charge of an Indian sub-assistant surgeon and a few ‘menial’ followers. Most Indian battalions had an official allocation of 17 followers; the Indian cavalry regiments had one of 317, the difference being for the care of horses. The British units in India, meanwhile, had their own Indian followers.³⁶

Of India’s 700 or so hereditary rulers – the maharajahs, nawabs and nizams known to the British as princes, who ruled their own semi-sovereign Indian States that were not official parts of British India, but were its associates – twenty-nine were signed up to the Imperial Service Troops scheme. Under this, they recruited men from their own territories for Imperial Service units, available for British use. The units were commanded by princes and landed nobles of their respective States, and had British officers as advisers. They had a total of 19,000 troops in infantry, sapper, cavalry, camel-mounted and other combatant units; the Jodhpur Lancers from Rajaputana were the most renowned. Their non-combatant units had 2,700 men, all in transport corps.³⁷

The Field Army and the Defence Force

India had nine permanent infantry divisions, distributed mostly about northern and central regions, and listed from the 1st to the 9th. They each had three brigades, numbered from the 1st to the 27th, containing three non-pioneer Indian battalions plus one British battalion apiece. The divisions were backed by their own Indian combatant support or ‘divisional’ troops, a full set of which had a pioneer battalion, two companies of sappers and miners, a signal company and an Indian cavalry regiment. They also had an artillery attachment, as a rule comprising thirty artillery pieces, or six batteries, of varying calibre and mostly of the Royal Artillery. A tenth infantry division was garrisoned in Burma, a province of British India. All ten divisions had standing administrative support

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116–23.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 230–35; and R. Singha, ‘Sepoy and “Menial”’, p. 68.

³⁷ Government of India, *Army in India*, p. 156.

from Indian non-combatant units. There were nine cavalry brigades in India, each of two Indian cavalry regiments and one British, with some Indian non-combatant units. Further, there were the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat independent brigades. These, in NWFP, each had four Indian battalions, one Indian cavalry regiment, and an Indian mountain battery. A fourth independent brigade was at Aden.³⁸

The divisions and cavalry brigades in India were classed as the Field Army, meaning they were on standby for field service outside British-administered India. This separated them from the internal Defence Force, which had the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat independent brigades and all the Army in India's other combatant units, and was responsible for India's internal security in the Field Army's absence. Within the Field Army's brigades, the presence of British army units alongside Indian was symptomatic of the imperialist distrust of the latter – it was intended not just as a safeguard against mutinous Indian troops, but as a 'stiffening' Anglo-Saxon element for battle against external enemies.³⁹

Commanders and Staff

The senior Indian commanders were drawn from the Army in India and the Home Army. The most junior were at brigade level. Next up were the divisional commanders. Above them was the Northern Army Commander, who oversaw five of the infantry divisions in India plus the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat independent brigades; he was parallel to the Southern Army Commander, overseer of the remaining four divisions in India, the Burma Division and the Aden Brigade. The highest level of command was Army Headquarters, the seat of India's Commander-in-Chief, appointed alternately from the British and Indian services. The Indian commanders had their own British staff officers in permanent positions. A brigade commander had his brigade-major and his staff-captain; a divisional commander had a larger group headed by his chief staff officer and directly supervised by the Commander-in-Chief's Army Headquarters Staff.

Indian service officers belonged, and British service officers were attached, to the two main Indian staff branches. One was the Indian General Staff, whose primary responsibilities concerned military operations, or the conduct of campaigns. Under its own Chief at Army Headquarters, it managed training in India and the planning and carrying

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–30.

³⁹ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 238.

out of Field Army operations. There were three grades of General Staff officer (GSO), from GSO1 down to GSO3. The other main branch was the Administrative Staff, which handled India's administrative services and non-combatants. Its leading officers at Army Headquarters were the Adjutant-General (responsible for recruitment, discipline, pay, military law and mobilisation), the Quartermaster-General (supplies, transport, the movement of troops and their quartering), and the Director of Medical Services. The Chief of the Indian General Staff was the Commander-in-Chief's principal advisor, and he held sway over his administrative peers as a first among equals.⁴⁰

The Indian Staff College opened in 1905 at temporary premises in the Deccan in Central India, before it moved two years later to its fixed home at Quetta in Baluchistan. It was intended as a counterpart to the Home Army's Staff College, which, at Camberley in southern England since 1836, had been the only staff college available to Indian service officers. Indian princes and landed nobles traditionally received honorary Indian staff appointments. From 1903 to 1913, in an Indian government attempt to formalise their military role, seventy-eight of them had officer training as members of the Imperial Cadet Corps. On graduation, several, including Thakur Amar Singh, were appointed to the staffs of Indian brigade or higher commanders.⁴¹

Civilians and Soldiers

Political control of the Army in India lay ultimately in the hands of the British prime minister, but customarily it was exercised by the Secretary of State for India and the viceroy. The Secretary of State was the British Cabinet minister at the India Office in London. He was not formally a member of the Indian government; rather he oversaw it. He worked in tandem with the viceroy, his subordinate on the subcontinent atop the quasi-independent Indian government. The viceroy, subject to India Office approval, was responsible for shaping policy on military matters as much as others. From day to day, he, and not the remote Secretary of State, was the Army in India's effective leader.

The India Office was accepted as the sole British government department with authority over the Army in India, with which the War Office, as the British government's army department, was strictly not to interfere. Much of the India Office's power was financial: the Secretary of State

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 243–50; and Government of India, *Army in India*, pp. 56–60.

⁴¹ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, see chapters, 2, 4 and 5.

had a right of total control over the Indian revenues that paid for the Army in India's upkeep. While the Indian government owned the Indian army, the British army units in India were on loan from the Home Army. The agreement here was that the Indian government was not to fiddle with the internal structure of the British army units. Otherwise, it had control of them and their training, in return for paying the cost of their garrisoning on the subcontinent. Should the British government require things of the Army in India, by convention it was to ask nicely through the Secretary of State as its go-between with the viceroy.

Ideally, the Secretary of State and the viceroy presided over the Army in India in harmony as virtual equals. The extent to which they might do so of course depended on how their personalities chimed. On questions of Indian military finance, for example, a dictatorial Secretary of State might exercise his right of control over Indian revenues to provide unilateral answers. A more accommodating Secretary of State might work towards a compromise.⁴²

To send the Army in India into action at short notice across British Indian borders or overseas, the only political sanction required was that of the Secretary of State in agreement with the viceroy. For Indian forces to conduct extended overseas operations, the British Parliament's permission was required. The 1858 Government of India Act ordained, as a check on the viceroy's power, that Indian revenues could not pay for a prolonged Indian campaign overseas. They could only do so if Parliament voted for them to contribute to its cost. Quite what the Indian government might pay was a matter of negotiation between the British and Indian governments. It centred on the question of how much an extended overseas expedition served their respective interests. If the British government viewed that kind of operation as very much in its interests, Parliament might vote for Indian revenues to pay for little or none of the cost. Then 'Imperial funds', meaning the British taxpayer, would bear the burden.⁴³

India's Commander-in-Chief was the viceroy's paramount military adviser. He and his Army Headquarters followed in the viceroy's wake, spending winters in Calcutta and summers at Simla. He was the only serving soldier on the viceroy's Executive Council, of a dozen or so British members who headed Indian government departments. He and his chief staff officers were only allowed to work in line with military policy and

⁴² J. Buchan, *Lord Minto* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1924), see chapter 11.

⁴³ Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 84–85.

budgeting set by the Secretary of State, the viceroy and the Council. The Chief of the Indian General Staff also advised the viceroy. He sat on the Imperial Legislative Council, which had around sixty British and Indian members, almost all civilian. They debated government policies, and ratified laws for India that the viceroy put before them.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 244.

2 Small Wars and Regular Warfare

In 1910 Charles Hardinge became the first Liberal viceroy since the 1890s. He had been the British ambassador to St. Petersburg, and most recently Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office in London. ‘Could I have foreseen all that was to happen to me during the following five and a half years in India’, he later wrote, ‘I wonder sometimes to myself whether I could have had the courage to go.’¹ His viceroyalty was mired in military controversies from the start. The question of what types of warfare the Indian army should be kept for proved particularly contentious. ‘The military authorities in this country can see no further than the ends of their noses’, he complained in 1913. ‘There is no doubt that they are extraordinarily tiresome people to deal with, as they are strangely ignorant of foreign affairs, although they think they know all about them.’² As we shall see, up to 1914 he was determined, against military advice, to maintain the Indian army not for regular warfare, but only for small wars.

Small Wars

Small wars were defined by their asymmetry. They were between a regular force and a semi-regular or an irregular one. A force’s type depended on its organisation. Regular forces were the most coherently organised. They belonged to nation or multinational states, and were commonly controlled and paid for by a strong central government with a firm tax base. Some of them, like the British and Indian armies, were filled with professionals. Others, including the German, French, Turkish and Japanese armies, had a mix of professionals and conscripts. Within them all, officers and men were allocated to standardised formations, and armed with general-issue modern weaponry. Regular armies had their own officer

¹ C. Hardinge, *Old Diplomacy: The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst* (London: John Murray, 1947), p. 192.

² CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to A. Nicolson, 22 July 1913.

corps, on the whole obedient to heads of state or political leaders, and their own railway networks for deployment. Europe had the most powerful collection of regular armies. The three greatest were the German, which had a peacetime strength of 800,000 men increasable on mobilisation to 3.8 million, the French, which was similarly sized, and the Russian, the biggest of all.

Most of the semi-regular armies were Asian. They included those of Afghanistan, China and Tibet. Like many regular forces, their men were professionals and conscripts retained by a central government. But they belonged to countries with weaker executives, less-developed tax systems and less industry. Further, their organisation was less coherent – their formations were not standardised, and they were armed only in part with modern weaponry.

Irregular forces contained part-time fighters who did not bow to any central government. In many cases they were impromptu groups of impoverished Asian or African tribesmen who were stirred into action by reactionary religious leaders or tribal chiefs to defend their rural ways of life against foreign influences. They lacked formal organisation to the extent that their fighters were personally responsible for their own food. At best they were armed with contraband rifles, at worst with bows and arrows, spears and stones.

The Indian army waged numerous small wars in the decades before 1914, mainly against irregular enemies. It usually fought alongside British army and Imperial Service units within small Army in India expeditionary forces. The scene of its small wars was occasionally the African lands aside the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, or the Asian realms where emirs, emperors and lamas had avoided European annexation. Yet most often it was British India's 6,000-mile northern border, running from the Makran desert by the Arabian Sea, past the eastern marches of Afghanistan, across the southern face of the Himalayas, and on to jungles of Assam and Burma. The purposes of India's small wars were normally to inflict short and sharp punishment for acts against imperial authority – a raid on British territory, a murder of a government official or a hostile detention of a diplomatic mission – and to facilitate an imposed treaty, commercial or otherwise. The policy beneath them all was ultimately defensive, being to safeguard imperial interests on and near the subcontinent. To that end, the necessity of keeping an Indian army on standby to fight irregular or semi-regular enemies was never in question at the India Office or in the viceroy's Council.

The north-west frontier was India's principal small war theatre. An Indo-Afghan border zone, it was roughly 500 miles long and dozens deep. At its southern end was South Waziristan in the Pathan tribal

areas, which formed the frontier's backbone. The tribal areas extended north-eastwards from Waziristan to the Swat valley and Bajaur, and they enclosed the Indian side of the Khyber Pass; in them lived around one million Pathans of numerous self-ruling tribes that splintered into clans.³ At the frontier's northern end, and outside the tribal areas, lay the princely state of Chitral. The frontier was a labyrinth of mountain passes and valleys, covered by broken and barren ground, rocky and boulder-strewn hills, cliffs, crags and ravines, pine forests and rushing rivers. It had no railways and very few roads; its main thoroughfares were thin footpaths and goat-tracks whose courses were barely distinguishable to anyone without local knowledge.⁴

The Army in India fought a particular type of small war on the frontier: 'hill warfare'. In the words of Sir Charles Callwell, a British service staff officer and the pre-eminent Edwardian theorist on small wars, 'Hill warfare may fairly be said to constitute a special branch of the military art. . . . It is the campaigns of regular troops against hill-men fighting in guerrilla fashion in their own native mountains and in defence of their own homes, campaigns almost the most trying which disciplined soldiers can be called upon to undertake.'⁵

The Pathan tribal areas were the hotbed of hill warfare. They were defended by irregular Pathan fighters who avoided concentrating in large numbers for any decisive battle, and whose agricultural society offered no head of state, capital city or other pivotal political target to seize for an outright victory. Thus in the tribal areas the Army in India sought not to inflict any clear or total defeat, but to compel Pathans into peace settlements that reflected a common desire to stop fighting. They went about this primarily by laying waste to material possessions, such as crops, houses and stone fortifications. 'The destruction of villages and crops may seem at first sight a barbarous method of carrying on war', reasoned Hugh Nevill, in 1914 a captain of the Royal Artillery and the leading young writer on hill warfare,

but it is generally the only way of meting out punishment [to] our predatory and elusive neighbours on the North-West Frontier. They have no trade to dislocate, no stocks and shares to depress, and [they] recognize and respect superior military power. . . . They admit the justice of retribution, but entirely misinterpret its non-exaction. To them vengeance is the prerogative of might, forbearance the corollary of weakness.⁶

³ R. Christensen, 'Tribesmen, Government and Political Economy on the North-West Frontier', in C. Dewey (ed.), *Arrested Development in India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988), p. 179.

⁴ T. Holdich, 'Tirah', *Geographical Journal* 12 (1898), 337–59.

⁵ C. Callwell, *Small Wars*, second edition (London: HMSO, 1906), p. 286.

⁶ See H. Nevill, *Campaigns on the North-West Frontier* (London: John Murray, 1912), p. 347.

The main Indian higher fighting formation for hill warfare was the infantry brigade, from which regimental columns set out in separate directions. The columns would do battle where the tribesmen chose to give it, usually in the form of brief skirmishes between small bodies of men. They were typically supported by one or two mountain artillery guns, in preference to field artillery whose horse-drawn carriages were unmanageable on the terrain. As a rule, the mountain guns operated individually, keeping as close as possible to the infantry to fire at short notice. The senior Indian commanders and their staff officers exercised battle leadership of a personal and permissive kind. The personal element involved their risking their own lives at the head of advances and the rear of withdrawals. This was to amplify their influence at regimental level, which tactically was the most important. The permissive element involved their issuing orders by word of mouth and allowing regiments substantial tactical freedom. Thereby they encouraged the regimental columns to fight flexibly in spread-out company and smaller groups that were essential against the dispersed enemy.

Indian forces' battle casualties in hill warfare were consistently low. This was chiefly because the rifle was the highest form of tribal firepower, and it was rarely afforded opportunities to inflict heavy damage – on the one hand, the tribesmen seldom gathered to deliver concentrated fire; on the other, their Indian and British enemies tended not to cluster in large enough groups for such fire to devastate them.

Imperial troops in the tribal areas had lines of communication that could stretch for miles, with pack mules plodding back and forth in single file carrying 160 pound packs, the ground not being conducive to wheeled transport or any wider stream. To allow the traffic to keep moving, Indian army pioneers and sappers and miners smoothed and widened tribal paths and built new roads. All the while, the lines of communication required careful protection from Pathan plunderers.

The Army in India's other sorts of small wars – in India's north-eastern jungles, on the Tibetan plateau or in African desert and bushland – were in many respects similar to hill warfare. The ground was dense with natural obstacles; the irregular enemies avoided gathering in large numbers for decisive battles and had no artillery; the Indian forces spread out in regions that had few roads and no railways; the battle casualties were low.

British and other Europeans called small wars 'savage' or 'uncivilized' warfare. This was not a comment on their own conduct; it reflected their view that they faced non-white, non-Christian enemies who were not their moral or cultural equals. Such enemies were 'savage' or 'barbaric' because they did not live up to moral or cultural standards that the Europeans liked to perceive in themselves. For example, irregular

enemies might mutilate soldiers they had captured – a clear indication, Europeans supposed, of their predisposition to fits of brutal passion, untempered by enlightened sensibilities of mercy or decency.

Regular Warfare

Regular warfare was the counterpoint to small wars. It saw regular armies fight one another, as they did in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05, or the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. These conflicts showed regular operations to have several features that up to 1914 were widely accepted as distinguishing them from small wars.

Regular wars were generally fought on the understanding that both sides were aiming for a definite victory, or a political decision, to shape a nation's identity, even define its destiny. Opposing armies protected their governments, capital cities and patriotic honour, all of which could be captured or crushed through battle. They were normally deployed in open countryside, in formations larger and more powerfully armed than those in small wars. They fought with divisions as parts of army corps, and army corps as parts of armies; infantry and cavalry were armed with rifles and machine guns, and supported by massed batteries of field and heavier artillery. To maximise the higher formations' offensive effect, as many as possible were manoeuvred in concert to exploit a weak point in enemy defences. Given their firepower and their men's lack of body armour, heavy casualties were routine. For protection in the field, therefore, troops were well advised to dig trenches. These could act either as staging posts during advances, or as the veins of wide defensive lines. Compared to small wars, greater demands upon administrative support, especially wheeled transport and medical care, were inevitable.

Broadly speaking, senior commanders and staffs exercised distanced and prescriptive battle leadership in regular warfare. They were stationed along chains of headquarters stretching up to a few miles from the battlefield, rising in seniority with distance from it. Only then could they gain the perspective to wield their large-scale infantry and artillery in unison, which they did by issuing detailed pre-battle timetables and tactical instructions.

Europeans recognised regular warfare as 'civilised'. Unlike small wars, it was often embarked upon by rival nations sharing certain standards of civil behaviour in peacetime. It followed that it was fought by men who upheld those standards as belligerents. For instance, European states kept civil prisons to help punish criminals in preference to inflicting mutilations or executions; in similar fashion, their armies took prisoner enemy soldiers who were not deliberately harmed once captured, and were kept

in state-sponsored camps until hostilities ended. For Europeans, such conduct was 'civilised' because it typified their senses of moral superiority over non-white or 'savage' peoples who conducted wars otherwise. Indeed it was codified in international agreements, from the first Geneva Convention of 1864 to the Hague Convention of 1907, to which the major European states were signatories. 'Civilized warfare', Hugh Nevill commented, 'is conducted on civilized methods':

In this class of campaign, wounded men are not the same encumbrance as against a savage enemy who gives no quarter and knows not the Hague Convention, for, if absolutely necessary, they may be left on the ground – often to their advantage in the case of some wounds – with the certainty that nothing worse will befall them than being made prisoners of war.⁷

In the early 1900s, most military thinkers took it for granted that all these features would characterise a great European war of the near future. They believed that a decisive victory could be achieved in reasonably short order through offensive manoeuvring in open battle, if an army could achieve a superiority of fire to allow its men, despite heavy casualties, to remain mobile enough to overwhelm defenders in person. They were optimistic that courageous troops would not need to linger for long in trenches. Ultimately, they thought, weight of numbers would be crucial, and the side with the greater national spirit would carry the day: its troops would be the ones with the moral fibre to push on through the worst hail of bullets and bursting shells.⁸

A small minority, including Charles Callwell and James Edmonds, placed a heavier emphasis on the part that trenches might play. In their eyes, men would come under such intense fire that trenches would not simply be temporary expedients, but would shape entire battles. Callwell predicted that attacking troops might have to adapt defensive trench tactics for the offensive, by means of 'a process almost akin to sapping – the seizure of successive positions, and fortifying them till the enemy can be crushed by close-range fire or ousted by a sudden rush across a very short distance'.⁹ Edmonds foresaw something similar, 'making the war one of what may be battles of many days duration called siege operations in the field'.¹⁰

A starker stream of thought doubted whether any decisive victory was possible. Argued above all by the Polish writer Ivan Bloch and

⁷ *Ibid.*, *Campaigns*, p. 312.

⁸ M. Howard, *The Lessons of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 97–126.

⁹ Callwell, *Tactics of Today* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1900), pp. 29–30.

¹⁰ Edmonds, 'The Campaign in Virginia in May and June 1864', *Journal of the Royal Artillery* 35 (1908), 546–47.

shunned by soldiers for its pessimism, it predicted battles not just of long duration because defensive firepower would repeatedly force attackers to a halt in trenches, but of equilibrium because the antagonists would be similarly armed, leading to deadlock. The armies involved, Bloch calculated, would be so vast that their food supply and medical care could buckle.¹¹

The Indian army was not involved as a belligerent in any regular war before 1914. That it should be kept ready to fight a regular war was firmly agreed from the 1890s to 1905 among the Indian government's civilian leaders and their military advisers. They were unanimous that Russia's empire was a grave threat to India's security, that the Russians might launch an expansionist war towards India through southern Persia or Afghanistan, and that if the Russians did so, the Army in India would need to counter-strike to hold them at bay before Home Army reinforcements arrived. Accordingly, the Indian government sanctioned the Army in India's preparation, with some attendant increases in military expenditure, to fight a potential defensive regular war against Russia on or shortly beyond India's north-western border. Further, between 1902 and 1905 Lord Kitchener, as the new British service Indian Commander-in-Chief, instituted India's permanent higher fighting formations. He placed the Northern Army's divisional headquarters along one line of advance through the Punjab and NWFP (pointing at Kabul), and the Southern Army's along another line through Baluchistan (facing Kandahar, Afghanistan's second city, and Persia).¹²

From 1906 to 1909, the consensus that the Army in India should be kept to fight a regular war against the Russians began to pale. Defeat in the Russo-Japanese War had left Russia in no state to attack India, and the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 was a momentous concord over Central Asia. For John Morley, an unusually dictatorial Secretary of State at the India Office from December 1905 to November 1910, these developments snuffed out the possibility of a Russian offensive into southern Persia or Afghanistan and beyond. He was a passionate pacifist, dedicated to social reform as part of Britain's new Liberal government, and committed to reducing Indian military expenditure wherever possible. Consequently he instructed Lord Minto, viceroy from 1905 to 1910, that the Army in India was no longer on standby to fight the Russians, and that the Indian military budget was to

¹¹ M. Howard, *Lessons*, pp. 97–121; and M. Welch, 'The Centenary of the British Publication of Jean de Bloch's *Is War Now Impossible?* (1899–1999)', *War in History* 7 (2003), 273–94.

¹² G. Arthur, *Life of Lord Kitchener*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1920), vol. 2, p. 135; and P. Magnus, *Kitchener* (London: John Murray, 1958), p. 199.

be reduced to a minimum to maintain the Army in India simply for small wars.¹³

Regarding the Russian threat to India, Minto graciously agreed to disagree, being of the opinion that although the chances of a war with Russia had lowered, they had not gone away. As to the reduction of the Indian military budget, he felt compelled to agree. At first Kitchener strongly objected to Morley's policies, but his protests soon ebbed. His later years as India's Commander-in-Chief, up to 1909, saw his reforming energy flag as he lost heart under Morley's financial restraints. The upshot was that by 1907 the policy of keeping the Army in India for anti-Russian operations had effectively been suspended.¹⁴

Kitchener was succeeded by Garrett O'Moore Creagh (Indian army), an Irishman awarded the Victoria Cross in the Second Afghan War of 1878–80. In 1910, Douglas Haig (British army) became the first Chief of the Indian General Staff. Creagh and Haig feared that Germany could soon start a great war to supersede the British Empire as a world power. They suspected Germany might invade France to dominate continental Europe, before looking to expand its influence in Asia towards India in alliance with Ottoman Turkey, most likely by means of the Berlin-Baghdad railway then under construction. They believed that if the Germans and Turks did join in such a war, the British Empire must strike back by committing forces from Britain, India and the Dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand to regular battlefields in Europe or Asia. They thought in terms of maximising the Empire's military strength at decisive points, and of the British army being too small to fight alone.¹⁵ 'If [a British] Expeditionary Force [from England] did join the French [on the continent of Europe], I fear that it would be the end of our Regular Army even if we marched into Berlin with them!', Haig admitted. 'I mean we could not provide for the wastage in such a war by voluntary enlistment [in Britain].'¹⁶ To help prepare the Empire for the German war Creagh and Haig envisaged, they felt that the Army in

¹³ Arthur, *Kitchener*, p. 231–47; J. Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c.1900–1916* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 219; Magnus, *Kitchener*, pp. 230–33; and J. Pollock, *Kitchener* (London: Robinson, 2002), pp. 330–31.

¹⁴ Buchan, *Minto*, see chapter 9; and J. Siegel, *Endgame: Britain, Russia and the Final Struggle for Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 47–49.

¹⁵ IWM, 2/69/70–71: Papers of Field-Marshal Sir H. Wilson, Haig Letters to Wilson, 19 April, 29 June and 2 August 1911; KCL/LHCMA, Papers of Lieutenant-General L. Kiggell: Haig Letters to Kiggell, 5 April, 29 June and 27 September 1911; Creagh, *Studies*, p. 236.

¹⁶ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Papers of Sir Harcourt Butler: Haig Letter to Butler, 10 May 1912; also see Haig to Butler, 30 October 1912.

India – and in particular the Indian service – required urgent increases in funding, size and equipment. They repeatedly told Hardinge as much from 1910 to 1912 after he had replaced Minto as viceroy.¹⁷

Hardinge, however, dismissed Creagh and Haig's views as 'hare-brained . . . fantastic and . . . in complete opposition to the international politics of the day'.¹⁸ He saw no need to ready the Army in India to fight any regular enemy. He accepted that Germany might well attack France as soon as 1913, starting a conflict he spoke of as 'the great Armageddon',¹⁹ but he did not think the prospect was India's concern. The golden rule of his defence policy was that India's strategic responsibilities only concerned direct threats to the subcontinent. He detected no such threat from Germany or Turkey, considering the Turks so corrupt they would not become a major military force until the 1950s at the earliest. Moreover, he judged the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention to have 'removed at least for some years all danger of Russian aggression from the North-West',²⁰ and he saw Japan as a friendly power, which it was by the Anglo-Japanese treaty of 1902, twice renewed by 1911. In his eyes, the external enemies the Army in India needed to prepare for were the Pathan frontier tribes, the Afghans, and conceivably the Chinese.²¹

Hardinge's driving viceregal ambition was to increase public spending on social reform, partly to fulfil Liberal ideals on welfare, and partly to boost his government's popularity with Indians, especially those of the Imperial Legislative Council. He wanted to decrease the Army in India's budget, which in 1910–11 amounted to almost 50 per cent of the Indian government's annual expenditure, or three times its education, famine relief and irrigation budgets combined. His big idea here was to cut 25,000 Indian troops on the grounds that the Army in India was not on standby to fight any regular enemy, and therefore the Indian army could be safely reduced.²²

Hardinge's views were supported in 1911 at the India Office, where Lord Crewe had succeeded Morley. Crewe agreed with Hardinge's strategic assessments and financial aims, and in any case opposed on pacifist principle the development of the Army in India to fight a regular war

¹⁷ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 254; and D. Goold, 'Lord Hardinge and the Mesopotamia Expedition and Inquiry, 1914–1917', *Historical Journal* 19 (1976), 921.

¹⁸ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to G. Allen, 12 January 1914.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Hardinge Letter to A. Nicolson, 15 October 1911.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Hardinge Letter to W. Nicholson, 4 October 1911.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Hardinge Letter to Sir E. Grey, 4 July 1911; and IWM, 2/69/70/71: Wilson Papers, Haig Letter to Wilson, 29 June 1911.

²² I. Beckett, *The Victorians at War* (London: Hambledon, 2003), p. 106; and B. Busch, *Hardinge of Penshurst* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1980), pp. 168–95.

alongside other British Empire armies. He believed that the more prepared armies were for war, the more likely governments were to wage it, and as a result the peacetime preparation of armies for war was dangerous and must be kept to a minimum.²³

The civilian rejection of Creagh and Haig's hopes for Indian military reforms was also propelled by the 'colour bar' principle. This was an incoherent notion that non-white troops in British employment should not fight a white enemy. Its nub was an anxiety that if non-white troops were allowed to confront and kill white men as equals in war, the prestige of whites as the world's dominant racial class would be punctured. It had been invoked in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78, when Indian troops had been deployed to Cyprus and Malta on the understanding they would not fight any white men, and in the 1899–1902 South African War, in which the Indian army was denied any combatant role against the white Boers.²⁴ The prospect of shelving the principle was of course entailed in India's preparation for a Russian war up to 1906 or so, but the issue was blurred here owing not only to Indian troops' unquestionable responsibility to defend India from external attack, but also to the presence of mixed race or non-white troops in the Russian army. Still, Herbert Asquith, as prime minister, was adamant in 1911 that the colour bar principle would prevent Indian divisions from joining any British Empire forces that might fight the Germans in Europe in the near future – 'he would never, in any circumstances, agree to such a use of Indian troops', he assured Crewe. This was relayed to Hardinge. He, like Crewe, took it as proof of the needlessness of preparing the Army in India for regular warfare.²⁵

From 1910 to 1912, the Indian government's civilian leaders therefore ruled out the Indian army fighting a regular war, and they insisted on military reductions. Hardinge directed Creagh and Haig to focus on maintaining the Army in India for internal security duties and for small wars on the north-west frontier. 'It is hardly necessary', he decreed in 1911, 'to discuss possible eventualities connected with Germany, Turkey, and other Powers which [Creagh and Haig] are of the opinion 'may necessitate in the future an increase in the Army in India'. . . . There is no likelihood in the immediate future of any operations against Foreign Powers [other than Afghanistan and possibly China].'²⁶ Haig was aghast. After it became plain that neither the viceroy nor the Indian councillors

²³ Spender and Asquith, *Asquith*, vol. 1, p. 346–49.

²⁴ L. Fraser, *India under Curzon & After* (London: Heinemann, 1911), p. 412.

²⁵ Busch, *Hardinge*, p. 195.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 194; and Creagh, *Studies*, p. 237.

were interested in his ideas of reform for a great war, he resigned his seat in the Imperial Legislative Council. 'I am distressed at finding a leader of the Empire like Hardinge so blind to the designs of Germany. What is to be done to awake the political leader to the danger which is so close?'²⁷

In 1913, Hardinge and Crewe's military policies were endorsed by two official committees. On the subcontinent, the Army in India Committee, set up by Hardinge to report on his government's military obligations, concluded that India should not be called on to keep troops to fight a regular war abroad. In London, the Committee of Imperial Defence, an advisory body to the Cabinet, considered how the Army in India might co-operate with other Empire forces involved in a major war in Europe. It accepted an Indian government answer that two Indian infantry divisions and an Indian cavalry brigade could be made available for overseas duty, but only to fill garrisons in Africa and the Mediterranean in order to release British battalions for the continent.²⁸

By the turn of July 1914, Creagh and Haig's successors in India – respectively, Beauchamp Duff (Indian army) and Percy Lake (of the British service and an ex-Chief of the Canadian General Staff) – had sparked no major changes to Indian military policy, over which Hardinge and Crewe still reigned.²⁹

²⁷ IWM, 2/69/70/71: Wilson Papers, Haig Letter to Wilson, 19 April 1911.

²⁸ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 1, pp. 12–13.

²⁹ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 254.

3 Strengths

‘A former Viceroy’, Lord Curzon wrote as one in 1917, ‘must have enjoyed many opportunities during his term of office in India of making the acquaintance and realizing the superb qualities of the Indian Army’:

During the past half-century, the foreign campaigns in which that Army has been employed, greatly to its credit and glory, have extended from Egypt and even Ashanti on the West to China on the East. . . . Before [1914] it was the pride of the Indian Army . . . that it rescued the Legations at Peking in 1900, and that on its banners were inscribed the names of hard-fought engagements in almost every part of the African and Asiatic Continents.¹

Having sanctioned several of the pre-war Indian army’s campaigns, Curzon understood its strengths. These were threefold: a wealth of high-quality regiments, a good mobilisation capability and a proficiency in deploying overseas. They all reflected great improvements after 1897 in the Army in India’s organisation for small wars and for regular warfare.

The Indian Regiments

At the outbreak of the First World War, the majority of the Indian regiments were internally cohesive – within them, the officers and men were conditioned to work hard with, and for, each other. To understand the tactical or lower-level fighting qualities characteristic of their cohesion, it is necessary to trace their development through campaign experiences and training. It is best to do so over two periods, from 1897 to 1908, and then from 1909 to 1914.

In the mid-1890s, the Army in India’s regiments were unevenly armed and trained. Its Indian troops, owing to the Indian government’s policy of restricting their firepower to reduce mutinous potential, had inferior rifles. They were issued with breech-loading Martini-Henrys dating from the 1870s that used black, smoke-giving powder, could fire a dozen

¹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps* pp. ix–x.

rounds of .450 round-nosed lead bullets per minute, and were accurate up to 1,500 yards. The British regiments, however, were armed with virtually state-of-the-art .303 Lee-Metfords. These used smokeless powder that did not betray a shooter's position, had an internal magazine, fired around 20 rounds a minute, and were accurate up to 2,000 yards. For their Lee-Metfords, the British troops were given Indian government-made dum-dum bullets – those without a metal jacket covering the bullet nose so they mushroomed on impact to create large wounds, giving them more stopping power than the Martini-Henry's solid lead bullets.² The British regiments were armed with Maxim machine guns; Indian regiments were not.³ Within the Army in India's artillery, the Indian and British mountain batteries both had 2.5-inch muzzle-loaders that fired black-powder 7-pound shrapnel shells, and broke into parts portable by mule.⁴

In terms of training, India's regiments were of two kinds. First, there were the units of the Frontier Force, an elite body exclusive to the Indian army. It had eleven infantry regiments, counting the Guides infantry. They had been permanently stationed on the north-west frontier since the 1850s. Through their experience of fighting the Pathan tribes, they had developed their own hill warfare light infantry skills. These, as we shall see, made them specialists in fighting flexibly in small groups or as individuals. The Frontier Force also had its own mountain artillery batteries, with which its infantry were well-accustomed to working, and five cavalry units.⁵

Second, there were the non-Frontier Force units. A small minority of the non-pioneer Indian battalions with north-west frontier experience had acquired some sophisticated hill warfare skirmishing skills (though not to the level of the Frontier Force). The remaining non-pioneer battalions – Indian and British – had not so developed, having not been stationed much or at all near the frontier.⁶ A number of them shared good musketry standards based on innovative rifle-range training that had emphasised hitting fast-moving targets. But on the whole, their

² W. Churchill, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, new edition (London: Thomas Nelson, 1916), p. 326.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴ C. Graham, *The History of the Indian Mountain Artillery* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1957), p. 90.

⁵ D. MacDiarmid, *The Life of Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson* (London: Constable, 1923), p. 71; and Moreman, 'Passing it On', *The Army in India and Frontier Warfare, 1914–39*, in K. Roy, *War and Society*, pp. 275–7.

⁶ C. Wylly, *From the Black Mountain to Waziristan, Being an Account of the Border Countries and the More Turbulent of the Tribes Controlled by the North-West Frontier Province, And of Our Military Relations with Them in the Past* (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. vii.

training was based on relatively unimaginative manuals common to the Home Army and the Army in India: the ‘drill-books’. The drill-books provided tactical training through general-purpose and rigid routines. These, inculcated on cantonment parade grounds, prescribed slow and steady advances across flat ground by means of closely formed companies in wide and thin lines that might pause during an attack if a ‘kneel’ order was given, and retirements simply in ‘quick-time’, with each man maintaining an ‘upright position’. Like the Army in India’s artillery training in general, they did not encourage much infantry-artillery collaboration beyond ad hoc arrangements on the spot. Most of the pioneer and sappers and miners units had well-honed technical abilities. India’s cavalry training, meanwhile, was preoccupied with mounted charges to rout an enemy in open country.⁷

In the Pathan tribal areas in June 1897, 10 of the autonomous tribes, fielding 100,000 fighting men, joined in an anti-British jihad. They were roused by charismatic clerics who warned that Christian imperialism was encroaching on their lands and endangering their way of life – ‘Pashtunwali’, or the way of the Pathans, a bundle of mores of honour, loyalty, courage, hospitality and revenge, all to be carefully observed by the individual. They laid waste to a string of government forts on the fringe of British-administered territory, including some guarding the Khyber Pass. To re-establish the forts and punish the offending tribes, the Indian government was quick to call on the Army in India.⁸

The Tirah was the focus of government retaliation. A land of 900 square miles and to the south-west of Khyber, it lay at the heart of the tribal areas. It belonged to two of the leading belligerent tribes, the Orakzais and the Afridis. The Tirah’s terrain was as difficult as any on the frontier. It was unmapped by white men, who had only visited its extremities. ‘[Mountain ranges] and watersheds shut it off from [British India]’, wrote one British cartographer. ‘It is this inaccessibility which has hitherto saved Tirah from the attentions of European explorers. It is a species of *cul-de-sac*, and interesting as it may have been in the field of speculative geography, its gates have hitherto been too well guarded for the explorer to do more than just look over the hedge.’⁹ In light of the Tirah’s historical

⁷ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 182; H. Hutchinson, *The Campaign in Tirah 1897–1898* (New York: Macmillan, 1898), pp. 226, 229–21 and 235–36; J. Lee, *A Soldier’s Life: General Sir Ian Hamilton* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 31–32; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, pp. 96–7.

⁸ A. S. Ahmed, *Pukhtun Economy and Society* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 67; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 210; and C. Tripodi, *Edge of Empire: The British Political Officer and Tribal Administration on the North-West Frontier, 1877–1947* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p. 86.

⁹ Holdich, ‘Tirah’, 337.

seclusion, the British intended to ransack it comprehensively. ‘The Indian government’, Charles Callwell commented, ‘decided that this was no occasion for half-measures’:

The acts of aggression committed by the Afridis [and] the Orakzais had been too insulting [and] outrageous to be met by a retaliation confined to punitive expeditions of the normal kind into the outer valleys peopled by the recalcitrant clans. These freebooters of the mountains had boasted that the ‘purdah’ concealing the Tirah could not be lifted. They were to be taught, once and for all, that they were grievously mistaken.¹⁰

The Tirah Field Force (TFF) was created for the job. Led by William Lockhart – a Scotsman of the Indian service, and previously the commander of the Frontier Force – the TFF had a total of 11,000 British and 23,000 Indian soldiers. It was spearheaded by two infantry divisions, each of which had brigades of four non-pioneer battalions, half Indian and half British. With them were Indian pioneers and sappers and miners, three Indian and three British mountain artillery batteries of 7-pounders, but hardly any cavalry, the terrain as was usual on the frontier precluding much cavalry action.¹¹

The TFF was to enter the Tirah from the south, at the Dargai Heights, a pass at 6,750 feet on the rim of Orakzai territory. From Dargai, its two divisions were to head directly north for twenty miles along a single line of advance to the Maidán, the central Afridi valley. By way of exit from the Tirah, they were then to sweep eastwards for forty miles. The 1st Division was to take a southern route along the Mastura valley, and the 2nd a northern one along the Bara. They were to retake the Khyber forts at the end of the valleys before going home. While in the Tirah, the TFF was to march by day and spend nights in central camps. From its main lines of advance, ‘flying’ brigade punitive columns – those temporarily shorn of administrative support, in aid of their mobility – were to branch off to find tribesmen to fight and things to wreck. They were to leave camp early in the morning and return by dusk.¹²

By early October 1897, the Orakzais and Afridis had learned that a large imperial force was about to attack. To discuss their response, the majority of their clan headmen met in Afridi Tirah, in an atmosphere electrified by jihadist mullahs who preached of looming annexation.¹³

¹⁰ Callwell, *Tirah 1897* (London: Constable, 1911), pp. 12–13.

¹¹ Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 438–39; and Hutchinson, *Tirah*, p. 37.

¹² Callwell, *Tirah*, pp. 1–27.

¹³ IOR, L/MIL/5/727: ‘Minutes of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence’ (1907), p. 8; R. Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War: How and Why They Fight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 156–60; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 210; A. Rauf, ‘Pan-Islamism and the North-West Frontier Province of British India,

‘A most warlike tone prevailed at this conference’, Callwell gathered, ‘an oath was taken upon the Koran to the effect that if any individual tribe or section were to come to terms with the Indian Government and were to make an agreement which did not include the entire coalition, then that tribe or section was to be publicly cursed as a foe to Islam.’¹⁴

The TFF broke into the Tirah at the Dargai Heights on 18 October. Initially it fought the Orakzais, who had around 12,500 fighters, during its brief passage through their lands in south-western Tirah. From early November to the end of the campaign, it fought the Afridis in central and north-eastern areas. They had some 15,000 fighters, among whom the Zakkas, the largest of the eight Afridi clans, were foremost.¹⁵ Although neither tribe had artillery, they did have some small arms. Pathan men commonly owned their own ‘jezzails’ – long-barrelled, tribal gunsmith-made muskets that fired rough bullets several hundred yards. They took great pride in using their jezzails accurately, something many of them could do with eyesight accustomed to focusing on distant targets in their hills and mountains.¹⁶ The Orakzais and Afridis also had breech-loading rifles, mostly in Afridi possession: approximately 1,500 Sniders, 2,000 Martini-Henrys and 200 Lee-Metfords. Generally these rifles, like the tribesmen’s substantial stocks of dum-dum bullets and other ammunition for them, either were obtained illicitly from Indian and British regiments in the Punjab and elsewhere, or were assembled by the tribal gunsmiths out of black market spare parts. The Sniders were a generation older than the Martini-Henry; they used black-powder cartridges, fired heavy .577-inch lead bullets that easily splintered bones, and were accurate up to 1,000 yards.¹⁷

As the TFF approached, the Orakzais and Afridis evacuated their elderly, women and children to local caves or Afghanistan, leaving the Tirah mostly deserted. They then set about making careful attacks, almost all of which were Afridi enterprises. Their preferred targets were the brigade punitive columns. They habitually pursued these in the same fashion. They allowed the columns moving out from the TFF’s main lines of advance to go uncontested over passes and up valley floors. All the while, they kept abreast of them on nearby ridges and hills, working in

1897–1918’, *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 12 (2007), 25–27; and A. Yate, *Lieutenant-Colonel John Haughton* (London: John Murray, 1900), pp. 221–23.

¹⁴ Callwell, *Tirah*, p. 33.

¹⁵ These are conservative estimates; the exact numbers are unknown. See Holdich, ‘Tirah’, 359; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 276.

¹⁶ S. Blacker, *On Secret Patrol in High Asia* (London: John Murray, 1922), p. 111.

¹⁷ *British Medical Journal* 1:1942 (1898), 797; and Moreman, ‘The Arms Trade and the North-West Frontier Pathan Tribes, 1890–1914’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22 (1994), 188–201.

‘lashkars’, or war parties, of between 25 and 300 men, armed with their breech-loading and magazine rifles, and led by ‘maliks’. A lashkar usually tracked one particular punitive column, using techniques cultivated in the tribesmen’s own tribal or clan wars. Its members widely scattered themselves on both sides of a punitive column, moving speedily and all but imperceptibly. Each man wore yellow-grey cotton clothes that acted as camouflage, and light shoes made out of dried grass and hay. Carrying just a rifle, a few cartridges, a knife or a small sword and a bit of food, he scampered softly across the terrain, making deft use of boulders, crags and crevices for cover and concealment.

Once a punitive column began to withdraw from a locale, usually in the late afternoon to retire to a central camp for the night, the lashkar would make sudden and sharp attacks. Its tribesmen targeted a column’s most vulnerable companies that strayed onto exposed or low ground. Closing in fast, they poured in rapid rifle fire from all around. Many were expert marksmen. They had been well-schooled in jezzail musketry (and in a few cases in Martini-Henry marksmanship if they had served in Indian government militias or the Indian army itself), and they were fast learners with their breech-loaders or Lee-Metfords. In one Afridi attack, a lieutenant of the 1st/2nd Gurkhas taking cover behind a large rock showed a fraction of his head above it; an Afridi instantly shot him dead through the brain. During another attack, a captain of the same regiment was hit full in the left shoulder by an Afridi-fired dum-dum bullet, ripping off his arm. Although the tribesmen might charge to fight hand-to-hand with their knives and swords, most often they withdrew after a brief fire-fight to preserve their strength.¹⁸

Well-concealed Afridi snipers using Martini-Henrys and Lee-Metfords were active day and night. One Afridi sniping trick involved a decoy sneaking up to a TFF camp sentry. The decoy then created a disturbance to get the sentry to show himself; once the sentry did so, an Afridi sniper shot him.¹⁹ Another Afridi ruse was pretending to desert the tribal cause. Five Afridis did this by surrendering to the TFF while it was encamped in southern Tirah, in the hope of escaping with valuable intelligence. ‘If they reckoned that we should receive them with open arms, pat them on the back, and give them liberty to come and go as friends’, wrote

¹⁸ Callwell, *Small Wars*, 289 and 343, and *Tirah*, p. 34–35; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 132, 140, 146–67, 219 and 233; Moreman, ‘The British and Indian Armies and North-West Frontier Warfare, 1849–1914’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20 (1992), 40, and *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), pp. 68–70; and Yate, *Haughton*, p. 225.

¹⁹ T. Holdich, *Indian Borderland, 1880–1900* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 361; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 77 and 190; and Yate, *Haughton*, pp. 151 and 176.

one British officer at the time, ‘they miscalculated, for the five men were carefully blind-folded while being conducted into Sir William Lockhart’s presence, and are detained as prisoners pending the development of events.’²⁰

As a rule, the Orakzais and Afridis took no prisoners. Traditionally, they either welcomed visitors to the Tirah as honoured guests, or rejected them as unwelcome outsiders. They tended to regard invading imperial forces as the worst form of the latter, as representatives of an alien cultural power that threatened the Pathan way. To deny that power’s authority while expressing the permanence of Pashtunwali, they often denied quarter to the men of the TFF, deliberately shooting at the wounded to kill them, and exterminating individuals or small groups whom they trapped. Further, they ritually mutilated the bodies, dead or alive, of dozens of Indian and British soldiers whose misfortune it was to fall into their hands. Such mutilating – involving knives, slashing and dismemberments – was an established form of Pathan retribution; it was common in tribal conflicts and in times of jihad. ‘The Hague Convention’, Hugh Nevill remarked, ‘is to them not even a name.’²¹

Still, the Afridis did not necessarily mutilate TFF soldiers. Whether they chose to could vary from one lashkar to another, depending on the temperature of jihadist feelings.²² Moreover, they occasionally took TFF prisoners. Three or four such instances are on record. For example, shortly before Christmas an Afridi lashkar held hostage a sergeant of the 1st/Royal Scots Fusiliers after he had tumbled into a ravine. They seem to have held hopes of ransoming him, or of using him as a bargaining chip, perhaps to save their homes from being razed. He was held for six weeks while the terms of his release were negotiated with British political (or intelligence) officers. Before he was returned safely, he was well treated under guard in Afridi houses. He was fed regularly with rice, maize and goat meat, and was allowed to play with his captors’ children who had returned from hiding. The Afridis also let him take delivery of illustrated magazines from his brigadier.²³

²⁰ Hutchinson, *Tirah*, p. 83.

²¹ *British Medical Journal* 1:1942 (1898), 796–97; Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 333, and *Tirah*, p. 35; C. Enriquez, *Pathan Borderland* (Calcutta: Thacker, 1910), pp. 78–79; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 123 and 228; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 347; O. Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 154 and 202; L. J. Shadwell, *Lockhart’s Advance through Tirah* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1899), pp. 22 and 40; and Yate, *Haughton*, pp. 73, 128, 139 and 158–59.

²² Yate, *Haughton*, pp. 204–05 and 222.

²³ *The Age*, 18 January 1898, p. 5; and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 4 February 1898, p. 3. Buchan, *The History of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, 1678–1918* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1925), see chapter XI; L. James, *The Indian Frontier War:*

At around the same time, another captured British sergeant was given Afridi medical attention. He had a bad stomach wound caused by a bullet that had passed right through him. Onto the bullet's entry and exit points the Afridis pressed the two halves of a freshly killed chicken, which they bound tight with a bandage. They then handed him to British doctors at a TFF camp, advising that the chicken should not be unwrapped. Their suggestion was not taken seriously, and the chicken was removed. The sergeant soon died from infection of his wound, having previously shown signs of recovery. On reflection, the doctors realised that the Afridis had probably tried to do him a kindness. The chicken might have had an antibacterial effect, and been applied as a standard Afridi treatment to prevent infection in gunshot wounds.²⁴

The TFF had three Frontier Force regiments in the 53rd Sikhs, 56th Punjabis and 5th Gurkhas. Their companies were trained in the best way to protect the columns advancing on the Tirah's valley floors – this was to keep flanking high ground clear of the enemy by controlling it at particular points. The 53rd Sikhs did so expertly in small, dispersed groups that supported one another without becoming too vulnerable or short of breath through over-scattering.²⁵ The Frontier Force regiments also provided adept rearguards as columns withdrew from valleys, employing elaborate techniques to protect not only their column's companies on valley floors, but also themselves; they worked in successive lines that fell back using a mix of independent and volley rifle fire, before sprinting away together at the appropriate moment to evade oncoming tribesmen. The 'scouts' of the 5th Gurkhas, a select subgroup of the regiment containing sixty or so men, attached to whom were a similar number of scouts drawn from the 3rd Gurkhas, performed rearguards with particular flair. Wearing trousers cut off at the knee to aid mobility, they ran at pace in zigzags in leaps and bounds across the steepest and most broken ground, 'with all the agility of mountain cats (or Afridis)', wrote a British map-maker who was under their guard.²⁶ They were peculiar to their regiments, having been specially trained to be self-reliant in the hardest hill warfare duties by

Being an Account of the Mohmund and Tirah Expeditions 1897 (London: Heinemann, 1898), pp. 272–73; and Yate, *Haughton*, p. 204.

²⁴ A. Haldane, *A Soldier's Saga* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1948), pp. 113–14; and Holdich, *Indian Borderland*, p. 364.

²⁵ Hutchinson, *Tirah*, p. 87.

²⁶ Quoting T. Holdich, 'Tirah', 359. Also see W. Condon, *The Frontier Force Rifles* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1953), p. 22; Holdich, 'Tirah', 359; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 230 and 239–40; and R. D. Palsokar, *History of the 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force), 1858–1991*, 3 vols. (Shillong: Private Publisher, 1991), vol. 3, p. 34.

Charles Bruce of the 5th Gurkhas and Arthur Tillard of the 3rd, their supervisors in the Tirah.²⁷

The TFF's Frontier Force troops were also expert at clearing tribal snipers. One morning, a detachment of the 53rd Sikhs worked its way up a cliff face high above a pass to dislodge Afridi snipers pestering Lockhart's headquarters. Night after night the Gurkha scouts were sent out to stalk tribal snipers. Barefoot, in disguise and with just their rifles, a few rounds of ammunition and their khukuris, they succeeded in surprising and killing several. 'They treated the tribesmen in their own coin', wrote Callwell, 'they were up to every trick, and they made themselves a terror to the enemy'.²⁸ In Bruce's opinion, 'they were almost as good as the extremely clever and active enemy himself'.²⁹

A few of the TFF's non-Frontier Force battalions with previous frontier experience fought well at times.³⁰ However, the majority, consisting largely of British army units educated in drill-book dogma, made repeated mistakes. They carried out manoeuvres that were 'acts of madmen', as Bruce put it.³¹ Their greatest blunders came during small column withdrawals from valleys after punitive sorties. The 1st/Northamptons suffered a minor disaster one evening as they made their way back from Saran Sar, a pass at 8,575 feet, to their camp at the Maidán. In the fading light, they chose a path along the bottom of a narrow, winding ravine. In doing so, they broke contact with the rest of their brigade, and left the overlooking, tree-covered ground free. 'It was a very natural mistake for a battalion to make which was unpractised in hill warfare', reflected Callwell, 'and which had taken the field without receiving any instructions as to the tactical methods which ought to be employed in operations of this peculiar kind.'³² The Afridis tracking the Northamptons punished the error immediately. They took advantage of the vacant high ground to inflict sixty-two casualties, including one detachment of an officer and ten men whom they killed to a man and mutilated.³³

²⁷ C. Bruce, *Himalayan Wanderer* (London: Maclehose, 1934), p. 154; Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 305, and *Tirah*, p. 161; and Woodyatt, *History of the 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles, 1815–1927* (London: Philip Allan, 1929), p. 70.

²⁸ Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 345, and *Tirah*, p. 161; Holdich, 'Tirah', 359; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 169 and 239–40; and Yate, *Haughton*, pp. 224–25.

²⁹ Bruce, *Wanderer*, p. 154.

³⁰ Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 305.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³² Callwell, *Tirah*, p. 88.

³³ IOR, L/MIL/7/15882: 'Court of Enquiry into the Circumstances Attending the Losses Sustained by the Northamptonshire Regiment in Tirah on 9 November 1897 (4 January 1898)'; Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 343; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 290; and Woodyatt, *3rd Queen*

That night, William Lockhart gave some words of advice to the Northamptons on parade. ‘We must remember’, he said, ‘that we are opposed to perhaps the best skirmishers, and the best natural rifle shots, in the world, and that the country they inhabit is the most difficult on the face of the globe’:

The enemy’s strength lies in his thorough knowledge of the ground, which enables him to watch all our movements unperceived, and to take advantage of every height and every ravine. Our strength, on the other hand, lies in our discipline, controlled fire, and mutual support. Our weakness is our ignorance of the country, and the consequent tendency of small bodies to straggle and get detached. The moral of all this is that careful touch must be maintained, and that if by mischance small parties do find themselves alone they should as much as possible stick to the open, and shun ravines and broken ground, where they must fight at a disadvantage, and run every risk of being ambuscaded and cut off. I trust that we may soon meet the enemy and wipe out all old scores with him, and I am confident that when that time comes you will all behave with a steady courage worthy of the best traditions of your corps. In the meantime there is no occasion to be depressed because some of us have been surprised, outnumbered, and overwhelmed on bad ground.³⁴

On several occasions when non-Frontier Force battalions clumsily brought on ambushes as the 1st/Northamptons did at Saran Sar, they floundered further with the problem of evacuating their casualties. Their men knew not to expect any Orakzai or Afridi mercy for these, and so the unwounded among them were quick to try to carry the wounded and killed to safety. But they had not been trained to do this efficiently, and they created vulnerable clusters of men carrying men, accompanied by others attempting to guard them. ‘The removal of wounded men is especially difficult owing to the nature of the ground’, remarked Callwell. ‘Every wounded man creates a little knot of men which offers the sniper a favourable target, one injured man thus begets others, and the progress of that part of the force in close contact with the enemy, becomes seriously – sometimes fatally – delayed.’³⁵ This happened most disastrously to the 2nd/Yorkshires (Green Howards) at Shin Kamar in eastern Tirah. Two of their companies, under fierce attack at close quarters, became so encumbered by their casualties that they ceased to function as fighting units; they retreated in disarray and abandoned their dead, never to be

Alexandra’s Own Gurkha Rifles, p. 72. Similar ravine trouble befell some Indian troops of the TFF; for instance, see Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 333.

³⁴ Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 146–47.

³⁵ Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 224, 288, 311 and 319, and *Tirah*, p. 87; and Moreman, ‘North-West Frontier Warfare’, 41–57, and *Army in India*, pp. 68–72.

recovered. The episode cost a total of fifty-nine casualties, twenty-seven of them killed.³⁶

The Afridis regularly fell upon the TFF's lines of communication where they spotted under-protected flanks. Their chief victims here were non-Frontier Force units that allowed their regimental transport to march in convoy after dark without outlying guards. One night near the Maidán, for example, a band of Zakkas sprung from the roofs of some houses as a convoy of the 1st/Queen's (West Surreys) passed on the road below. They relieved the regiment of 100,000 rounds of ammunition, a cache of Lee-Metfords, and 350 kits. 'The baggage guard of the Queen's, which was heavily beset for a time, suffered seven casualties', Callwell noted, 'some 70 ponies, moreover, stampeded and were lost':

[This] nocturnal episode could only be described as untoward from every point of view. [It] had a bad moral effect; and [it] encouraged the Zakkas, who are amongst the most hardened and dextrous marauders on the Indian frontier, to persist in their harassing enterprises. . . . The comparatively easy capture of spoil so highly prized as rifles and ammunition no doubt helped to determine the Zakkas in continuing a guerrilla warfare against the Field Force.³⁷

The non-Frontier Force battalions' fighting nadir came in December 1897, when the 2nd Division was run ragged for a week on its march down the Bara valley. In heavy snow, sleet and rain, as the temperature fell to minus 29°C, the campaign's largest concentration of Afridis dominated the high ground, darting along ridges and making persistent attacks. By the end of the month, the division had lost several hundred men killed and wounded, and many times more animals had been shot.³⁸ 'Regiments new to this savage mountain warfare, which have only practised drill-book methods of attack and retirement, find themselves seriously handicapped', grumbled one British army officer. 'The drill-book makes no allowance for a terrain in which the activity of a goat is necessary for the individual soldier. . . . It was not written for frontier fighting, yet it is the guide for us all in India, as in England.'³⁹

The TFF's mountain guns were busy throughout the campaign. Typically they worked individually, bursting shrapnel over enemy-occupied ground ahead of advancing infantry, or smashing Afridi houses. They consistently struggled with two problems. First, their black-powder shells gave off large puffs of smoke, warning tribesmen to take cover behind

³⁶ Hutchison, *Tirah*, pp. 217–18.

³⁷ Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 319, and *Tirah*, pp. 76–77.

³⁸ Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 69, 216, 229–31; Palsokar, *5th Gorkha*, p. 34; Shadwell, *Advance*, p. 141; C. Wylly, *Black Mountain to Waziristan*, p. 322; and Yate, *Haughton*, p. 199.

³⁹ Hutchinson, *Tirah*, p. 229.

rocks, thus nullifying a shell's effect.⁴⁰ The second problem was infantry-artillery co-operation. On 20 October, the Dargai Heights were held by an abnormally large gathering of 8,000 tribesmen, mostly Orakzais, lodged behind tall rocks. The pass could only be taken by frontal assault across open and steep ground. In the late morning, Indian and British battalions attacked with artillery support that was intermittent and badly synchronised with the infantry advance, leaving the tribesmen almost untroubled. 'Rarely in the course of [Army in India] campaigns against irregular antagonists', observed Callwell,

have [troops] been called upon to undertake a more awkward task than traversing those few yards [at Dargai] under the converging fire of swarms of tribesmen shooting down at almost point-blank range from behind excellent cover. . . . A score of rifles were directed on each individual, and the gallant officers and men [were] wiped out under the stream of lead.⁴¹

The assault failed fast. The casualties amounted to thirty-one killed and ninety seven wounded, chiefly among the 2nd/1st Gurkhas and the 1st/Dorsets. The mistake of insufficient shellfire was realised, so that a follow-up and successful infantry effort was helped by three minutes of rapid, concentrated fire from twenty-four mountain guns. Even then the artillery fire's synchronisation with the infantry was wanting because its stop signalled the infantry's start; it did not maximise its effect by continuing until the infantry were so close to the tribal position that they became endangered by the shells. Although the second assault at Dargai was better than the first, both showed a shortfall in infantry-artillery thinking.⁴² Other incidents in the Tirah revealed the same thing. Often while the mountain guns were firing, their battery commanders were approached by infantry officers with ad hoc and inexpert suggestions as to what their guns should do. 'There is a first principle', wrote one of them,

which wants to be widely known and strictly observed by all [in the TFF], but more especially by Staff Officers. It is this: Don't speak to the C.O. of a battery when his guns are in action, any more than you would speak to the man at the wheel. They all do it! and I had to explain, firmly to one man who assailed me with suggestions, that with only four guns I really could not fire at more than six different objects at one and the same time!⁴³

⁴⁰ C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 110; and Yate, *Haughton*, p. 225.

⁴¹ Callwell, *Tirah*, pp. 53–54.

⁴² Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 154, 160 and 376, and *Tirah*, pp. 55–56; and Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 71–72.

⁴³ Hutchinson, *Tirah*, p. 238.

By the campaign's close in March 1898, the TFF had left many a tower of smoke billowing above ransacked tribal homesteads, retaken the Khyber forts, and pressured the belligerent Orakzai and Afridi elders into truces. Further, its non-Frontier Force battalions had learned things about hill warfare, and their tactical performance had improved a little. Its British officers, however, spoke not of a victory, but of a draw or a defeat. They agreed that the TFF – Frontier Force units apart – had been 'worsted' far too often.⁴⁴ 'To enter the mountains to attack an Afridi', mullied one British service officer, 'is to jump into water to catch a fish.'⁴⁵

In total, the TFF had lost 1,250 casualties, and the tribesmen far fewer, no more than 300 or so.⁴⁶ Indeed, before it had left the Tirah, some of the TFF's battalions had become exhausted and had to be replaced; low levels of physical fitness had been particularly noticeable among its British units.⁴⁷ Its sister punitive forces, which were smaller, had fared similarly in other parts of the tribal areas, at the cost of 1,100 men.⁴⁸ One-third of all the imperial forces' casualties had been killed, largely because of Pathan killing of wounded and captured.⁴⁹

The Army in India's mixed tactical performance in the Tirah and elsewhere on the frontier ignited a great debate on its fighting fitness. The debate was driven by assumptions that there would be further campaigns in the tribal areas, most likely against the Pathans alone, but possibly against them in alliance with the Russians and Afghans. Either way, it was clear that India's forces were not thoroughly prepared. That they should be was agreed from 1899 to 1905 between two Conservative Secretaries of State at the India Office, Curzon as the Conservative viceroy, and three Indian Commanders-in-Chief (the latter were Lockhart before he died

⁴⁴ IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Correspondence of Sir George Roos-Keppel: D 613/3, 'North-West Frontier' (13 April 1916); Bruce, *Wanderer*, p. 154; A. Deshpande, 'Military Reform in the Aftermath of the Great War', in P. S. Gupta and A. Deshpande (eds.), *The British Raj and Its Indian Armed Forces* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 180; H. Gough, *Soldiering On* (London: A. Barker, 1954), p. 61; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 166–67; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 307; Yate, 'North West Frontier Warfare', *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute of India* 42 (1898), 1191, and *Haughton*, p. 215; and H. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of Forty-Eight Years' Service* (London: John Murray, 1925), p. 48.

⁴⁵ Moreman, 'North-West Frontier Warfare', 40.

⁴⁶ Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 345; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 73 and 246; and Yate, *Haughton*, p. 215.

⁴⁷ Yate, *Haughton*, p. 226; and J. Fortescue, *The Empire and the Army* (London: Cassell, 1928), pp. 302–3.

⁴⁸ Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 96; Churchill, *Malakand*, pp. 171, 198, 201 and 203; *Hansard* (House of Commons), 'British Losses on the North-West Frontier (Statement of Secretary of State for India)', 54:828 (1898); and H. Mills, *The Pathan Revolt in North-West India* (Lahore: Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1897), p. 14.

⁴⁹ *British Medical Journal* 1:1942 (1898), 796–97.

in office in March 1900 from malaria, his temporary replacement, Power Palmer, another former Frontier Force commander, and Kitchener). These civilians and soldiers ensured that the Army in India was reformed for small wars and for regular warfare on the north-west frontier and its environs – though no one was quite sure what that sort of regular fighting would involve, given the terrain and uncertainties about how Afghans and frontier Pathans would respond to a Russian advance; in any event, it was likely to require Indian forces to control long strips of territory up to Kabul, and thus to have hill warfare aspects.⁵⁰

Weaponry modernisation was a cornerstone of the reforms, indicating a significant recovery in government faith in Indian troops. Starting in 1900, the Indian regiments of the Field Army and of the Defence Force's independent brigades were issued with the same magazine rifles as the British units on the subcontinent. Initially they received Lee-Enfields – with sharp, metal-jacketed bullets likely to pass straight through a body, and not with dum-dums, which for active service were discontinued as inhumane. From 1903, the Indian and British regiments were issued with a new and near state-of-the-art magazine rifle, the Lee-Enfield Mark I. The mutual upgrade was spurred by a dramatic growth in the Pathan frontier tribes' rifle ownership. Since the Tirah campaign, they not only had developed their gunsmiths' factories to produce increasingly sophisticated Martini-Henry copies and ammunition, not only had obtained more stolen rifles from the Indian and British regiments, but also had started to receive tens of thousands of breech-loading rifles from Europe, smuggled into their tribal areas, principally by French cartels via Muscat, southern Persia and the Afghan province of Helmand. 'The [frontier tribes'] military power', Kitchener reckoned in July 1905,

is increasing not slowly, but by leaps and bounds. It is estimated that out of some 270,000 fighting men, no less than 94,000 possess breech-loading rifled arms. So great now is the trade in such arms, and so completely is it beyond our control, that the time seems possible within the next few years when every fighting-man will possess a modern weapon.⁵¹

For the government, it was essential that the Army in India was better armed than the tribesmen – hence the general issue of Lee-Enfields.⁵²

⁵⁰ IOR, L/MIL/5/727: 'Minutes of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence' (1907), p. xii; and L/MIL/17/5/1752: 'Proceedings of the Army in India Committee, 1912: Minutes' (1913), p. 19; Holdich, 'Tirah', 357; and Moreman, *Army in India*, pp. 70–72.

⁵¹ Moreman, 'Arms Trade', 209.

⁵² *The New York Times*, 24 June 1900: 'The Rearmament of the Indian Army'; S. Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry, 1880–1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 42; R. Macdonell and M. Macaulay, *A History of the 4th Prince of Wales's Own Gurkha*

Most of the Indian battalions and cavalry regiments were given two Maxim machine guns, largely with a view to regular warfare against the Russians.⁵³ Furthermore, all India's mountain batteries' muzzle-loading 7-pounders were replaced with the breech-loading, pack mule-portable and smokeless 10-pounder guns they were to have up to 1914. Any heavier replacement was ruled out because mules could only carry so much on frontier terrain. The new 10-pounders had a range of 6,000 yards, twice that of their predecessors, and could fire more rapidly. India's horse and field batteries were also upgraded. The horse artillery received 13-pounders to replace 12-pounders, and the field artillery 18-pounders to replace 15-pounders.⁵⁴ To support these modernisations, Curzon established new Indian armaments factories, including hydro-electric ones to make smokeless ammunition.⁵⁵

Curzon, and Minto after him, oversaw changes to the Army in India's training. The changes were guided primarily by those two viceroys' Commanders-in-Chief, with the aim of giving all India's units more balanced preparation to fight small wars and regular warfare on India's north-western borders. From 1900, Army Headquarters issued new training manuals of two types. The first were for European regular warfare. They were War Office creations, authored by British service officers of the Home Army. Issued in Britain and in India to replace the drill-books, they contained tactical principles shaped largely by the British army's experiences in South Africa, where drill-book training had left its men sorely lacking in the tactical flexibility to cope with the Boers' modern firepower. They directed that infantry should advance in wide and deep lines of skirmishers using field cover to limit casualties, and that all arms should co-operate closely. They were underlain by a traditional understanding that British regiments highly trained in drill and musketry would be ready enough to fight all non-white, small war enemies as their racial inferiors, and only needed thorough tactical training to face white enemies.⁵⁶ The other new manuals were for the north-west frontier. They

Rifles, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1940), vol. 1, p. 145; R. Waters, *History of the 5th Battalion (Pathans), 14th Punjab Regiment, Formerly 40th Pathans, or The Forty Thieves* (London: Bain, 1936), p. 49.

⁵³ H. Huxford, *History of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, 1824–1949* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1952), p. 52; Palsokar, *5th Gorkha*, p. 36; and W. Watson, *King George's Own Central India Horse* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1930), p. 287.

⁵⁴ *The New York Times*, 24 June 1900: 'Rearmament'. C. Graham, *Artillery*, pp. 101–2.

⁵⁵ *The New York Times*, 24 June 1900: 'Rearmament'.

⁵⁶ S. Jones, 'The Influence of the Boer War (1899–1902) on the Tactical Development of the Regular British Army 1902–1914', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton (2009), see chapters 1–4; and W. Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), pp. 156–57.

were produced in India, and were issued there alone to supplement the regular warfare manuals. Their chief text was *Frontier Warfare* (1901), offering 15,000 words of tactical notes largely written by old hands of the Frontier Force. The notes codified the Frontier Force's hill warfare techniques, and drew lessons from the Tirah and other recent frontier campaigns. It followed that *Frontier Warfare* was about how to fight Pathan tribes rather than Russians.⁵⁷

With the new manuals in place, regimental training was reinvigorated. Kitchener instigated new exams and courses for British officers, and he encouraged them to nurture Indian officers' initiative, a quality he had detected a dearth of among the British battalions in South Africa. He insisted on better musketry, especially in individual fire. He introduced his regimental 'Tests', lasting 55 hours in active service conditions as battalions were marked out of 2,200 points for trench construction and other combat skills. Further, he delocalised the Frontier Force, making its regiments routinely available for service away from the north-west. His intention was to create space for the non-Frontier Force units in the garrisons there, so that for the first time they could train regularly on frontier terrain.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, he bestowed on the Army in India a new system of higher training, on the principle that the permanent Indian brigades and divisions he installed should train in peacetime under the senior commanders and staff officers who would lead them in war. He initiated annual large formation manoeuvres, normally involving a single brigade or division. They lasted a week or so, with the senior commanders present devising the training programme.⁵⁹

How did the reforms impact the Army in India's training up to 1908? In regimental training, which took up the bulk of the training calendar, the Indian non-pioneer battalions concentrated on north-west frontier fighting against the Pathans. On the one hand, the British officers of the Frontier Force were intent on maintaining its excellence in hill warfare. On the other, those of the non-Frontier Force Indian battalions freshly chose to train their men for hill warfare in particular. Their military world seemed to have come alive after a relatively sleepy early to mid-1890s. The 1897–98 frontier campaigns had been the biggest in British

⁵⁷ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901* (Simla: Superintendent Government Printing, 1901), and *Frontier Warfare and Bush Fighting, 1906* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1906); Creagh, 'The Army in India', *Army Review* 4 (1913), 31–39; G. Henderson, *The Science of War: A Collection of Essays and Lectures, 1892–1903* (London: Longmans, 1912), p. 349; and Moreman, *Army in India*, pp. 71–72, and 'Passing it On', p. 277.

⁵⁸ Arthur, *Kitchener*, vol. 2, pp. 169–70; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, p. 133.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

experience, and the non-Frontier Force units' performance in them was cause for alarm, as was the swelling Pathan arsenal; Curzon and Kitchener were meteoric arrivals on the Indian scene whose reforming zeal pulsed downwards; the new training manuals dealt with the Empire's latest battlefield problems; the new century brought a sense of a clean slate. Moreover the non-Frontier Force officers considered hill warfare to be their battalions' most likely form of fighting, and thus the one for which their men should be best prepared. Indeed, if their men were primed for hill warfare, they thought, that would set them in good stead for a frontier war involving the Russians. The upshot was that they had a new energy to improve regimental training, and they did that with Pathan enemies firmly in mind.⁶⁰

Using *Frontier Warfare* and like manuals on the regimental training ground, the British officers of the non-pioneer Indian battalions widely gave instruction in the following disciplines:

1. *Marching*. An Indian brigade on the march in the tribal areas was expected to cover around 6–10 miles a day, which could be very strenuous at the frontier's higher altitudes. To prepare Indian troops for this, improved physical fitness and marching became central to regimental training, for instance during Kitchener's Tests.⁶¹
2. *Musketry*. Indian troops were trained more meticulously in individual rifle fire. They were also taught to treasure their new magazine rifles as personal possessions never to be lost, and to collect all their expended magazines; both practices were to limit the leakages to the tribesmen.⁶²
3. *Machine gunnery*. A few men of each Indian battalion were selected as machine gunners. They were not specially trained to fire in tandem with riflemen, however. The rifle remained the supreme regimental weapon, being lighter and more portable than the Maxim, and of far greater use against dispersed tribal enemies.⁶³
4. *Small group tactics*. For instruction in these, each Indian battalion was arranged into four double companies, each of which could split in half to give a unit its total of eight companies – the key regimental tactical units for hill warfare – before fragmenting further into platoons or

⁶⁰ Creagh, 'Army in India', 34.

⁶¹ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, paras. 31 and 47; K. Roy, 'The Construction of Regiments in the Indian Army: 1859–1913', *War in History* 8 (2001), 143–44; Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 83; Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 213; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroy's*, p. 134.

⁶² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 109; and Moreman, 'Arms Trade', 202, and *Army in India*, p. 78.

⁶³ Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 50.

smaller sections.⁶⁴ The troops were taught that to cope with Pathan rifle fire, making best use of boulders and other natural cover was fundamental, along with rapid individual and company movement. ‘Pace in hill fighting is everything. That is to say, there are often occasions when, if you can go fast, you have the finest weapon possible at your hand’, said one British officer.⁶⁵ Troops were then instructed in carefully controlled fire and manoeuvre.⁶⁶ For advances, they practised working in scattered and flexible groups. One technique was known as ‘trickling’: ‘In order to expose men as little as possible in crossing open ground, the instructor will teach the squad to dash across open spaces one by one’, *Frontier Warfare* directed; ‘As soon as the first man has crossed, the section commander will direct the men to dash over to him at top speed, one by one, and each, if possible, selecting a different course.’⁶⁷ The importance of covering rifle fire during trickling and similar movements was emphasised. ‘If the company is advancing up two parallel ridges, covering and cross fire may be used with good effect from either ridge. . . . In all attacks it is absolutely necessary to [provide] heavy covering fire.’⁶⁸ For retirements, troops rehearsed moving back by alternate lines, with ‘each line alternately passing through the other, and taking up a position to cover the retirements of the latter.’ All the while, the lessons of the Tirah campaign were borne in mind. ‘[During] retirements off a hill’, *Frontier Warfare* ordained in reference to the 1st/Northampton’s disaster at Saran Sar, ‘nullahs and ravines should be studiously avoided, unless their exact direction is known, and the heights on either side held.’⁶⁹

5. *Bayonet work.* Troops were drilled to make full use of their bayonets. ‘It is necessary to fix bayonets within 300 yards of the summit on any ridge, whether the enemy may have appeared to have retired or not.’⁷⁰
6. *Initiative among Indian officers and men.* During their small group tactical training, the Indian troops were of course instructed to follow their British officers, who saw it as their sacred duty to lead confidently and conspicuously from the front. But for flexibility, as

⁶⁴ Dodwell, *Cambridge History of India*, vol. 6, p. 399.

⁶⁵ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, paras. 1–34; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, p. 173.

⁶⁶ Moreman, ‘North-West Frontier Warfare’, 54, and *Army in India*, p. 96; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, pp. 50, 80–82, 90–91 and 94.

⁶⁷ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, paras. 5, 20 and 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 28 and 35.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, para 51. A nullah is a stream or watercourse, with or without water.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 28.

battalions in frontier battle habitually needed to break into parts more numerous than the British officers present, they were required – above all the Indian officers among them who were given command of companies of 100 men and platoons of 30 – to make decisions for themselves. *Frontier Warfare* was unequivocal on this. ‘Junior officers and non-commissioned officers should be taught to act on their own initiative, as they will often be called upon to rely on their own resources.’ ‘All ranks should be encouraged and taught to act on their own resources, always bearing in mind that they belong to a certain unit, and must conform to its movements in the manner best suited to the occasion.’⁷¹

7. *Scouting*. In imitation of the 5th and 3rd Gurkhas, the non-Frontier Force Indian battalions began to develop their own scouts. These were chosen from their most agile and intelligent men capable of mastering the requisite skills. They received individual instruction not only within their regiment, but also on a special scout training course run by the Frontier Force’s scout mastermind, Charles Bruce. They were taught to conceal themselves as snipers, and to close in on and kill enemy ones. They were also trained in day and night reconnaissance to monitor tribal movements and positions. At all times, they were told, stealth was vital. ‘Scouts’, advised *Frontier Warfare*, ‘should remember that the less they are seen or heard the better their work will be done.’⁷² Fleet feet and high levels of durability among scouts were encouraged by the 5th Gurkhas’ annual ‘khud’ challenge, a cross-country race set up by Bruce and open to other regiments. The race’s course went up and down precipitous hillsides. Gurkhas dominated it, no matter how hard their competitors trained. They had an average height of five feet two inches, giving them a lower centre of gravity than taller Pathan, Punjabi or British runners, and thus a decisive advantage when going at pace over rocky downhill stretches. ‘To see, from a distance, a batch of trained Gurkhas in a *khud* race coming down a really difficult bit’, wrote an officer of the 7th Gurkhas, ‘can best be described as reminding one exactly of raindrops falling down a window-pane.’⁷³
8. *Technical work*. In the Tirah campaign, the Afridis’ long-range rifle fire had made the Army in India’s frontier field camps more dangerous places than ever before, and the camps’ defences had been

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, paras. 6 and 34–35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, paras. 9–11 and 15; P. Hansen and K. Mason, ‘Charles Granville Bruce’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (May, 2011); and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 52.

⁷³ Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroy*, pp. 135 and 171–73.

wanting. For the future defence of camp perimeters in tribal territory now bristling with enemy riflemen, Indian troops were trained to construct trenches, breastworks and parapets reinforced by machine guns, barbed wire and any useful materials at hand. To hold camps' outlying ground, they learned to set up pickets, or small fortified field posts, also with trenches, parapets and barbed wire. For the digging, they used the Sirhind entrenching tool.⁷⁴

9. *Evacuation of casualties.* To save casualties in the tribal areas from being shot, or, as *Frontier Warfare* put it, a fate 'worse than instant death', regiments were instructed that their wounded and killed had to be removed behind cover as quickly as possible. 'Not more than one man should be left with a wounded man. In carrying wounded under cover, care should be taken that a number of men do not collect together.'⁷⁵ Other troops were then to take responsibility for evacuating the wounded – ideally carrying them to safety by individuals or duos, and, if necessary, delivering a counter-attack 'to prevent the enemy having a close target on the party carrying the wounded down'.⁷⁶
10. *Enemy wounded and prisoners.* In the spirit of the Geneva and the Hague Conventions, and in the interests of gathering intelligence from captives, Indian recruits were told to adhere to the Indian army's official policy for treating enemy wounded and prisoners; this was not to harm them unnecessarily, to take prisoners, and to provide medical care. 'The tribes know our methods perfectly well', Beauchamp Duff informed a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1907, 'and they regard those methods as eminently sporting. . . . They know that their sick and wounded will be spared and nursed back to health.'⁷⁷

The pioneer battalions and the sappers and miners were also trained in small group frontier tactics. Their own technical specialities were improved through the taking on of civil contracts; for example, the 107th

⁷⁴ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, paras. 38–39; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 137; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 317; and W. Tugwell, *History of the Bombay Pioneers* (London: Sidney Press, 1938), p. 176.

⁷⁵ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, para. 30, and *Frontier Warfare and Bush Fighting, 1906*, p. 138.

⁷⁶ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, para. 34. Also see Moreman, "Passing it On", p. 277; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 311.

⁷⁷ IOR, L/MIL/5/727: 'Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence' (1907), p. 7; and *Hansard* (House of Commons), 'The Zakka Khel Expedition (Statement of Secretary of State for India)', 184:626–28 (1908).

Pioneers worked on docks, dams, roads and railways in western India.⁷⁸ Across the Indian infantry and technical units, only a modicum of regimental training was directly related to regular warfare. At Lahore in 1908, the Indian officers of the 38th Dogras, by regimental arrangement, received a lecture from a Royal Artillery officer on modern field guns and their effects. Such regular warfare-specific instruction was rare, however, and it did little to distract Indian units from their preoccupation with hill fighting against the Pathans.⁷⁹

A significant minority of Indian recruits had more to teach their British officers of hill warfare than their officers did them. Between 1897 and 1908, the number of Pathan regulars in Indian army service rose from 2,500 to 10,500. Many of them came from the tribal areas; around a quarter were Afridis. Altogether, they filled sixty-seven Pathan companies across forty-three regiments.⁸⁰ They brought with them an expertise in small group and scouting skills that flowed from their tribes' active fighting culture. 'Light-infantry individual work on the hill side is naturally their *forte*', wrote George MacMunn:

To live and work among Pathan companies at manoeuvres or on the border patrol is an education of itself, a brothership with the most active, strenuous men you could imagine. And since he who drives fat oxen must himself be fat, so the British officer who can control, lead and inspire the trans-border Pathan, must be something more than a man among men. When I see them ending their lives on a Devon golf course with an old brown pipe, and know what they have been and done in their prime, I am astonished.⁸¹

Among India's British battalions up to 1908, there was not much enthusiasm for regimental training in hill warfare. Despite the Tirah campaign, their officers' racial arrogance led many of them to persist in the belief that British troops did not require scientific tactical preparation to fight the Pathan tribes. Besides, their battalions were only in India temporarily, thus limiting their sense of need to prepare their men to fight an enemy particular to India. Their service's greatest recent campaign was the South African War, and the lessons they drew from that were read towards European regular warfare. All in all, they preferred to train their men along the lines of the regular warfare manuals.⁸²

⁷⁸ Tugwell, *Pioneers*, pp. 175–76.

⁷⁹ KCL/LHCMA, Howell Papers: 'Frontier Warfare Tactics, Notes on Invading Tirah, 4 October 1907' (4/3/4); MacMunn, *Behind the Scenes in Many Wars* (London: John Murray, 1930), p. 83.

⁸⁰ Christensen, 'Tribesmen', p. 180; Ellinwood, 'British Policy', p. 108; Enriquez, *Borderland*, p. 140; Hutchinson, *Tirah*, p. 54; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 275–76.

⁸¹ MacMunn, *Marital Races*, p. 245; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 52.

⁸² Creagh, 'Army in India', 34.

The Indian cavalry maintained their preoccupation in regimental training with mounted duties. A few of their British officers had picked up British army conclusions from South Africa that there were important dismounted roles for modern cavalry to play, principally to hold trenches where modern firepower made mounted progress impractical. Consequently, a small minority of the Indian cavalry regiments were trained in dismounted work. But most were not. The Indian cavalry's frontier experiences in 1897–98 catalysed no great change in their training after they had played their traditionally marginal part, in the Tirah riding along the lines of communications, protecting these or carrying messages, and in the Swat valley pursuing tribesmen on open ground.⁸³ There were other restraints, too. The silladar regiments' British officers spent much of their time attending to their regimental funds, farms and other matters of silladar administration, all of which distracted them from innovating on the training ground. Moreover from 1903 to 1906, Douglas Haig, as India's Inspector General of Cavalry, stressed the importance of reconnaissance and other mounted work over dismounted duties.⁸⁴ Although some Indian cavalymen were trained to operate regimental machine guns from necessarily dismounted positions, the performance of dismounted duties did not become general practice among them. This was seen in their indifferent musketry, their not being issued bayonets or digging tools, and their obsessive playing of polo and other mounted sports to prepare for active service.⁸⁵

By comparison with their infantry counterparts, the Indian officers of the Indian cavalry were not much encouraged to show initiative. Part of the problem was their regiments' attacking tactics. These centred on charges by concentrated mounted groups, and therefore could more easily be supervised by British officers than could small group infantry tactics, lessening the need to train the cavalry's Indian officers to act independently.⁸⁶ Compared to their Indian service equivalents, India's British cavalry regiments, because of their service's South African experiences, struck more of a balance between mounted and dismounted work.⁸⁷

⁸³ Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 228 and 252.

⁸⁴ Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 95.

⁸⁵ Badsey, *Doctrine*, p. 180; Barrow, *Fire of Life*, pp. 107–08; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 196–98; Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 94–114; W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, p. 287; and M. Wylly, *The Poona Horse*, 2 vols. (London: Royal United Service Institution, 1933), vol. 2, p. 75.

⁸⁶ Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, pp. 279–81; and J. Wakefield and J. Weippert (eds.), *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914–15: Captain Roly Grimshaw* (Tunbridge Wells: Costello, 1986), pp. 43–44.

⁸⁷ Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 94–96.

The Indian and British artillery batteries in India acknowledged that they had a lot to learn to get the best out of their new guns – to develop not just fire accuracy, but also co-operation with the infantry and the cavalry. From 1903 they attended new artillery training camps, where they discussed fresh fire tactics, including some inspired by the Russo-Japanese War of sending mountain artillery forward in close support of infantry. ‘Marks were given for tactics and fire discipline and for fire effect’, recalled one British officer, ‘the results being shown by the award of badges of different classes to be worn by the rank and file for twelve months.’⁸⁸

The Indian brigade and divisional training between 1899 and 1908 involved mock battles against regular and irregular enemies. At hill warfare infantry brigade manoeuvres, held on suitably difficult terrain, battalions and mountain artillery batteries practised advances on passes, ridges or villages. They worked according to rules laid down in *Frontier Warfare* to combine more smoothly than had been the case at the Dargai Heights and elsewhere in the Tirah:

When the enemy are found to be holding a strong position, it is necessary to bring the fire of all the available artillery to bear on it. . . . Under cover of the artillery fire . . . the infantry can gradually push forward and take up a position from which to deliver the assault: if the enemy’s position is along the ridge or crest of a hill, it is often practicable for infantry to advance with perfect safety up the hill to within about a hundred feet of the top, while the artillery continue to shell the enemy’s position.⁸⁹

While the battalions practised this, the cavalry regiments at the manoeuvres worked on reconnoitring and other mounted duties.⁹⁰

The regular warfare manoeuvres were mostly divisional. Conducted on flat, open countryside, they generally called for infantry brigades to advance in wide and deep lines, backed by field and mountain artillery. The details of infantry-artillery co-operation differed greatly depending on the presiding general. Many generals loosely organised their manoeuvres as mobile warfare, leaving brigade or regimental officers to decide for themselves the specifics of how lower-level units should advance, at pace or otherwise.⁹¹ The most complex manoeuvres were those of the 4th Division in Baluchistan in the autumn of 1906. They were tightly controlled at all levels by the divisional commander, Horace Smith-Dorrien,

⁸⁸ C. Graham, *Artillery*, pp. 102–04.

⁸⁹ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare, 1901*, paras. 109–117.

⁹⁰ M. Creese, ‘Swords Trembling in their Scabbards’: A Study of Indian Officers in the Indian Cavalry, 1858–1918’, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester (2007), p. 209; C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 102; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 262.

⁹¹ Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, pp. 315–37; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, p. 176.

a British service officer and survivor of the Battle of Isandlwana, Tirah campaign and Boer war. 'Part of the [4th Division's] squadron, battery, and company field training in the summer [of 1906]', he wrote, 'had been the preparation of a great entrenched position on the lines of the Russo-Japanese War':

The idea was that an army had dug itself in on a position of great length with unturnable flanks, and that 2,000 yards in the centre of the position should be actually prepared in every particular, and eventually be available for an attack by the whole of my command troops. The position was laid out on the most up-to-date lines [with] first line trenches, second line trenches, third line trenches – the latter complete with dug-outs for orderly-rooms, kitchens, latrines, sleeping-places for troops, and magazines, all of them labelled, and the whole connected up by communication trenches. Behind were hidden emplacements for the bulk of the guns, whilst there were several in the advanced trenches. [At the autumn manoeuvres], the whole scheme was explained to every man, and the first day the covering troops established themselves under artillery fire about 1,700 yards from the position at sundown, and dug in during the night. Next night they were reinforced and moved forward about 800 yards, and again dug in before daylight. The third night a further advance of 400 or 500 yards was made, and fresh trenches dug. Not a man was allowed to show himself by daylight, and dead silence was de rigueur. All food, ammunition, blankets, etc., were carried up during each night. On the fourth night it was decided to rush the position at dawn, covered by the bomb-throwers, after an overwhelming fire from guns, rifles, and trench-mortars. These latter had been established in a trench within 300 yards of the position. It was a very impressive operation. The fire and noise were terrific, and the bombs, representing the guns in position, made it very realistic.⁹²

Afterwards, Smith-Dorrien saw to it that the troops of each company were led by their officers on a tour around the entire defensive position, 'so that every point might be explained to them'. 'After all was over, we held a conference at which all officers, British and [Indian], were present, and the lessons of the operation were fully discussed.'⁹³

In a tradition inherited from the British army and developed towards an ethos distinctly of their own, the Indian regiments had their personal esprit de corps, that magical ingredient of lower-level cohesion that makes a man's unit his second home. British officers encouraged their recruits to take pride in their unit as better than others, and many did this compellingly because they did so themselves. 'I believed with a passion worthy of a religion', said one of the 4th Gurkhas, 'that there was no

⁹² Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, pp. 337–38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

other regiment on earth like it.⁹⁴ Indian officers, as caste or clan elders, told the ranks that they must uphold the good names and ideals not just of their regiment, but also of their families, tribes or religious communities. Their senses of togetherness were quickened by quirks of regimental dress such as green puttees or a yellow fringe on the turban; by marching cadences, for instance the Sikh chant in Punjabi of ‘*Wā guru jī ka khalsa! Serī Wā guru jī kī futī! Sūt serī akhal!*’;⁹⁵ by regimental bands that played regimental songs, including the pedarastic Pathan balled ‘Zakhmi Dil’ (‘The Wounded Heart’), on sitars, shehnais (wooden reed-pipes), dhols (a two-sided Punjabi drum) or Highland bagpipes; by annual religious festivals, among them the Dasehra celebrations held by Gurkha units in honour of the goddess Kali, at which rifles were stacked, adorned with flowers and blessed by a Brahmin priest, and sacrificial male goats and buffalos were anointed, tethered to a post and beheaded by a single stroke of the khukuri; or by week-long regimental reunions, or ‘melas’, where active and pensioned soldiers and their families gathered for speeches in Urdu, Punjabi or Pashtu, Khattak dances and Sikh songs, wrestling and rifle competitions, feasting and drinking.⁹⁶ ‘In our Regiment, we were a band of brothers’, wrote a British officer of the Indian cavalry. ‘We were serious soldiers and, although I say so, first-class soldiers.’⁹⁷ Many regiments’ self-pride was revealed in the upkeep of their home depots. ‘The Guides [at their Mardan] headquarters’, wrote a British service commander who was a regular visitor in 1904–05, ‘was a Corps quite impossible to beat at anything’:

Polo and sport in every form, camaraderie and efficiency flourished in that quite delightful spot. The gardens were beautifully kept; the Mess was the scene of much hospitality during winter and a haven a rest where you could cool yourself in the clear swimming-bath in summer. It was . . . officered by the pick of the Indian army and with Indian officers and men selected from the frontiers of every clan and race, but all animated with one ideal: ‘the honour of the Guides’. . . . At the shortest notice the Guides were always ready to march anywhere [and] there were always more recruits on the waiting list than there were vacancies to be filled.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ R. Ahmed, *History of the Baloch Regiment 1820–1939* (Abbottabad: Baloch Regimental Centre, 1998), p. 166.

⁹⁵ ‘Hail God of the liberated! Victory to the holy ones! My body is to thee O God!’

⁹⁶ N. Collett, *The Butcher of Amritsar: General Reginald Dyer* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 108; Hudson, *Fane’s Horse*, p. 108; and Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, vol. 1, p. 149.

⁹⁷ W. Magan, *Soldier of the Raj* (Norwich: Michael Russell, 2002), p. 220.

⁹⁸ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 211.

The fruits of the Indian army's training were plain to see in small wars from 1900 to 1908. In August 1900, the 51st Sikhs (Frontier Force) were serving with the foreign forces deployed to China to quell the Boxer Rising, the xenophobic movement with Qing government support that attacked foreigners and their commercial interests. As part of the column of 20,000 international troops sent to lift the Boxer siege of the foreign legations at Peking, the Sikhs marched to the capital from Tientsin, a river-port near the East China Sea, by way of the banks of the River Hai. Their march covered fifty miles and lasted ten consecutive days. They had to contend not only with bad roads and stifling temperatures of around 40°C in the shade, not only with large fields of fourteen-foot-high millet crops in which there was no air movement, not only with brackish drinking water that caused them nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting, but also with Chinese opposition.⁹⁹ At Yang-tsun in the midday sunshine of 6 August, the third day of their march, they had to capture some trenches blocking their way. The trenches, dug along a railway embankment, were held by the Guards, a wing of the imperial Chinese army, trained by German army instructors, and armed with smokeless Mauser rifles and Krupp 77mm field guns.¹⁰⁰ 'The day was a very hot one and no water was procurable, so the troops were tired and thirsty before they advanced', recalled a British officer of the Sikh regiment.¹⁰¹ At 2,000 yards from the Guards' trenches, the Sikhs began to make use of their hill warfare training to press forwards in small and scattered khaki groups, arranged in a deep formation of five lines. They came under fire from Chinese riflemen concealed among adjacent crops and further forwards, and from a dozen Guards' field guns which repeatedly dropped shrapnel shells among them. But their groups stuck together, advancing at pace and in zigzags, returning fire with their Lee-Metfords and taking advantage of inclines in the ground and other natural cover. They soon carried the Guards' position, having lost twenty-six killed and badly wounded. The majority of their casualties, with fractured bones, dislocated joints and severe haemorrhages, were the Indian army's first from modern shellfire.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *British Medical Journal* 2:2078 (1900), 1275, and 2:2086 (1900), 1811–12; E. Norie, *Official Account of the Military Operations in China, 1900–1901* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1903), pp. 60, 463–65 and 470.

¹⁰⁰ J. Elliot, *Some Did it for Civilization; Some Did it for Their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002), pp. 12, 244, 401–02 and 525.

¹⁰¹ *History of the 1st Sikh Infantry*, 2 vols. (Calcutta: Thacker, 1903), vol. 2, p. 87.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 88; Indian General Staff, *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India*, 7 vols. (Simla & Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1907–13), vol. 6, pp. 475–76; and A. Landor, *China and the Allies*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1901), vol. 1, pp. 358–59.

To the Sikhs' right, the 3rd Battalion of the United States army's 14th Infantry Regiment had also attacked under shellfire. 'It was a hot race between the Sikhs and our men to reach the enemy's position first', the American battalion's adjutant wrote.¹⁰³ It was not a race the Americans won. They moved in much closer formation than the Sikhs, and they wore more conspicuous blue uniforms; both things exposed them more to the Guards' fire, and slowed them down as they suffered three times as many casualties.¹⁰⁴ In the following days, they marched alongside the Sikhs. 'That march is imprinted on my memory that nothing can efface', one of the American soldiers later said. 'It was full of terrible experiences, short of water, and forced to march after you were almost unable to walk.'¹⁰⁵ The 51st Sikhs continued to push ahead the faster. 'The thin-legged Indian troops stood the march very well', thought Arnold Landor, an English writer who accompanied the international column. '[They] were taking things in a calm fashion [and] did not seem to suffer quite so much as some of the other troops. They generally marched in the cool of the morning and evening, which saved the men considerably, instead of doing like the Americans, who marched in the hottest hours of the day.'¹⁰⁶

On 14 August, the Sikhs, led by Thomas Scott, their Irish captain who had served with Indian troops in the Pathan tribal areas, East Africa and Uganda, were the first troops to penetrate the ramparts of Peking. They relieved the British legation with the 7th Rajputs, fellow marchers from Tientsin.¹⁰⁷ 'We had not been abandoned!' wrote a British mining engineer among the rescued:

Into [the] quadrangle [by the legation's perimeter] hundreds of native troops were filing and piling arms. They were Rajputs, all talking together, and greeting some of our sailors and men, and demanding immediately *pane, pane, pane* all the time in a monotonous chorus. I could not understand that word.¹⁰⁸ . . . [They were] standing together, wiping the sweat from their streaming faces. [Then] I noted . . . tall Sikhs . . . in little groups, looking dog-tired. But they were very excited, too, and waved their hands to me.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ U.S. Army, *Reports of the War Department, Year Ended June 30, 1900: Part 7* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), pp. 45–50.

¹⁰⁴ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 6, pp. 475–76; and Landor, *China*, vol. 1, p. 362.

¹⁰⁵ P. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 191.

¹⁰⁶ Landor, *China*, vol. 1, p. 374.

¹⁰⁷ *The Times*, 8 April 1937: 'Obituary: Lieutenant-General T. E. Scott', *History of the 1st Sikh Infantry*, vol. 2, pp. 89–90.

¹⁰⁸ It means 'water'.

¹⁰⁹ B. L. Putnam Weale, *Indiscreet Letter from Peking* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1907), pp. 296–97.

For the rest of that year and into 1901, the Indian units in China gave glimpses of their internal cohesion on garrison duty. At Peking, the 7th Rajputs and 24th Punjabis' high states of training for hill warfare were hinted at in their efficiency as military police in the city's south-east, where the local population approached 200,000. Their job was to help re-impose civil order, which had broken down completely with the foreign armies' arrival. They patrolled the streets and markets to encourage public confidence, and trained Chinese to work as police after their departure. Initially their men used Chinese interpreters who translated Mandarin into English for their British officers. Before long, however, 'they picked up a lot of the Chinese language with an aptitude . . . for acquiring a foreign tongue', noted George Barrow, the Indian cavalry officer supervising them.¹¹⁰ 'It would be difficult', Barrow went on, 'to praise too highly the reliableness of the [7th Rajputs and 24th Punjabis'] troops – Rajputs, Sikhs, and Afridis – as military police':

[They] never flinched from performing their duty, often in the face of superior numbers. They quickly gained the confidence of the Chinese, and the most friendly relations existed between them and the inhabitants, while the respect which they inspired in the latter was never relaxed. They were often placed in trying positions and they never failed to come out with credit to themselves and the Indian army.¹¹¹

Such trials involved not only disorderly locals, but also other foreign troops. The Sikhs and Afridis arrested around two dozen German officers and men who tried to loot on their beat, overpowering them and bringing them in to headquarters.¹¹²

Like the 51st Sikhs under attack on their march to Peking, the 52nd Sikhs (Frontier Force) proved cohesive under pressure in 1903 in the British Protectorate of Somaliland. They were helping to counter a jihadist insurgency whose leader was known to the British as Mullah Haji Muhammed-bin-Abdullah, or the 'Mad Mullah'. 'You have oppressed our ancient religion without cause', he told the British consul-general. In his followers, the Dervishes, who knew him as Sayyidi, he looked for the traits of the true believer:

He who does not scorn the origins and ways of the Somali
 And who does not perform menial tasks for the wages of unbelievers.
 He who devotes himself to the holy war and is garlanded with flowers.
 He who turns against the English dogs
 And who wins the victory and glory and the songs of praise.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Barrow, *Fire of Life*, pp. 62–76.

¹¹¹ Norie, *China*, pp. 483–88.

¹¹² Barrow, *Fire of Life*, pp. 65 and 77.

¹¹³ M. Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, new edition (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003), pp. 34–39.

Bin-Abdullah, the Dervishes, their families and livestock collected in the Haud, the wilderness of sand and bush covering central Somaliland. They invited the imperial forces to find them there by avoiding the coast, where the British presence was best established. On the mid-morning of 17 April, a 'flying' reconnaissance column containing two locally recruited companies of the King's African Rifles, with a Maxim gun apiece, alongside one British officer and forty-eight men of the 52nd Sikhs, with Lee-Enfields, came across bin-Abdullah's main force in the middle of the Haud, near Gumburu Hill. The column formed into a square, which had the Sikhs at the front and the Maxims at opposite corners, before it was attacked by more than 10,000 Somali and Arab horsemen, riflemen and spearmen, charging from cover 300–600 yards away. 'From three sides the Dervish horsemen swooped down upon the square, firing from the saddle as they came', recorded Douglas Jardine, a colonial administrator drawing on the evidence of a Committee of Enquiry into the affair:

While the front face and flanks were thus completely engulfed in a surge of horsemen calling on Allah and hurling imprecations at the infidels, the spearmen and dismounted riflemen attacked our rear. Again and again the Mullah's cavalry precipitated themselves into the square which stood firm, fighting with grim determination. The Maxims at the corner of the square swept the enemy, whose dead lay in great heaps all around. . . . Neither the Maxim nor the rifle fire of the square succeeded in stopping the rushes of the Dervishes, whose frenzied valour, encouraged by the shrill cries of their womenkind in the rear, impelled them to charge the square time and again, impervious to the terrible punishment that was being meted out to them. Indeed, it is difficult to know which to admire most – the dogged courage of our Sikhs, Yaos, and Somalis as they stood firm in the square, hopelessly outnumbered, or the fanatical contempt for death displayed by the savage enemy.¹¹⁴

The imperial troops soon ran out of ammunition, in the Sikhs' case, it seems, sooner than if they had used volley fire instead of their rapid individual fire.¹¹⁵ Large numbers of spearmen then got into the square, breaking it up. The Sikhs were pushed back and separated, but they reformed and charged with bayonets fixed. They all fought to the death, as did the column's 9 British officers, who were mutilated, and 139 of its African troops; the remainder of the latter, numbering 35, managed to escape.¹¹⁶ 'We have both suffered considerably', bin-Abdullah wrote in

¹¹⁴ D. Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1923), pp. 104–05.

¹¹⁵ Callwell, *Small Wars*, pp. 103 and 394.

¹¹⁶ These escapees gave evidence to the Committee of Enquiry, as did Dervish captives who had fought at Gumburu Hill; the British further reconstructed what had happened by going over the ground just after. Condon, *The Frontier Force Regiment* (Aldershot, Gale

an open letter to the English people. But he was undeterred. 'All you can get from me is war, nothing else. I have met your men in battle and have killed them. We are greatly pleased at this. Our men who have fallen in battle have won paradise. God fights for us.'¹¹⁷

The 107th Pioneers and companies of the 3rd Sappers and Miners were stationed in Somaliland for two years up to 1904, having been brought in to improve the government lines of communication into the interior. They built roads, for instance one of 210 miles between Berbera, a port on the Gulf of Aden, and Bohotle, the inland British garrison on the Abyssinian border. To secure their roads against the Dervishes, they constructed nineteen roadside defensive posts. These had stone or mud brick walls with loopholes, and were protected by earth parapets reinforced with wooden rivets and grain bags, by trench systems that commanded the surrounding country, by four-feet-high barbed wire entanglements, and by rows of uprooted thorn bushes. One of the posts by the coast was camouflaged by man-made sand-banks topped with loose seaweed, and it had outlying tripwires with tin rattles attached.¹¹⁸

Several non-Frontier Force Indian battalions spearheaded the Empire's invasion of Tibet. They were chosen because of their rigorous training in hill warfare. On 6 May 1904, three companies of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers and one of the 1st/8th Gurkhas, all armed with Lee-Metfords, made an assault in broad daylight on the Karo La, a mountain pass at 16,500 feet and the highest point between India and Lhasa. They faced 1,500 Tibetan soldiers who had Martini-Henry pattern rifles and held, in the eyes of Francis Younghusband, the British service commander of the invading forces, 'a very strong position, surrounded with glaciers, and behind a loopholed wall of great solidity, 800 yards long, which they had built right across the pass'.¹¹⁹ In biting winds and under fire, the Sikhs on the left and the Gurkhas on the right manoeuvred in small groups up frozen cliffs to get above the defenders' flanks. 'Little by little the almost indistinguishable dots moved upward along the face of the cliff', Perceval Landon wrote of the Sikhs, whom he watched as the special correspondent of *The Times*:

What the hardship must have been climbing up to an altitude which could not have been less than 18,500 feet it is difficult for the ordinary reader to conceive. Hampered alike by his accoutrements and by the urgent anxiety for rapidity, [they] had but scanty opportunities for rest. It was such a climb as many a

& Polden, 1962), pp. 72–74; and War Office, *Official History, Operations in Somaliland, 1901–04*, 2 vols. (London: HMSO, 1907), vol. 1, pp. 169–70.

¹¹⁷ Jardine, *Somaliland*, p. 122; and Laurence, *Heart of a Stranger*, p. 39.

¹¹⁸ Tugwell, *Pioneers*, pp. 170–73; and War Office, *Somaliland*, vol. 1, p. 137, and vol. 2, pp. 350 and 473–77.

¹¹⁹ F. Younghusband, *India and Tibet* (London: John Murray, 1910), pp. 189–90.

member of the Alpine Club would, under the best circumstances, have declined to attempt. . . . Still, in spite of everything, the little figures crept upward, and at last reached the line of perpetual snow, where they could be seen clambering and crawling against the dazzling surface of white. . . . An outbreak of fire from the southern slope of the valley showed that [the Gurkhas] had established themselves above the enemy's right. . . . A brisk crackle of musketry broke out; the exchanges were heavy, but the issue was never in doubt.¹²⁰

The Sikhs and Gurkhas fired down on the Tibetans, before descending to drive them off and take the pass. They inflicted dozens of casualties, while losing five killed and thirteen badly wounded.¹²¹ 'It was an intense relief to me to hear that they had been successful in clearing the gathering at the Karo La', Younghusband confessed. 'It was a plucky and daring little action, and unique of its kind in the annals of any nation; for never before had fighting taken place at altitudes well over the summit of Mont Blanc.'¹²²

In 1907, five Zakka gangs operating out of Afridi territory made a series of raids on NWFP. They looted a railway station, a post office and several villages, abducting Hindus for ransom, wounding soldiers and killing policemen as they went. On 28 January 1908, one of the gangs raided the walled city of Peshawar, the provincial capital. The gang overpowered an armed guard at one of the city's great gates, before creating diversions within to distract the police from their sacking of the money-lending quarter. They then safely made off with Rs. 100,000 worth of jewels, silver and gold, loaded on horses and mules.¹²³ This 'outrage' convinced the Indian government of the need for military reprisals.

On 15 February, therefore, the 1st Division invaded the Tirah from the north-east, via the Khyber road. Commanded by James Willcocks, it was the first Army in India force to visit since William Lockhart's in 1898. Its three brigades had nine Indian battalions, of which five belonged to the Frontier Force; the remainder were non-Frontier Force units that had become highly trained in the rules laid down in *Frontier Warfare*. They were supported by the 23rd Sikh Pioneers and companies of the 1st and 2nd Sappers and Miners, and by four Indian and two British 10-pounder

¹²⁰ P. Landon, *Lhasa: An Account of the Country and People of Central Tibet and of the Progress of the Mission Sent There by the English Government in the Year 1903-04*, 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1905), vol. 1, pp. 269-75, and vol. 2, p. 389.

¹²¹ P. French, *Younghusband* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), pp. 231-32; Huxford, *8th Gurkha*, p. 48; and Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 4, p. 93.

¹²² Younghusband, *India and Tibet*, p. 190.

¹²³ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers Regarding Orakzais, Zakka Khel Afridis and Mohmands* (London: HMSO, 1908), pp. 85-95; B. Blacker, *Adventures*, pp. 11-12; and Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, pp. 3-5. Rs. 100,000 was equivalent to around £7,000 or the annual pay of an Indian battalion.

mountain guns.¹²⁴ The division went straight into the Bazar valley, the Zakkas' winter home whose peaks were coated with the last of the snows. Its remit was to stick to the valley to punish the Zakkas collectively – 'capturing all we can and inflicting as severe punishment as possible', Lord Minto directed – while picking no quarrel with any other Afridi clan.¹²⁵

The Zakkas had several days' warning. Their 5,000 men of fighting age could have retreated into hiding in Afghanistan along with their families and flocks, but they chose not to. The Zakkas were the most anti-British of the Afridi clans; they were the most reluctant to provide Indian army recruits, virtually to the point of refusal, and the least seduced since 1898 by Indian government offers of unprecedented subsidies in return for their goodwill. Indeed, their raiding gangs had enjoyed the popular support of their clansfolk, who had fêted them as anti-imperial crusaders.¹²⁶ As the 1st Division approached, jihadist mullahs in the Bazar valley played upon memories of 1897, calling for active Zakka resistance. They succeeded in mobilising a number of Zakka lashkars eager to contest the invasion. A few of the Zakka fighters were armed with tribal-made Martini-Henry copies. Most of them, however, had Lee-Metfords, Martini-Henrys and other European rifles, in many cases having bought them in Kabul, where the Emir of Afghanistan's anti-British brother, Nasrullah, had given the Zakkas cash to spend on small arms and ammunition smuggled in via Muscat.¹²⁷

Without delay the 1st Division established a main camp at the centre of the Bazar valley, and other camps between there and the Khyber. All its units helped to fortify the camps with permanent defences. 'Camp perimeter entrenchments were carried out entirely by the troops and except in the case of the camp at Chura [in east Bazar], were very well done', reported William Dundee, a colonel of the sappers:

The entrenchments consisted as a rule of earth parapets for use kneeling or lying down with the ground in the rear cut out for the men to sleep in. Breast-works of dry stone walling were given on hard stony sites and head cover was liberally supplied in the form of stone loop-holes [for rifles and machine-guns], boulders

¹²⁴ *The Times*, 5 January 1934: 'Obituary: General Sir E. Barrow'; Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 333; and Willcocks, *Romance*, pp. 210–11. There was also the divisional allotment of three British battalions.

¹²⁵ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, p. 98.

¹²⁶ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, pp. 2, 8 and 32; C. Collin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier, 1890–1908*, second edition (London: Curzon Press, 1975), p. 146; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 8.

¹²⁷ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, pp. 105 and 108; C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 112; and Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, pp. 2–3.

placed at intervals of 2 feet or so along the crest of the parapets, and sprigs of [bush or shrub] stuck into the crest.¹²⁸

Dundee also explained how pickets were set up beyond the trenches. 'Piquets being of course more exposed to attack than the perimeter, the supervision of [the sappers'] officers was largely concentrated on to the defences of the piquets which were much stronger than similar defences in Tirah in 1897.' Barbed wire was put not only around the piquets, either on the ground or raised on stone pillars and iron posts, but also between them.¹²⁹ On several nights from 16 February, the camp defences were peppered by Zakka rifle fire from hill crests. But the 1st Division's troops were generally kept safe and sound by their trenches. The barbed wire, meanwhile, ensured that the Zakkas kept their distance, and were denied opportunities to swoop on camp stores.¹³⁰

In the crisp and clear daytimes, the 1st Division sent out various punitive columns, guided by maps descended from the Tirah campaign. As the columns dispersed, their Indian units manoeuvred rapidly and aggressively in small, scattered and agile groups, making use of natural cover and dominating hillsides and heights.¹³¹ They co-operated closely with the mountain guns, whose long-range smokeless fire was new to the frontier battlefield. Companies of the 45th Sikhs and other units advanced faultlessly on one Zakka-held ridge with the support of 4 of the 10-pounders, which shelled the ridge crest from 1,500 yards; the guns fired a total of 50 shrapnel shells until the companies were 60 feet below the crest, before the troops pressed home the assault.¹³² Zakka dwellings and crops were torched, wood and fodder were confiscated, and the pioneers and sappers and miners used explosive charges to down tribal towers and other stone defences.¹³³

It was once the columns had turned back for camp that the Zakka lashkars closed in, much as the Afridis had in 1897. Yet they scored no success even approaching the Afridi coup at Saran Sar. Daily from 17 to 22 February, withdrawing Indian troops struck a neat balance between retreat and attack, bursting their lungs to reach decisive points on the hillsides while keeping company shape, and firing rapidly with

¹²⁸ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 39.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–15; and Neville, *Campaigns*, p. 335.

¹³¹ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, pp. 113–21; M. Channing, *India Mosaic* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1936), pp. 247–48; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 17; Moreman, *Army in India*, pp. 91–92, and "Passing it On", p. 278; Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 333–35, 349 and 352.

¹³² C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 111–12; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 335–36 and 354.

¹³³ Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 401; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 223.

their Lee-Enfields to cover one another against Zakkas who appeared at close quarters. They were also covered by the mountain guns, which in one instance fired 176 shrapnel shells over some Indian companies withdrawing by alternate lines. Besides the bullets and shells, the Zakkas pursuers had to beware ‘fougasses’, or explosive mines. These were of thirty pounds of guncotton, and were laid by the sappers and miners on spots where the Zakkas were likely to tread. One of the mines was detonated by an electric trigger connected to a wire, killing four tribesmen.¹³⁴

By 26 February, the Zakkas were seeking terms. By the 28th, a peace deal, written in Persian and brokered by the elders of the other Afridi clans, had been agreed. ‘The problem how, in a very short time, to so punish the Zakkas clan as to induce them to make any submission appeared almost insoluble’, wrote the 1st Division’s political officer, George Roos-Keppel, of frontier fame for his mastery of colloquial Pashtu that was said to have gained him acceptance as a Pathan among Pathans. ‘Fortunately’, he continued,

we had to deal with a very gallant enemy, who assisted the solution by fighting in so determined a manner on the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st February as to suffer very heavy loss. . . . The enemy’s casualties in the fighting between the 15th and 21st February exceeded those of all the Afridis in the Tirah Campaign of 1897–98. . . . But for these losses it would have been impossible to bring the tribe to reason without a protected occupation of the country, and it is only the remarkable military success of the expedition which made a settlement feasible. The Afridis, who are no mean judges of hill fighting, express themselves amazed at the handling and conduct of the troops as unlike anything they have seen or heard of, and the fact that they have obtained no loot in mules, rifles, stores, or ammunition, on which they confidently counted to compensate them for their own losses, has given them a strong distaste for expeditions conducted on these novel lines.¹³⁵

The Zakkas had lost 70 killed and over 300 wounded, and had inflicted only 32 infantry casualties, of whom 85 per cent were Indian.¹³⁶ They had showed themselves enough for 100,687 bullets and 1,034 shells to be fired at them, and had exhausted their own ammunition stocks in trying to keep up.¹³⁷ ‘That the enemy lost heavily while our own casualties were small is due to the improvement in musketry training and the manner in which the troops work and run up shelter at the shortest possible

¹³⁴ C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 112–13; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 40; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 335–36 and 350.

¹³⁵ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, pp. 114–15. Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, pp. 17–18 and 32–37.

¹³⁶ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, pp. 26–28, 32–33, 37 and 49.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 37 and 49.

notice', James Willcocks reported on 5 March, having quit the Bazar valley. 'Constant night work [on trenches and field defences] now forms a regular part of infantry training and the results were very plainly visible. As far as hill fighting is concerned our troops had little to learn from the Afridis.'¹³⁸

That March, the Mohmands, a collection of nine clans whose territory lay in the Pathan tribal areas to the north-east of the Tirah, formed an anti-British coalition with some lashkars from the Afghan province of Nangarhar. Together they mustered around 17,000 jihadist fighters, armed mainly with breech-loaders.¹³⁹ By mid-April, they had made several small raids into NWFP, and threatened to make a big attack. The 1st Division, again under Willcocks, was sent to disperse them and punish the Mohmands. A six-week campaign ensued, lasting until 30 May. Initially, the 1st Division retained just five of its Indian battalions from the Zakka expedition, the others having been switched for fresh Indian units. After further changes in May, the division used a total of six Frontier Force and eight non-Frontier Force Indian battalions, supported by two Indian and one British mountain batteries.¹⁴⁰

The 1st Division's opening move was to establish a line of fortified camps near the edge of NWFP under the hills of Mohmand, where the jihadists had defiantly planted their standards on the forward slopes. On the night of 23–24 April, the jihadists made a wave of assaults on the camps, targeting in particular the two largest, at Matta and at Garhi Sadar. Their efforts reached a crescendo of half an hour's concerted fire from thousands of rifles, accompanied by some charges on foot.¹⁴¹ 'All these attacks were repulsed but caused us several casualties', Willcocks noted.¹⁴² Once again the 1st Division had solid entrenchments and parapets to protect against tribal bullets, and its outlying barbed wire entanglements proved insurmountable for most of the onrushers.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, pp. 104 and 117–21.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126–31. S. Haroon, *Frontier of Faith: Islam in the Indo-Afghan Borderland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 63.

¹⁴⁰ 'Field Operations: Mohmand – Khyber, Dated Peshawar, 19th June 1908, From Major-General Sir James Willcocks, Commanding Mohmand Field Force, to the Chief of Staff, Army Head Quarters, Simla', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6058; Neville, *Campaigns*, p. 339; and C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 112. In mid-May the 1st Division's allotment of British battalions in Mohmand was reduced to two.

¹⁴¹ C. Kingsford, *The Story of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment* (London: Scribner's, 1921), p. 126; and Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 1, Supplement A, pp. 20–21.

¹⁴² 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6054.

¹⁴³ D. Lindsay, *Regimental History of the 6th Royal Battalion (Scinde), 13th Frontier Force Rifles* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1936), p. 41; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 338 and 352.

At daybreak on the 24th, the division began to push into the hills. For the next five weeks its punitive columns meandered all over Mohmand, penetrating right up to the Afghan border and pitching a number of new camps. Although there were some thunderstorms with heavy rain, in daylight cloudless skies and intense heat were the norm as temperatures rose to 47°C in the shade. ‘The incessant marching under a fiery sun, with only a very limited amount of indifferent water, the choking dust and plagues of flies were all a severe test of endurance by day’, wrote Willcocks,

whilst at night the men were generally kept awake and at their posts for hours together, owing to the constant fire kept up by the enemy; and which would have proved even more costly than it did but for the labour expended on the entrenchments and which added considerably to the daily work they were called on to perform. . . . The amount of firing done by the enemy may be gauged from the fact that 185 horses and mules were killed and wounded, a large proportion of which were hit in our camps at night.¹⁴⁴

Despite these difficulties, the Indian columns vigorously applied their training in musketry and small group tactics. They fought their way up and down hills and ridges against stubborn jihadist lashkars no less skilful than their Afridi counterparts. The columns co-operated with the mountain guns much as they had against the Zakkas, with one of the Indian batteries firing a total of 577 shrapnel shells, another 464.¹⁴⁵ Two of the Frontier Force battalions, the 57th Wilde’s Rifles and the 59th Scinde Rifles, excelled. At one point they descended in flexible groups to the bottom of a deep and intricate ravine, where they fought from house to house, killing and wounding dozens of the defenders. Elsewhere, the Scinde Rifles successfully stormed a mosque held by a band of jihadist riflemen who refused to surrender and fought to the death. For several of the column withdrawals subjected to tribal pursuit, the Guides infantry provided flawless rearguards.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile the 34th Sikh Pioneers and two companies of the 1st Sappers and Miners blew up 144 stone towers of various descriptions, using an average charge of 171 pounds. They also detonated more fougasses.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ ‘Field Operations: Mohmand’, *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6058.

¹⁴⁵ C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 114; Moreman, *Army in India*, pp. 92–93; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 337–54.

¹⁴⁶ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, pp. 147–49 and 154; Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 26; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 1, Supplement A, pp. 23 and 42; Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, pp. 36–41; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 235.

¹⁴⁷ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 1, Supplement A, Appendix III; and Sandes, *Sappers*, pp. 401–03.

In Mohmand the Indian regiments' Pathan recruits made frequent displays of their home-grown skirmishing flair. In a daylight attack on a Mohmand-held height, an Afridi of the 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force) named Nur Baz independently chose to race 250 yards ahead of his company over steep, broken and boulder-strewn ground. From a distance, he shot dead one Mohmand defender on the ridge-top, which he reached well ahead of his company, killing two more Mohmands before securing a defensive foothold.¹⁴⁸ Among the Indian scouts, Pathan snipers shot as skilfully for the Army in India as they might have against it. On one bright morning in central Mohmand, a jihadist sniper high above a 1st Division column shot dead two men, the second of whom was a Mahsud soldier caught unawares while puffing on a 'bidi', or Indian cigarette. Some Pathan scouts were turned to, as Mark Channing, a British officer of a mule pack, witnessed:

The best shot in the rear-guard [Pathan] company is called up. A [young Afridi]. Guttural Pushtu words sputter [between him and a jemadar]. The young Pathan salutes, returns to his comrades, and proceeds to take off his heavy marching-kit, keeping only his rifle and bayonet. Then he starts up the hill side. Four men, with accoutrements, follow him, keeping about fifty yards in his rear. Or maybe it is seventy-five yards. . . . Some time later, up among that wilderness of boulders, some one shouts who, we don't know. Then somebody shouts back. . . . Our man and his covering party are invisible. Ten minutes after comes the sharp report of a Government rifle. [A British officer next to me] slams his field-glasses into their case and lights another cigarette. 'He's got him!' The young Pathan lopes down to us. . . . 'Shabash! How did you manage to do it so quickly, Gul Mohammed?' 'The Rose of Mohammed' frowns as if the praise displeased him. . . . The Government whose salt he had eaten [meaning whose pay he had received] had given him an order, and that order had been obeyed.¹⁴⁹

The 1st Division's battle casualties in Mohmand totalled 250; 85 per cent, as against the Zakkas, were Indian. At a conservative estimate, the jihadist casualties were six times as many, including 450 killed.¹⁵⁰ The Indian combatant casualties were evacuated swiftly and securely, as their regiments had rehearsed, and not one of them was lost to the enemy; the same can be said of the Zakka expedition.¹⁵¹ The significance of this was

¹⁴⁸ E. Candler, *The Sepoy* (London: John Murray, 1919), pp. 74–78.

¹⁴⁹ M. Channing, *Mosaic*, pp. 249–50. 'Shabash!' is a congratulation like 'bravo!' or 'well done!'; 'Gul' means 'rose'; 'eating salt' was a colloquial Indian expression for receiving army pay.

¹⁵⁰ India Office, *East India (North-West Frontier) Papers*, p. 154; 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6060–65.

¹⁵¹ 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6058; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 1, Supplement A, p. 54, and vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 20.

underscored by the fate of one Muslim follower in Mohmand. ‘One of my young drivers’, wrote Mark Channing, ‘disobeyed orders and after nightfall left the camp to go into the open beyond. He had no need to go for the purpose for which he went.’ Unhappily, the driver was soon caught:

We heard him scream in the darkness for hours, unable to go to his aid in a no-man’s land seamed with tortuous chasms varying in depth from ten to twenty feet or more, and among which lurked five thousand keen-eyed [Mohmand] enemy. In the morning we found him pegged out, spread-eagle-wise, on his face. They had mutilated him in the beastly Frontier fashion, then slashed his back with their knives, and finally lit a fire over his kidneys. It was smouldering when we came. The fact that, like those who did these things to him, he was a Mohammedan made no difference to them. That is the Trans-Frontier way.¹⁵²

The Indian battalions made some mistakes of their own in Mohmand. ‘Notwithstanding our superior arms, training and discipline’, Willcocks admitted, ‘the [Mohmand] tribesmen in their native hills had the better of us during the hours of darkness.’¹⁵³ He had in mind the dark and rainy night of 16–17 May, when thick thunder clouds over Mohmand shut out the moonlight, and one section of the 22nd Punjabis under an Indian officer, Jemadar Mir Afzal Khan, made a costly error while manning a picket outside their brigade’s camp. In Mark Channing’s words:

[The] picket was heavily attacked three times. When a reinforcing double company got to it the picket was practically wiped out. For some reason they had not built any head-cover on top of the circular stone wall, and the [Mohmands] picked them off when the lightning flashed. Every Indian officer and N.C.O. was killed, and all were shot in the head or chest. They carried the bodies into camp on stretchers, and I thought the procession would never end. Some of them were lying on their backs with their arms raised, as if in the act of firing a rifle.¹⁵⁴

The 22nd Punjabis had in fact lost eleven Indian soldiers shot dead through the head, and nine wounded in the neck or the upper chest, all hit by Mohmand marksmen hiding behind a village wall, firing to the rhythm of a dhol. The 57th Wildes Rifles (Frontier Force) had been similarly targeted at a picket nearby, but they had built better cover and held off the tribesmen without loss to themselves.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² M. Channing, *Mosaic*, pp. 252–53. His name was Ghulam Mahomed; see ‘Field Operations: Mohmand’, *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6065.

¹⁵³ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 234.

¹⁵⁴ Channing, *Mosaic*, p. 251.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Field Operations: Mohmand’, *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6055 and 6061; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 1, Supplement A, pp. 37–39.

Nevertheless, the 1st Division's mistakes in Mohmand were few and far between. Its operations there, like those against the Zakkas, were regarded as a triumph of Indian training. 'I can unhesitatingly say', Willcocks remarked on his return from Mohmand to Peshawar, 'that no troops could have rendered better service in the field.'¹⁵⁶ In London, at the India Office, John Morley passed his discerning eye over a flood of reports on the 1st Division's efforts since February. 'Although I cannot judge of skill in military operations', he said, 'I am convinced that these were brilliantly executed.'¹⁵⁷

In action in China, Tibet, the Bazar valley and Mohmand, the Indian regiments' small group tactics had only worked so well because their troops had been good at acting on their own initiative. While the Indian officers and men had dispersed into battle under the umbrella guidance of their British officers who told them what the general intention of their company or detachment was, they had made decisions for themselves – as they had been encouraged in their training – to ensure that the intention was realised. The Indian officers had frequently proved effective once given their brief. In Tibet, the Sikhs' climb to 18,500 feet at Karo La had been led by an Indian officer, Wassawa Singh, a stern but inspiring taskmaster who had given his men very few pauses to catch their breath and driven them on through personal example.¹⁵⁸ At the 22nd Punjab's ill-fated picket in Mohmand amidst the lightning flashes, Jemadar Mir Afzal Khan may have failed in directing his men to construct proper cover, but he could not be faulted for his independent determination to take responsibility for maintaining his post. 'He was severely wounded early in the night, but . . . he concealed the fact', Willcocks ascertained,

and continued to command, encouraging his men by word and action. One of the men called to him, 'Are you wounded?' to which he replied, 'Yes, but only slightly in the hand.' Presently a second bullet hit him, and again he called out, 'I am all right, only another hand wound,' and carried on; and when relief arrived he fell dead. He had received two mortal wounds . . .¹⁵⁹

Also in Mohmand in May 1908, Havildar Mir Dast of the 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force), an Afridi of the Khambur clan, had organised on his own initiative a small group to flush out some jihadists behind

¹⁵⁶ 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6058. For the sense of an Indian triumph in Mohmand, see Collin Davies, *The Problem of the North-West Frontier*, p. 152; Moreman, *Army in India*, p. 93; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 346.

¹⁵⁷ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 226.

¹⁵⁸ Landon, *Central Tibet*, pp. 271–74.

¹⁵⁹ 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6059; Willcocks, *Romance*, pp. 234–35.

a wall among some bushes, above a stream. He had led an assault at close quarters, during which his men shot two of the jihadists; Mir Dast himself was shot through the thigh from three yards, before he bayoneted his assailant.¹⁶⁰ Wassawa Singh and Mir Dast, like a number of other Indian officers who had acted similarly, were awarded the highest award for Indian valour, the Indian Order of Merit, which carried extra pay and the title of 'Bahadur', meaning 'most honourable'. For them, the Victoria Cross was out of the question – it was only opened to Indians in 1911. Such has been the regard for VC recipients that many holders of the Indian Order of Merit, a relic of the East India Company, have received less recognition than the VCs, even though they acted with no less guile and guts in the face of the enemy.

The British suspected that their Pathan enemies in hill warfare tried to target the Indian battalions' British officers in particular. Before the Zakka expedition, all its Indian service British officers were ordered to wear khaki turbans in order for them to blend in with their men. 'Apparently the Afridis had heard of the Boer practice of picking off officers, and intended to give us special and personal attention!' wrote Mark Channing.¹⁶¹ In the event, the Zakkas did not kill or wound a single of the Indians' British officers. In Mohmand, the British officers of the Indian battalions fell in small numbers – two killed and six wounded – and at different stages, so that they never left a local vacuum of white command. This was typical of India's small wars; even though British officers led them from the front, they suffered so few casualties that the Indian troops were almost never left with none to guide them.¹⁶²

What happened to the Indian soldiers on active service who were cut off from British officer leadership? They all belonged to units well trained for hill warfare, and they proved capable of using their own initiative to guide themselves. In Somaliland in 1903–04, some Pathans of the 107th Pioneers became separated from their column, lost and alone in isolated bushland; for three days they lived off dew from leaves and grass while looking for the column, which they re-found.¹⁶³ Shortly before that episode, in a quiet village in North Waziristan, a small column made up of the 51st and 53rd Sikhs (both Frontier Force) was invited by the locals to halt at a particular spot to take food. The column was lulled into accepting, prompting its four British officers and their Indian companies to gather round. Tribal snipers suddenly opened fire, mortally wounding

¹⁶⁰ VCGCA: 'Victoria Cross File no. 875: Mir Dast'; Candler, *Sepoy*, p. 74.

¹⁶¹ Callwell, *Small Wars*, p. 288; and Channing, *Mosaic*, p. 246.

¹⁶² 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6060; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 26.

¹⁶³ Tugwell, *Pioneers*, p. 170.

two of the British officers and incapacitating the two others, and a number of tribesmen rushed out from the houses to attack the Indian troops at close quarters. The three senior Indian officers present – all subadars – rose to the occasion. They conducted a successful fighting withdrawal by small groups working skilfully together to fall back in successive movements. They made good use of a garden wall and other cover, and prevented oncoming tribesmen from dominating the flanking ground.¹⁶⁴

‘The majority of Indian officers are very fine fellows and possessed of acumen, perception and sound common sense far above their fellows, or they would not be where they are’, commented an Indian service British officer.¹⁶⁵ Indeed the pre-1914 differential between the number of British officers in a British and Indian battalion – twenty-eight to twelve – should not be seen simply as leaving the Indian units with a shortfall of lower-level leadership. Rather, each Indian battalion should be seen as having twenty-eight British and Indian officers, with the Indian officers’ value being proportionate to how thoroughly they had been instructed in the principles of *Frontier Warfare*. James Willcocks, in praising well-trained Indian officers he had overseen as an Indian brigade commander from 1904 to 1907, felt moved to say it was ‘an honour . . . how many I recall who [took] their equal place alongside their British comrades’.¹⁶⁶

‘Every thinking soldier who has served on our recent Indian [north-west frontier] campaigns’, Ian Hamilton, a British service officer, wrote in 1905,

is aware that for the requirements of such operations a good Sikh, Pathan or Gurkha battalion is more generally serviceable than a British battalion. If, for instance, a non-commissioned officer and a dozen men are required to picquet a mountain top two or three miles distant, until the column has passed, and are then to find their way back and follow on with the rear guard, no one in his senses would send British soldiers. They might lose their way; they might [get caught up] and require to be extricated. . . . For advance guards, rear guards, road-making, night fighting, escorts to convoys, and for [almost] everything in fact that takes place [on the frontier] . . . [Indian] troops . . . can give points to [British].¹⁶⁷

Hamilton acknowledged something that usually went unsaid: the Indian army was unquestionably the British army’s superior at hill warfare. The Indian army had the Frontier Force, the British army had nothing comparable; the Indian service’s British officers had devoted themselves to hill warfare training in the wake of the Tirah campaign, their British service peers had not; many Indian units had Afridis, Gurkhas and other

¹⁶⁴ Indian General Staff, *Operations in Waziristan, 1919–20* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1921), pp. 23–24. Also see Haldane, *Soldier’s Saga*, p. 111.

¹⁶⁵ Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁶ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 212.

¹⁶⁷ I. Hamilton, *Scrap Book*, p. 29.

local recruits who had joined up with certain ready-made attributes for frontier fighting, British battalions drew men from shires, slums and Celtic fringes who were not so adapted. The upshot was a virtuous circle of frontier fighting development for the Indian army, in which the British army scarcely shared. Recognising this, Army Headquarters did not favour British units for frontier service. For the Waziristan Blockade of 1901–02 – against the Mahsuds and the Darwesh Khel Waziris, and a full-blown frontier campaign in practice though not in name, at Lord Curzon’s insistence – a total of seven Frontier Force and fourteen non-Frontier Force Indian battalions fought in the tribal areas, but not a single British battalion was called on.¹⁶⁸ When the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat independent brigades were created under Kitchener, they were stationed in NWFP as India’s first line of regular frontier defence. To fulfil that purpose as best as possible, not one British regiment was posted to them. Meanwhile, the three British battalions given to each of India’s new permanent divisions were included as safeguards, as we have seen, against Indian mutiny and supposed racial frailty, rather than as frontier specialists. In 1908, the 1st Division’s British battalions did well enough in wide brigade advances on Zakka or Mohmand ridges, as they had practised at Indian brigade manoeuvres. But for the majority of the division’s fighting, which was made up of more delicate small group or scouting duties, its Indian regiments, especially Frontier Force ones, were habitually used in preference.¹⁶⁹

The Indian cavalry regiments saw only a little action between 1900 and 1908, in general as single units in support of the infantry. Their training proved adequate for what was required of them. Against the Mohmands, the 19th Fane’s Horse did useful mounted reconnaissance. Further, on a rare patch of flat and open Mohmand ground, a squadron of the 21st Cavalry (Frontier Force) had an even rarer chance to chase tribesmen retreating from infantry attack. The cavalymen charged to cause panic in the tribal ranks, sabring twenty of them and driving the others onto an open hillside. ‘On ascending the hill’, James Willcocks recorded as an onlooker, ‘[the tribesmen] came into full view of our mountain guns, which were immediately turned on them, and the rapid fire of shrapnel and Maxims completed their rout.’¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ *The Times*, 7 August 1901: ‘The New Policy in Waziristan’, p. 13; Indian General Staff, *Waziristan*, pp. 27–29; and Neville, *Campaigns*, pp. 328–29.

¹⁶⁹ W. Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown: An Autobiography* (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1941), p. 187; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 212.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Field Operations: Mohmand’, *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6057; M. Y. Effendi, *Punjab Cavalry* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 30–34; and Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 345.

‘As is well known to anyone with any knowledge of the tribesmen’, Willcocks added, ‘they never leave behind a wounded man, risking anything rather than that he should be made a prisoner.’¹⁷¹ This, of course, greatly reduced the scope for Indian units to take prisoners in the tribal areas, as did the tribesmen’s tendencies to avoid fighting in large, concentrated formations, and to make individual jihadist attacks, often charging with a sword and no intention of being taken alive.¹⁷² On the occasions that real prospects of taking tribal prisoners did arise, Indian troops at times gave no quarter, very likely as payback for tribal maltreatment of Indian wounded.¹⁷³ But usually they treated wounded and captured tribesmen in line with the Indian army’s humane policy. In 1908, for instance, they took around thirty prisoners against the Zakkas and Mohmands. The prisoners were given medical attention, before being interrogated by Indian military intelligence.¹⁷⁴

The Tibetan campaign presented Indian troops with more substantial opportunities to take prisoners than hill warfare did. The Tibetan combatants gathered in bodies of up to 2,000 men, and, compared to the Pathans, they were willing to surrender. At least several hundred of them were taken prisoner by the Indians.¹⁷⁵ Many were not, however, where their status as an active enemy was open to interpretation. At Karo La on 6 May 1904, the Sikhs and Gurkhas had to decide for themselves how to treat fleeing Tibetans who minutes earlier had been shooting at them. ‘If they turned to surrender, we spared them. If they ran away, we shot’, said one Sikh jemadar.¹⁷⁶ Two months later, some men of the 1st/8th Gurkhas were in less of a mood to compromise. During the regiment’s search of some mountain caves for fugitive Tibetan fighters, one of these, according to an English journalist with the invading forces, ‘shot a Gurkha who was looking into the cave where he was hiding’:

He then ran out and held up his thumbs, expecting quarter. He was rightly cut down with *kukris*. The dying Gurkha’s comrades rushed the cave, and drove six more over the precipice without using steel or powder. They fell sheer 300 feet.

¹⁷¹ ‘Field Operations: Mohmand’, *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6058.

¹⁷² Nevill, *Campaigns*, p. 369; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 235.

¹⁷³ Churchill, *Malakand*, pp. 111–12.

¹⁷⁴ ‘Field Operations: Mohmand’, *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6058; B. Blacker, *Adventures*, pp. 12–13, and Channing, *Mosaic*, p. 252. For prisoner taking during the Waziristan Blockade, see Indian General Staff, *Waziristan*, pp. 27 and 29.

¹⁷⁵ Candler, *The Unveiling of Lhasa* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), pp. 110, 131, 162 and 216; and French, *Younghusband*, pp. 223–24.

¹⁷⁶ C. Lucas, *Waziristan to Tibet: The Chronicles of Colonel H. R. Brander, 32nd Sikh Pioneers, 1882–1910* (Bloomington: Booktango, 2012), see chapter 17.

Another Gurkha cut off a Tibetan's head with his own sword. On several occasions they hesitated to soil their *kukris* when they could despatch their victims in any other way.¹⁷⁷

Gurkha scouts did in fact use their khukuris in the tribal areas to decapitate Pathans, before taking away the severed heads. They seem to have done so not simply to make vindictive or triumphant gestures, but to confirm their killings of enemy snipers to their British officers.¹⁷⁸ Pathans on regimental service, meanwhile, lacked the motivation to kill or mutilate wounded and captured enemies as they might when fighting as tribal warriors. Such acts were rituals specific to tribal conflicts or to jihad, both of which were impossible for their regiments to wage.¹⁷⁹

From 1909 to 1914, the development of the Indian regiments' internal cohesion involved further reform of the Army in India's training manuals. At the Imperial Conferences on Defence in London in 1909 and 1911, the Empire's white political leaders and their military advisors gathered to discuss their collective security interests. They resolved that military training throughout the Empire should be standardised. A new British government-led policy emerged for the Home Army and Army in India to use the same training manuals, and it was put into practice in India by O'Moore Creagh and Douglas Haig, respectively as the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the Indian General Staff. In 1911, therefore, the Army in India's use of both regular warfare and north-west frontier fighting manuals was officially discontinued. Instead, updated War Office regular warfare manuals for particular arms were issued. With them came a new manual-in-chief: the British army's *Field Service Regulations* (1909).¹⁸⁰ These contained general principles, shaped by Boer war experiences, on how regular battles should be conducted in Europe. They encouraged infantry to attack in skirmishing lines with companies firing and moving flexibly to progress against modern firepower, and all arms to co-operate closely. What they were not concerned with was small wars. To prevent officers in India from being distracted from the *Field Service Regulations*, *Frontier Warfare* and its sister manuals were cancelled.

¹⁷⁷ Candler, *Lhasa*, pp. 268–69.

¹⁷⁸ Candler, *Sepoy*, pp. 17–18. I am grateful to Dominik von Bohlen und Halbach for sharing his research in Nepal on this area, and to Gordon Corrigan for his thoughts on the Gurkha scouts.

¹⁷⁹ For a discussion of Pathan viewpoints, see Holdich, 'Tirah', 351–53.

¹⁸⁰ War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part I: Operations, 1909*, revised edition (London: HMSO, 1912).

Indeed, in many British army eyes the latter had become an unhealthy obsession among Indian service officers.¹⁸¹

The cancellation of the frontier manuals was badly received within the Indian infantry regiments; so badly, in fact, that the second edition of the *Field Service Regulations* (1912) had an amendment in the form of six paragraphs on mountain warfare, as a concession to the Indian army. Most of the Indian battalions' British officers did not take the *Field Service Regulations* to heart. They continued to see the Pathan tribal areas as their most important battleground, and they generally concentrated on keeping up their units' hill warfare know-how. The significant exceptions appear to have been officers of a minority of recently formed Indian battalions, such as the 47th Sikhs (founded in 1901). Their regiments had no personal traditions of north-west frontier fighting to preserve, helping to make them relatively open to the *Field Service Regulations'* principles as a sound basis for training.

The *Field Service Regulations* and their ancillary cavalry manuals did not come to any rigid conclusion as to the proper balance in training between mounted and dismounted duties. This was a blank cheque for the officers of the Indian cavalry to continue to focus in regimental training on traditional mounted work. For the British units in India, the cancellation of the frontier manuals was of little consequence – the *Field Service Regulations* were a means for their regimental training to maintain its overriding interest in regular warfare.¹⁸²

As the Chiefs of the Indian General Staff up to 1914, Douglas Haig and Percy Lake held regular warfare manoeuvres in NWFP, the Punjab and Central Provinces, requiring Indian divisions to apply the *Field Service Regulations'* tactical principles. They arranged the manoeuvres not as Smith-Dorrien had the 4th Division's in Baluchistan in 1906, but as open warfare. They asked battalions to dig trenches only in basic form; sweeping advances in wide lines for quick victories were their real theme.¹⁸³ The cavalry practised supporting the infantry by galloping to

¹⁸¹ Charteris, *Field-Marshal Earl Haig* (London: Cassell, 1929), p. 53; Creagh, 'Army in India', 33–36; Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 113–14; MacMunn, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 82; Moreman, *Army in India*, p. 93, 'Kitchener', p. 71, and "Passing it On", p. 278.

¹⁸² *47th Sikhs War Record*, new edition (Chippenham: Picton, 1992), pp. 1–2; and Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, p. 280.

¹⁸³ *The Times*, 21 December 1912: 'The Northern Army of India: Manoeuvres', and 21 January 1913: 'Northern Army of India: Strategy at the Manoeuvres'; Creagh, *The Autobiography of General Sir O'Moore Creagh V. C., with an Introduction and Notes by Major-General Sir Charles E. Callwell* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), pp. 274 and 292; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 144; Tugwell, *Pioneers*, p. 176; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 12, and *Romance*, pp. 266–67.

rout a retreating enemy.¹⁸⁴ Haig hoped that this combined training would fan the embers of Indian regimental interest in regular warfare preparations. Yet on his visits to Indian messes he found that officers still dwelled on the lessons of the Tirah over those of South Africa.¹⁸⁵

In the Army in India's few small wars from 1909 to 1914, Indian regiments did most of the work, and they did it well. In 1911–12, Indian battalions of the 6th Division fought on Persia's Makran Coast to choke the arms trade between Muscat and the Pathan tribal areas. In skirmishes in and around villages on the shores of the Gulf of Oman, they worked in small groups against tribal rifle traffickers.¹⁸⁶ The 38th Central India Horse patrolled the sandy wastes inland, manning machine gun posts to intercept arms caravans.¹⁸⁷ On India's north-east frontier, meanwhile, a force of 2,350 Indian troops took on the Abor tribesmen of Assam. Platoons of the 1st/2nd and 1st/8th Gurkhas negotiated thick jungle in pursuit of Abor fighters and fired accurately at them, and the 32nd Sikh Pioneers built strong camps, digging perimeter trenches protected by sharp entanglements improvised from bamboo and other jungle plants.¹⁸⁸

The Pathan tribes of the north-west frontier did not provoke any major operations against them between 1909 and 1914. Nonetheless, the Indian units garrisoned there creditably performed what duties were required of them. In the winter of 1910–11, the 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force) were ordered to transfer from one post in NWFP to another in Baluchistan. They promptly completed a 400-mile march along the edge of the tribal areas, through rain, sleet and snow that often washed away the undulating roads.¹⁸⁹ In February 1914, two non-Frontier Force Indian battalions – neither of which had served against the Zakkas or Mohmands in 1908 – were in a punitive column sent into the mountains of Buner, by the Swat valley, to punish two Bunerwal villages for harbouring brigands. They marched forty-eight miles in thirty-six hours over steep ground littered with rocks, boulders and bushes, and drenched by rain; with two Frontier Force units, they set up pickets above the villages, advanced

¹⁸⁴ W. Raleigh and H. Jones, *The War in the Air*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922–37), vol. 1, pp. 410–22.

¹⁸⁵ NLS: Papers of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, 1910 diary, 22 August, and 1911 diary, 31 March and 17 August. Also see Moreman, *Army in India*, p. 177, and "Passing it On", p. 278.

¹⁸⁶ IOR, R/15/5/391: Indian General Staff, 'Report on the Operations of the Makran Field Force in April and May 1911' (1913); Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 336–37; W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, pp. 287–97.

¹⁸⁷ W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, pp. 287–97.

¹⁸⁸ P. Millington, *On the Track of the Abor* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, 1912), pp. 16, 27, 69–70 and 100.

¹⁸⁹ H. Wylly, *History of the 5th Battalion 13th Frontier Force Rifles 1849–1926* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1929), pp. 62–63.

in tandem with smokeless mountain artillery fire, and captured several prisoners. 'All troops have shown unflagging energy and spirit', their brigade commander reported.¹⁹⁰

In surveying the Indian army of 1914, James Willcocks said of the Frontier Force's infantry, 'their fighting capacity is well known to all who have ever served in India [and they] have been the backbone of England's power in the East.'¹⁹¹ No other army had a body of battalions quite like them. For fifty years, barely a week had passed in which some of their officers and men, even after the delocalisation of their corps in 1903, had not been active either on the north-west frontier – on punitive missions, routine border patrols, map-making reconnaissances, or armed escort duties with civil servants, political officers and politicians – or overseas. All their experiences gave the Frontier Force units proud traditions and a day-to-day liveliness that made their bonds of internal cohesion especially tight.¹⁹² After the Tirah campaign, as we have seen, a complementary breed of high-quality, internally cohesive non-Frontier Force Indian battalions came into flower. They numbered approximately seventy-five. They had been trained so that the Frontier Force's craft of hill warfare had been spread among them, preparing them to fight flexibly in small groups or as individuals using modern rifles – Lee-Enfield Mark IIs after a further upgrade under Creagh – in co-operation with the mountain artillery. The Indian cavalry regiments were not such efficient fighting units, but they too had significant levels of internal cohesion. 'By 1914', concluded Hugh Rawlinson, a professor of English at the Deccan College and a military historian, 'there is no doubt that, as a result of sweeping reforms, the Indian army was, on the whole, a well-armed, well-trained, and well-led body of men.'¹⁹³

As Rawlinson implied, a minority of the Indian regiments were not high or even good quality. In general, they had unbroken traditions of serving far from the north-west frontier, they attracted the least ambitious and sought-after British officers, and they kept low standards. Early on in Charles Hardinge's viceroyalty, he reckoned that twenty-five of them were unfit to fight anyone. The 88th Carnatics were a case in point. While guarding Hardinge's Calcutta residence, they posted to the front gate a

¹⁹⁰ IOR, L/MIL/17/13/56: Indian General Staff, 'Report on Punitive Operations against the Bunerwals' (1914); B. Blacker, *Adventures*, pp. 26–27.

¹⁹¹ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 212.

¹⁹² Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, p. 71.

¹⁹³ H. Rawlinson, *Napier's Rifles: The History of the 5th Battalion 6th Rajputana Rifles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), pp. 130–33. Also see J. Stephenson, 'The Indian Army', in B. Pitt (ed.), Purnell's *History of the First World War*, 128 parts (1970–75), part 27, pp. 744–51; and Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 4.

languid sentry who put down his rifle and took off his shoes to smoke a cigarette. James Willcocks inspected the 88th shortly afterwards, and he found them to be ‘the worst regiment he had ever seen, anywhere’.¹⁹⁴

The high-quality Indian battalions, totalling eighty-five or so including the Frontier Force, were deliberately concentrated in the Field Army’s senior, or ‘fighting’, higher formations. They were mostly in the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions, stationed respectively in NWFP, the northern Punjab and Baluchistan (and all on standby to advance across India’s north-west borders), and in the 3rd, 6th and 7th Divisions, lying close behind the 1st, 2nd and 4th (and earmarked for the north-west or for overseas). They were also in the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat independent brigades. The low-quality Indian units, on the other hand, tended to be stationed in central or southern India. They either belonged to the 5th, 8th and 9th Divisions or were un-brigaded. They were deemed unsuitable for deployment beyond India’s administrative borders, and were kept back to help the Indian police preserve domestic order in the provinces.

Ultimately, the Indian army’s wealth of high-quality battalions reflected that the north-west frontier was a great crucible of tactical development. On the frontier, the winds of tactical change blew down from the Pathan hills as much as they did up from the Indian plains. The Frontier Force had initially acquired many of its skirmishing skills by copying Pathan techniques. The small group skills that became characteristic of the wider Indian infantry were also in some measure in imitation of tribal example.¹⁹⁵ The tribesmen, meanwhile, learned their own lessons. ‘There has undoubtedly been a considerable change in the art of war as practised by the Pathan tribes’, Hugh Nevill wrote in 1912, ‘which may be traced with certainty to the improvement of their armament’:

[If one surveys frontier warfare up to the late 1880s], several instances will be found in which the tribesmen charged the regular troops sword in hand in broad daylight, but [since 1890] they have revealed a growing disinclination to try the fortune of war by such drastic methods. Instead of the reckless daring characteristic of warriors who depend for success on hand-to-hand encounter, guile and studied prudence have become the chief weapons in the moral armoury of the transfrontier Pathan. . . . It cannot be denied that the Pathans have taken . . . advantage of the long ranging-power of the modern rifle, [which] has relegated the sword to a secondary position. . . . Improvement in the armament of the tribesmen first became noticeable in the Hunza-Nagar Expedition of 1891–92 [at the northern end of the tribal areas], and has been steady and continuous ever since. The Kanjutis [of Hunza] were found to be in possession

¹⁹⁴ Busch, *Hardinge*, pp. 192–94; Goold, ‘Lord Hardinge’, p. 920; and Hardinge, *My Indian Years, 1910–1916* (London: John Murray, 1948), pp. 31–32.

¹⁹⁵ MacDiarmid, *Grierson*, p. 71.

of all kinds of firearms of European manufacture; during the defence and relief of Chitral in 1895 the followers of [the Bajauri chieftain] Umra Khan were as well armed as [the] greater part of [the Army in India relief force]; two years later in Tirah a further advance was marked by the appearance of the '303' rifle in place of the '450' Martini. It is true that small-bore rifles had not reached the tribesmen in any great number in 1897, but still they were available in sufficient quantity to have a marked effect on the campaign. . . . Eleven years later the Bazar Valley and the Mohmand Expeditions proved that the '303' rifle was in still more general possession by the inhabitants of the frontier hills.¹⁹⁶

Part of the Afridis' upper hand in the Tirah campaign had been that their tactics, while in many respects familiar to seasoned observers, were steeped in innovations to make the most of their rifles – which they had only just obtained, and had not used before against the Empire. The weight they placed on harassing punitive columns returning to camp for the night was unprecedented, and was in recognition of the fact that a lashkar's rifles would be most effective where its knowledge of the ground allowed it to concentrate rapid fire against exposed companies in confined spaces. A lashkar could best do this having tracked a punitive column moving out from camp in the morning, because then it knew what the line of return would be later in the day, and, should some imperial troops go astray on their way back to camp, it could likely predict the optimum ground for closing in.

Individual jezzail 'sharp-shooting' was an old Pathan practice, but the Afridis' sniping with their Lee-Netfords in 1897–98 demonstrated fresh adaptation to precision rifle technology that had quadruple the range of jezzails. As each TFF camp was established in Afridi Tirah, the Afridis took their time before sniping into them. By day, they placed observers on the surrounding heights to identify headquarters, mess tents and other permanent camp points, and only began to fire by night once snipers had pinpointed their best targets.¹⁹⁷ 'These vultures of the night . . . a dozen or so of the crack shots', recalled Thomas Holdich (India's intrepid Superintendent of Frontier Surveys, who personally mapped much of Afghanistan and the Pamirs and spent the Tirah campaign completing his mapping of the tribal areas), 'carefully estimate the range of the camp, which, covering many a square acre of ground, was a big enough target in all conscience even for evening practice':

hiding behind grey boulders and stones big enough to conceal an ordinary partridge, did they wriggle and turn themselves into the position where they would lie ere the night finally fell. Then . . . bullets come spluttering, splashing, tearing,

¹⁹⁶ Neville, *Campaigns*, pp. 105–06 and 365–66.

¹⁹⁷ Holdich, 'Tirah', 351–56; and Neville, *Campaigns*, pp. 316–17.

and smashing right into the middle of the camp, where tired men had perchance just sat down to a frugal dinner. Once more! The general's tent this time! We all know him – this for our evening salaam! and the sandbags artfully piled in front of the general's door are pitted with marks as of small-pox. By this time a few men and a few mules are stretched on the ground and the men are still guessing (if they have sense left in them) from what direction the bullets come. One officer has left the dinner-table with his arm smashed – another, still sitting at the camp mess-table, has quietly dropped his head on his plate, and his knife and fork gently slide out of fingers that will never grasp them again.¹⁹⁸

In February 1908, the Zakkas were quick to adapt to the problems posed by the 1st Division in the Bazar valley. Early on in the invasion, as a punitive column withdrew from the main Zakka village of China, the Zakkas risked venturing out into a comparatively open patch of country to make a close-quarters attack on a Royal Garrison Artillery mountain battery. They managed to shoot six of the British gunners, but in the process exposed themselves to rapid Lee-Enfield fire from Sikh and Gurkha infantrymen on either side of them. They lost heavily. Thereafter they were conspicuously more careful to avoid exposing themselves to converging rifle fire.¹⁹⁹ The Zakkas' very first experience under the 10-pounder smokeless artillery fire taught them that not presenting targets was the best protection against it, now that the earliest indication of an incoming shell was a shell-burst up-close. In the following days, some of the gunners grew so frustrated by lack of tribal fighters in their sights they began to take snap shots at walls at ranges of up to 3,600 yards, on the off chance that tribesmen might be hiding behind them; unfortunately, one of these shots smashed into a funeral party, killing some mourners.²⁰⁰

After the first of the sappers and miners' fougasses had been detonated, the Zakkas took care not to step anywhere near where they suspected more might be.²⁰¹ As for the Zakkas' sniping practices, these evolved, too. On the opening nights of the 1st Division's occupation of the Bazar valley, the Zakkas found that their individual night sniping much less effective than in 1897–98 because of the imperial camps' trenches and parapets; they in fact hit no troops within the camp perimeters. The middle days of the campaign saw a lull in night sniping as the Zakkas thought over their response. This came in late February, when they initiated heavy

¹⁹⁸ Holdich, *Indian Borderland*, p. 361.

¹⁹⁹ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, pp. 15 and 26–27.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–12; Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 353–55; and C. de Sausmarez, 'Notes on the Bazar Valley Expedition', *Journal of the Royal Artillery* 35 (1908), 282.

²⁰¹ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 40.

night sniping against selected camp targets from several directions simultaneously, presumably on the understanding that if there was a gap in the defences to be found, their bullets now had a better chance of finding it. They correctly identified the 1st Division camp at Chura as the one with the weakest entrenchments. They gave it special attention on the last night of the campaign, and succeeded in shooting four Indian soldiers.²⁰²

In 1897, the Mohmands and their neighbouring tribes of the Swat valley had joined in the tribal risings only to suffer relatively large losses where they charged in numbers across open ground in broad daylight against machine gunners and riflemen of the Malakand Field Force. Against the 1st Division eleven years later, the Mohmands' memories of 1897, combined with their upsurge in rifle ownership since 1900, led them to alter their approach. '[A] most striking feature of the [Mohmand] expedition of 1908 is the number of night operations undertaken by the tribesmen', Hugh Nevill observed:

All their great efforts were made at night. They made, it is true, [some] determined attacks [by day], but [these did not] really mean business. . . . Night attacks were, of course, common enough in former campaigns, but there seems to have been a much more definite object in view than usual in [the Mohmands' most serious night] attacks, [which] were made in considerable force. . . . The question may well be asked: Is this a sign of the times? . . . Has the Pathan realized that what the magazine rifle has made impracticable by day may be possible by night? History asserts that uncivilized warriors are usually averse from night operations. [It appears that] modern science has compelled a conservative people to move with the times and adapt their tactics to the firearms of the day.²⁰³

The Mohmands tried in 1908 to prevent a repeat of their casualties of 1897 by avoiding imperial firepower in daylight, and to turn the tables by combining their rifle fire against their Army in India opponents where these were most concentrated and immobile – in camp, at night.²⁰⁴

The Afridis and Mohmands were just two of the frontier's long list of tribes that were in a perpetual state of tactical flux. Among the others, the Bunerwals developed a new style of bullet more unpleasant than even the discontinued dum-dum, as Stewart Blacker, an officer of the Guides,

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14–15, 17, 19 and 39.

²⁰³ Nevill, *Campaigns*, pp. 352–53.

²⁰⁴ 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6053–54 and 6056; Graham, *Artillery*, pp. 112–13; S. McCance, *History of the Royal Munster Fusiliers*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1927), vol. 2, p. 36; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 234.

discovered in 1912 when out one morning with a regimental party in the Swat valley:

We climbed on foot up the narrow stony track, up into thick pine forests, up again into sparse scrub and rock. In front to one hand there sprang up sheer the peak called Eagle's Nest. In a moment, rifle fire banged out all around us, and I mean all around. Every now and then black-clothed figures appeared from behind boulders, and we shot back at them without sparing our ammunition. These Buner people wore black or very dark blue, which gave them a slightly sinister look. Soon it dawned on me how it was that loud reports were coming from very close behind us. Explosive bullets were detonating on the rocks. It was a relief to think that we were not surrounded, but the prospect of being hit by a big detonating bullet rather offset that. The ingenious men of Buner, who at that time mostly possessed Martinis, had hollowed out the noses of those big lead bullets and inserted the detonators used with high explosive. These they had obtained by the usual Pathan sleight of hand from the works of our great canal tunnel, then being driven through the granite Malakand range. By the same token their Martinis had come from Australia, when that Government re-armed its troops with the .303 and rather rashly sold their Martinis in too open a market.²⁰⁵

What the north-west frontier emphatically was not, therefore, was a soft school of war. It was a highly competitive environment where the Army in India and the tribesmen were locked in a cycle of tactical innovations and responses to get the better of one another. Indeed, the Pathans competed in arms less frequently with the Empire's forces than they did between themselves. Besides their tribal or clan wars, they engaged in hereditary blood feuds with their own cousins. Thus they wanted their rifles to help them settle many more scores than those they had with the British. The rifle became epicentral to life in the tribal areas not just as a prized status symbol – 'our arms, dearer to us than our very lives', the Afridi maliks told George Roos-Keppel²⁰⁶ – but as a daily danger. 'All [the Indian army's Afridi recruits] complain bitterly of the evils which have followed the introduction of the long-range rifle into their country', wrote Thomas Holdich:

Formerly, a man who was at blood-feud with his neighbour could at least till his fields by daylight, keeping one eye open to the possible chances of a shot fired within visible distance. Now, they say, it is quite impossible to tell from whence a bullet may strike, and the only safeguard is to take to agricultural pursuits by night only. Born and bred in such an atmosphere, it is no matter of surprise that an

²⁰⁵ My thanks to Barnaby Blacker for providing this quotation (from the papers of his grandfather, Stewart Blacker).

²⁰⁶ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/32, Butler Papers: 'Translation of an Address Presented by the Khyber Maliks and Elders to the Hon. Lt.-Gov. Colonel George Roos-Keppel, K.C.I.E., Agent to Governor-General and Chief Commissioner, North-West Frontier Province, at Peshawar, on 12 November 1908'.

Afridi should be steeped to the chin in all the arts and wiles of tribal and domestic treachery. It is rather astonishing that he should ever possess the soldierly quality of faith to his colours and his salt at all, and should reserve the brutalities and treacheries of his bandit existence for his own tribe and his own hearthstone.²⁰⁷

If the Pathans had their eye on any particular battle trophy, it was the rifle (an English magazine rifle cost around Rs. 400 on the open market in the tribal areas, or three years' pay for an Indian infantryman).²⁰⁸ When fighting for the Indian army in the tribal areas, whether in open battle or as snipers, they made a point of retrieving rifles from men they had shot. In Mohmand in 1908, for instance, one Afridi of the 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force) who had killed two Mohmand tribesmen returned to camp 'with a jaw like a bulldog, grinning all over, and the three rifles slung to his shoulder'.²⁰⁹ That year the Mohmands were no less covetous of the Afridis' Lee-Enfields. 'During the latter part of the Mohmand expedition', a British recruiting officer for the tribal areas recorded, 'the Mohmands induced half a dozen Afridi [soldiers of an Indian regiment] to desert with their arms and accoutrements. As soon as the deserters joined them they were immediately relieved of their rifles, ammunition and clothes, and were left naked to find their way back to Tirah as best they could.'²¹⁰

The Home Army's regimental training from 1897 to 1914 progressed along different lines than India's. After the South African War had exposed the shortcomings of the 1890s drill-books, there was an intense Home Army debate as to how the British service should best prepare for regular warfare. At first, the debate concerned the Russians should they attack towards India, triggering the sending of reinforcements from the UK. From 1904 or so, in the interests of British imperial security in relation to Europe, the debate came to focus on the Home Army possibly fighting the Germans there. It was in response to both these visions of Home Army duty that the War Office's new regular warfare training manuals had been written from 1900. The manuals meant a great deal to the British army officers who had fought in South Africa and anticipated a German war. Such officers were spread thick across the Home Army, and they thought hard about what the manuals' general principles meant. A consensus emerged in the Home Army's infantry regiments that British troops should be trained as skirmishers capable of rapid individual rifle fire, trench digging, field craft and self-reliance under pressure – qualities

²⁰⁷ Holdich, 'Tirah', 350–52.

²⁰⁸ India Office, East India (North-West Frontier) Papers, p. 111.

²⁰⁹ Candler, *Sepoy*, p. 77. Also see Channing, *Mosaic*, p. 250.

²¹⁰ Enriquez, *Borderland*, p. 78.

that became hallmarks of Home Army battalions through regimental and higher training. Within the Home Army's cavalry, for all that there was argument about the relative values of mounted and dismounted skills, the supporters of the dismounted arts ensured that many cavalry units were trained accordingly.²¹¹

By 1914, therefore, professionalism had risen among the regiments of the Army in India and the Home Army. Quite what this meant in terms of fighting competence from regiment to regiment was of course a question of service membership and location. The 40th Pathans, say, were a high-quality non-Frontier Force battalion. They had Orakzai, Afridi and other Pathan recruits with particularly high-level skirmishing and scouting skills, and their internal cohesion had been cemented by active service in Tibet, the Bazar valley and Mohmand. At Indian divisional regular warfare manoeuvres in 1909, they had used their sense of flexible small group tactics to capture a trench from the 2nd/Black Watch, surprising the Scotsmen with an impromptu night attack.²¹²

The 1st/Highland Light Infantry, meanwhile, were not as efficient as the 40th Pathans. The battalion had served in the South African War, from which it had drawn lessons such as spreading out troops in attack against modern firepower. Up to 1914 it had been stationed in India, where its officers had given their attention to the War Office's regular warfare manuals, but had struggled to develop coherent company fighting practices. Its companies had consistently been handed separate internal security duties in various towns and cities, making regular and concentrated regimental training impossible, inevitably obstructing the breeding of common tactical habits. Moreover, the battalion had received Home Army drafts trained in certain drills and disciplines that its men in India had not. The upshot was that when its companies gathered at some Indian regular warfare manoeuvres shortly before 1914, they lacked the 40th Pathans' verve. In the words of one of their officers, they were 'rather at a loss' as to how to work together.²¹³

As for the Home Army's battalions, many were stationed with it for most or all of the time between 1902 and 1914. Through its training culture, which focused on regular warfare with an increasing emphasis on facing the Germans, they developed a higher level of skills for European warfare than the battalions in India did. For example, the Home Army's Hythe School of Musketry nurtured exceptional standards of rapid individual rifle fire that the Army in India was known not to have.

²¹¹ S. Jones, 'Tactical Development', pp. 172–83.

²¹² Waters, *Forty Thieves*, pp. 83 and 90–91.

²¹³ L. Oatts, *Proud Heritage: The Story of the Highland Light Infantry*, 4 vols. (Glasgow: Gaunt, 1961), vol. 3, pp. 120–29.

The Home Army's battalions, however, were not trained in hill warfare, so the 40th Pathans and other high-quality Indian battalions possessed tactical skills they did not.²¹⁴ Further, their officers' perceived a real difference between them and their sister battalions in India. 'The difference', as Robert Graves put it in reference to the Royal Welch Fusiliers, 'was that, in August 1914, the Second Battalion had just finished its eighteen years overseas tour, whereas the First Battalion had not left England since the South African War and was, therefore, less old-fashioned in its militarism.'²¹⁵

Although the Indian army's regiments were trained differently compared to the Home Army's, this did not make them simply inferior. In 1913, Walter Venour, the commandant of the 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force), suggested that hill warfare training was 'a useful fighting asset to any unit under any conditions'.²¹⁶ The performance of the 51st Sikhs (Frontier Force) against Chinese shellfire in 1900 had already indicated he was not daydreaming.

Mobilising

By the mid-1890s, Army Headquarters had often mobilised small-scale forces and was accustomed to moving them by rail towards Indian borders for deployment beyond. Largely owing to reforms under Lord Roberts, India's Commander-in-Chief from 1885 to 1893, there were some mobilisation systems in place. For instance, the Indian cavalry regiments each had eighty-seven mules given them by the government for their own peacetime transport use, on the condition that in wartime the un-mobilised regiments among them would hand their mules to the mobilised. Further, there was a small collection of Indian field hospitals, ambulance trains and other medical units kept on standby for active duty. If called on to mobilise small forces of anything up to 15,000 troops or so, the Army in India could do it without great difficulty. This was shown in 1900, when the mobilisation of the small Indian force for China went smoothly, taking a fortnight.²¹⁷

To counter the 1897 north-west frontier risings, the Indian government mobilised forces on a much larger scale than had been seen on the subcontinent for decades: a total of 60,000 Indian and British regular troops, 4,000 troops of Imperial Service units, and non-combatant support including 71,800 animals. The Army in India proved badly prepared.

²¹⁴ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/2198: 'Memorandum on Army Training in India, 1910-11', p. 10; S. Jones, 'Tactical Development', pp. 172-83.

²¹⁵ Graves, *Goodbye to all That*, p. 181.

²¹⁶ Moreman, 'North-West Frontier Warfare', 59.

²¹⁷ Holdich, *Indian Borderland*, p. 356; and Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 72-75.

Its mobilisation was so lumbering that it gave the Orakzais and Afridis two months' respite before the Tirah was touched. At Simla, because India had no standing fighting formations from brigade-level upwards, Army Headquarters suddenly had to pull together from scratch multiple field forces, each containing divisions with headquarters staff, brigades and support troops. A muddle ensued. The staff departments had overlapping responsibilities, causing serious confusion under the pressure of the large and unfamiliar mobilisation. Getting together the TFF's headquarters staff under William Lockhart was a slow process. Lockhart received his mobilisation orders while on leave at Bad Nauheim in Germany. As he travelled from there to India via Italy and Egypt, he personally summoned some staff officers he wanted for the Tirah from London to join him at Piacenza. But he had to convince Simla that these officers should take precedence over selections made for him in India, and there were many days of haggling as to his final list.²¹⁸ Meanwhile, the transport infrastructure in place on mobilisation was far from sufficient to provide for the number of troops bound for the tribal areas. Army Headquarters had to improvise a large amount of first-line transport, entering into a frenzy of rushed dealmaking with local contractors around the subcontinent to get enough animals, carts and wagons.²¹⁹

There was bureaucratic chaos at the field forces' railheads near Pathan territory, where many of the British officers from regimental level upwards were short on the administrative skills for a large mobilisation. This was of course linked to the officers' experiences in previous small wars, in which they had helped to organise much smaller concentrations. More importantly, few of them had specialist staff training. Previously, they had alternated between regimental service and staff posts, as a rule taking up the latter only for brief periods. In the absence of any open and coherent system of Indian staff appointments, they had specialised in these either through favouritism within senior commanders' personal 'circles', or through opportunism in the form of unconventional application by telegram. India had no staff college, and few of the Indian service's British officers had been encouraged to go to the British Staff College, not least because it was expensive to attend. When the frontier field forces set off into the tribal areas, therefore, much of their first-line transport was badly organised. For example, the first brigades to march into Pathan territory were over-allocated with what field medical units were available, leaving others short.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Haldane, *Soldier's Saga*, pp. 102–06; and Moreman, 'Kitchener', pp. 58–59.

²¹⁹ *The New York Times*, 4 June 1900: 'Rearmament'; Creagh, *Studies*, p. 249; and Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 79–80.

²²⁰ C. Graham, *Artillery*, pp. 86–87; Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 75; and Hutchinson, *Tirah*, pp. 47–48.

As the incoming Commander-in-Chief in 1902, Kitchener heard many administrative horror stories from 1897, and they fuelled his reform of India's mobilising capability for large-scale frontier operations. He made the staff departments at Army Headquarters better adapted to handle a major mobilisation, spreading out and balancing their responsibilities, encouraging longer working hours, and giving staff officers new and more focused roles. These roles included administering India's new infantry divisions, which he placed under Army Headquarters' direct supervision, bypassing Army Command level.²²¹ His main means of preparing for a large-scale mobilisation was creating India's higher fighting formations; they could mobilise without delay because they had fixed headquarters staff and units.²²² Kitchener also expanded India's non-combatant organisation. He created many of the administrative units – such as the Army Bearer Corps – that were to be in place in 1914.²²³ He wanted to expand India's north-western rail network for wartime deployments, but he was denied the funds. Still, India had the world's fourth-largest railway network, reaching near most of its borders.²²⁴

The 1st Division's invasion of the Tirah in February 1908 put Kitchener's mobilisation reforms to the test. 'It was the first Frontier Expedition mobilized on the lines of Lord Kitchener's new Indian Army reorganization scheme', commented James Willcocks. 'He himself was very greatly interested in seeing how it would work out, and wrote me a long personal letter on many subjects connected [with] transport etc.'²²⁵ As the division was ready-formed at Peshawar with fixed headquarters staff and brigades, it was mobilised swiftly and surely. In March, Kitchener told Willcocks at Calcutta how pleased he was that 'his new Army scheme had been so successful at its first trial'.²²⁶

The Indian General Staff came into being in 1910 after Kitchener had done the groundwork for its establishment. It and the Administrative Staff continued the development of India's ability to mobilise. Under Douglas Haig, they oversaw the drawing up of timetables for Indian divisions to be deployed by rail to the north-west frontier or Indian seaports, and of new mobilisation directions for regiments.²²⁷ The benefits were shown in 1911 at George V's great Delhi durbar to celebrate his coronation as India's King-Emperor. The durbar required a large military presence,

²²¹ Moreman, 'Kitchener', pp. 58–62.

²²² Arthur, *Kitchener*, vol. 2, p. 140.

²²³ Menezes, *Fidelity*, p. 218.

²²⁴ Arthur, *Kitchener*, vol. 2, p. 150.

²²⁵ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 221.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

²²⁷ MacMunn, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 84, and *The History of the Sikh Pioneers* (London: Sampson Low, 1932), p. 390; and Terraine, *Haig*, pp. 47–49.

and it was treated by Army Headquarters as an opportunity to try out the latest mobilisation procedures. From 19 to 25 November, the Indian General Staff, using plans as if India was at war, conducted the detraining at Delhi from 81 trains of 3 Indian infantry divisions, 3 Indian cavalry brigades and assorted other combatants, totalling 50,000 troops, along with thousands of non-combatants. The concentration was punctual, and from its mistakes lessons were drawn, such as the need for early concentration of battalion advance parties at railhead bases. It had in fact involved numbers comparable to the mobilisation of 1897, but had taken a week rather than two months.²²⁸

Deploying Overseas

Deploying overseas was an Army in India, and more broadly a British Empire, speciality. 'We should not forget how often during the last hundred years troops from India have been despatched by sea to take part in one or other of the numerous warlike expeditions in which [India] has been engaged', one British military critic wrote in 1905. 'No army has had greater experience in the embarkation and disembarkation of troops than has the army of India.'²²⁹ Since 1762, the British had repeatedly sent Indian soldiers overseas to secure India's communications and trade routes. An initial deployment to the Philippines had been followed in the 1800s by many others, not just to Singapore, east Africa, Abyssinia, Aden and elsewhere around the Indian Ocean, but through the Red Sea to Sudan and Egypt, and into the Mediterranean, to Cyprus and Malta. By 1900, in co-operation with the Royal Navy, the Royal Indian Marine (India's small navy) and the British merchant marine, the Army in India had developed, in the words of Lord Curzon, 'a preparedness to embark at a moment's notice for Imperial service in other parts of the globe [with] admirable efficiency.'²³⁰

This preparedness was demonstrated in 1900 by the expeditionary force India sent against the Boxer Rising. On 18 June, the India Office asked Curzon to despatch a force to China immediately. At Simla, Power Palmer, as the Indian Commander-in-Chief, oversaw the hasty formation of expeditionary brigades containing only Indian regiments, totalling 10,000 troops. Command of the brigades was handed to Alfred Gaselee (Indian army), with Edmund Barrow (Indian army) as his chief of staff.

²²⁸ R. Graham, *Military Report on the Arrangements for the Coronation Durbar at Delhi in December 1911* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1913), pp. 1–10.

²²⁹ Anonymous, 'The Fear of Russia and the Defence of India', *Blackwoods Magazine* MLXXIV (1905), 591–92.

²³⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. x.

Gaselee had served on the staff in several previous Indian expeditions, including to Abyssinia in 1867–68. So had Barrow, for instance to Egypt in 1882. Their staff officers, who also had Indian expeditionary experience, were given standard transport duties. They requisitioned merchant steam ships at Indian seaports, and ensured that the ships were refitted for military use, largely by the sappers and miners.²³¹

The Indian battalions for China were mobilised from 19 June. Within a week they were embarking at Calcutta onto the requisitioned merchant ships, which had been quickly refitted. They boarded speedily under the direction of experienced Indian senior commanders, staff and regimental officers, and likewise their non-combatant support, such as first-line transport animals and carts. On 25 June, the first Indian transport for China sailed from Calcutta. It was soon followed by others from Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Rangoon.²³²

The Indian expeditionary force arrived in north-east China on 14 July, at Taku by the mouth of the River Hai, some thirty miles downstream from Tientsin. There were no fixed regulations for its disembarkation, yet its officers and the Royal Navy drew on procedures used since the 1850s to set it ashore efficiently, using light landing vessels.²³³ ‘Off Taku . . . on the 15th July’, wrote the commandant of the 7th Rajputs,

the naval transport officer came on board of us, and it was decided that we should embark in lighters, and be towed up the Peiho River to Tientsin on the following day. We had three months’ stores on board, and the captain of the ship derided the idea of our being able to unload the vessel and fill the lighters in less than seventy-two hours. However, everybody set to work with a will, and by the afternoon of the next day we had loaded up and started.²³⁴

Capably landed, the Indian force was ready to take an immediate part in the military operations. By contrast, the German expeditionary force was unready to do so for a whole month, after its arrival in September. Imperial Germany had little experience in deploying forces overseas. In consequence, the shipping of its 21,000 soldiers for China from Wilhelmshaven and other North Sea ports suffered severe administrative

²³¹ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 6, pp. 454–55; and Norie, *China*, p. 46.

²³² *1st Sikh Infantry*, vol. 2, p. 83; Norie, *China*, p. 427; and H. Vaughan, *St. George and the Chinese Dragon: An Account of the Relief of the Peking Legations* (London: Pearson, 1902), p. 15.

²³³ IOR, L/MIL/17/20/14: ‘China Expeditionary Force’ (1901), p. 62; Anand A. Yang, ‘(A) Subaltern(s) Boxers: An Indian Soldier’s Account of China and the World in 1900–1901’, in R. Bickers and R. G. Tiedemann (eds.), *The Boxers, China and the World* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield: 2007), p. 58; Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 6, p. 455; and Norie, *China*, p. 444.

²³⁴ Vaughan, *St. George*, pp. 15–16.

delays, being hampered by poor army-navy co-operation. At Chinese seaports the unloading of the German ships was error-strewn. 'The Germans are in an awful mess', reflected James Grierson (British army), the Army in India's representative on the staff of Feldmarschall Alfred von Waldersee, the leader of the German expedition and supreme commander of the foreign coalition forces in China. 'I daresay they would be all right if they only had to cross the frontier into France, but this sort of thing is beyond their ken altogether and they are quite up a tree.'²³⁵

Kitchener did not actively develop the Army in India's ability to deploy overseas, but the Indian General Staff under Haig did. From mid-1910 to the end of 1911, Haig masterminded a secret staff project code-named 'Nathi', a Punjabi word translatable as 'imp', and therefore stood as an oblique reference to an imperial scheme. The Nathi project's aim was to create plans for the despatch of an Army in India expeditionary force to fight either alongside the Home Army against the Germans in Europe, or by itself against the Turks in Ottoman Mesopotamia, landing at the Ottoman port of Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, the Indian General Staff made plans for an Indian expeditionary force containing the 3rd, 6th and 7th Indian Divisions, plus four Indian cavalry brigades, to be shipped to Europe or the Persian Gulf as quickly as possible. Travel arrangements, instructions and timetables were made for these divisions and brigades to entrain promptly before embarkation at the seaports of Bombay and Karachi. For the German option, plans were made for their shipping to Egypt, a de facto British protectorate and pivotal point of transit for France. While Haig oversaw the Nathi project, he kept informed Henry Wilson, the British General Staff officer in London responsible for planning a Home Army expeditionary force to France. Haig hoped that his planning might combine with Wilson's, and thereby contribute to more integrated Empire preparation for a European war.²³⁶

Initially the only people in India who knew about the Nathi project were soldiers: Haig and a clique of his most trusted staff officers at Army Headquarters. To prevent anyone else learning of it, all the paperwork involved had cover-sheets listing the officers authorised by Haig to see them. The secrecy reflected Haig's taste for intrigue. His officers were

²³⁵ IOR, L/MIL/17/20/14: 'China Expeditionary Force' (1901), pp. 62–63; MacDiarmid, *Grierson*, pp. 168 and 174–76; Norie, *China*, p. 341; and B. von Schellendorf, *The Duties of the General Staff*, War Office translation, fourth edition (London: HMSO, 1905), pp. 564–65.

²³⁶ IOR, L/MIL/17/11/46: 'Report of a Staff Tour, 1911' (Simla, 1912); Charteris, *Haig*, pp. 54–56 and 59; and Creagh, *Studies*, p. 254.

acting purely on his sanction, and, as they well knew, they were flying in the face of government policy for the Indian General Staff to work only on matters directly related to subcontinental security.²³⁷

By October 1911, Haig had put together a basic scheme for an anti-German or -Turk Indian expeditionary force. That month Hardinge found out about it. 'I was secretly informed that [planning] was in progress . . . as to the number of divisions that could be sent to Europe from India in the event of a continental crisis.'²³⁸ He was outraged, and ordered Haig not just to terminate the project but to destroy it. Hardinge said it was 'dangerous' because the General Staff had not received government permission to prepare for a European war, and soldiers should never disobey their political masters; he also said it was 'useless' because the Indian army, in keeping with the colour bar principle, was officially not for use in European battle.²³⁹

Haig decided that further defiance of civilian authority was in order. He handed down Hardinge's directive to destroy to Alexander Hamilton Gordon (British army), his Director of Military Operations. 'There was a look in Haig's eye', Hamilton Gordon later said, 'which made me realize that he would not regard any deviation from rigid adherence . . . with undue severity.'²⁴⁰ The scheme was hidden at Army Headquarters, and more work was done on it. 'We are taking elaborate precautions to keep [the] scheme secret', Hamilton Gordon told Wilson in November. '[I] try to shut the mouth of anyone who talks of plans for Indians to fight in Europe: someone in the Club talked, and has been spoken too. People need to hold their tongues; there is no need for informal chit-chat which has caused the mischief.'²⁴¹

Haig also oversaw the production of new expeditionary manuals and notes for Army in India officers. Many of the existing procedures for gathering troops at ports and shipping them abroad were written down in terms of best practice.²⁴² Further written guidance came in the *Field Service Regulations*. The 1912 edition included a new section on army

²³⁷ IWM, 2/69/70/71: Wilson Papers, Haig Letters to Wilson, 16 March, 19 April, 7 September and 9 November 1911; and A. Hamilton Gordon Letters to Wilson, 6 November 1911 and 1 February 1912; IWM, DS/MISC/80: Wilson Papers, Wilson Diaries, 26 August and 7 November 1911.

²³⁸ Hardinge, *Indian Years*, pp. 32–33.

²³⁹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to G. Allen, 12 January 1914; Charteris, *At G.H.Q.*, p. 47.

²⁴⁰ Terraine, *Haig*, pp. 47–49.

²⁴¹ IWM, 2/69/70/71: Wilson Papers, Haig Letters to Wilson, 9 November 1911, and A. Hamilton Gordon Letters to Wilson, 6 November 1911 and 1 February 1912.

²⁴² Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 120.

movements by sea in co-operation with the navy, which became part of the training at the Indian Staff College.²⁴³

Between the Boxer Rising and 1914, there were only minor overseas deployments from India. Several Indian battalions were shipped individually to join small garrisons about the Indian Ocean, for instance at Hong Kong. The largest single sea-borne deployment was to the Makran Coast in 1911, when 1,000 Indian troops of the 6th Division, in collaboration with the Royal Indian Marine and Royal Navy, sailed from Bombay in two requisitioned merchant ships. These deployments showed the Army in India's proficiency in deploying overseas to be in good health.²⁴⁴ Indeed, it was Army Headquarters' boast that 'in no Army can be found officers and men who are better prepared to immediately undertake expeditions in any corner of the globe'.²⁴⁵

India's aptitude for sea-borne deployments was characteristic of the great maritime empires besides the British. The Japanese army and navy had strictly codified procedures for their mutual co-operation, which had worked well in, and been developed through, the Russo-Japanese War. Germany remained a comparatively low-grade global amphibious power. Its army and navy certainly learned lessons from their mistakes in deploying to China in 1900–01. But by 1914, because Germany had a European-focused defence policy and was relatively lacking in major overseas military and naval bases, its soldiers and sailors had not greatly improved their capacity to perform combined operations.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Creagh, 'Army in India', 32.

²⁴⁴ Moreman, 'Kitchener', p. 70.

²⁴⁵ Army Headquarters, *Frontier Warfare and Bush Fighting*, 1906, p. 71.

²⁴⁶ Callwell, *Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1905), pp. 437–39 and 440–44; and Schellendorf, *Duties of the General Staff*, p. 565.

4 Weaknesses

‘Owing to the want of money’, Douglas Haig complained in September 1911, ‘India has nothing like nine divisions fit for war.’¹ O’Moore Creagh subsequently remarked that the pre-war Army in India ‘was not even properly prepared for an encounter with semi-organized Asiatic enemies. . . . The Army’s state was due to a regime of pacifists, who refused funds to keep it efficient and treated the repeated warnings of myself and my Staff with scorn’.² Haig and his Chief were fully aware of the Indian army’s two main weaknesses up to 1914 – a stunted combined arms capability to fight a regular European enemy, and inadequate administrative preparation for large-scale operations.

Combined Arms Capability

To prepare for a European conflict, ideally pre-war India’s senior commanders and staff would have sparked a dynamic debate among officers at all levels on how regular battles should be fought; they would have identified the key questions, and encouraged answers to be found at staff conferences, at manoeuvres, in papers for army journals, or in the regimental mess. An Army in India culture of thinking about regular warfare would have emerged, producing distinctive theory on how to tackle a regular enemy. Further, India’s higher formation manoeuvres would have had a certain consistency to build up a distinct Indian combined arms capability using a wide range of modern equipment; the manoeuvres would have recurred annually for the same divisions with the same units of infantry, engineers, cavalry, artillery, signallers and aviators, making their training sufficiently uniform and repetitive to develop shared practices. Yet the Army in India, and with it the Indian army, little did all these things. Quite why is looked at here up to 1909, and then from 1910 to 1914.

¹ IWM, 2/69/70/71: Wilson Papers, Haig Letter to Wilson, 7 September 1911.

² Creagh, *Autobiography*, p. 296, and *Studies*, p. 254.

William Robertson – the first soldier to attend the British Staff College having enlisted as a private, and in 1913–14 the Home Army’s Director of Military Training – detected in the Army in India’s officers up to 1909 ‘a tendency to become antiquated and stereotyped in method, owing to the difficulty of keeping pace with the development of military ideas in Europe’.³ Part of the problem was India’s senior commanders. Promotion in the early 1900s among those on the subcontinent, James Willcocks wrote, ‘was given by length of service, and selection had to take a back seat’:

Money was saved by keeping on officers, long after many of them had ceased to be fitted for command, as it kept down the pension lists. . . . The consequence was that in a country like India, where youth and vigour should rank first in apportioning work, exactly the contrary was the case. Merit had to subordinate itself to rules and customs, and far too old a race of officers were frequently placed in positions for which they were unfitted. In themselves mostly good and gallant soldiers in their day, it was no fault of theirs but of the pernicious system under which they served.⁴

Indian commanders who were appointed from the Home Army had usually been jettisoned as the British service’s less able and older officers. ‘What excuse’, Willcocks wondered, ‘can be offered for the methods adopted by the War Office in selecting officers of the Home service for higher commands in India?’:

Here at least was an opportunity for sending out young brigadiers and generals, but nothing of the kind was done. On the contrary, although good soldiers with good records were frequently selected, they were generally long past the age for brigade commands and would not have been given them in England. In fact the War Office used India as the dumping ground for senior officers whom they wished to reward, but for whom they did not mean to find a place in [the British Isles].⁵

The Home Army’s promotion system placed less emphasis on seniority than India’s. It was more competitive, allowing able officers to rise faster. Its brigadiers and divisional commanders tended to be aged between their mid-forties and early fifties, compared to the Indian standard of mid- to late fifties. Meanwhile, its officers viewed the subcontinent as a military backwater, best avoided. To them, the Home Army’s social environment, to which Edward VII added lustre as a sociable king happy to keep the company of military officers, was far more magnetic than India’s, which was merely viceroy-centred. Also, they saw European regular warfare as

³ Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, p. 80.

⁴ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

the highest form of fighting, and the Home Army as the Empire's garrison most likely to engage in it. For the good of their social lives and careers, therefore, they preferred Home Army service over India. One Scottish officer of the Indian army sniffed an 'almost intangible disparagement of Indian soldiering in War Office circles. . . . The acceptance of an Indian appointment has been viewed by promising and ambitious officers of the British service as tantamount to professional suicide'.⁶

In 1891, Horace Smith-Dorrien, as a thirty-three year old officer of the Sherwood Foresters and a graduate of the British Staff College, visited Army Headquarters at Simla 'to ask what my chances of a Staff appointment were, and whether a Staff College Certificate was of any value in India':

The cynical reply I got was that much value was not set on the p.s.c. ['passed staff college'] in India, but there was no reason why the holding of such a certificate should prevent my obtaining a Staff appointment. Staff College graduates were regarded with suspicion in India. None of the Headquarters Staff, from the C-in-C. downwards, had graduated, and the hostility to what was regarded at home as the magic p.s.c. was very marked.⁷

A year later, a group of British Staff College graduates including Smith-Dorrien held a dinner at Simla. Among other senior officers, they invited Lord Roberts (the Commander-in-Chief) and Henry Brackenbury (the Military Member of the viceroy's Council). There were after-dinner speeches, Smith-Dorrien recalled, 'chiefly touching on the advantages of the Staff College':

Lord Roberts's was kindly expressed, but far from encouraging; but that of the Military Member was distinctly sarcastic, and he concluded by saying that the one blot on his military career was that he had never obtained the Staff College Certificate, 'but, when I look round this table, and see our noble C.-in-C., our capable Adjutant-General, our efficient Quartermaster-General, and our astute Military Secretary, and I realise that they have risen to their present high positions without that certificate, it acts as a balm on my wounded feelings.' The effect of these speeches on the certificated hosts was like cold water down the spine. I went to bed that night confirmed in my belief that, so far, India had not grasped the necessity for specialising in Staff Training.⁸

India's small wars up to that point, having not necessitated large-scale bureaucracy and scientific battle planning, had bred a weak Indian staff tradition. The main means of gaining junior promotions had not been a Staff College education, but gallantry against Pathans, Afghans

⁶ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 120.

⁷ Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, p. 72.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

or Sudanese. Further, the British officers of the infantry and cavalry in India did not have a strong intellectual culture. Extremely few of them had been to university; most were proud of themselves as practical soldiers who did not ponder too much on military theory. They habitually treated leave as an opportunity to disengage with the intellectual aspects of army life. Those drawn to writing in their spare time generally chose not to turn out works on war, but to recount their sporting, hunting or travelling triumphs – classics of the genre are *Eighteen Hundred Miles on a Burmese Tat, Through Burma, Siam, and the Eastern Shan States* by George Younghusband of the Guides,⁹ and *Across the Roof of the World, A Record of Sport and Travel through Kashmir, Gilgit, Hunza, the Pamirs, Chinese Turkistan, Mongolia and Siberia* by Percy Etherton of the 39th Garhwals.¹⁰ There were not many exceptions, and their focus was hill warfare, especially in the immediate aftermath of the Tirah campaign.¹¹

The Indian Staff College was founded by Kitchener in 1905 to help haul Indian staff work into a new era of twentieth-century requirements, above all large frontier operations against the Russians. Although the Indian College's teaching had a subtle lean towards mountain warfare compared to the British Staff College's, it remained a general school of war. Its curriculum was the same as at Camberley; it too schooled officers in the management of small war and regular operations. While Kitchener promoted more balanced and focused staff work at Army Headquarters, he encouraged increased professionalism among the staffs of India's new higher formations. This had the most impact at divisional and brigade levels, because beneath Army Headquarters there was effectively a corps level vacuum. The real role of the Northern and Southern Army Commanders was to inspect regimental training – and not to organise their divisions in combination in wartime, a duty Kitchener reserved for Army Headquarters. They had very few staff officers, Kitchener having virtually absolved them of headquarters bureaucratic duties to enable their freer movement as inspectors from cantonment to cantonment.¹²

As Indian staff work gathered a modernising momentum under Kitchener, a small body of officers began to dedicate their careers to staff duties. Beauchamp Duff, a p.s.c. and India's Chief of Staff from 1906 to 1909, emerged as an archetype. Alongside him were a small handful of

⁹ Published in London by Allen in 1888.

¹⁰ Also published in London, by Constable in 1911.

¹¹ For example, see A. C. Yate (129th Baluchis), 'North-West Frontier Warfare', *RUSI Journal* 42 (1898).

¹² TNA, WO 106/1449: 'Memorandum by Secretary of State for India' (8 August 1916), p. 2.

the Home Army's leading staff officers – including John Cowans¹³ – but they did not remain on the subcontinent for long, consistently opting to return to Britain sooner rather than later.¹⁴

For all Kitchener's hopes for frequent Indian divisional regular warfare manoeuvres, these were few and far between due to lack of government funding. When they were convened, little was achieved. At some rare multi-divisional manoeuvres in the Punjab in 1905, there was not enough artillery for proper practice of battle against any regular enemy.¹⁵ Smith-Dorrien's trench warfare manoeuvres in Baluchistan in 1906 were a one-off. They were inspired by his recent visit to army exercises in Germany, yet India's other senior officers almost never attended foreign manoeuvres in Europe, and none of them showed such imagination as he did in divisional training.¹⁶ The appointment of Ian Hamilton as India's official observer of the Russo-Japanese War might have led to more Indian manoeuvres like Smith-Dorrien's. The guest of the Japanese staff in Manchuria, Hamilton closely scrutinised the trench fighting there, concluding that infantrymen needed to fight flexibly as digger-skirmishers against modern firepower. After his departure from Manchuria in 1905, however, he served with the Home Army.¹⁷ In any event, year on year under Kitchener there was much variation in the manner of Indian regular warfare manoeuvres. Various training manuals came and went, and nearly all the divisional commanders treated regular battle as open warfare, leaving the specifics of how companies or platoons should advance to brigades or battalions.¹⁸

The two largest of India's small wars between the Tirah campaign and 1909 – against the Zakkas and Mohmands in 1908 – did not encourage senior commanders and their staff officers to think in the ways required to lead larger forces in European battle. Against the Zakkas, Willcocks led the 1st Division by riding dozens of miles on horseback to direct his leading battalions personally. He indicated only general plans of attack to his brigadiers, and allowed the mountain artillery batteries to operate independently. At his headquarters, haphazard and informal standards of staff work were commonplace. Willcocks lost his copy of the Indian government's most secret diplomatic code book, having carelessly left it on a stone wall in the heart of Zakka territory. One of his headquarters'

¹³ D. Chapman-Huston and O. Rutter, *General Sir John Cowans, The Quarter-Master General of the Great War*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1924), vol. 1, pp. 120–28.

¹⁴ Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, pp. 350–51; and Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 3.

¹⁵ Creagh, *Autobiography*, p. 244.

¹⁶ Ballard, *Smith-Dorrien*, p. 120.

¹⁷ Lee, *Hamilton*, pp. 87–96.

¹⁸ Arthur, *Kitchener*, vol. 2, p. 168; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, pp. 132–33.

mornings in Mohmand was largely taken up with a practical joke centring on painting an officer's white horse brown.¹⁹ Also in Mohmand, Willcocks' chief of staff, William Birdwood (Indian army), did not see himself as a bureaucrat or remote tactical technician. He kept 'close touch with [the Indian] troops to whom I was devoted':

I... made a point of keeping up the closest possible relations with the various fighting units. Everyday I was out [in Mohmand territory] with one brigade or the other, realising exactly what their difficulties were and trying to put them right... trying, in general to let the troops realise that the General they served was ever mindful of their well-being and safety. I was, and have always been, convinced that this is the right way to set to work, for it is the human factor – the man behind the gun – that counts, first and last.²⁰

From 1910, Creagh and Haig aimed to use the *Field Service Regulations* to nurture a new Army in India combined arms capability, specifically for regular warfare overseas.²¹ 'Personally I would rather stay at home', Haig had written in London in 1909 as one of the Home Army's staunchest Germanophobes, 'but Creagh pushed one on and on thinking the matter over, and looking at the importance of developing a General Staff in India, I thought it best that I did go.'²² A starting point for Creagh and Haig was India's weaponry and other fighting equipment, which they recognised as limited. The Army in India's rifles were only a little inferior to the Home Army's new pattern of Lee-Enfield, the Mark III. The Home Army's machine guns – also two per battalion – were slightly better than India's. The vast majority were either Maxim's as used on the subcontinent or modified, upgraded Maxim's. The rest were Vickers models, which were lighter, wieldier and more reliable.²³

Whereas the German army had standard-issue grenades and trench mortars, the Home Army had none, and the Army in India only had unofficial prototypes, made in tiny numbers by the sappers and miners. Between 1909 and 1911, Willcocks, stimulated by Spanish army tests of hand and rifle grenades designed by the English engineer Martin Hale, carried out impromptu Hale's grenades tests with sappers of the Indian 1st Division. This encouraged the 3rd Sappers and Miners to design their own pattern hand and rifle grenades under Robert McClintock (Royal Engineers). They had already made their own mortars, based

¹⁹ Willcocks, *Romance*, pp. 225 and 244.

²⁰ Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, pp. 190–91.

²¹ IWM, 2/69/70/71: Wilson Papers, Haig Letter to Wilson, 16 March 1911; and NLS: Haig Papers, 1910 Diary, 22 August, and 1911 diary, 17 August; Creagh, 'Army in India', 35, and *Autobiography*, pp. 229, 241 and 260.

²² KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Haig Letter to Kiggell, 24 April 1909.

²³ Farrar-Hockley, *Death of an Army*, new edition (Chatham: Wordsworth, 1998), p. 88.

on Japanese models and firing 2-pound dynamite bombs (with a time-fuse) 150 yards; these were in fact the mortars used in Smith-Dorrien's Baluchistan trench warfare manoeuvres.²⁴

Compared to the Army in India, the Home Army had guns greater in number and power. It had several brigades of 4.5-inch medium field howitzers (compared to India's one), and heavy batteries of 5-inch heavy field guns that fired 60-pound shells (India had none). The German army's artillery dwarfed the Army in India and the Home Army's put together. It had 5,096 15-pounder field guns, 1,230 medium field howitzers, plus an array of heavy artillery including 5.9-inch howitzers using 90-pound shells. Its biggest guns were giant 16.8-inch howitzers fed with 2,000-pound shells – a weight in a single shot that the Indian mountain guns would have had to fire all together, three times, to achieve.²⁵

Although India's five communications companies had a modicum of modern apparatus – for example electric telegraph and wireless sets – none of their equipment was quite up to date. For battlefield communications, the Army in India was largely reliant on the traditional means of heliographs (a mirror on a tripod that reflected sunlight to flash messages in Morse code), flags, human messengers, and a commander's voice. The Home Army's six Royal Engineers signals companies had only slightly superior field communications equipment.²⁶

Creagh and Haig pleaded with Hardinge for the funds to issue the Army in India with new rifles, machine guns and grenades, and to expand its artillery and field communications equipment. 'The reply', wrote Creagh, 'was that the Indian army had only to be prepared to meet unorganised antagonists.'²⁷ Hardinge, bent on military economy, thought it fit to invest only in rifles. There was a strong argument that hand grenades would be of real use in hill warfare, but there was a stronger one that they should not be introduced to the tribal areas. The Pathans were already well practised at injuring imperial troops by throwing rocks and boulders, and if hand grenades were thrown at them, they could be relied on to start throwing back their own ones before long.²⁸

²⁴ A. Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912), pp. 28 and 196; Millington, *Abor*, pp. 16–18; Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 446; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 83 and 93–94, and *Romance*, p. 231.

²⁵ N. Morrow, 'The Employment of Artillery', *Field Artillery Journal* 5 (1915), 325 and 334; Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 995–96.

²⁶ Robertson, *Private to Field-Marshal*, pp. 160–61; Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 705; and War Office, *Somaliland*, vol. 1, pp. 81–82, and vol. 2, p. 485.

²⁷ KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Haig Letter to Kiggell, 14 July 1910 and 25 May 1911; Creagh, *Autobiography*, p. 244.

²⁸ Indian General Staff, *Expeditions*, vol. 2, Supplement A, p. 40–41.

India's first aerial reconnaissance unit came into being in 1900, in the form of the sappers and miners' 'Experimental Balloon Section'. This had modern balloon apparatus and gases, intended for flights high above the Pathan tribal areas. After unsuccessful tests, the Balloon Section flew no more from 1910.²⁹ The following year in the Deccan, Haig conducted novel Army in India tests with biplanes, of the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company. The results were promising, and shortly afterwards the money was found to set up the Indian Flying Corps. The Corps was paltry by any standards, however. It had four aeroplanes, of which just two were up and running; the Home Army's Royal Flying Corps had 179 aeroplanes for military use.³⁰

Haig despaired of India's senior commanders. 'It is difficult to have efficiency in the Indian army with such slow promotion', he grumbled in March 1911.³¹ He tried to re-educate the Indian divisional commanders by setting them written problems on European battle. But their answers disappointed him, showing them generally to be ill-prepared for regular warfare. Willcocks irked him in particular. 'I sent [a problem on corps command against a European enemy] to Willcocks & asked for his appreciation. He does not even make a try and asks for more information etc. . . . I think he is quite beyond his depth as a [corps commander].'³²

Haig conducted a series of Indian General Staff conferences and paper exercises during which officers discussed and practised likely duties in a major regular war, such as mobilising divisions, constructing railway timetables, or planning *Field Service Regulations*-style attacks. From May to November 1911, he set exercises framed 'to demonstrate the methods whereby a force from India might co-operate beyond the seas with an imperial force [against] a group of states who are endeavouring to break up the Empire'. He tried to sharpen the European flavour by referring his officers to Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* (1832), quoting it as 'the most profound book on the subject and still the best guide on general principles'.³³

Two groups of Indian General Staff officers took shape under Haig, both selected on merit. The first was made up of older officers born

²⁹ Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 446.

³⁰ IOR, L/PS/20/257: *Mesopotamia Commission, Report of the Commission Appointed by Act of Parliament to Enquire into the Operations of War in Mesopotamia* (London: HMSO, 1917), p. 38; Raleigh and Jones, *War in the Air*, vol. 1, pp. 421–22.

³¹ NLS: Haig Papers, 1911 Diary, 31 March.

³² KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Haig Letter to Kiggell, 27 April 1911.

³³ IOR, L/MIL/17/11/46: 'Report of a Staff Tour, 1911' (1912), pp. 3, 29–31 and 55; and NLS: Haig Papers, 1910 Diary, see 'Memoranda'.

in the 1860s. Most of them had not been to staff college, but from the 1890s and 1909 had been among India's best staff officers or regimental commanders, and so they were offered senior General Staff posts. Havelock Hudson was one of their leading lights. By 1911, Hudson held a senior appointment in the Indian General Staff's Duties and Military Training section. 'He is a first rate fellow', wrote Haig, 'absolutely trustworthy and keen for the good of the show. He is not p.s.c. but is first rate notwithstanding.'³⁴ The second group consisted of officers of a younger generation, born since 1870 or so. Most of them were graduates of the Indian Staff College, and they tended to hold the junior General Staff positions.³⁵

By 1914, the Indian General Staff had had just four years to bed down. Still, it had brought heightened professionalism and a new breadth of outlook to Indian staff work, continuing apace the modernisations started in earnest under Kitchener. When it had been called on to manage active operations – those in southern Persia in 1911, for instance, or in Abor country in 1911–12 – it had done so with an unprecedented efficiency. 'The officers of the Abor Expedition', wrote Alexander Hamilton Gordon, 'have said that it was the best organized affair that they have been on.'³⁶ The Home Army's British General Staff was slightly older than its Indian cousin, having been founded in 1906. It was more prepared to manage regular operations, in large part as it had a greater proportion of Staff College graduates, Quetta having produced no more than 218 up to 1914.³⁷

All the while, the professional development of the Indian princely and landed noble staff officers was held in check. In the interests of maintaining British prestige, they were denied any status akin to any British staff officer's; their training and appointments to the staffs of senior commanders were unrelated to real responsibility above company level. Some of them, if they gained their commander's trust, were given basic tasks including tracing copies of battlefield maps. That was as far as things went.³⁸

In their attempts to intensify higher Indian training for regular warfare, Creagh and Haig got a taste of the financial frustrations endured by

³⁴ KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Haig Letter to Kiggell, 5 April 1911.

³⁵ Moreman, 'Kitchener', pp. 71–74.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 'Kitchener', p. 70.

³⁷ IOR, L/MIL/17/11/46: 'Report of a Staff Tour, 1911' (1912); and KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Haig Letter to Kiggell, 31 August 1911; Moreman, 'Kitchener', pp. 71–74; and Robbins, *Generalship*, pp. 35–41.

³⁸ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, see chapter 4.

Kitchener. 'In 1912–13', Creagh wrote, 'only £9,000 was allowed me for the training of the Army in India, a sum that was totally inadequate':

Training conditions no doubt differ to a considerable extent in England from those in India, but the grant for regular troops on the Home Establishment – numbering less than three-fifths of those in India – was nine times as great as what was allowed me. In spite of frequent representations for an increase in the grant, the Government of India was unable to appreciate the necessity for training troops in combination.³⁹

Although the Indian manoeuvres from 1910 were slightly larger and more frequent than before, restricted funding prevented them from forming a dependable annual programme. The better-funded Home Army was able to carry out combined training more regularly.

Creagh and Haig's manoeuvres, and Percy Lake's from 1912, took place on open plains. They involved Indian infantry brigades attacking in combination in a single direction under *Field Service Regulations* principles, digging extended trench lines as they went, with signallers, field artillery and cavalry in support.⁴⁰ Yet standard practices between the fighting arms were barely imparted. Typically the manoeuvres lacked senses of urgency and relevance. The regiments involved could be widely spread out in open countryside in which they heard birdsong rather than gunfire, as live firing was often restricted to save money; or they might be fighting an imaginary regular enemy named after a colour (such as 'Greenland') and unrelated to any active threat they perceived to themselves. Such things limited how seriously the troops took what was going on, and what they learned. Digging and occupying trenches at manoeuvres could seem a tiresome way to pass the time, rather than a real opportunity to try out techniques for holding earthworks under pressure from artillery. Troops were more alert and receptive on the regimental training ground. Tactical lessons in hill warfare at regimental level might seem comparatively important because service against the Pathan tribes was a commonplace, leading men to pay more heed. An infantryman would know that if he did not pay attention here, one day he might make a mistake at the cost of mutilation; if he did not dig a trench well in combined training, it might not seem to matter so much.⁴¹

³⁹ Creagh, *Autobiography*, p. 292.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 21 December 1912: 'The Northern Army of India: Manoeuvres', and 21 January 1913: 'Northern Army of India: Strategy at the Manoeuvres'; Creagh, *Autobiography*, pp. 274 and 292; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 144; Raleigh and Jones, *War in the Air*, vol. 1, pp. 410–22; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 12, and *Romance*, pp. 266–67.

⁴¹ Barrow, *Fire of Life*, pp. 117–18.

The upshot was that the Army in India of 1914 could field a combined arms force, but not a powerful one capable of going into regular battle with a clear sense of what it was going to do. Its higher training had been too inconsistent, in time and in teaching, for things to be much better. Haig rued this. ‘The full power of an army can be exerted only when all its parts act in close combination’, he observed in 1911. ‘The Army in India’s training of the several arms in combination is not as satisfactory as it should be. In fact it is the weak spot of the Army.’⁴²

Administration

In small wars from 1897 to 1914, India’s administrative services performed reasonably well. Established practice dictated that Indian regiments on active service joined British ones in being supplied by the Indian government. Army Headquarters oversaw the purchase of supplies through Indian administrative staff officers attached to field commanders. The staff officers agreed short-term supply contracts with local suppliers, both in India and abroad; on receiving the supplies, food and clothing being the most important, they distributed them to the regiments from field supply bases. Food was liberally provided. In China in 1900, meat, vegetables and fruit were bought locally; such a glut of oatmeal, barley, rum and other supplies were sent from India that the shipments had to be stopped. In 1908 against the Zakkas and Mohmands, flocks of sheep and goats were slaughtered and cooked in the field to make plentiful curries.⁴³ All the food, as a matter of routine, was prepared strictly according to the Indian units’ various caste or community eating habits. ‘Amid Afghan mountains, in Burmese forests, on Sudan plains, in darkest West Africa, I have served with my splendid Indian soldiers’, wrote James Willcocks, ‘but never have I known them complain that the Government, whose salt they were eating, neglected a single opportunity of maintaining their customs intact.’⁴⁴

Among the higher-quality Indian units, there was a clear understanding that on active service, should caste or religious customs be impossible to maintain in the face of the enemy, then these must be relaxed rather than stand in the way of military efficiency.⁴⁵ As one British officer explained:

⁴² IOR, L/MIL/17/5/2198: ‘Memorandum on Army Training in India, 1910–11’, pp. 1–2.

⁴³ IOR, L/MIL/17/20/12: ‘Official Account of the Military Operations in China, 1900–1901’, pp. 468–69; Rudolph, Rudolph and Kanota (eds.), *Reversing the Gaze*, p. 155; and Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 242.

⁴⁴ Willcocks, ‘Indian Army Corps’, p. 5.

⁴⁵ W. Hailes, *The Jat Regiment: a History of the Regiment*, 2 vols. (Bombay: Privately Published, 1967), vol. 1, p. 76.

‘Under their contract with Government, sworn to on enlistment, Indian soldiers must not allow caste prejudices to interfere in any way with the performance of their duties on active service; nevertheless it is very necessary to consider them and to deal with them discreetly, though firmly.’⁴⁶

The Indian troops usually departed their cantonments for small wars bearing little more than their standard-issue uniforms. In several theatres they met great cold: in the Tirah in 1897 the temperature fell to -9°C , in China in 1901 to -22°C , and in Tibet in 1905 to -40°C . They also met rain, hail and snow. ‘The winter was a very severe one’, Thakur Amar Singh wrote in January 1901 at Shanhaikwan, an ancient fortified town in north-eastern China where he was stationed as an officer of the Jodhpur Lancers:

The fruits, bread, everything used to freeze. The men’s moustaches used to freeze with their breathing. . . . The urine in the piss-pots was all frozen. Even sometimes the perspiration used to freeze on the bodies of the horse while they were still hot from [patrolling in the countryside]. [Yet] there was no limit to the clothes we wore.’⁴⁷

To cope with the winter conditions in China, Tibet and elsewhere, the Indian troops were provided with an abundance of warm clothing, including Canadian warm coats, sheepskin overcoats, lambskin vests, Norwegian socks and fur gloves. Indeed, in the Chinese winter of 1900–01, they were better supplied with the necessary clothing than their German counterparts, whose staff had neglected to bring enough.⁴⁸

In 1897, as we have seen, the Indian first-line transport proved inadequate on mobilisation for the large frontier operations. Once in the Tirah, the first-line transport units that had been in place before the campaign stuck to their tasks. But the majority of transport followers, freshly enlisted, showed much less enthusiasm for their work; many of them deserted as the winter drew in and they found out that the Pathans might shoot or mutilate them.⁴⁹ Kitchener overhauled India’s first-line

⁴⁶ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 41. How the compromising of caste standards was regarded in the troops’ villages was of course a separate question; see Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, pp. 75–76.

⁴⁷ Rudolph, Rudolph and Kanota (eds.), *Reversing the Gaze*, pp. 128–30 and 149.

⁴⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/20/14: ‘Miscellaneous Reports Regarding the China Expeditionary Force’ (1901), pp. 59–62; Hailes, *Jat Regiment*, vol. 1, p. 71; Huxford, *8th Gurkha*, p. 44; MacDiarmid, *Grierson*, pp. 173–88; Norie, *China*, p. 447; Rudolph, Rudolph and Kanota (eds.), *Reversing the Gaze*, p. 128; *The Story of the 1st & 2nd Battalions, 41st Dogras*, 2 vols. (Bombay: Thacker, 1923), vol. 1, p. 8; and A. von Waldersee, *A Field-Marshal’s Memoirs* (London: Hutchinson, 1924), p. 227.

⁴⁹ Hudson, *Fane’s Horse*, pp. 79–80; W. O’Connor, *On the Frontier and Beyond* (London: John Murray, 1931), p. 12; and E. Stotherd, *Sabre and Saddle* (London: Seeley, 1933), pp. 122 and 147.

transport from 1902. He established the Supply and Transport Corps, creating its pack mule and other animal transport units. These were a substantial improvement because they contained permanent servicemen, trained in peacetime to serve with commitment in war.⁵⁰

During the 1st Division's frontier operations of 1908, the Supply and Transport Corps' new animal transport units performed efficiently, especially its mule packs. To supply the 50,000 troops at the King-Emperor's Delhi durbar three years later, they plied back and forth between the Corps' depots and the regimental camps, in keeping with the *Field Service Regulations'* administrative principles. 'The standard of knowledge and efficiency of the [their] officers and non-commissioned ranks was excellent', declared the durbar's Director of Supply and Transport, Gilbert Palin (Indian army), in his report on the event. 'Their standard of work has been a high one and my long experience of the Corps enables me to say that considerable advancements have been made. . . . There exists a health spirit of esprit de corps and co-operation which were lacking in former years.'⁵¹

On active service on the north-west frontier, Indian forces were not billeted, field camps being far more secure than usually hostile local villages. Overseas, they were often billeted, with the arrangements made by Indian administrative staff officers. In Peking in 1900, the Indian troops were placed comfortably in requisitioned houses and public buildings. 'The Board of Works and the Board of War', one American missionary noticed, 'fell to . . . an Indian regiment, the tall and dusky warriors of the hill tribes of the Indian frontier making themselves at home in the ample apartments at their disposal.'⁵²

The Indian troops' medical officers were commonly competent and upheld high standards of cantonment hygiene. Their regimental hospitals, however, could support only basic medical care. 'There can be no question', an IMS committee decided in 1910, 'that the regimental hospital is not only comfortless in the extreme, but that its many shortcomings as regards furniture prejudice the success of treatment very seriously.'⁵³ In Creagh's view, 'the hospitals in Indian regiments were a disgrace to civilization':

Medical instruments were deficient; medical comforts were non-existent. . . . There was no operating theatre; there was no room for segregating infectious cases. The only way this could be done was either to screen off a part of the

⁵⁰ MacMunn, *Behind the Scenes*, pp. 80–82.

⁵¹ R. Graham, *Durbar*, pp. 50–68.

⁵² A. Smith, *China in Convulsion* (New York: Fleming, 1901), p. 539.

⁵³ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/2010: 'Report of Committee Appointed to Consider the Introduction of Station Hospitals for Indian Troops in Place of the Regimental System' (1910), p. 22.

one long room of which the hospital consisted, or to put such cases outside in all weathers in single fly tents. The hospital was like a British railway station cow-shed.⁵⁴

The Indian regiments on active service left behind their regimental hospitals, and senior staff of the Army in India's Medical Services provided a higher standard of care. In 1897, the Medical Services were not structured for the size of the frontier field forces, placing an intense strain on them. They had to improvise, frantically concentrating in the north-west medical resources from throughout India. There were shortages of medical support in the tribal areas; for instance, the field hospitals were too few and did not have enough stretcher bearers, compelling weary troops to carry their own sick and wounded along the lines of advance. Better medical care was seen at Rawalpindi, where the IMS set up general hospitals for the field forces. The hospitals were given India's best medical equipment and were well run. Of the 2,500 sick and wounded they received, not one of the wounded died.⁵⁵

In China in 1900–01, the Indian Medical Services offered field care superior to that of 1897–98. The original number of Indian troops committed was small, which permitted the provision of enough field hospitals. Although these were initially short of transport, they were supervised by experienced IMS doctors, were well supplied and had comfortable wards. Alongside them was a modern hospital ship, moored at sea off Taku. A gift from the Maharajah of Gwalior, the vessel was the first of its kind to sail with an Indian expeditionary force, and the Indian wounded and sick from inland were smoothly transported to it on river junks. There were few patients for Gwalior's hospital ship because the Indian troops were kept in good health. This was partly because they did not do much fighting. It was also because their IMS doctors kept a close eye on them, conducting frequent medical checks and maintaining high hygiene standards. The Indian troops' sickness rates were low, with just a few cases of pneumonia, frostbite, mumps, measles and venereal disease. A tuberculosis epidemic among the 1st/4th Gurkhas was related not to Chinese conditions, but to their dank cantonment huts in India.⁵⁶

The German doctors, on the other hand, were lacking in experience of non-European conditions. They struggled to keep their troops healthy, Salmonella bacteria transmitted through contaminated water and food proving a particular problem. At Peking in November 1900, barely 1 per cent of the 3,100 Indian troops were sick, compared to 10 per cent of

⁵⁴ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 265.

⁵⁵ *British Medical Journal* 1:1942 (1898), 796–97; and Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 113–14.

⁵⁶ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 264; and Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, vol. 1, p. 155.

the 5,000 Germans.⁵⁷ According to James Grierson, the Germans were so unfamiliar with serving abroad that they looked to the Indian forces for how 'to take care of themselves in a foreign climate'. In view of the Germans' expeditionary ails, Grierson concluded 'we now possess the monopoly of knowledge of warfare in uncivilised countries'.⁵⁸

Kitchener instituted India's Army Hospital Corps and Army Bearer Corps in 1903–04. By 1914, their equipment was outdated, after the Indian government had been reluctant to spend much money on them. In India's small wars, its Medical Services had always managed to get by with what they had, leading the viceroy's Council to see little reason to improve them from 1905 or so.⁵⁹ It is important to add that the Indian troops who encountered extreme winters in small wars up to 1914 were not debilitated by it. Although they did suffer from some frostbite, pneumonia and even snow-blindness in the tribal areas, China and Tibet, their overall sickness rates were low. The simple reason was that the Indian army's supply and medical services had grown accustomed to caring for Indian troops in Asia's colder places by giving them sufficient food, clothing and medical care.⁶⁰

Field post offices run by civilian staff of the Indian Department of Posts routinely accompanied the Indian forces overseas. There were twenty Indian field post offices in China by early 1901, carrying their own stamps and stationery, sold at Indian inland rates. As a result the troops were able to write, or dictate to scribes, letters home, which were efficiently despatched.⁶¹ For the Indian soldier, strong postal links between his unit and his home were in fact ever-present. 'We are in daily correspondence with our young men who are serving in the Indian army in remote localities', some Afridi fathers were glad to say in 1912.⁶²

The organisation of the Indian followers in the field had a significant flaw: many more than were strictly required were often sent. While the Army in India's regiments took a select few of their internal followers on active service, Army Headquarters controlled the provision of followers otherwise. This was exploited by civilian Indian agents. They received

⁵⁷ IOR, L/MIL/17/20/14: 'China Expeditionary Force' (1901), pp. 59–60; MacDiarmid, *Grierson*, p. 173; and Norie, *China*, pp. 48, 462 and 469–71.

⁵⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/20/14: 'China Expeditionary Force' (1901), pp. 59–60. For a similar conclusion from an American critic, see Landor, *China*, vol. 1, p. 373.

⁵⁹ Creagh, *Studies*, p. 243.

⁶⁰ D. Thapar, *The Morale Builders, Forty Years with the Military Medical Services of India* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1965), pp. 30–31.

⁶¹ E. Proud, *History of the Indian Army Postal Service*, 3 vols. (Privately Published, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 289–306.

⁶² IOR, Mss Eur F 116/32, Butler Papers: 'Address by the Khyber Maliks at Peshawar on 12 November 1908'.

a fee for each follower they provided to Army Headquarters, and they deliberately engaged as many as they could. One of their tricks was to contract followers to do just one specific job – such as kneading dough or carrying water – and thereby to contract a greater number than if they had taken on fewer to perform more than one task each. Indian forces in the field were therefore accompanied by an uneconomical number of government-contracted followers. The up-side for the Indian troops, of course, was that they were rarely short of followers.⁶³

The Indian expeditionary force to China in 1900–01 was the largest sent overseas up to 1914. It had a total of 18,000 troops, almost all Indian, and they were conspicuously well supplied. This was probably linked to the force's deployment sufficiently far from the subcontinent to trigger the constitutional arrangement for India not to pay for it, prompting the British Parliament to vote to bear its entire cost. In consequence, the Indian government seems to have spent more money on the Indian troops in China than it would have had it footed the bill. An implication is that the further Indian troops were deployed from India, the better they might be supplied.⁶⁴

By 1914, the Army in India's small wars had left it with a nucleus of experienced staff officers and non-combatant units well used to working together to maintain small forces in the field. However, should the Army in India's administrative services be called on to maintain large forces abroad in a regular war, it was recognised that they would be substantially unprepared. Creagh pointed this out to Hardinge. He saw it as his personal duty to represent the interests of the Indian troops, and he urged the viceroy to finance the re-equipping of the Indian administrative services, especially the medical branches, to gear them for high numbers of casualties, not just for small wars. 'There were many urgent requirements which could not safely be postponed', Creagh wrote, 'and I stated that until these requirements should be made good the Army could not be looked on as efficient.'⁶⁵ Again, Creagh found that funding was refused:

[Guy Fleetwood Wilson], the Finance Member of [Hardinge's] Executive Council, obtained complete administrative control of Army Finance in its most minute details. He, supported by the [viceroy] and the Secretary of State, starved the Army during the time I commanded it, to a greater extent than had ever been done before . . . between them they bled it white. . . . Their one object was to curtail all military expenditure.⁶⁶

⁶³ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/1863: 'Report on Commissariat Frauds' (1901); Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 151.

⁶⁴ *Hansard* (House of Commons), 'Army Estimates, 1903–04', 130:575 (1904).

⁶⁵ Creagh, *Autobiography*, pp. 282 and 296.

⁶⁶ Creagh, *Studies*, pp. 250–54 and 265.

Creagh's anger at Hardinge's military cuts drove him to resign his post six months early, in March 1914. His tenure had been defined by constant financial arguments between him and senior civilians who regarded him with intellectual contempt and never took seriously his proposals for administrative reforms.⁶⁷ In 1913, Fleetwood Wilson derided him as 'this impossible old fool. . . He is absolutely Gaga'.⁶⁸ 'Ill-natured critics', Lord Crewe told Hardinge that year on hearing that Creagh had suffered a minor stroke, 'might point out that it would not make any great difference – on the lines of the Old South African story of the wounded officer who was subject to a wonderful operation for the removal of his entire brain, after which he was immediately appointed to the Intelligence Department.'⁶⁹

As the Indian army's battle casualties were low from 1900 to 1914, its systems for replacing them – its reserve and the pools of linked regiments – got by. Nevertheless, Haig was not blinded to the fact that the Indian reserve of 35,000 men was small for regular operations. He calculated that it was only two-fifths of an acceptable size, or 85,000 men. Yet 'the financial hornets of Simla', as he referred to the viceroy's Council, denied the funding to increase it accordingly.⁷⁰ Had the reserve been increased as Haig wanted, it would proportionately have reached a size similar to the British 'Army Reserve', which contained 145,000 former regulars retained in the UK. Even then, India would have been well short of the British army's overall reserves. On top of the Reserve, the British service had a 'Special Reserve' of 64,000 part-time soldiers. Besides, there was the Territorial Force of 269,000 part-time volunteers who were not obliged to serve overseas, but were expected in wartime to perform home defence duties to release the Home Army's regulars for overseas. The Indian government kept no Territorial-esque force. Its 34,000 militiamen, within irregular corps including the North Waziristan Militia, Khyber Rifles and Assam Military Police, were intended purely to help the Army in India guard India's northern borders, and not to do so alone to free Indian divisions for war abroad.⁷¹

Between 1906 and 1911, the Indian Staff College's Commandant, Thompson Capper (British army), lectured that attacking operations

⁶⁷ IOR, L/PS/20/257: *Mesopotamia Commission, Report*, pp. 104–05. Creagh, *Autobiography*, pp. 302–03; and Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 85.

⁶⁸ Goold, 'Lord Hardinge', 920.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Butler Papers: Haig Letter to Butler, 15 August 1916; Creagh, *Studies*, p. 260.

⁷¹ F. Moberly, *The Campaign in Mesopotamia*, 4 vols. (London: HMSO, 1923), vol. 1, p. 63.

were best persevered with despite any administrative difficulties entailed. ‘Too often’, he said, ‘we hear of leaders, who excuse themselves for not doing the obviously right thing by pleading the difficulties of supply and transport. We must meet such objections with the old adage – ‘where there’s a will there’s a way’.’ His outlook was at one with an Army in India consensus, consistent with the *Field Service Regulations*’ principles, that the Administrative Staff should follow where the General Staff led, being the less-prestigious branch that was rightly an underling because it did not make war-winning strikes.⁷² Thus at the 1911 Delhi durbar, Gilbert Palin detected that the commanders and General Staff officers at the head of the troops tended to make peremptory demands of the Supply and Transport Corps without questioning the administrative consequences. He and his administrative officers were frequently not consulted in the General Staff’s planning of the troops’ movements beyond the Delhi railheads, and were left ill-informed of them; it was assumed that the administrative services would just cope. This caused numerous problems for Palin, some of which required him to work a twenty-hour day to resolve. He suggested that in any future operations involving similar bodies of troops, closer co-operation between the General Staff and the administrative services would be required. Otherwise, he warned, there might be ‘evil results’.⁷³ At the end of the durbar, the status of his branch was insinuated in the organisation of the grand military parade. Under the parade’s original scheme, the transport units were to process alongside the regiments, but on second thoughts the General Staff cut them so that no representative body of Palin’s officers, men or animals went on show.⁷⁴

The Army in India’s command structure instilled by Kitchener, meanwhile, had an administrative Achilles’ heel. In giving the Northern and Southern Army Commanders only skeleton staffs, and preserving divisional administrative oversight for Army Headquarters, he bequeathed India a top-heavy administrative system. The problem was that this denied officers opportunities to practise administrative work at corps level. ‘The . . . two Inspectors’, Charles Douglas, as the Home Army’s Adjutant-General in 1906, remarked of India’s Army Commanders, ‘who will apparently have nothing to do with the administration of the troops forming [India’s] Divisions in peace, will, with their staffs . . . take the field without that knowledge of higher administration of their commands

⁷² A. Syk, ‘The 1917 Mesopotamia Commission’, *RUSI Journal* 154 (2009), 98.

⁷³ R. Graham, *Durbar*, pp. 66–68.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

which is an essential qualification for Commanders in war.⁷⁵ Neville Lyttelton, the first Chief of the British General Staff, agreed: ‘[With] no [Indian] staffs higher than those of Divisions, the staffs which would be wanted for armies in the field [are] non-existent in peace, and serious inconvenience may be anticipated in war from the want of experience and training of newly constituted headquarters staffs.’⁷⁶

⁷⁵ TNA, WO 106/1449: ‘Memorandum by Secretary of State for India’ (8 August 1916), p. 2, quoting minutes of the Army Council, 1906.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

5 To Flanders

‘The fleet which left Alexandria, carrying the whole of the Lahore Division, consisted of fifteen ships’, Herbert Alexander, an officer of the 9th Mule Corps, remembered of IEFA’s progress into the Mediterranean on 23 September 1914:

As they passed out of the harbour one by one, and formed up in two parallel lines, they made a most impressive spectacle. . . . The escort consisted of HMS *Weymouth* and HMS *Indomitable* which sailed at the head of the fleet. Soon afterwards seven transports, carrying the 1st Indian Cavalry Division, joined us, and the climax was reached when, on a brilliantly sunny day, this wonderful array of ships met the transports bearing the Territorial Division bound for Egypt, with HMS *Minerva* as escort. A halt was called while the captain of the *Minerva* boarded the *Weymouth*. This spectacle of thirty-nine transports drawn up in so small an area, protected by only three men-o’-war, made one realise as nothing else could have done how much Great Britain owes to her navy, and how wonderful is her command of the sea. The sun was setting as the boat bearing the skipper of the *Minerva* was pulled back to his ship. The scene as the two great fleets moved off again – each to play the part assigned to it in the Great War – is one which must have impressed itself indelibly on the mind of every officer and man who was privileged to see it.¹

Certainly IEFA’s despatch to the western front was a significant achievement. In 80 days from August to October 1914, it was efficiently mobilised and delivered 7,000 miles from India to Flanders. This was only made possible, like the sending of Indian brigades to China in 1900, by the Army in India’s pre-war proficiency in deploying overseas.

Mobilisation on the Subcontinent

At the India Office on 5 August 1914, the day after Britain had declared war to contain German expansionism, Lord Crewe supported the use of Indian resources for the cause so long as the subcontinent’s security

¹ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 26.

was maintained.² On the 5th and 6th at 10 Downing Street, an ad hoc war council of Cabinet ministers and senior military advisers decided on what sort of war Britain would wage. The council decided that the BEF should go to France, initially with four infantry divisions and one cavalry division of the Home Army, or the bulk of the peacetime regular higher formations in Britain. The council also resolved to call for one Indian infantry division to move to Egypt, a de facto British protectorate. It presumably did so at the prompting of Lord Kitchener, the new Secretary of State for War with overall responsibility for directing the British government's military effort, or of Douglas Haig, since 1912 the Home Army's only permanent corps commander. Ostensibly the move was so that the Army in India, as the Committee of Imperial Defence had been given to expect in 1913, could provide garrison troops for Egypt, releasing British battalions from there for BEF service.³ However, the council thought in terms of Indian troops actually fighting with the BEF. It accepted they should be considered as available to do so; all its members were in agreement but for Lord Roberts, who wanted the colour bar to remain in place. 'He strongly deprecated the sending of Indian troops to Europe', Herbert Asquith wrote, 'to the horror of K. and all the other Generals.'⁴ The majority supported the use of the Indian army on the continent essentially on the grounds that the war would be costly and long, and the BEF would require far more trained troops than were on hand in the Home Army.⁵

On 6 August, the Cabinet rubber-stamped the war council's request for an Indian division for Egypt. Kitchener explained the decision to Crewe for relaying to India, presenting it as non-negotiable. Crewe then instructed Hardinge as follows: 'The early despatch of one Division from India to Egypt has been decided on by the Cabinet, but the possibility of its employment for use in Europe is to be kept in view.'⁶ Hardinge had no objection. Now that Britain was at war with Germany, he, like Crewe, believed that the Empire must fight, and that Indian military resources should be used overseas, subject to subcontinental security requirements. Quite how much of the Army in India should be released overseas was

² J. Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe* (London: Constable, 1955), p. 143.

³ TNA, WO 256/1: Haig, Western Front Diary, 5–6 August 1914; Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, 2 vols. (London: Cassell, 1926), vol. 1, p. 53.

⁴ M. Brock and E. Brock (eds.), *H. H. Asquith, Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), letter 260 (14 January 1915); and Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1914, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁵ KCL/LHCM, Howell Papers: D. Haig Letter to Howell, 4 August 1914 (6/2/14); D. French, 'The Meaning of Attrition, 1914–1916', *English Historical Review* 103 (1988), 386–88; and Pollock, *Kitchener*, pp. 375–76.

⁶ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3086: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, August 1914), 6 August 1914.

an open question, to which neither Hardinge nor Crewe yet felt a need to give any answer.⁷

Between 7 and 8 August, Kitchener determined that he wanted two Indian divisions and one Indian cavalry brigade for Egypt – again for garrison duty, but possibly for European service. He told Crewe to request as much from Hardinge. Crewe was willing, being content that he and India were properly subordinate to Kitchener on military issues relating to the European war. He was aware that Hardinge, far away and closer to Indian interests, might not be of quite the same mind. Therefore, on passing on to Hardinge Kitchener's more than doubled request for Army in India forces for Egypt, Crewe recommended that the Indian government should 'not place obstacles in the way of helping our War Office to utmost extent, even if some temporary depletion of your establishment is involved. It is sound maxim that main theatre of war must be first consideration'.⁸ Hardinge consented. He ordered Beauchamp Duff at Army Headquarters to mobilise the 3rd and 7th Indian infantry Divisions, plus the 9th Indian Cavalry Brigade, for despatch to Egypt as IEFA.⁹

At the start of August, the thirty-one infantry and cavalry regiments and additional combatant and non-combatant units of what, within a week, was to become IEFA were scattered about the subcontinent. They were stationed along a large arc spanning 2,500 miles from Chaman, a border post in Baluchistan opposite Kandahar, through NWFP, the Punjab and the United Provinces to Hyderabad city, a princely state capital 400 miles south-east of Bombay. Approximately a third of their Indian ranks were at home on summer leave. Because it was monsoon season, flooded rivers, landslips and disrupted communications lay between many of the men's villages and their regimental depots. In the words of Kenneth Henderson, a Glaswegian officer of the 39th Garhwals at Lansdowne, 'the order to mobilize could not have come at a worse time.'¹⁰ Still, IEFA efficiently concentrated for departure from Bombay and Karachi in two to three weeks, as the Army in India's existing mobilisation capability – like for the 1911 Delhi durbar – moved smoothly through its gears.

By 8 August, Duff had turned to Haig's 1910–11 General Staff plans for sending an expeditionary force to a German war. He activated the

⁷ IOR, L/MIL/17/16/22: 'Telegrams between the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy', Hardinge to Crewe, 8 August 1914; Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 98.

⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/16/22: 'Telegrams between the Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy', Crewe to Hardinge, 7 August 1914.

⁹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3086: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, August 1914), 7 and 8 August.

¹⁰ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 109.

administrative machinery they provided for the immediate concentration of Indian divisions for despatch to Egypt. He selected the 3rd and 7th Divisions and 9th Cavalry Brigade, with their peacetime complement of Royal Artillery field guns plus two Indian signals companies, and mobilised them directly through their respective headquarters staff. These, from 8 August, stuck to the procedures prescribed for them in 1910–11 to mobilise promptly their combatant units. Meanwhile, Army Headquarters and the divisional staffs mobilised IEFA's Indian supply, transport and medical units. For example, the 3rd Division was assigned the 2nd and 9th Mule Corps, both of 768 Argentine, Chinese and Indian pack mules and 500 'higher' followers, with attachments of 200 Army Transport carts.¹¹ Equally, the 3rd and 7th Divisions were each allotted five Army Hospital Corps field ambulances, supported by companies of the Army Bearer Corps, and they shared Army Hospital Corps field hospitals.¹² None of the Indian wireless signal squadrons were given to IEFA; those released for overseas were eventually to go to Mesopotamia. As for the Indian Flying Corps, none of its aeroplanes were deemed ready for active service, and its pilots were sent to England to join the Royal Flying Corps.¹³

It took around two weeks for IEFA's Indian regiments and non-combatant units to collect for departure from their regimental depots or cantonments. This was as quick as was possible, the retrieval of many of their men from leave being delayed by the monsoon conditions. They followed their specific mobilisation instructions laid down in 1910–11. To take care of small details, several of them made good use of previous experience of packing for overseas. Complications inevitably arose. The 9th Mule Corps' 200 Army Transport carts had previously been considered as for peacetime use only, but the corps was ordered to take the carts to port for overseas service, leading to depot packing problems because the carts' mobilisation for active duty had not been practised. But common sense quickly overcame such troubles.¹⁴

After marching for their designated railway stations, most of IEFA's Indian regiments and non-combatant units were swiftly moved on trains to port at either Bombay or Karachi. The few exceptions were units

¹¹ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 3 and 29.

¹² Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 52–58.

¹³ IOR, L/PS/20/257: *Mesopotamia Commission, Report*, p. 38. Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 63.

¹⁴ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 109–10; Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 5–8; Charteris, *Haig*, p. 57, and *At G.H.Q.*, p. 47; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 24 and 27–28; Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 117; Terraine, *Haig*, p. 48; W. Thatcher, *The Fourth Battalion, Duke of Connaught's Own Tenth Baluch Regiment in the Great War, or the 129th DCO* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1932), pp. 2–3; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 168.

delayed in the Himalayan areas worst affected by the monsoon. The 39th Garhwals, for instance, got caught by floods on their march from Lansdowne to their railhead at Kotdwara. They were trapped for several days in a forest by stagnant and mosquito-infested swamp. The only beneficiary was Frederick Lumb, a captain of the regiment who a month earlier had gone on a shooting holiday higher up in the Himalayas, and on mobilisation was sought by a regimental runner. 'He was in some inaccessible spot on the Tibetan border, fully three weeks off, when the news reached him', recalled Kenneth Henderson,

and he rejoined by forces marches in some surprisingly short time. His marching really was a remarkable performance. He outmarched his servant and even his dog, our old frind Blanco, who was so footsore he had to be carried in on a charpoy! It must have been an extraordinary experience for Lumb, out of what had been a cloudless sky when he went off, suddenly to get the news that we were at war with Germany of all countries, without previously getting any of the news that led up to it. He rejoined at Kotdwara on the 28th August, they day before we entrained.¹⁵

The IEFA units' train movements were overseen by the Indian General Staff under precise arrangements prepared in 1910–11.¹⁶ The mobilisation of its British combatant units was comparatively straightforward because their men were all in cantonments and could more easily be concentrated. Thus on 12 August the 2nd/Leicesters were able to quit Ranikhet, a hill station west of Nepal, within sixty-nine hours of their mobilisation. The summer heat was intense as the IEFA battalions travelled westwards on their trains. The 1st/Connaught Rangers were baked in their carriages while crossing the Thar Desert from the Punjab, and a small number of the Irishmen died of heatstroke.¹⁷

From 18 August, IEFA's units began to arrive in Bombay and Karachi.¹⁸ At the latter, they waited for their ships either by the docks in tents and in cargo sheds, or in a camp on the racecourse. At Bombay, they camped in the city's public parks. 'On arrival at Bombay', wrote Herbert Alexander, 'the orders [for the 9th Mule Corps] were to camp at Cotton Green, close to the Taj Mahal Hotel':

The management of this hotel had very sportingly offered to put up officers proceeding on service free of charge, so I gladly availed myself of this privilege

¹⁵ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 110. A charpoy is a light, woven bed with wooden legs.

¹⁶ Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, p. 144.

¹⁷ H. Jourdain and E. Fraser, *The Connaught Rangers*, 3 vols. (London: Royal United Service Institution, 1924), vol. 1, p. 428.

¹⁸ H. Wylly, *History of the 1st and 2nd Battalions the Leicestershire Regiment in the Great War* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1928), pp. 106–07.

and spent a week in Bombay in great comfort. Not so my poor men, who were washed out of their tents the very first night by one of the heaviest downpours of rain Bombay had seen for years – four inches during the night of our arrival reducing the camp to an absolute quagmire. Thus early did the men come in contact with the discomforts of active service: it was good training for Flanders.¹⁹

From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean

Up to 25 August, Kitchener, through Crewe, directed that IEFA was to relieve British battalions in Egypt, Sudan, Malta and Gibraltar; the proviso regarding possible European service remained.²⁰ Meanwhile, Hardinge decided that he wanted at least one Indian division to fight with the BEF in order to break the colour bar principle. Doing so, he felt, would show a newfound British respect for Indians, and be a potentially popular move to encourage Indian support for his government. He pressed the idea on Crewe, but he received no positive answer. There was little Cabinet interest in his colour bar cause, its ministers being busy enough with other war questions.²¹

In north-eastern France on 26 August, the BEF was ensnared in a defensive action at Le Cateau, costing it 7,800 casualties. This was part of a desperate week's fighting for it, to the left of the French army, when it retreated some 200 miles from Mons in Belgium. Le Cateau persuaded Kitchener on the 27th to act on the IEFA proviso concerning continental service. Having already decided to give the BEF two more infantry divisions and one more cavalry division made out of the Home Army's last remaining peacetime regulars, he now wanted all the trained reinforcements he could get from the Empire.²² 'The casualties are very heavy [and] our men have retreated against their will', Asquith fretted. 'We are going to send all the Egyptian & Mediterranean garrison & the 2 Indian divisions as soon as they can be got to Marseilles to support them.'²³

While Hardinge was pleased at the colour bar's lifting, the Army in India's hill warfare-focused British officers were astonished. 'Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine Indian troops would be used in Europe against the Germans', wrote Kenneth Henderson of the 39th Garhwals.²⁴ For James Willcocks, who at the Punjabi hill station of Murree was

¹⁹ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 9.

²⁰ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3086: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, August 1914), 9–25 August.

²¹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letters to V. Chirol, 19 and 27 August. Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 99.

²² IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3086: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, August 1914), 28–30 August.

²³ Brock and Brock, *Asquith*, letter no. 136 (28 August 1914).

²⁴ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 110.

nearing the end of his four years in command of the Northern Army, and was shortly to be selected by Beauchamp Duff to lead the Indian Corps, 'it [had] seemed impossible. . . . The idea of Indian troops being sent into the heart of Europe had not entered into my calculations'.²⁵

IEFA was shipped to France in seven weeks. It efficiently embarked and disembarked at five seaports:

1. Bombay and Karachi, from which IEFA convoys, led by the 3rd Division and part of the 9th Cavalry Brigade, sailed from 22 August;
2. Port Said and Alexandria, which were important points of transit from 9 September, being used in particular by the 3rd Division, which camped by Cairo for a week in mid-September at Cabinet request to support the Egyptian garrison; and
3. Marseilles, where IEFA began to disembark on 26 September.

Dozens of experienced and capable Indian General Staff and Administrative Staff officers, in co-operation with officers of the Royal Navy and Royal Indian Marine, oversaw IEFA's shipping. They followed set procedures and plans, not only to requisition merchant and passenger ships in India for use as troop transports, but also to arrange the required port facilities including wharves, unloading berths, cranes and store sheds. At the Bombay and Karachi docks, the requisitioned ships were converted for military use by experienced refitters of the 2nd and the 3rd Sappers and Miners, assisted by a number of artisans drafted in at short notice from the Great Indian Peninsular and other railway companies. Together, they deftly put in place on the ships access ramps, cranes, bunks, stalls, racks and containers.²⁶

To move on and off the ships at each port from India to France, IEFA's commanders and staff officers from divisional level downwards ushered their units. They generally knew one another well from peacetime, drew on personal experience of overseas deployments and co-operated effectively. Combatant and non-combatant units alike followed previously practised and well-known methods, and they had Indian General Staff manuals to hand. Consequently, IEFA's troops, equipment, followers, horses, mule packs and carts were slickly loaded and unloaded. At Karachi, for instance, one Indian battalion boarded its ship in just forty-five minutes.²⁷ A trickier time was had at Bombay by Herbert Alexander's 9th Mule Corps, which used gangways for loading:

²⁵ Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', p. 2, and *Romance*, p. 274.

²⁶ W. Marshall, *Memories of Four Fronts* (London: Benn, 1929), pp. 5 and 8; and Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 439.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–25; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 36–37; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 13–16.

If by any chance the first mule took exception to the gangway, the probability was that all the rest did the same. Sometimes we had almost to carry them on board. With a rope under the animal's tail, and escape barred by a crowd of men, we used to haul and heave. There was one animal which had evidently made up its mind that it would not take a sea-voyage, but after kicking half a dozen men and scattering the crowd it yielded to the inevitable and stood upon the gang-way. There was not then room enough to kick, so some of the men hoisted the beast on their shoulders and bore it triumphantly up the gangway and into the hold: that mule literally smiled over the trouble he was giving.²⁸

At Alexandria, where Alexander's corps landed for three days, it moved its mules by other means:

Only one gangway was procurable, so, in order to expedite the landing of the animals, we decided to use the slings for the mules. . . . It is surprising how simple a matter is the slinging of animals. At first we slung them singly, but afterwards two together, which really proved better, because the animal did not seem to mind so much having the sling adjusted if another victim was standing by his side. The spectacle of two helpless mules dangling side by side in mid-air, looking around them in blank bewilderment, is quite amusing. As they landed on the wharf, they were led straight to the selected camp close by and picketed in lines. A guard was posted to keep an eye on the camp, but most of the men remained on board. In order to give the men a sight of the town, a route-march was arranged the day after our arrival. They enjoyed the walk, and were much interested in the shops and streets which are quite different from those of India. The local people, for their part, seemed interested in the Indians, and at times cheered them and gave them presents of cigarettes.²⁹

To protect IEFA's convoys from two German navy cruisers, SMS *Königsberg* and SMS *Emden*, which were believed to be hunting along the Indian sea lanes, the Royal Navy had to provide escorting firepower. In mid-August, the navy was able to provide prompt protection for IEFA's early convoys containing the 3rd Division and 9th Cavalry Brigade, but not for the later ones carrying the 7th Division. By the end of the month, it had become severely stretched by its war commitments in the North Sea and the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, so that it alone could not provide enough escorting firepower for IEFA. The Admiralty in London had to get help from the French, and did not arrange sufficient escorting firepower for all IEFA's convoys until mid-September. The upshot for the 7th Division's troopships was that they were held at port at Karachi for three weeks.³⁰ 'During this wait', Kenneth Henderson wrote,

it was hard to keep the Garhwalis occupied and fit. There was no open ground within miles on which to play football or even to drill, and all we could do was

²⁸ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 9–10.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23–24.

³⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 13.

route-marching and physical exercises. On 20 September our convoy was at last ready to start; or rather was allowed to start, for we had been ready enough for ages. It was now by the way that we got orders to call our divisions and brigades by their territorial names instead of their numbers, so as to avoid confusion with the British formations of similar numbers alongside which we were soon to be.³¹

The War Office had decreed that within the BEF, IEFA's two infantry divisions and its initial cavalry brigade must not be known by their Army in India numbers, but by distinctive Indian titles that no Home Army formation would share. The 3rd Indian infantry division became the Lahore Division, and the 7th became the Meerut Division. The brigades of both divisions were similarly de-numbered and renamed, and the 9th Cavalry Brigade was turned into the Secunderabad Brigade.³² Also in preparation for the continent, Beauchamp Duff increased the Lahore and Meerut 3rd and 7th Divisions' attachments of Army in India field artillery. He doubled their standing guns from peacetime, giving them each three Royal Field Artillery brigades of 18-pounders, or altogether 108 field guns. He did not assign them any of India's mountain guns, which were considered too low calibre for France.³³

To Flanders

'On September 26, the ships carrying the first of the Indian troops dropped anchor in Marseilles harbour', recorded Herbert Alexander. 'Some sort of a greeting from our allies we had expected, but what actually happened almost defies description':

The first inkling of what our reception was to be came from the ships we passed en route to the wharf. On every deck were gathered passengers and crew, waving handkerchiefs and hats in greeting. Then, as the transports passed alongside the many wharves and quays, we could see large crowds collected at every advantageous point to cheer the Indian contingent and welcome it to France. I could not help contrasting this reception with our send-off from Amballa [in the Punjab] and Bombay, where nobody appeared to take the slightest interest in our departure. . . . As the ships bearing the various detachments came into port, [the 9th Mule Corps] marched off about 9am. Even at that early hour the streets were alive with people. From docks to camp [we] passed through streets lined with the good folk of Marseilles, who clapped their hands, cheering vociferously and shouting. . . . At some places we had almost to force our way through the cheering crowds. . . . Truly the humble mule-driver entered into his own that day. In India he is accustomed to being rather looked down upon, but in Marseilles he

³¹ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 111.

³² TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (September 1914), 20 September.

³³ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 18–20.

received a greeting enthusiastic enough to have satisfied the Household Cavalry or the Brigade of Guards.³⁴

The 129th Baluchis were the first Indian regiment to land and march through the streets of Marseilles, which they did shortly before the 9th Mule Corps. Other Indian units followed throughout the morning. ‘It was a delirious scene’, said Massia Bibikov, a Russian artist among the crowds. ‘People who were drinking in the cafes of the Cannebière, men, women, officers, stood up on their chairs and shouted, “*Vive Angleterre! Vivent les Hindous! Vivent les Alliés!*”’³⁵ Local women clung round the necks of the Indians, kissing them and pinning flowers to their chests. ‘These strangers from a distant land astound us by standing shoulder to shoulder with us in the defence of French soil’, commented Maurice Barrès.³⁶ ‘The last part of our march lay through an avenue of trees, beautiful in their autumn tints’, wrote Herbert Alexander, ‘leading to the Parc Boreli and the race-course on which our camp was to be pitched.’³⁷

The Lahore Division and Secunderabad Brigade’s units provided a steady spectacle because they disembarked without delay, while the Indian troopships’ dockings were conveniently staggered as their different engine speeds brought them in at different times. The division was swift to set up camp, with its soldiers and followers unloading baggage from mule carts, distributing leather water bags, erecting tents, and digging ovens in the ground or building them out of bricks. Just hours after landing, the Indian troops had freshly baked chapattis and naan breads to eat, and the time to attend prayers at sundown and smoke hookahs afterwards. When the Meerut Division’s turn came, it disembarked in similar fashion.³⁸

The transfer of IEFA from Marseilles to Flanders took two to three weeks. From the first week of October, the Lahore Division and Secunderabad Brigade were moved on trains to Orléans, south-west of Paris. From the second week, they were followed there by the Meerut Division. From 17 October, the Lahore Division began to move from Orléans to Flanders, where it joined the BEF in the field on the 23rd. These rail movements were principally organised by the French General Staff and the French railway authorities, together shouldering the responsibility for the railway movements of BEF forces then arriving in France.

³⁴ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 27–31.

³⁵ M. Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles* (London: Smith, Elder, 1915), p. 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁷ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 31.

³⁸ Bibikoff, *Marseilles*, pp. 25–26; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 13–16; Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 227.

The timetabling worked well, and at French or Flemish railway stations IEFA's units moved on and off trains efficiently.³⁹

There were some delays during IEFA's passage through France as it was held up for alterations to its equipment from India, orchestrated by the British General Staff. At Marseilles, all IEFA's Lee-Enfield Mark IIs were replaced by Mark IIIs; this alignment of Army in India and Home Army rifles was designed to simplify the supply of ammunition to the frontline. A few of IEFA's Indian and British regiments' machine guns were replaced with newer British army Vickers models. The rest of the IEFA machine guns, for lack of more Vickers guns, were modified; their long tripod legs were sawn in half so that their gunners would be less exposed in battle.⁴⁰ Much of IEFA's signals companies' pre-war equipment, which was a generation behind the Home Army's, was replaced with up-to-date telegraph apparatus and telephones.⁴¹ At Orléans, IEFA's first-line transport was augmented by requisitioned French and British civilian horses, wagons and carts, all of which were dumped at an artillery practice ground outside the town. 'The medley of carts of every description that met the eye the first morning at Orléans was enough to turn one's hair grey', wrote Willcocks:

A vast plain, now converted into a bog, was literally strewn with vehicles and horses; every species of conveyance found a place, and the fair at Nijni Novgorod could not have shown greater variety; the char-a-banc and the baker's cart; structures on prehistoric springs; pole and draught harness; horses in hundreds without collars, head or heel ropes – in fact, just loose. It might have appeared grave if it had not been so amusing.⁴²

The delays to IEFA's deployment to Flanders should not mask its achievement by 23 October. IEFA was the largest expeditionary force ever despatched from India – its initial two divisions and cavalry brigade amounted to around 24,000 troops, or around double the number of troops sent from India to China in 1900. Its delivery to Europe went according to Army in India experience and planning, and would have taken weeks longer but for the preparedness to undertake it that had built up since the 1800s.

In late October and early November 1914, IEFA's five further Indian cavalry brigades – added to it at Kitchener's request, with Royal Horse

³⁹ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 10–11; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 36–37; A. Henniker, *Transportation on the Western Front, 1914–18* (London: HMSO, 1937), pp. 37–38 and 73–75; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 13–16.

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (September 1914), 'Report on Changes in Organisation'.

⁴¹ Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 63; and Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 707.

⁴² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 44; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 26.

Artillery and Indian non-combatant support – sailed from India for France. They were also mobilised quickly through the 1910–11 Indian General Staff plans and handed new Indian titles at the War Office's behest. Their voyage was well conducted due to experience of shipping cavalry and to Indian General Staff manuals on caring for horses at sea. By mid-December, they had all disembarked at Marseilles.⁴³

To Mombasa, Mesopotamia and Tanga

The Army in India's proficiency in deploying overseas was also borne out by IEFA's sister expeditionary forces of 1914. On 19 August, IEFC, containing 3,000 Indian troops of un-brigaded and mostly Imperial Service battalions, sailed from Bombay to help secure British East Africa (now Kenya). Unlike IEFA, its composition had not been fixed in peacetime for rapid mobilisation. Nonetheless, because it was small, Army Headquarters was able to form it without undue delay. In co-operation with the Royal Navy and Royal Indian Marine, IEFC's transports were promptly requisitioned and refitted. They arrived at the British East African port of Mombasa on 1 September, before disembarking quickly and smoothly under the experienced command of James Stewart (Indian army), who had served on the staff of an Indian brigade shipped to China in 1900.⁴⁴

IEFD departed India on 16 October for the Persian Gulf, at whose head it was to assert British influence if Turkey joined the Central Powers. It was initially made up of 1 brigade, totalling 4,731 officers and men, of the 6th Division. That brigade, like the brigades of IEFA, was mobilised as a formation fixed in peacetime, and as instructed by the 1910–11 Indian General Staff plans. It was led by Walter Delamain (Indian army), a man of considerable familiarity with previous Indian deployments overseas, having been on many including to the Makran Coast in 1911; the majority of his regiments also had such experience. In co-operation with the Royal Navy and Royal Indian Marine, Delamain and his units worked well together to ensure their efficient embarkation onto their transports at Bombay. From 6 to 10 November, after Britain had declared war on Turkey, they disembarked on the south-eastern fringe of Mesopotamia, at Fao and Sanayah. Their landings, capably overseen by Delamain and Royal Navy officers, were carried out in difficult shallow waters and onto a muddy enemy shoreline devoid of landing

⁴³ Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 117–20; Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, pp. 294–98; and W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, p. 308.

⁴⁴ E. Paice, *Tip and Run: The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London: Weidenfeld, 2007), p. 27.

facilities. Through good reconnaissance, the best available landing sites were selected; a well-organised system of small boats was then used to offload the transports. The remainder of the 6th Division soon followed in Delamain's wake and also landed efficiently.⁴⁵

The smooth deployments of IEFB and IEFD, like that of IEFA, should not be taken for granted. The deployment of IEFB did not go nearly so well. It was riddled with inefficiencies that pivoted on defects absent in its sister expeditionary forces, including IEFs E and F sent to help secure Egypt and the Suez Canal against the Turks. IEFB came into being in August 1914 within a few days of the war's outbreak, but it did not leave India for east Africa until the end of September. The arrangements for its shipment were a protracted muddle. Its composition and departure dates were changed time and again as the deployments of IEFs A, C and D were prioritised. When its brigades were eventually settled, it found itself with one from the 9th Division and one made up of Imperial Service units. The holding back of its departure for almost two months revealed that without quick agreement on composition, as was the case with IEFs A, C and D, serious delay likely followed.

IEFB's disembarkation at Tanga – the German East African port it was ordered to seize – was, in the words of the British merchant captain of one of its fourteen troopships, 'perfectly disgraceful and badly managed'. The disembarkation was overseen by IEFB's commander Arthur Aitken (Indian army) in tandem with a Royal Navy captain, Francis Caulfeild of HMS *Fox*, a light cruiser protecting IEFB's convoy. Once the convoy had arrived off Tanga on 2 November, Aitken and Caulfeild neglected to reconnoitre for a primary landing site, leading them to choose a very bad one: a swampy beach, at unnecessary distance from Tanga, surrounded by dense undergrowth, overlooked by a cliff and with high coral reef in the sea before it. The landings that followed took fifty-six hours and were unduly slow and clumsy. Aitken did not closely plan or lead them; Caulfeild took an over-cautious approach to piloting the transports towards the shore for their offloading onto small boats; battalions awkwardly quit their transports as they lacked instruction for disembarkation; several of the small boats carrying troops from their transports towards the shore became stuck on the reef; further beaches had to be chosen to complete the landings. The disembarkation of IEFB, like the German

⁴⁵ M. Carver, *The Turkish Front 1914–18* (London: Pan, 2004), p. 11; Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 346; C. Murphy, *Soldiers of the Prophet* (London: Hogg, 1921), pp. 52, 54 and 60–61; and C. Townshend, *When God Made Hell: The British Invasion of Mesopotamia and the Creation of Iraq, 1914–1921* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), pp. 5–6.

army's in China in 1900, reflected that without efficiency at all levels of an expeditionary force, disembarkation could go seriously awry.⁴⁶

Still, IEFB's deployment was the exception that proved the rule: the Army in India had a proficiency in deploying overseas carried over from peacetime. In that, it was not alone. In the first six months of the war, the British Empire moved by sea for war purposes one million men by means of co-operating imperial armies, navies and merchant marines. There was not only the deployment of the original BEF from the UK to France, but also a wide range of other sea-borne deployments – British battalions for the BEF were shipped to England from imperial garrisons in Nova Scotia, Bermuda, Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, Sudan, South Africa, India, Burma, Mauritius and China; Territorial units were shipped from England to Egypt and India to fill garrisons that had released British and Indian battalions; Canadian troops were shipped from Canada to England, and Australian from Australia to Egypt; African troops from British West Africa were shipped to attack the port of Douala in German Cameroon (or 'Kamerun'); troops from New Zealand were shipped to capture German Samoa. All these deployments were displays, like IEFA, of British sea power and imperial preparedness to deploy troops by sea, without which the Empire's forces could have done very little of the fighting they did in 1914.

Among the other Allied powers, the Japanese used their pre-war expertise in army-navy co-operation to deploy troops against the Germans in North China and around the Pacific, to the Caroline, Mariana and Marshall islands. Further, the French army used its long imperial experience of shipping troops in co-operation with the French navy and merchant marine to move Moroccan, Algerian and Senegalese units from North and West Africa to France. In the face of all these Allied sea-borne deployments, Germany was virtually helpless. It could neither stop them nor carry out similar deployments. While it entered the war with a great army on the continent of Europe, it did not have the naval and military power overseas to rival the Allied sea movements. In 1914, it proved unable to sink a single British Empire troopship, and it could not deploy military forces to or from Europe by sea. Germany's lack of a combined naval and military global capability was a real weakness. IEFA's deployment therefore stands as an example not just of Army in India or British Empire proficiency at overseas deployments, but of a great Allied military and naval superiority outside Europe.

⁴⁶ R. Anderson, 'The Battle of Tanga, 2–5 November 1914', *War in History* 8 (2001), pp. 297–309; and Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 39–57.

6 'Saving' the BEF

Throughout First Ypres, John French oversaw the handling of the BEF's British corps and their reinforcements. 'I know', James Willcocks told the viceroy in September 1915, 'that Sir John French feels that but for the presence of the Indian Corps, he might last October and November have found his task almost impossible when Ypres was trembling in the balance and each man was worth his weight in gold.'¹ 'Those who know [the Indian army's] share [in First Ypres]', Willcocks then assured his readers in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1917, 'can be but of one opinion':

viz., that the Indian soldiers are due a great debt of gratitude by the people of [Britain], because at a time when our own countrymen were fighting against enormous odds and performing deeds of deathless glory, the Indian Corps was able to step in and fill a gap, and thus to help roll back the billows thundering against that thin but still unshattered granite wall. No claim is made for them except that they arrived in the very nick of time and took their place in the sadly reduced battle line, thus relieving the strain which was becoming nigh intolerable for our own brave men.²

First Ypres was in fact the battle in which the Home Army came to depend on the Army in India not to fail. The Indian Corps may not have 'saved' the BEF all by itself, but it was a vital link in a chain of reinforcements without which the BEF, and the Allies, would have suffered a disastrous defeat.

The BEF's Reinforcements

From August to mid-September 1914, the fighting on the western front was mobile, in keeping with most pre-war expectations of European battle. It was indecisive because the German and the French and British higher formations had manoeuvred to counteract one another,

¹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 2 September 1915.

² Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 8.

and defensive fire frequently overwhelmed attacking infantry. From mid-September, the fighting entered a semi-mobile period, which started with the Germans' decision to go on the defensive east of Paris to secure captured territory, entailing their adoption of trenches along the River Aisne. As they dug in there, both sides attempted to outflank one another to the north. Up to mid-October, they crept northwards through the Somme valley and beyond, clashing in a series of inconclusive engagements as they made reciprocal outflanking efforts. By the third week of the month, the last uncontested area in which one side was likely to outmanoeuvre the other was Flanders – a level and low-lying plain, dotted with villages, farms, manure heaps, woods, windmills and small factories, criss-crossed by hedgerows, canals and streams, with the ancient trading town of Ypres at its heart. To the south, all the way to neutral Switzerland, opposing defensive lines had come into being.

To the east of Ypres, the Germans gathered a large force of numerous corps within their 4th and 6th Armies. Their intention was to smash through Flanders for a decisive victory. Directly opposite, the Allies drew up a thin line of trenches running southwards from the North Sea. The Belgian and French armies held the northernmost section, centring on Dixmude and stretching fifteen miles; to their right, the whole of the BEF, with some French support, took up a thirty-five-mile line hinging on Ypres.

First Ypres began on 19 October, when the German 4th Army attacked the northern half of the Allied line and the 6th Army the southern. They battered the enemy positions with divisional attacks so intense that the Allies' own hopes of going on the offensive evaporated fast. The battle was compartmentalised, taking the form of a string of local engagements in which German infantry assaults were desperately held off by defenders dug in along hedge lines, canals and village outskirts. It lasted until 13 November, when the Germans shut down their offensive, having repeatedly failed to break through at the cost of 100,000 casualties; the prospect of further losses for no major advance had become unacceptable.³

The stakes had been very high. If the Germans had broken through the British or the Allied lines – and they could scarcely have come closer than they did – they would have been let loose to overrun the northern French seaboard and much of inland France. First Ypres has therefore been fairly described as 'a battle but for which Germany might have conquered Europe in Napoleonic style and, even if they had

³ J. Stevenson, *1914–1918, The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 76.

not been ultimately victorious, have prolonged the war to Napoleonic length'.⁴

At the battle's outset, the BEF included all its original divisions created out of the pre-war Home Army: the six infantry divisions of Douglas Haig's I Corps, Horace Smith-Dorrien's II Corps and William Pulteney's III Corps, plus the two cavalry divisions of Edmund Allenby's Cavalry Corps. Alongside them were a couple of British divisions established in England in September: the 7th Division, containing regular battalions recalled since the war's outbreak from garrisons in South Africa, Egypt and the Mediterranean, and the incomplete 3rd Cavalry Division, made up of cavalry regiments scraped together from the pre-war Home Army and the South African garrison. The 7th Division and the 3rd Cavalry Division formed Henry Rawlinson's IV Corps, which joined the BEF at Ypres in the second week of October.⁵

What were the reinforcements potentially available to the BEF during the battle? They were of three kinds. The first came from the Home Army. It had almost no more men ready for BEF service. The British army's pre-war reservists and special reservists had virtually dried up, having been deeply drawn on since the first week of August. As for the Territorials, they were not simply on hand for overseas duty. They had signed up before the war to serve only in the UK, and were generally not trained and equipped for continental battle. Nonetheless, some Territorial battalions consented to fight with the BEF. Kitchener sent eight of them – three infantry and five cavalry (or yeomanry) – to Flanders in the autumn. On French's direction, they saw action at First Ypres in the central and northern sections of the BEF line that were under the heaviest pressure. On several occasions, they were critical to the break-up of local German momentum, not least on the night of 31 October to the south of Ypres at the centre of the BEF line, where the 1st/14th London Regiment (London Scottish) lost 9 officers and 400 men at the village of Messines.⁶ The numbers of wartime recruits in Britain were over half a million by October. But they needed to be trained and equipped before they could go anywhere, and that would not be until at least mid-1915.

Second, there were reinforcements from the Empire. On the one hand, these consisted of white troops. The pre-war British battalions on their way to France from the non-European garrisons went into new divisions in England – the 8th, 27th, 28th and 29th – that were not set up in

⁴ M. Howard, 'Ypres', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 February 2005.

⁵ Keegan, *First World War*, p. 141.

⁶ Beckett, *Ypres*, pp. 31 and 125; Conan Doyle, *The British Campaigns in Europe 1914–1918* (London: Bles, 1929), p. 147; Farrar-Hockley, *Death of an Army*, p. 169; and A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, p. 145.

time for First Ypres.⁷ The expeditionary forces of white settler recruits from Canada, Australia and New Zealand were bound for the BEF, but none of them were near the battlefield. The Canadian force docked in England on 14 October, only for Kitchener to give it six months' training on Salisbury Plain. The Australians and New Zealanders were nowhere in sight; they were at King George Sound in Western Australia, waiting for naval protection against the *Emden*. Although South Africa had white armed forces, they were unavailable for the BEF in 1914, largely because they were preoccupied with invading adjacent German territory and putting down a Boer rebellion.⁸

Of the Empire's non-white troops, on the other hand, the only ones within reach of the BEF belonged to IEFA. There was no question of the British-officered black African troops of the West African Frontier Force or the King's African Rifles fighting in Flanders. They were recruited, trained and equipped exclusively for African service. Besides, under the colour bar principle as it applied to them, they were permitted to fight the few white German soldiers among the predominantly black German forces on African soil, but were not considered racially suitable to fight the all-white German army in Europe. The other parts of the Empire, from the Caribbean to the Pacific islands, had no trained indigenous forces to send.

IEFA reached its Flemish railheads on 19 October, with the Lahore Division a week ahead of the Meerut. The two divisions had approximately 15,000 Indian troops and 5,000 British, including the temporarily attached Secunderabad Brigade, and excluding the Lahore Division's Sirhind Brigade, which had been detached in Egypt to guard the Suez Canal (and was not to rejoin until early December).

From 23 October to the end of First Ypres, Indian Corps units held around twelve miles, or approximately 34 per cent, of the BEF line. John French deployed them as quickly as he could, to where he felt they would best shore up his defences. In the last week of October, he gave the Lahore Division's Ferozepore Brigade to Allenby's dismounted Cavalry Corps, whose six-mile line lay at the BEF centre, along the Messines ridge. Allenby was so short of cavalymen that he called on Ferozepore Brigade battalions to hold up to two miles of his line. The remainder of the Indian Corps – which was rejoined by the Ferozepore Brigade

⁷ Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, pp. 54–55; Jourdain and Fraser, *Connaught Rangers*, vol. 1, pp. 436–40; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. 9–19; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 60–61 and 75.

⁸ P. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (London: UCL Press, 1994), pp. 84–86; G. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army: The Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914–1919* (Ottawa: The Queen's Printer, 1962), p. 29.

from 2 November, and all the while had the Secunberabad Brigade – held around ten miles on the BEF's right. French ordered it to reinforce Smith-Dorrien's II Corps from 24 October, and to relieve II Corps on the 29th. The Indians' active part in the battle ended around 5 November; from then on, the Germans' focus was the left of the BEF position.⁹

The French army provided the third kind of reinforcements for the BEF. It released a constant trickle of infantry, cavalry and artillery, mainly from its IX and XVI Corps. They fought in several parts of the BEF line, usually of John French's choosing. In October, they bolstered II Corps and the Cavalry Corps, and in November Haig's I Corps by Ypres. They were the absolute limit of reinforcements that the French were willing to provide the BEF. The bulk of the French army had its own defensive worries, above all to the north of Ypres around Dixmude, next to the Belgians.¹⁰

'Filling a Gap'

At First Ypres in the last week of October, the BEF's British units sent from England were getting very tired. 'I have been having a pretty trying time of it', Smith-Dorrien wrote to his wife on the 25th. 'My poor troops are simply worn out – & their losses are tremendous. Day & night without cessation they are in close touch with the Enemy fighting hard.'¹¹ 'We are hanging on only by our eyelids', Henry Rawlinson stated on the 26th of IV Corps, in line near Ypres to the left of the Cavalry Corps, 'we want men, and always more men'.¹² On the 31st, to the north of IV Corps and on the BEF's far left in front of the walls of Ypres, Haig's I Corps was 'very exhausted . . . 2 Brigadiers assure me that if the Enemy makes a push at any point, they doubt our men being able to hold on.'¹³ By 1 November, among the 84 battalions of the BEF's 7 British infantry divisions, 75 had fewer than 300 men, a third of their strength in August, and 18 had fewer than 100. The British cavalry divisions were similarly reduced.¹⁴ 'If we wanted any more men in the front line', said one British cavalry officer, 'we had better go across and see if the Germans would lend us some.'¹⁵

⁹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, see chapters 3–6.

¹⁰ Beckett, *Ypres*, 170–72 and 193–94; L. Fraser, *The French Official Review of the First Six Months of the War* (London: Constable, 1915), pp. 32–33; and Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 277.

¹¹ Beckett, *Ypres*, p. 103; and Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, p. 461.

¹² F. Maurice, *The Life of General Lord Rawlinson* (London: Cassell, 1928), p. 113–15.

¹³ G. Sheffield and J. Bourne (eds.), *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters, 1914–1918* (London: Weidenfeld, 2005), pp. 76–77.

¹⁴ B. Gardner, *Allenby* (London: Cassell, 1965), p. 80–81; Farrar-Hockley, *Death of an Army*, p. 169; and Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 277.

¹⁵ Beckett, *Ypres*, p. 144.

The combined effect of the BEF's Territorial, Indian and French reinforcements was to save it from fatal overstretch, no matter how hard its Home Army regulars had fought. In the first fortnight of November, or the second half of First Ypres, its regular battalions shipped from England had merely 20,000–30,000 troops. In holding the BEF line, they were directly helped by at the very least a comparable number of Territorial, Indian Corps and French troops, together holding around 50 per cent of the BEF position. Had these reinforcements not been present, the line they held would have been the responsibility solely of the BEF's British regulars who had been at First Ypres from the start. It is difficult to see how the latter could not have been overstretched and defeated had they been compelled to cover the whole BEF line by themselves. There was only so much they could do; for them to have coped alone up to the second week of November would have been too much. 'The proposition to those who know the facts is almost self-evident', declared F. E. Smith.¹⁶ Haig appears to have agreed. He was said by Walter Lawrence to have 'always gratefully acknowledged that the arrival of [the Indian Corps] saved the situation by filling a gap'.¹⁷ For John Charteris, on Haig's staff at First Ypres, the Indian Corps was 'invaluable' because it 'filled a gap in the line when we had no other troops to put in'.¹⁸ For the same reason, French also called the Indian Corps 'invaluable', just as Willcocks claimed.¹⁹

¹⁶ Merewether, *Indian Corps*, p. xvii.

¹⁷ Lawrence, *The India We Served*, p. 271.

¹⁸ Charteris, *Haig*, p. 57, and *At G.H.Q.*, p. 67.

¹⁹ J. French, *1914*, pp. 196, 228, 252–53 and 265. Also see French's testimony in IOR, L/MIL/17/5/2401: 'Secret Military Department Minute on the Situation in India Consequent on the War' (6 June 1915), p. 4.

7 Climate, Casualty Replacements and Departure

‘On the departure of the Indian Corps from my command’, read a Special Order of the Day from John French on 22 November 1915, ‘I wish to send a message of thanks . . . The Indian troops have shown most praiseworthy courage under novel and trying conditions, both of climate and of fighting, and have not only upheld, but added to, the good name of the Army which they represent . . . They have done their work here well.’¹ As French’s message implied, the Indian Corps’ removal from the BEF was not because the Indian infantry were officially considered to have ‘failed’. It was triggered neither by the Flemish climate nor by casualty replacement problems, but by the Indian government’s grandiose strategy in Mesopotamia.

The Flemish Winter

At the Indian camp outside Orléans in early October 1914, the Indian troops had few clothes for the oncoming winter. Beyond their standard khaki or green uniforms, they had only what the BEF’s Quartermaster-General had been able to spare them: a small number of warm coats and a crate of oversized underpants. Although extra blankets were intended for each man, far from enough were available. Thus, in the evening cold, men of the 57th Wilde’s Rifles (Frontier Force) were reduced to keeping warm by wrapping themselves in some scavenged tablecloths and curtains.²

In the first fortnight of November, the temperature at night in the Indian Corps’ trenches was dropping to -10°C . Heavy rain, frost or snow were becoming daily occurrences. The Indian troops, however, had started to receive more warm clothes than they could wear or even carry. They got them from the Indian Soldiers’ Fund, a charity set up in

¹ TNA, WO 95/1089: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1915), ‘Special Order of the Day, from Sir J. French, Commander-in-Chief, British Army in the Field’ (22 November 1915).

² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 46.

London in October by well-connected British politicians, administrators and retired senior Indian commanders to provide material ‘comforts’ for the Indian troops of IEFA. The Fund had its own supply network centred on a London warehouse provided by the department store owner Gordon Selfridge. In co-operation with the India Office and the War Office, it shipped material aid from England to the western front. By November, the Fund had started to send to IEFA hundreds of thousands of warm garments from around the British Isles – thick socks, gloves, mittens, mufflers, woollen jumpers, balaclavas and much else besides – that it had bought or been given.³

‘Clothes we have in such abundance showered on us we do not know what to do with them’, wrote the 41st Dogras’ commanding officer in early December.⁴ ‘I have so much warm clothing’, said his counterpart of the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas, ‘that if we move I must leave several cart-loads behind if it is not taken from me.’⁵ ‘Since the real cold set in’, James Willcocks conveyed to the Fund on 10 December from the Indian Corps’ headquarters at Hinges chateau, ‘it is a case of being over-clothed. I have seen every [Indian] unit of every sort, and no one takes more trouble than I do to see they have enough. It is *absolutely untrue* for anyone to say the Indian troops now in France are underclad.’⁶ The Fund ensured that IEFA’s Indian troops had more than enough warm clothing throughout their time on the western front.⁷ Indeed, the Indians’ officers had to keep an eye on their men’s packs to stop these from becoming overloaded with hoards of balaclavas, shirts and socks.⁸

The Indians received a large amount of other clothing and supplies to help them cope with the Flemish outdoors. From December 1914, the Indian Soldiers’ Fund sent them rubber boots (both Wellington and knee-length), waterproofs (including capes and turban covers), and charcoal braziers for the trenches. It also sent thousands of clay pipes with pipe tobacco, tens of thousands of bidis, and hundreds of thousands of Western cigarettes of an eventual 22 million.⁹

With the War Office, India Office, Indian government and IEFA Administrative Staff, the Indian Soldiers’ Fund ensured that from

³ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 510–14.

⁴ IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1: ‘Indian Soldiers’ Fund, Proceedings of the General Committee, Book 1’, see papers and appendices, October to December 1914.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 119–20; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 101.

⁸ D. Drake-Brockman, *With the Royal Garhwal Rifles in the Great War* (Haywards Heath: Clarke, 1934), p. 70; and Hudson, *Fane’s Horse*, p. 132.

⁹ IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1–13: Indian Soldiers’ Fund, Proceedings and Reports; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 117.

October 1914 the Indians in the field received a varied and full diet. They provided food in unprecedented quantities for an expeditionary force from India; fruits, vegetables, meats, cereals and dairy products came from France, Britain, Algeria, India and the Caribbean. 'The men got noticeably fat on the liberal and good rations', commented a British officer of one Indian regiment.¹⁰

In the winter of 1914–15, Indian Corps headquarters reported that 'the Indians have stood the climate better than the British'. The Indians received frontline medical care from IMS doctors that helped to make their sickness rate less than half that of the BEF's British troops.¹¹ This had much to do with feet. British troops, excepting a minority within the Scottish regiments, wore tight boots and puttees that constricted blood circulation in the lower leg. Combined with prolonged exposure to water on the trench floor, their boots and puttees could cause feet to swell, turn blue and develop blisters and sores. For the worst cases of this condition – 'trench foot', distinguishable from frostbite, caused simply by cold – amputation was necessary. Indian troops suffered less than British from trench foot and frostbite. The major reason was a traditional Indian army practice of wearing oversized boots, which, unlike British army boots and puttees, allowed for good blood circulation and two pairs of socks, helping to keep feet healthy in the cold and wet conditions.¹²

IMS doctors made regular trench inspections to check that the Indians' feet were kept as warm and dry as possible. They encouraged the regular use not only of fresh Indian Soldiers' Fund socks, but also of Indian Soldiers' Fund tins of foot ointments and antiseptics. Some Indian regiments, in particular the 41st Dogras and 34th Poona Horse, still suffered high rates of frostbitten feet. Nonetheless, as a rule the Indians' feet were kept in relatively good condition. The diseases suffered by the Indians in the winter of 1914–15 were mostly unrelated to the cold weather. There were a few cases of pneumonia, but there were more of malaria, caught by Garhwalis and Gurkhas while travelling in Himalayan lowlands during mobilisation, and of mumps, a European virus the Indian troops were freshly exposed to. The overall rates of disease among IEFA's Indian troops, including sexually transmitted diseases, were low: the average Indian daily sick rate in

¹⁰ IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1–13: Indian Soldiers' Fund, Proceedings and Reports; IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 119; IWM, 73/88/1: Papers of Major-General Sir R. Ewart (Deputy-Director of Supply, Indian Corps), Diary 1914–15; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 98.

¹¹ TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1914), 22 November.

¹² TNA, WO 159/16: War Office Report to Kitchener on Health of Indian Troops in France.

Flanders was 2 per 1,000, several times lower in fact than in peacetime India.¹³

The Indian troops, therefore, were not debilitated or made physically ill by the Flemish winter of 1914–15 in any special way. Just as they had coped with cold, wet and snow in pre-1914 small wars, they coped with the winter conditions on the western front. They were once again well supplied with clothes and other things to wear or keep warm with, they were well nourished, and they were well cared for by IMS doctors. All this was common knowledge among IEFA's British officers. 'The majority of the Indians [in Flanders] kept in excellent health', wrote Kenneth Henderson, 'they got warm clothing and plenty of food. . . . I am at a loss to account for the impression prevalent in some quarters that the Indians were specially tried by the climate.'¹⁴

At the War Office, Kitchener knew that the Indian Corps' Indian troops had coped well with the winter of 1914–15. Accordingly, in summer 1915 he decided that the Indian Corps was fit to spend a second winter on the western front. On 1 September, he ordered Willcocks that the corps would do just that and must begin preparations for the adequate winter care of the Indians to be repeated. Willcocks welcomed the order, confident in the knowledge that the Indians had already stood one Flemish winter and could stand another. Hardinge agreed, having kept in good touch with private correspondents in Europe as to the condition of IEFA's Indian troops.¹⁵

Earlier that summer, Austen Chamberlain, Lord Crewe's replacement at the India Office since May, had dwelled on the idea that the Indian troops should not be exposed to another Flemish winter. It seems he assumed the Indian soldiers were naturally unsuited to European winters. Hardinge disapproved. '[Chamberlain] is absolutely wrong. If Indian soldiers are only properly clothed, they can stand the cold of Europe.'¹⁶ Crewe had held the same assumption as Chamberlain, as he told Thakur Amar Singh in January 1915. Amar Singh begged to differ. 'I explained to him that the actual sickness [in Flanders] amongst [the BEF's Indian

¹³ IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1–13: Indian Soldiers' Fund, Proceedings and Reports. *The Times*, 28 October 1914, p. 5; J. Greenhut, 'Race, Sex, and War: The Impact of Race and Sex on Morale and Health Services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914', *Military Affairs* 45 (1981), p. 74; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 503; and *The Times History of the War*, vol. 2, p. 341. Venereal diseases do not appear to be included in this.

¹⁴ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 119–20.

¹⁵ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to Willcocks, 6 January 1915; Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 2 September 1915; and Hardinge Letter to J. Nixon, 12 September 1915.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Hardinge Letter to V. Chirol, 29 July 1915.

troops] was far less on average than in British troops. . . . The cold has been most intense but [the Indian troops] have withstood it wonderfully well.¹⁷ If the Indian troops did have any distinctive gripe with the Flemish climate, Amar Singh felt, it was with unfamiliar damp, though not to the extent of significantly impairing their fighting fitness.¹⁸ While on leave from the BEF, Willcocks often found ‘that people in England believed that the Indian troops could not stand the severe climate’. ‘There were no grounds for such’, he objected, ‘the [Indian troops] were, of course, undergoing great hardships, but so were others.’¹⁹

The Indian soldiers on the western front certainly complained of the cold and the wet. But so did troops of all the armies there.²⁰ Any soldier’s health in the Flemish winter hinged not on what part of the world he came from, but on how he was looked after. Around 45 per cent of the Indian Corps’ original Indian troops came from the north-west frontier or Himalayan regions in which heavy rains, sub-zero temperatures, frosts and snowfall were commonplaces; most of the rest came from the Punjab, where it also rained and got cold. Further, a significant minority had experienced harsh weather in small wars. Yet none of these things inured them against the cold weather of north-western Europe. Warm clothes, waterproof equipment, good food and medical care did, as was the case for IEFA’s Indian cavalrymen, the European troops on the western front, and the non-Indian non-white troops there, including those in French service from North and West Africa, Indo-China and Madagascar.²¹ ‘There is an intense cold owing to the prolonged frost’, a Sikh cavalryman in France wrote home to the Punjab on 26 January 1917. ‘But this weather does not do much harm, and we Indians keep very well in it. . . . Government has made such excellent arrangements for food and clothing that every soldier is able to face the cold with complacency.’²²

Flanders had the kindest climate of all the Indian army’s theatres during the war. The Indian troops with real problems with the climate were elsewhere. The men of IEFB were continually sapped of their strength by the heat, humidity and diseases of East Africa. For instance, at Christmas 1914, the 13th Rajputs went to Uganda. After six months there

¹⁷ Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 381.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹⁹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 194.

²⁰ Graves, *Goodbye to all That*, p. 248; and Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 36.

²¹ *The New York Times*, 17 April 1915, p. 8; R. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 2008), pp. 87–90.

²² TNA, FO 383/288: ‘Secret Supplementary Letters Forwarded by the Censor, Indian Mails, France (10 January 1917)’.

they were ‘almost incapacitated by sickness’, and after nine months they undoubtedly were: 95 per cent of the regiment had been struck down by malaria.²³ In 1917, the South Waziristan Field Force, sent against jihadist Mahsud lashkars, faced even worse climactic conditions. Its fifteen Indian and two British battalions fought in temperatures reaching 50°C in the shade in valleys where dysentery, malaria and blood-sucking sandflies were rife. The 1st/4th Gurkhas, formerly of IEFA, became so exhausted and sick that they were declared unfit for duty. They were sent to take the airs of the Arabian Sea coast to recuperate.²⁴

Casualty Replacements

The Indian Corps was rested from the frontline in January 1915. Between First Ypres and Christmas, its Indian casualties had totalled 7,126:

1. 39 Indian officers killed, and 96 wounded;
2. 905 Indian other ranks killed, and 4,370 wounded; and
3. 31 Indian officers and 1,685 Indian ranks missing.

The missing lay largely on the battlefield, as the Germans took around 300 Indian prisoners in 1914. The corresponding casualty figures for the Indian troops’ British officers were approximately fifty killed, eighty-five wounded, and twenty missing. A few Indian units that had been heavily attacked at First Ypres, before serving another six weeks in the trenches, had suffered particularly high losses. The 129th Baluchis were the most extreme example. ‘We have lost 13 British officers, 16 Indian officers and about 800 men’, wrote one of their British officers at Christmas. ‘We have now practically no regiment left.’²⁵ More typically, the Indian battalions had each suffered between 300 and 400 casualties. Thus their average strength had fallen to 450.²⁶

Up to the end of January 1915, the Indian Corps received Indian army casualty replacements from several sources. Between October 1914 and 1 January 1915 the Indian reserve could only provide a handful of its forty British officers. A few more British officers came from IEFA’s Indian regimental home depots; when its Indian battalions had left these in 1914, each had left behind at least one British officer; such officers were now called to France, in some instances in exchange for a wounded officer

²³ C. Hordern and H. Stacke (eds.), *Military Operations: East Africa, Volume I, August 1914–September 1916* (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 131.

²⁴ Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, p. 393.

²⁵ Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 34.

²⁶ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 206.

who was not fit to fight but could do depot work.²⁷ The availability of replacement British officers for IEFA's Indian battalions was not helped by Kitchener in the war's opening fortnight having commandeered for the Home Army 257 Indian service British officers on leave in the British Isles. These officers, to Duff's dismay, were never returned to the Indian army, which therefore at a stroke had lost 10 per cent of its pre-war white officer corps before it went into action.²⁸

The Indian reserve also provided some 3,000 Indian troops for the Indian Corps by January 1915. The majority of these, however, were under-trained and physically weak. At IEFA's main base depot at Marseilles, IMS medical inspectors found 876 of them to be unfit for service, and a considerable number of others to be almost unfit.²⁹ Of those 876, for instance, 181 were pronounced 'unfit . . . on military grounds as distinct from medical, *i.e.* old age, weakness, miserable physique etc.' According to Merewether and Smith,

A story was current at the time that, at the inspection of this class [of 181 reservists], an aged man was asked whether he felt fit and keen. He replied that when he left Bombay, by mercy of God, he had one upper tooth left. Putting his fingers in his mouth, he removed the one tooth and presented it for examination.³⁰

In late 1914 at Army Headquarters, Beauchamp Duff oversaw the reinforcement of the Indian army abroad, giving the question close attention. For IEFA's Indian battalions, he extracted pre-war regular officers and men from the Indian battalions still on the subcontinent. This was partly a matter of using the pre-war system of linked regiments, yet the linked units alone could not provide what was required. Those in India could not be left too low in numbers for their own wartime duties, which, as most of them belonged to the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions and the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat independent brigades, had already meant fighting jihadist factions among the Pathan frontier tribes, and might, the Indian government was rightly apprehensive, come to include larger scale frontier operations against the Afghans. Consequently, to reinforce the Indian Corps, Duff began to draw on not just linked Indian battalions in India, but also non-IEFA Indian battalions in general.

The range of non-IEFA Indian battalions that Duff could use was much restricted. He could not deplete the Indian battalions of IEFs B,

²⁷ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 111.

²⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/1618: 'Correspondence (Telegrams) between Duff and Kitchener', see the August 1914 correspondence on Kitchener's commandeering of Indian service British officers on home leave.

²⁹ Menezes, *Fidelity*, p. 247; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 464–65.

³⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 464–65.

C, D, E and F because they needed their own officers and men to fight, and in many cases had become low on numbers due to their own African or Mesopotamian campaigning. Further, Kitchener was adamant that the men of the low-quality Indian battalions were too ill-trained for the European battlefield. He instructed Duff that only high-quality Indian regiments were to be drawn on to reinforce IEFA. 'In the campaign on the Continent', he said in one telegram to Simla, 'we must get the best of [Indian] foot and make a real good show. . . . These Germans want first rate [Indian troops] to face them.'³¹

The upshot was that in late 1914, Duff selected Indian casualty replacements for the Indian Corps largely from his best regiments in India, drawing widely on the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions and on the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat Brigades. He ordered many of their regiments to release a complete double company of pre-war regulars. In the 1st Division, the Guides infantry (Frontier Force) provided one for the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force), the 38th Dogras one for the 1st/39th Garhwals, the 127th Baluchis one for the 129th Baluchis, and so on. In addition, several regiments were told to give up experienced British officers. All these casualty replacements began to arrive at Marseilles in December 1914.³² 'Whole double-companies', Willcocks recalled, 'arrived from other battalions, splendid fighting material and glad to be with us; and although this meant weakening the units they came from, that was another story with which we could not concern ourselves.'³³

The Indian troops lightly wounded in Flanders, meanwhile, were obliged to return to fight with the Indian Corps once IMS doctors had passed them fit. In small wars, the Indian wounded had been allowed to go home, eligible for a pension. In November 1914, Willcocks suspended this allowance within the Indian Corps, initially in response to Indian self-infliction of wounds (as we shall see) and partly as a means to increase the numbers of Indian troops available for active service. The first lightly wounded Indian troops started to return to their battalions in December 1914.³⁴

By the last week of January 1915, the Indian Corps' Indian battalions' losses of 1914 had been substantially restored. For example, the 6th Jats had 460 officers and men; the 15th Sikhs had 670; the 47th Sikhs had 775; the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) had 870; the 58th Vaughan's

³¹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/1618: 'Correspondence (Telegrams) between Duff and Kitchener', Kitchener to Duff, 27 August and 8 September 1914.

³² *Ibid.*, Kitchener to Duff, 15 January 1915; and L/MIL/17/5/3090: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, December 1914), pp. 23–29.

³³ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 190.

³⁴ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence report to Kitchener, 22 March 1915.

Rifles (Frontier Force) had 825; the 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force) had 580; the 129th Baluchis had 400; the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas had 835. At this stage, the majority of the Indian battalions in Flanders each had on active duty approximately 10 British officers, whether originals or new drafts from India, and 400 Indian officers and men who had been serving with them since the war's outbreak.³⁵

From the end of January to June 1915, the Indian battalions suffered heavily in the First Army's offensives and in the Second Army's counter-attacks at Second Ypres. The Indian casualties during this period totalled 8,354:

1. 49 Indian officers killed, 164 wounded;
2. 1,038 Indian other ranks killed, 6,280 wounded; and
3. 4 Indian officers and 819 Indian other ranks missing.

Again, the missing were mostly on the battlefield, the Germans having taken a further 300 or so Indian prisoners by summer 1915. The casualty figures for the Indian battalions' British officers were some 75 killed, 135 wounded and 30 missing. From July to mid-September, the Indian Corps suffered few casualties because it had a quiet period of trench holding while the First Army was on the defensive.³⁶

From February to August 1915, the Indian Corps continued to receive Indian army casualty replacements from several sources. By December 1914, the Indian reserve had expanded its number of British officers to 500 by recruiting junior Indian government officials, businessmen, planters and other Britons living in India. Its new recruits had undergone basic military training in India, and many of them were sent to the Indian Corps from early 1915. As the year went on, the reserve recruited greater numbers of British officers, trained them in India and continued to send many to France. Also that year it provided the Indian Corps with a few thousand more Indian reservists, many of good quality, though a significant number were weeded out at the Marseilles depot.³⁷ As Willcocks quoted from the depot's official reports of the early summer:

One lot of reservists was classed as 'utterly valueless'. . . . Another small draft was classed together as 'particularly poor', of another out of thirty-five men sent 'ten are plague convalescents who have not even yet recovered their full vigour.' One boy was referred to as fourteen years of age, and another as a 'mere child'. Of a

³⁵ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3092: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, February 1915), pp. 12–13.

³⁶ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 383.

³⁷ Greenhut, 'Imperial Reserve', p. 63; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 466; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 310.

draft of sixty-seven reservists nine were of 'indifferent physique' and fifty-eight 'unfit'. Indian appeared anxious to fill up sorely-needed shipping with trash of this sort.³⁸

In the meantime, Duff had continued to order the regiments of the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions and the Kohat, Bannu and Dejarat Brigades to provide pre-war regulars for France. The Guides infantry (Frontier Force), for instance, gave up a further three companies in February.³⁹ By June, Duff had drawn IEFA drafts from around thirty-five of the Indian army's best battalions in India.⁴⁰ The process had been painfully gradual and uncertain, Hardinge having hesitated to consent to the depletions, and only granting them grudgingly. Since late 1914, he had become increasingly resistant to releasing troops from India for Europe. He resented overbearing demands from Kitchener for reinforcements for IEFA, complaining of 'the evil tendency at Whitehall to regard India as a milch cow'. He wanted to keep his battalions in India as strong as he could for his own subcontinental security purposes.⁴¹

To help reinforce IEFA's Gurkha battalions, Duff turned to the military police of Assam and Burma. He asked their Gurkha militiamen to exchange their work in the hills of those provinces for regular infantry duty overseas; many agreed and were sent off to the Indian Corps.⁴² Duff also got troops for IEFA from the Imperial Service units. The Punjabi Nawab of Malerkotla provided 200 men of his sappers and miners, and Maharajah Narendra Shah of Tehri Garhwal a similar number of his.⁴³

The new policy of obliging Indian infantrymen lightly wounded in Flanders to return to fight was continued; 57 per cent of them did so.⁴⁴ A significant number of the Indian units' original British officers also went back to their regiments having recovered from wounds. For example, Frederick Gray of the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) returned from hospital in April 1915. '[A] priceless reinforcement', wrote Stewart Blacker, who was attached to the 57th from the Guides:

The 57th's supremely gallant commander . . . was . . . a pillar of strength. 'Blast ye' Gray had been severely wounded in the first Battle of Ypres, but that did not abate his lion-like courage or the vigour of his English. In point of fact he was

³⁸ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 310.

³⁹ B. Blacker, *Adventures*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3091-8: *IEFA War Diaries* (Simla, January to August 1915), see entries relating to Indian casualty replacements for IEFA. Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 466 and 515-58.

⁴¹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to G. Allen, 16 February 1915.

⁴² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 133.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 24; and Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 450.

⁴⁴ Harrison, *Medical War*, p. 55.

really quite junior, a major in the Regiment, but we subalterns regarded him as a veteran of immense age, especially because he wore that beautiful crimson and yellow medal ribbon, gained when [the Indian army], a neck ahead of the U.S. Marines, stormed the ancient Tartar ramparts of Peking.⁴⁵

The Indian Corps' greatest source of Indian casualty replacements was India's wartime recruits. The Indian army had previously recruited around 15,000–20,000 men per year. In the first two years of the war, it continued to recruit volunteers through regimental depots working individually and drawing on the same communities as before. From August 1914, each depot looked for men to replace their own regiment's casualties; from January 1915, they recruited for an extra company that Duff ordered every unit to create as a new reservoir of reinforcements. These things led the regimental depots from the war's earliest months to recruit significantly more men than before. From October to December 1914, their traditional recruiting grounds provided the numbers required, with combined monthly rates of around 8,000 men; in 1915, the rates were a little lower. In the war's first twelve months, the Indian army enlisted a total of 78,232 Indian recruits, mostly Punjabis. They were all trained at regimental depots for a minimum of eight months, a period prescribed by Duff.

From June to September 1915, 8,000 trained Indian wartime recruits became available each month for active service, and from September to December, slightly fewer.⁴⁶ The Indian Corps began to receive large numbers of them in July. That month one draft of 3,000 wartime recruits at Marseilles was described by Willcocks as 'very good . . . some of them quite exceptionally so, and I feel years younger now as I see these fine fellows joining the ranks'.⁴⁷ Such men continued to flow into the Indian Corps from August to November.⁴⁸

Between April and September, the Indian Corps received five fresh, high-quality Indian battalions: the 40th Pathans from Hong Kong, and the 33rd Punjabis, 69th Punjabis, 89th Punjabis and 93rd Burma Infantry from Egypt. Duff had selected them for the western front because they had their pre-war companies of well-trained regulars intact.

⁴⁵ My thanks to Barnaby Blacker for this quote (from the papers of his grandfather, Stewart Blacker).

⁴⁶ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3091–8: *IEFA War Diaries* (Simla, January to August 1915), see entries relating to Indian recruitment and training. Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 128–29; Omissi, *Voices*, p. 1; and Tan, *Garrison State*, 102.

⁴⁷ TNA, PRO 30/57/52: Willcocks Letter to O. Fitzgerald (Kitchener's private secretary), 31 July 1915; and WO 256/5: Haig, Western Front Diary, 27 July 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 313.

⁴⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3098–101: *IEFA War Diaries* (Simla, August to November 1915), see entries relating to casualty replacements sent to France.

As they joined the Indian Corps, they took the place of some of its original battalions, which were sent either to Egypt to rest or to Gallipoli to fight.⁴⁹

The Indian Corps' Indian battalions' casualties were not fully replaced between February and June 1915. Duff did not have more casualty replacements to provide them other than a limited trickle of pre-war regulars from other regiments, plus military police and Imperial Service troops. Also, it took time for freshly wounded officers and men of the Indian Corps to recover for further duty, for all that some came back quickly from hospital in France or England, even doing so twice by mid-1915. On 21 May, four days before the Battle of Festubert's close, the Indian Corps' total number of Indian troops had fallen to around 7,000 – having been 15,000 on the eve of First Ypres, excluding the Sirhind Brigade then in Egypt. By the end of May, the total numbers of officers and men among the Indian battalions in Flanders were uniformly low. For example, the 9th Bhopals had 409; the 15th Sikhs had 250; the 39th Garhwals had 600, their two battalions in Flanders having been amalgamated because of low numbers; the 47th Sikhs had 451; the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) had 446; the 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force) had 271; the 129th Baluchis had 263. On average, the Indian battalions had around four or five of their original British officers with them.⁵⁰

It was accepted in the Indian Corps that because its Indian battalions now contained majorities not only of British officers who either were pre-war regulars from non-IEFA Indian battalions or were wartime-trained reservists, but also of Indian troops who were drafts from non-IEFA battalions that recruited from different martial race communities to them, their fighting efficiency was not what it had been up to First Ypres. In the eyes of Walter Lawrence in mid-June:

The [Indian infantrymen] have been accustomed to look upon their regiment as a family: they have lost the officers whom they knew, and the regiment, which formerly was made up of well-defined and exclusive castes and tribes, is now composed of dissimilar elements. The 15th Sikhs is now composed of men taken from nine different units. This is no longer a regiment; it has no cohesion. In many Battalions, when [an Indian soldier] is asked whether he wishes to go back to his regiment, he knows that it is a regiment commanded by officers whom he does not know and composed of men with whom he has no caste or tribal affinity.⁵¹

⁴⁹ C. Graham, *Artillery*, p. 136; and *The Times History of the War*, vol. 10, p. 367.

⁵⁰ TNA, WO 256/4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 21 May 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 296.

⁵¹ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 15 June 1915.

Between late May and July, in light of the Indian battalions' low numbers and their sapped pre-war internal cohesion, GHQ, First Army headquarters and Willcocks debated whether the Indian Corps was a viable formation, and whether the Lahore and Meerut Divisions might require major reorganisation, for instance through amalgamation. To help prop up the corps during that period, GHQ gave it temporary injections of British divisions. At one point, on 5 June, the corps contained two British divisions alongside its Indian ones, giving it a total of 36,000 British infantrymen to 11,000 Indian.⁵²

From July, however, the Indian battalions, as Willcocks put it, 'were again gradually rebuilt'.⁵³ Their numbers started to be boosted by the first arrivals of trained wartime Indian recruits. By late August, their numbers were almost back to pre-war levels: most contained between 700 and 900 officers and men each, and altogether they had 16,250 Indian troops.⁵⁴ Indeed, in June, Duff began to have so many trained Indian recruits available to him to send overseas that he informed the War Office he could provide the Indian Corps with sufficient numbers of casualty replacements for the western front well into 1916, and possibly beyond.⁵⁵

In late May, the debate within the BEF regarding the Indian battalions' low numbers and losses of fighting efficiency through receiving drafts from various other regiments had spread to government circles in London and India. It had boiled down to a question of whether the Indian Corps, because of its low numbers and the mix of Indian infantry reinforcements that had been received in France, should continue to serve with the BEF. In June and July, the most influential voices on the matter – Hardinge, Duff, and above all Kitchener – rejected the idea of any withdrawal of the Indian Corps. They supported the Indian infantry remaining in France as a politically important show of imperial unity and strength. They knew that the Indian casualty replacement problems were (numerically speaking) being repaired by the increasing availability of wartime recruits in India, and they felt confident that the general fighting efficiency of the Indian Corps was being raised through the introduction to it of the fresh high-quality Indian battalions in exchange for some of its original ones.⁵⁶

For Hardinge, the return of the Indian Corps to the subcontinent was in fact all but unthinkable. Just eight of India's pre-war British battalions

⁵² TNA, WO 256/4: Haig Western Front Diary, 1 and 21 May 1915; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 385; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 296.

⁵³ Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 30.

⁵⁴ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3098: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, August 1915), pp. 44–45.

⁵⁵ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3096: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, June 1915), Appendix 50.

⁵⁶ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 288.

remained there, and the forty-three released overseas had been replaced by only a few Territorial units from the UK. If the Indian infantrymen came home from France, Hardinge was concerned, they would arrive without a sufficient complement of British troops to maintain the Army in India's traditional Indian-to-British ratio of 1:2.5. This prospect was unacceptable to the viceroy; the attached internal security risk was too great for him. He also took the view that 'it would the greatest political mistake to have [the Indian Corps] back from France, since it would create the impression in India that we had been defeated.'⁵⁷

Overall, Hardinge felt that 'we ought to regard the Indian troops in Flanders as there for better or for worse',⁵⁸ and Duff that 'the Indian army must see to a finish their role of supporting the British army in the field in France'.⁵⁹ As for Kitchener, 'he meant, happen what might, to keep the two Indian Divisions in France. . . . His determination regarding the retention of Indian troops in France was summed up in these words: 'Even if only two men are left, one shall be the Lahore and the other the Meerut Division'.⁶⁰

After Kitchener had told Willcocks that he agreed with Hardinge and Duff,⁶¹ Willcocks agreed too: 'I am dead against their leaving France at all.'⁶² Between January and June, Willcocks had seriously questioned whether his Indian units' low numbers might mean they should serve away from the western front. But by late August, he believed that the trained wartime drafts from India were sufficient for his corps to remain in France; they guaranteed that it was 'in as good fettle as was then possible'.⁶³

The Indian Corps' one day of fighting at the Battle of Loos in September cost its Indian battalions around 2,000 Indian casualties and 80 British officers. These losses did not much weaken it numerically, now that it was getting a steady supply of wartime recruits from India. Throughout October, the average strength of the Indian Corps' Indian battalions was between 700 and 1,000 officers and men, higher than ever before. By the end of the month, it had received 30,000 drafts from India since October 1914 to replace its total Indian army casualties of around

⁵⁷ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letters to V. Chirol, 29 July 1915, and to W. Birdwood, 6 August 1915.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3096: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, June 1915), p. 32.

⁶⁰ Willcocks, *Romance*, pp. 286 and 288–89.

⁶¹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 198.

⁶² CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 2 September 1915.

⁶³ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 320.

500 British officers and 18,000 Indian troops – in other words, enough to cover its losses despite the low-quality Indian reservists sent to France.⁶⁴

The Indian army's casualty replacement problems on the western front in 1914–15 followed a similar pattern to the regular British army's. From September to November 1914, the BEF's original British divisions ran low on numbers (especially, as we have seen, during First Ypres) because Home Army regular reserve arrangements made in peacetime proved insufficient. For Nevil Macready (British army), the BEF's first Adjutant-General, autumn 1914 was a time of acute British casualty replacement shortages. By the close of October, the British regimental depots had largely run out of trained reinforcements to send to France.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the pre-war internal cohesion of many British regular battalions had been badly damaged by their high casualty rates. In December, many British battalions in France remained short of men and were low on fighting efficiency. Two cases were the 2nd/Connaught Rangers (of the 2nd Division within Haig's I Corps), which had around 350 officers and men, and the 1st/Connaught Rangers (of the Lahore Division), which was down to a similar number. There being no prospect of substantial reinforcements for either battalion from their depot in western Ireland, and the 2nd Battalion being so tired that its divisional commander considered it to be 'of no military value',⁶⁶ they were amalgamated.⁶⁷

By spring 1915, the BEF's British regular battalions' numbers were much recovered through wartime recruitment, and they had started to develop a new sort of fighting efficiency based on wartime training and experience – like the Indian battalions did, as is shown later on. The British units' casualty replacement and internal cohesion low points in late 1914, therefore, were similar to the Indian army's in spring 1915; equally, their improved numbers by spring 1915 were akin to the Indian army's by the summer.

'The Pasha of Baghdad'

If Kitchener, Hardinge and Duff believed from June to August 1915 that the Indian Corps could be adequately reinforced well into 1916 at the very least and should remain with the BEF, and if on 1 September

⁶⁴ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3100–01: *IEFA War Diaries* (Simla, October to December 1915), see entries relating to casualty replacements sent to France; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 460, 469 and 488–89.

⁶⁵ N. Macready, *Annals of an Active Life*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1924), vol. 1, p. 215.

⁶⁶ WO 256/4: Haig Western Front Diary, 1 May 1915.

⁶⁷ Jourdain and Fraser, *Connaught Rangers*, vol. 1, p. 450.

Kitchener ordered the Indian troops to stay in Flanders for a second winter safe in the knowledge that they could cope with one, why was the Indian Corps ordered on 31 October to leave the western front? The answer is that Hardinge had changed his mind, and the British government had followed him against the will of Kitchener. The viceroy's volte-face had nothing to do with how the Indian soldiers had been faring in France; rather, it was down to his strategic ambitions in the Muslim world. As he wrote on 9 October, 'I hope to be the Pasha of Baghdad before I leave India!'⁶⁸

Because IEFD was an Army in India expeditionary force, it was controlled by the India Office and Indian government. By August 1915, spearheaded by the Indian 6th Division, it had advanced in Mesopotamia to within 100 miles of Baghdad. Hardinge was eager to capture the city forthwith. He thought that doing so not only would dampen what support there was for Turkey among the British Empire's Muslim subjects, but also would raise British prestige in the eyes of other Muslims – not least the Afghans, whose neutrality was in serious doubt after a diplomatic mission from Berlin had evaded Allied patrols in the deserts of Persia and arrived at Kabul. He was advised by IEFD's commander, John Nixon (Indian army), that to take Baghdad, Force D should be reinforced by two infantry divisions. The viceroy was disinclined to provide the two divisions from India. If he released further troops from there, he felt, internal security would be put at too much risk. Through Austen Chamberlain at the India Office, he pressed the British government to provide the necessary reinforcements. He suggested that divisions from Egypt could be suitable, or ones from France, including those of the Indian Corps. Kitchener rejected both suggestions, in the case of the Indian Corps remaining hard set on its presence within the BEF as politically important. Into September he still held sway over the Cabinet, and his word was the British government's decision on the matter.⁶⁹

By early October, Hardinge, through Chamberlain, had successfully encouraged the British government to think again about Baghdad. He had focused his suggestions as to reinforcements for IEFD on the Lahore and Meerut Divisions, identifying them as the divisions that the British government and GHQ would most easily release from the BEF, by dint of their being Indian and therefore less valued than British. By 24 October a majority of Cabinet ministers, keen for a success over the Turks after the Allied forces landed at Gallipoli since April had advanced metres and not miles, and looking for a victory somewhere to set-off against the German

⁶⁸ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to R. Benson, 9 October 1915.

⁶⁹ IOR, L/PS/20/257: *Mesopotamia Commission, Report*, pp. 22–28.

invasion of Serbia, had also come to the conclusion that Baghdad was a desirable political target, and they accepted Hardinge's idea that the two Indian infantry divisions in France were the reinforcements to send. Kitchener bitterly disagreed with them. Yet he was overruled, his influence in government having plummeted since September. His colleagues had lost confidence in him over military disappointments, the Battle of Loos being the latest.⁷⁰

The Indian Corps' departure from the western front was because it was required to fight elsewhere, and not because it was deemed inadequate to fight on where it was. The two things should not be confused. Whatever the Cabinet may have thought about the Indian army, had it not decided to back the capture of Baghdad, the Indian Corps would have stayed put. It is true that the Indian army struggled to get enough recruits to replace overseas casualties due to its narrow pre-war recruitment base, but this was not in 1914 or in 1915. The problem came after IEFD's attempted capture of Baghdad at the end of 1915 had failed, leading to several months of costly fighting in early 1916 in central Mesopotamia, around the town of Kut al-Amara where greatly increased Indian forces tried to recover the situation. It was the casualty replacement demands from that Mesopotamian fighting that outstripped supply from India's pre-war recruitment base, and not those of the Indian infantry on the western front. Army Headquarters responded by widening the Indian recruitment base beyond the old martial race villages, and by introducing centralised control to ensure that the necessary numbers were enlisted. The reformed system provided IEFD, including the Indian 3rd and 7th Divisions (ex-Lahore and Meerut), with enough casualty replacements, just as it could have done had those two divisions fought on in France.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* Cassar, *Kitchener's War: British Strategy from 1914 to 1916* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2004), pp. 232–34; Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, pp. 1–32; and Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. 2, p. 42–43.

⁷¹ Tan, *Garrison State*, see chapters 3 and 4.

8 Self-Inflicted Wounds and Fleeing the Trenches

At the Karachi docks in August 1914, a British officer of the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) fell into conversation on the quayside with the commander of a British battalion. They chatted about the prospect of the Indian troops fighting with the BEF. 'The Indians', the British service officer said, 'will never stand up to the fighting in France under modern shellfire.'¹ This was among the first of many slights that were to come the Indian army's way as to its men's capacity to fight on the western front. In the winter of 1914–15, rumours were rife in the BEF and London that the Indian infantrymen were easily overwhelmed in the face of shellfire, and were self-inflicting wounds and running away, unlike tougher British troops.² Thus George Roos-Keppel on leave in England was led to believe that 'the Indian troops in Flanders have done badly'. 'This I know', he told an old friend in the New Year, 'so do not believe official reports.'³ Once back in NWFP, where he spoke with wounded Pathans returned from the western front, he was not so sure. 'The Pathans have fought well in Europe', he concluded in one confidential report to the viceroy.⁴ In truth, IEFA's Indian troops did self-inflict wounds and they did flee the trenches, but neither thing should conceivably dominate characterisations of their general fighting performance.

Self-Inflicted Wounds

At First Ypres, the Indian Corps' medical staff estimated that of its total 1,848 Indian troops wounded between 23 October and 3 November,

¹ Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 79.

² C. Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British & the Somme 1916* (London: Phoenix, 2006), p. 62; D. Gilmour, *Curzon* (London: Papermac, 1995), p. 433; Home, *Cavalry Officer*, p. 47; and D. Richter (ed.), *Lionel Sotheby's Great War: Diaries and Letters from the Western Front* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997), p. 79.

³ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/32, Butler Papers: Roos-Keppel Letter to Butler, 20 January 1915.

⁴ IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/2, 'North-West Frontier' (13 October 1915).

1,049 had hand wounds, mostly to the left hand. A significant number of these hand wounds were very likely not self-inflicted, having resulted from unintentional exposure to enemy fire in the shallow and open front trenches entered by the Indian units in October. Yet several hundred were self-inflicted. For F. E. Smith, this was ‘the qualification to the claim that in the main the Indian troops engaged arose, with rare and intrepid courage, to the height of the crisis which summoned them to Flanders’.⁵

The self-inflicted wounds were largely among particular battalions that went into action first – especially the 15th and 47th Sikhs, holding the left of Horace Smith-Dorrien’s II Corps line – and that had been immediately bombarded by a range of German shells, including 90-pound high explosive ones fired from 5.9-inch howitzers. On arriving in the front line, those two Sikh regiments, Smith-Dorrien related, were ‘treated to a very heavy shell-fire from what we call the portmanteau guns. The [90-pound] shells [explode on landing to] make a tremendous hole . . . and are considered to be like the arrival of a great portmanteau on the ground’.⁶ The self-inflicted wounds resulted from a snap decision by a number of Sikhs and other Indians that their obligations to the British should not extend to suffering such shellfire; they probably believed that if they wounded themselves they could choose to go home, in keeping with pre-war Indian army custom.⁷ Walter Lawrence sensed a little of what might have been going through their minds:

The ideas of the [first Indian troops to] arrive in Hospital . . . are naturally hazy and distorted. The men have gone through great strain and have often suffered severe shock. They are prone to exaggeration and have very little sense of proportion. But [soon they] become more coherent, and [they say that] the style of warfare [they met in the front trenches] was utterly opposed to their ideas and former experience. They are used to fighting on the open plain or the mountain side, and they have been accustomed to fighting a foe whom they could see. This was a constant remark in Hopsitals, that ‘we have been hit but have never seen a German’.⁸

On 2 November, when the Indian Corps’ doctors were collating their casualty reports to show the numbers of Indian hand wounds in the past

⁵ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 481.

⁶ Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, pp. 456–58.

⁷ IOR, Mss Eur F 143/77: Papers of Sir Walter Lawrence, ‘Secret (Not for Publication), An Analysis of 1,000 Wounds and Injuries Received in Action, with Special Reference to the Theory of the Prevalence of Self-Infliction’, by Colonel Sir Bruce Seton (Commanding officer, Kitchener Indian Hopsital, Brighton); TNA, PRO 30/57/52: Willcocks Letter to Kitchener, 10 November 1914; Greenhut, ‘Imperial Reserve’, p. 57.

⁸ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 27 December 1915.

eleven days, a crushing attack on the left of the Indian line pushed back the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas. James Willcocks panicked. He informed GHQ of the hand wounds and of the attack on his left, and, fearing that there might be more of the same on both counts, he apparently warned John French that the Indian Corps 'might go at any moment'.⁹ As French later wrote of 2 November,

Willcocks . . . felt anxiety as to the line his Indian troops were holding, and sent his Chief of Staff [Havelock Hudson] to me at Bailleul to ask if he could be reinforced. Under the conditions then existing, I was most anxious that the Indian Corps should hold its own without assistance and, after calling into consultation other officers of great Indian experience, I refused to do so.¹⁰

In the week starting 3 November, Willcocks steeled himself to cope alone with his corps' problems. Through military courts in the field, he took action to deter further Indian self-infliction of wounds. Two of the Indian soldiers who had deliberately wounded themselves were executed by firing squad; several others were handed prison sentences of fourteen years. Moreover, Willcocks imposed the new rule that the Indian lightly wounded, encompassing all those with hand wounds (which took up to five weeks to heal) must return to duty once passed fit. Because of his measures, the Indian hand-wound rates suddenly dropped.¹¹ 'My faith in the Indian troops was justified', French wrote, '[Willcocks] reported [on 7 November] that the Indians were doing well and that he was full of confidence in them.'¹² Willcocks then reported to Kitchener on the 10th:

The question of self-maiming I hope is settled. It was a source of very great anxiety to me for some days; but the men fight well. . . . If I get some evidence I know how to deal with it. The Doctors are so nervous of giving evidence & I myself naturally loathe hearing it. Still duty is duty & I will not slacken my efforts but keep my eyes open. I have this matter well in hand & I have many people watching the laggards. As a whole the men are splendid I know. I had to shoot two men – I hope no more.¹³

From 10 November to March 1915, the consensus among the combatant British officers of the Indian Corps, IEFA's medical officers and

⁹ KCL/LHCMA, Papers of Lieutenant-General Sir G. S. Clive: 'Personal Diaries', 4 November 1914 (2/1). Also see Beckett, *Ypres*, p. 109.

¹⁰ J. French, 1914, p. 265.

¹¹ TNA, PRO 30/57/52: Willcocks letter to O. Fitzgerald, 10 November 1914, and WO 154/14: 'Court-Martial Convictions in the Indian Corps, October 1914 to February 1914'.

¹² J. French, 1914, p. 266.

¹³ TNA, PRO 30/57/52: Willcocks Letter to O. Fitzgerald, 10 November 1914.

the War Office was that the Indian self-infliction of wounds in Flanders had been stamped out.¹⁴

In April and May 1915, self-inflicted wounds re-emerged among the Indian Corp's Indian troops. They did so among drafts freshly received from India who had not felt the deterrent effect of the First Ypres executions and imprisonments, and among whom there were widespread false rumours that lightly wounded Indian troops could once again choose to go home.¹⁵ A few hundred of them self-inflicted wounds, some in the hand and many in the calf and feet.¹⁶ Again, Willcocks saw that military courts made an example of the culprits, by means of hefty prison sentences. Also, it was made clear that the rule on the lightly wounded returning to action remained in place. By late May, the rates of suspected Indian self-inflicted wounds had again dropped.¹⁷

For the remainder of the Indian Corps' time in France, its British officers and the War Office did not consider there to be a problem with Indian self-inflicted wounds. 'There were men who were caught red-handed', Walter Lawrence told Hardinge in November 1915, 'but I always held the view that unless there were direct evidence it was most unfair to suggest that any wounds were self-inflicted. I have talked to any number of men with wounds in their left hand, and their statements as to how the wound happened satisfied me that it could not have been self-inflicted.'¹⁸ 'It was an unfortunate thing', he informed Kitchener the following month, 'that persons should have jumped to the conclusion that Indian self-infliction of wounds was a common practice, and I know that the Indian troops felt this.'¹⁹

Self-infliction of wounds, therefore, was not endemic among the Indians of the Indian Corps. It occurred as a discernible problem in October 1914, and among a minority in spring 1915, but not otherwise. Indeed, the Indians' hand-wound statistics from First Ypres concern only to their first eleven days in battle, or around 2.5 per cent of the Indian Corps' total time at the front. Even then, those statistics relate almost entirely to

¹⁴ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 2 September 1915, and Walter Lawrence to Hardinge, 3 November 1915; TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 15 June 1915, and 27 December 1915; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 181–82.

¹⁵ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 28 July 1915.

¹⁶ TNA WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 15 June 1915; and WO 256/4: Haig Western Front Diary, 5 May 1915.

¹⁷ TNA WO 154/15: 'Court-Martial Convictions in the Indian Corps, June–September 1915', and WO 154/16, 'Court-Martial Conviction in the Indian Corps, October–November 1915'.

¹⁸ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Walter Lawrence to Hardinge, 3 November 1915.

¹⁹ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 121; TNA WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 27 December 1915.

certain battalions or companies within just two brigades (the Ferozepore and Jullundur) of the Lahore Division.

Hundreds of the BEF's British troops self-inflicted wounds in 1914, as Asquith had learned by Christmas Eve: 'There have been quite a number of cases lately of [British] privates being tried and sentenced for mutilating their left hands, so as to make them incapable of handling a rifle. I knew this had happened with the Indians; that it should have spread to our men shows what a shattering thing the trenches must be.'²⁰ Self-inflicted wounds were a serious problem for the French army in 1914, prompting dozens of executions.²¹ The German army also had them that year.²² They continued to appear among white troops on the western front up to 1918, with the BEF having a formal system of penal field hospitals specifically for British troops who had wounded themselves.²³ 'With regard to self-inflicted wounds', wrote the 39th Garhwals' officer Kenneth Henderson,

it came as rather a shock to us British officers to be told when we had been a short time in the trenches that Indian soldiers wounded themselves in order to get away from the front. Put in that way, it was a cruel slander; the fact being of course that the evil is to be found in every army and every nationality, as we now know.²⁴

Fleeing the Trenches

On their way to France in the summer of 1914, IEFA's British and Indian battalions were ordered by the War Office to switch from their Army in India eight-company structure to the Home Army's four-company structure. This was not a serious problem for the Indian battalions on the European battlefield. They adapted easily enough, relying on their pre-war training under the eight-company structure to work in double companies; further, they often operated in half-companies, or what to them in India had been a company.²⁵

²⁰ Brock and Brock, *Asquith*, letter no. 234 (24 December 1914); and A. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, pp. 39, 142 and 146.

²¹ Strachan, 'Training, Morale and Modern War' in *Journal of Contemporary History* 41 (2006), 219.

²² TNA, WO 157/597: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (November 1914), 'Report I.G. 270, Evidence of Vice-Feldwebel Braun (captured 24 November 1914), 112th Regiment, XIV Corps'.

²³ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 121 (on the penal field hospitals), and 96/29/1, Papers of Lieutenant S. Steven (1st/4th Black Watch): Letter of 5 July 1915 (on courts martial of British troops for recent self-inflicted wounds in France).

²⁴ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 121.

²⁵ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 18; and Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 11.

While fighting under their new company structure at First Ypres, on several occasions Indian troops under German pressure fled their trenches after their British officers had become casualties. In the late morning of 28 October, a company of the 9th Bhopals was lying down along a wide and shallow front trench by the southern edge of Neuve Chapelle. They came under accurate shrapnel fire that killed or wounded most of their British and Indian officers, and the men began to flee their position. 'The unwounded were all making for home', wrote a Home Army staff officer of II Corps, watching on from the roof of a nearby house. He went to rally the fleeing Indians, but 'nothing I could do would stop them . . . they were terrified by the shrapnel'. They were soon met by other British officers of their regiment and were regrouped.²⁶

On 29 October, a few miles to the south of Neuve Chapelle near the centre of the Indian Corps line, two companies of the 2nd/8th Gurkhas came under attack in a front trench at around 10pm. Their trench was an agricultural drainage ditch 12–25 feet wide, and had a parapet that the Gurkhas (with their average height of five feet two inches) had to stand on ammunition boxes and ration crates to fire over. For eighteen hours straight, the Gurkha companies under their British officers held on against rifle, machine gun and trench mortar fire, shrapnel and high explosive shellfire, and several infantry assaults. British officers, Gurkha officers and their men endured all this together, despite many direct hits.

Meanwhile, small groups from the regiment's companies in reserve were consistently fed into the front trench. By 4pm on the 30th, that trench had almost been flattened. All nine British officers in it, plus five Gurkha officers, had been killed or were incapacitated by wounds; among the Gurkha ranks, there had been 208 casualties, 60 per cent killed by shellfire.²⁷ The surviving Gurkhas were exhausted. Their Gurkha officers decided to lead them in abandoning their position and retreating to the rear. 'I saw men leaving the front trench where I was from both ends', one badly wounded British officer reported two hours later, 'and was told by a Gurkha officer and Havildar, order had come to retire. I received no order. Too late to stop it.' 'I regained consciousness', said another wounded British officer, 'when I found no one else in the trench. . . . Our men were very shaken.'²⁸

The Gurkhas' retreat allowed German infantry to press over the abandoned front trench and capture a makeshift reserve trench, which was

²⁶ L. Thornton and P. Fraser (eds.), *The Congreves, Father and Son* (London: John Murray, 1930), p. 244.

²⁷ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 80–82; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 70–75.

²⁸ TNA, WO/95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1914), 'Statements by Officers of 2nd/8th Gurkhas'.

another wide drainage ditch. Not long after, a counter-attack involving the 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force) recaptured the reserve trench. The 58th then had to hold it as a new front line. They did this on 31 October, from around 3am to midnight:

During the whole of the 31st, the 58th were deluged with rifle and shellfire, varied by mortar bombs and hand-grenades, which destroyed the parapet in many places and caused a number of casualties. . . . The enemy's shells and bombs frequently fell into the trench, and the full force of the explosion was felt. . . . In spite of all, the 58th held their ground until relieved. Their casualties were 3 British officers and 5 other ranks killed, 4 Indian officers and 79 other ranks wounded. Havildar Karam Singh [gave] a fine display of endurance and pluck in continuing to command his men, although dangerously wounded, until he was removed at night.²⁹

On 30 October, several miles to the north of Neuve Chapelle near the village of Hollebeke, the 129th Baluchis, on the Cavalry Corps' left, had been more heavily attacked. At 6am, two of their companies were holding front trenches, and most of their two other companies were in the process of relieving them. They all came under intense high explosive and shrapnel shellfire, delivered in part by Krupp heavy siege guns that had recently wrecked the thick concrete walls of modern forts in Belgium. The 129th's trenches and their environs were obliterated. Many of their British and Indian officers were killed or badly wounded; dozens of their men suffocated beneath collapsed trench walls, or drowned in water-filled shell holes.

Against the mass German infantry assault that followed, a few men of the 129th stood firm to fight, including five Punjabi Muslim machine gunners. They took turns firing their gun after their British officer had been struck down. The first four of the Punjabis to take the trigger were killed one after another, and the fifth, Khudadad Khan, was badly wounded and left for dead by the advancing Germans (Khudadad was in fact the first Indian to be awarded the Victoria Cross).³⁰

One section of the 129th, meanwhile, was withdrawn by its British officer to the garden of Hollebeke chateau, through which ran the Cavalry Corps' reserve trenches. The majority of the regiment's Indian troops, however, who had lost their British and Indian officers, fled in panic. Some wandered into the arms of Home Army regiments to the north; many more found refuge in a wood near Hollebeke chateau, before being rallied in the afternoon by their British and Indian officers sent from the chateau to find them. Among the troops who had fled into the wood

²⁹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 76–77.

³⁰ VCGCA: 'Victoria Cross File no. 693: Khudadad Khan'.

were young Mahsuds. ‘What they cannot stand is the shelling’, Walter Lawrence wrote after coming across them in hospital. ‘I saw four of the young Mahsuds, all from the same village, all insane from the horror of the bombardment.’³¹

While the 129th’s front trenches had been pulverised, two British officers and eighty men of the regiment had been in reserve at a farm. Here they had been bombarded by incendiary shells. The British officers had led them to cover in the cellar of a farm building, but the building had caught fire and become a collapsing inferno. Only one Indian officer and a few men managed to escape. Further shelling incapacitated the Indian officer, leaving his men dazed among the farm buildings. As a group they stalled, unsure not just of what to do, but also of where to go – only four days earlier, an Indian officer of the 129th at Hollebeke had asked an Urdu-speaking Home Army officer, ‘Do just tell me, which is Belgium and which is France: in which direction is London: and where are the enemy now?’³² A passing British lance-corporal who happened to speak some Urdu found the stranded Baluchi band at the farm, and led them to the rest of their battalion at Hollebeke chateau. The regrouped 129th, largely using their rifles, then helped British cavalymen hold up the German infantry.³³

The Dogra and Afridi companies of the 57th Wilde’s Rifles (Frontier Force) were six miles to the south of Hollebeke, in the Cavalry Corps’ front trenches, screening Messines village. They were attacked on 31 October at 3.30am. The Dogras’ trench, along a hedge line, was shelled before infantry attacked. An intense two-hour small arms fire-fight ensued, with the Dogras holding their line under their British officers. The Dogras were then forced back by fresh German machine gun fire from the right; still under British officer leadership, they kept their discipline, retreating twenty yards to fire rapidly from lying positions. Their last British officer was wounded, prompting a Dogra jemadar, Ram Singh, to take up company command. Ram Singh led his men in fighting on until they had all been killed or wounded. Nearby, his fellow jemadar, Kapur Singh, also provided leadership in the absence of their British officers:

Kapur Singh fought it out until but one wounded man [of his section] had been put out of action, and then, rather than surrender, shot himself with his last cartridge. Even this war can present few more devoted pictures than the death of

³¹ TNA WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 27 December 1915; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. 12–20; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 41.

³² KCL/LHCMA, Howell Papers: Howell Letter to His Wife, 25 October 1914 (6/1/1–47).

³³ C. Byrne, *The Harp and Crown: The History of the 5th Lancers, 1902–1922* (Lulu Books, 2008), pp. 78–79; and Willcocks, ‘Indian Army Corps’, 12.

these noble-hearted Dogras and their heroic Indian officer who chose rather to follow his men than to surrender.³⁴

To the Dogras' right, the Afridis of the 57th had been similarly attacked. They had been pushed out of their trenches sooner than the Dogras, having lost all their British officers (though which happened first is unclear). They had retreated in confusion but had been rallied by their senior Indian officer, Subadar Arsla Khan. 'The occasion generally discovers the man', Willcocks wrote, 'and he was there in the person of Subadar Arsla Khan. . . . Leading a counter-attack with the bayonet he gained sufficient time to pull his men together.' Shortly after 6am, in the early light, Arsla Khan gathered the tired and wounded Dogras and Afridis behind their lost trenches, and he led their withdrawal towards Messines.³⁵

'The path of their retirement', observed Frederic Abernethy Coleman, a New Yorker who looked down at it from the Messines ridge as a volunteer BEF motor-car driver, 'led straight into an inferno of scattering earthquakes. . . . The blinding flash and nerve-shattering roar of the big howitzer shells, ever punctuated by the dozens of wicked, whirring shrapnel that searched every quarter, might well have demoralised troops of much more experience of the new gun-cult of modern warfare.'³⁶ Coleman referred to the increased German rate of shellfire: shells were landing every second across the ground between the ridge and the advancing infantry. He saw the surviving Dogras and Afridis as they came into Messines:

Straggling Indians were all along the road, many of them wounded. . . . A big [Afridi], covered in blood, came up, pale and tottering, supported by a comrade. Most of the wounds were in head or arm, allowing the men to navigate rearwards under their own power. One passed, insensible, borne on a door by four of his fellows. The next was in a motor-car, half lying on the front seat, huddled with pain, a blanket between his set teeth: a brave chap, horribly wounded, but holding on with sublime courage and never a groan to tell of his awful agony.³⁷

Arsla Khan had kept some of his men together as they moved back, yet under the shellfire the Indian retirement had become disorganised. The Dogras and Afridis retreated into the village along different streets, where they lingered in disorder.³⁸ They came across Rex Benson of the

³⁴ S. Blacker, *On Secret Patrol*, p. 147; and Merewether, *Indian Corps*, p. 36.

³⁵ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3092: *IEFA War Diary* (February, 1915), pp. 30–32; S. Blacker, *Patrol*, p. 147; Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 54; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 61; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 37–38.

³⁶ F. Coleman, *From Mons to Ypres with French* (London: Clowes, 1916), pp. 232–33.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3092: *IEFA War Diary* (February, 1915), pp. 30–32.

9th Lancers and other officers of Home Army cavalry regiments, who rounded them up and put them in a reserve trench. Benson's impression was that the men of the Frontier Force unit had become 'very lost without their [British] officers. . . . They were splendid in the trenches as long as their officers were there but afterwards did not know what to do.'³⁹ He had of course not witnessed what their Indian officers had done, and he was not disposed to enquire. Merewether and Smith knew better:

Subadar Arsla Khan is one of the finest specimens of the Indian officer imaginable. During the Mohmand Expedition of 1908, he was granted the 2nd Class of the Indian Order of Merit for gallantry during a hand-to-hand fight in which he killed two of the enemy with his Mauser pistol, and turned the enemy out of an important 'Sangar' [or small stone fort]. He was granted the 2nd Class of the Order of British India for his good services at Messines. . . . The Subadar is a Malikdin Khel Afridi, and a man of considerable importance in his tribe. The 57th Rifles have every reason to be proud of him.⁴⁰

In the early morning of 2 November, near Neuve Chapelle on the left of the Indian Corps line, two separate areas of the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas' front trenches were pummelled, and in parts destroyed, by high explosive mortar fire and shellfire. The dazed British officers, Gurkha officers and men were compelled to move out, allowing the Germans in. At that time, and during further shelling later in the day, the Gurkha regiment's companies, half-companies and platoons responded variously:

1. Some Gurkha ranks who had lost their British officers, and not their Gurkha officers, independently fled to the rear in terror to take refuge in drains, ditches and ruined houses;
2. some Gurkha ranks who had lost their British officers, and not their Gurkha officers, did not flee, but once they had lost their Gurkha officers they did;
3. some Gurkha officers who had lost their British officers organised some of their men to cling on to areas of front trench;
4. some Gurkha officers and non-commissioned officers who had lost their British officers decided to withdraw their men to the rear; and
5. some British and Gurkha officers led their men in counter-attacks involving fierce close-quarters fighting with khukuris.⁴¹

³⁹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: R. Benson to Hardinge, November 1915.

⁴⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 204–05. Also see 'Field Operations: Mohmand', *Supplement to the London Gazette* (14 August 1908), 6060.

⁴¹ TNA, WO/95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1914), 'Report B. M. 14', by Brigadier-General C. Johnson, and 'Memorandum G. 488', by Lieutenant-General C. Anderson; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 84–89; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 78–82.

Throughout November, the Indian Corps' Indian battalions were bombarded by German trench mortars and artillery. In the first week of the month, the 1st/ and 2nd/39th Garhwals were shelled daily at the centre of the Indian line. 'One thing struck us', wrote one of their British officers, 'and that was the steadiness of our men under artillery fire . . . it was marvellous how well they stood it and how steady they were.'⁴² For several days from 21 November, the 6th Jats on the Indian right were repeatedly bombed by heavy trench mortars. 'These monster bombs', Merewether and Smith recorded, 'caused [dozens] of casualties, and gave the men no rest, for the trenches were broken up, repaired and broken up again, repaired and re-occupied, and so it went on until the troops were worn out with constant strain and want of sleep.' Yet the Jats did not budge.⁴³

On 20 December, the Indian Corps received its heaviest attack on the western front. At dawn, most of its line began to be mortar-bombed and shelled. At 9am, on the centre-right of the line near Givenchy, ten explosive mines, each of 50kg gunpowder, planted by the German VII Corps, and lying under 1,000 yards of front trenches held by the Lahore Division's Sirhind Brigade, were detonated. The trench floors shuddered; seconds later they cracked apart with an ear-splitting explosion; earth was punched high into the sky. Some men were instantly killed or buried alive, others were stunned. Grenade-throwing Germans, with co-ordinated support from machine guns, mortars and artillery, quickly flooded onto the Sirhind Brigade's line and the adjoining trenches.⁴⁴

The mines had turned the Sirhind Brigade's ground from a patchwork of waterlogged lines and dugouts into a flat expanse of liquid mud that came up to men's thighs, pulled off their boots, jammed their rifles and denied them fire-steps or parapet protection. On the brigade's centre and right, the survivors of the 1st/1st and 1st/4th Gurkhas collected themselves under their British and Gurkha officers to inflict, with rifle fire, a heavy toll on the oncoming Germans, before engaging in vicious hand-to-hand fighting with khukuris. But they were outnumbered and forced to retreat. They moved back in reasonably good order, in some cases under Gurkha officers after British ones had become casualties. Several Gurkhas who held onto forward ground were surrounded and captured.⁴⁵

⁴² D. Drake-Brockman, *Garhwal*, pp. 29–30.

⁴³ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 108–09.

⁴⁴ TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (December 1914), 'Document G.S. 392', translation of a captured German VII Corps report.

⁴⁵ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 119–20; Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, p. 188; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 175–77. The 125th Napier's Rifles of the Sirhind Brigade were considered by Willcocks to have performed poorly at Givenchy,

The 129th Baluchis were attacked to the right of the 1st/4th Gurkhas. Although their ground was not mine-blasted, it was waterlogged and had been churned by heavy shellfire. Many men of the 129th fled in panic after their British officers had been killed or wounded.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the regiment's Afridis stood firm to fight. One of them was angered by the idea that his section might fall back, saying, 'Why should we go? We have no ammunition, but there are twenty of us and we have bayonets.' The Afridis did eventually retire, but only when ordered to.⁴⁷

The Lahore Division units retreating down the main road from the Indian frontline near Givenchy filed past reserves going in the opposite direction. 'I met about 300 men of different regiments, mostly 129th Baluchis', one British officer reported. 'Many of them had thrown away their rifles and they said that all their officers had been killed.'⁴⁸ 'The state of the wounded beggars all description', said another officer who was on the road, Roly Grimshaw of the 34th Poona Horse:

Little Gurkhas slopping through the freezing mud barefooted; Tommies with no caps and plastered in blood and mud from head to foot; Sikhs with their hair down and looking more wild and weird than I have ever seen them; Pathans more dirty and untidy than usual; all limping or reeling along like drunken men, some helping an almost foundered comrade. In most cases misery depicted on their faces.⁴⁹

In the New Year, Frederic Abernethy Coleman looked into the events of 20 December at Givenchy. 'I visited [the Lahore Division's billets] to gain some first hand knowledge of what had transpired':

I learned that the Indians had fought much better than the bare accounts would indicate. The trenches in [the Givenchy] sector were full of mud and water. One officer [of the 129th Baluchis] I met had discovered in the thick of the fighting that of a hundred rifles in his trench but three were sufficiently free from mud to be usable. Another officer told me his [Afridis] had exhausted their ammunition. A box of ammunition arrived. The men carrying it were jarred by a howitzer shell that fell a few yards away just as they reached the trench. They dropped the heavy box into the trench with a splash and straightway it sunk many feet into the soft ooze and mud, all efforts at its recovery seemingly only serving to immerse it more deeply. The awful conditions of the ground and of the trenches

though quite why is not clear; the majority of the regiment does not seem to have been the frontline when the Germans attacked on 20 December; see Ellinwood, *Indian Corps*, pp. 378 and 414.

⁴⁶ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Butler Papers: Haig Letter to Butler, 7 January 1915; and KCL/LHCMA, Papers of Sir B. Liddell Hart: 'Talk with Sir Claud Jacob, 1932' (LH 11/1932/45).

⁴⁷ Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. 26–35 and 237.

⁴⁸ Greenhut, 'Imperial Reserve', 60.

⁴⁹ Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, p. 54.

out of which the Indian troops were driven were largely responsible for their initial repulse. . . . No criticism could possibly be launched at their valour.⁵⁰

What do all these responses to German pressure, which cover all the Indian flights from trenches in Flanders in 1914, tell us about the Indian army? Most obviously, they show that Indian troops who had lost their British officers could become less effective, and that they would have benefited from having more British officers. But they reveal far more than this. They confirm that the Indian battalions' pre-war training had nurtured in their Indian officers, as had been seen in Waziristan, Tibet and elsewhere in pre-1914 small wars, a spirit of initiative so that they were not simply dependent on their British officers, and were prepared to lead their men by themselves. Walter Lawrence gathered as much from the Indian wounded. They told him that the Indian Corps' Indian officers 'have commanded Companies . . . when the British Officers had fallen. These men seem to have used skill, judgment and coolness'.⁵¹ As Willcocks put it in reference to First Ypres, 'the Indian officers were here, there, and everywhere. [They] will take the place temporarily of the Sahib when the fatal shell or bullet does its deadly work.'⁵² Thus the Indians did not simply become directionless after they had lost their British officers; rather, this might happen after they had lost their Indian officers too.

The Indian battalions' responses to pressure in 1914 confirm another thing seen in pre-1914 small wars, not least at Gumburu Hill in Somaliland: they had the internal cohesion to stick to tough fighting tasks. Indeed, this helps to explain some of the Indian retreats in Flanders. Units, such as the Dogra and Afridi companies at Messines on 31 October, might fall back because they had the cohesion to stand firm under pressure, tired themselves by doing so, and became drained of their strength to hold on for longer than they did.

The most fundamental thing shown by the Indians' responses to pressure in 1914 is that modern firepower could so disorientate or terrify them that they stopped fighting or retreated in disorder. This is the underlying explanation for the Indian flights. British or Indian officer leadership and a regiment's internal cohesion could all help Indian troops to stand firm under pressure, but beyond the control of all these things was an individual's psychological breaking point under fire. Thus in November, the 6th Jats, 39th Garhwals and 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force)

⁵⁰ Coleman, *Mons to Ypres*, pp. 298–99.

⁵¹ IOR, Mss Eur F 143/77: Walter Lawrence Papers, Lawrence Letter to C. Wigram (George V's assistant private secretary), 19 July 1915; Creagh, *Studies*, p. 274.

⁵² Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 10.

stood firm under bombardments that did not break the limits of what officer leadership, unit cohesion or individual spirit could stand, whereas in October and December those limits were shattered within the 129th Baluchis.

In 1915, the Indian battalions almost never fled as they had in 1914. The main reasons were twofold. First, the Indian troops were put under much less pressure than in 1914. The Germans did not make heavy attacks on the Indian lines as they had at First Ypres or Givenchy, partly because they were on the defensive, and partly because where they did make heavy attacks on the BEF, the Indian Corps happened not to be there. The upshot was that much less pressure on the Indians meant many fewer of them moving back under it. Second, the Indians' trenches – as we shall see – came to offer better protection than in 1914, dramatically reducing the effects of enemy fire.

When the Indian troops did come under pressure in 1915, they showed similar responses as before. At Second Ypres in the mid-morning of 26 April, the 40th Pathans, fresh from Hong Kong and marching around Ypres' southern moat, were shelled for the first time. German shells were streaming overhead into Ypres, but one dropped short and directly onto the 40th's Yusufzai company, killing and wounding one Indian officer and twenty-two men. There was no visible confusion, however. The company's cohesion, born of years of training in India and small war experiences, prompted its Yusufzai ranks instinctively to close up and march on without a pause. For Willcocks, 'their baptism of European warfare was an instance of cool discipline as if on parade'.⁵³

That afternoon to the north-east of Ypres, the Lahore Division's Ferropore and Jullundur brigades counter-attacked across open farmland. Their assault petered out against machine gun fire and shellfire, leaving their troops high up the battlefield near the German lines. From these, chlorine poison gas was released; the Indian brigades were neither trained nor equipped to cope with it. The gas drifted onto them; there was widespread terror as it took its effect, which was to cause overstimulation of lung fluid, and thereby death by drowning. Most of the troops fled.⁵⁴ Among those who did not was Mir Dast, the Afridi veteran of the Mohmand campaign, now a jemadar who had been sent to IEFA as a casualty replacement from the 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force). He and a few others were quick to press their faces to the ground, keeping them there until the worst of the gas had blown over. Once it had, Mir

⁵³ B. Blacker, *Adventures*, p. 60; and Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 27, and *With the Indians*, p. 247.

⁵⁴ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 312.

Dast was left isolated and with no British officer. For several hours, under fire, he regrouped many of the men who had not fled, including around a dozen wounded, before organising their retreat in careful stages.

‘This splendid Indian officer’, wrote Merewether and Smith, ‘already possessed the 2nd Class, Indian Order of Merit, for his gallantry in the Mohmand Expedition, and now for his most conspicuous valour was awarded the Victoria Cross.’⁵⁵ ‘Amongst those who had been rendered unconscious by the gas and subsequently rescued by Jemadar Mir Dast’, they went on, ‘was Havildar (now Jemadar) Mangal Singh (15th Sikhs). On recovering consciousness, in spite of intense suffering, he went out time after time and helped to bring in the wounded under fire.’⁵⁶

Were the Indian troops alone in fleeing under pressure, or even especially prone to do so? They were not. It was a commonplace among the men of all the armies on the western front to abandon positions because they were exhausted or had been pushed beyond their psychological breaking point by modern firepower. In August 1914 in Lorraine near the Franco-German border, large numbers of the French XV Corps, mentally shattered by German shellfire, fled without orders.⁵⁷ In mid-October in nearby Champagne, French West African soldiers panicked under shellfire and ran from their trenches.⁵⁸ At First Ypres, men of numerous British regiments within I, II, IV and the Cavalry Corps quit their trenches without orders because of exhaustion and terrifying German bombardments that pushed them beyond the limits of their endurance.⁵⁹ Haig saw some of them at the northern end of the BEF line: ‘[I saw] crowds of [British soldiers] who came down the Menin road from time to time during the Ypres battle having thrown everything they could, including their rifles and packs, in order to escape, with a look of absolute terror on their faces, such as I have never before seen on any human being’s face.’⁶⁰ Indeed, German troops at First Ypres retreated to avoid British fire.⁶¹ Then on 20 December 1914, British battalions of the Indian Corps, including the 1st/Highland Light Infantry and 1st/Seaforths, fell back under pressure, as Roly Grimshaw of the 34th Poona Horse glimpsed when he saw some of their men caked in mud

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 313–14; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 252.

⁵⁶ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 314.

⁵⁷ Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 224.

⁵⁸ A. Clayton, *France, Soldiers and Africa* (Brassey’s: Exeter, 1968), pp. 248–49; and Fogarty, *Race and War*, pp. 83–84.

⁵⁹ Ballard, *Smith-Dorrien*, p. 240; Beckett, *Ypres*, pp. 162–63; J. French, *1914*, pp. 248–50; Gough, *Soldiering On*, p. 121; and Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, pp. 485–89.

⁶⁰ TNA, WO 256/2: Haig Western Front Diary, 7 November and 4 December 1914.

⁶¹ Coleman, *Mons to Ypres*, p. 231.

alongside the retreating Indians.⁶² Welshman of I Corps did the same thing under fire in January 1915.⁶³ At Second Ypres, French, African, Canadian and British troops fled from the shellfire and poison gas. And so on in every army on the western front up to 1918, including the Portuguese.⁶⁴

Of course the Indian units had fragilities that led them to fall back on occasion, but so did battalions of all armies. ‘The talk I hear of the Indian army not being staunch makes me very angry’, Roly Grimshaw protested in January 1915 on hearing British army rumours that the Indian troops were especially fragile under fire, ‘I have seen quite as much lack of staunchness in certain British regiments as in Indian.’⁶⁵ There was no real difference between what Coleman saw on Afridi faces at Messines, what Haig saw on British faces on the Menin road, or what Grimshaw saw on Sikh faces at Givenchy. Ultimately, Indians fled not because they were Indian, but for the same reason as European or African troops: they were human. ‘The Indians naturally do not like shellfire and trench firing’, wrote Willcocks, ‘who does?’⁶⁶

⁶² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 120 and 123.

⁶³ Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 96.

⁶⁴ Thapar, *Morale Builders*, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, p. 61.

⁶⁶ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 5 December 1914. It is worth adding that no evidence has ever come to light that self-inflicted wounds or flights from trenches were the cause of the Indian Corps’ withdrawal from the BEF.

In Shanghai in the summer of 1901, *Der Ostasiatische Lloyd*, a local journal, published a letter by a German soldier serving against the Boxer Rising. The men of his battalion, he wrote, ‘shrug their shoulders and laugh pitifully when they are asked what they think of their Indian comrades’. He described the Indian service as ‘a field army which will remain of second rank’, and its troops as ‘sham soldiers without any muscle’.¹ Fourteen years later, similar sentiments abounded in Germany. In the first week of October 1914, an American journalist reported how common it was in the cafés and streets of Berlin to joke about the Indian army. ‘There is an interesting tendency to make fun of the fighting value of the native Indian troops, whose landing at Marseilles received much publicity in the German press.’² Karl Götz, the Bavarian artist, had already designed some popular bronze medallions mocking the Indian army in France as nothing more than a travelling circus.³ ‘We have not seen any of their Indian troops’, said a source from the German War Ministry, ‘but we are not afraid of them.’⁴

Such German opinions were soon modified. The reason was that IEFA’s Indian battalions made great use of their pre-war training for the north-west frontier. They did so largely in 1914, while their original companies were intact, but also in 1915 – as some of some of their original officers and men remained with them, as they absorbed high quality companies of pre-war regulars transplanted from India, and as the 40th Pathans and other fresh pre-war battalions came from Hong Kong or Egypt. ‘At first we spoke with contempt of the Indians’, a German infantryman wrote home after they had got into his trench in late

¹ *The Times*, 1 October 1901, p. 6.

² *The New York Times*, 5 October 1914, p. 2.

³ D. Dendooven and P. Chielens (eds.), *World War I, Five Continents in Flanders* (Tielt: Uitgeverij Lannoo, 2008), p. 116.

⁴ *The New York Times*, 5 October 1914, p. 2.

1914. ‘Today we learned to look at them in a different light . . . The devil knows what the English has put into those fellows!’⁵

Marching

When the Indian units made up of regulars well trained before the war were required to march hard on the western front, they did so with an efficiency characteristic of the pre-war Indian army in China or the Pathan tribal areas. On 24–25 April 1915, the Lahore Division’s Indian battalions, containing a majority of pre-war regulars, marched thirty miles from near Neuve Chapelle to the Belgian village Ouderdom in order to reinforce the Second Army at Second Ypres. They marched through the night to arrive at Ouderdom as quickly as they could, toiling in heavy rain on the slippery cobble-paved roads that left men footsore. After marching under shellfire for a further ten miles in the early morning of the 26th, they fought to the north-east of Ypres in Second Army counter-attacks, in the course of which they were gassed. Many of them continued to march hard in the following days, including the 57th Wilde’s Rifles (Frontier Force).

From 27 April to 2 May, the 57th, having been reduced to an exhausted rump of pre-war regulars – 2 British officers, one of whom was Stewart Blacker of the Guides, 3 Indian officers and 131 ranks, many of them veterans of the Zakka and Mohmand expeditions of 1908 – marched 45 miles. Without maps, they followed a series of confused Second Army orders and counter-orders to march for hours at a time from place to place in the Ypres area, stumbling and slipping along the slimy stone roads, under fire from German medium field howitzers and catching what sleep they could.⁶ ‘No one thought of food, exhaustion was too great’, wrote Blacker.⁷ In the daylight of 29 April, ‘Shells burst remorselessly everywhere, and the stricken countryside reeked with their smoke and fumes, with which mingled here and there, in the hollows, the poison of the mysterious gas, against which there was still no form of defence. Again orders came for the exhausted band to be thrown into an attack to the north; again this was countermanded.’⁸

On the night of 1 May, Blacker led his troops back into France to rejoin the Indian Corps. ‘It was a toilsome march for a number of reasons. The men had not yet recovered from the exhaustion of fighting, many were

⁵ *The Times*, 6 December 1914, p. 1.

⁶ B. Blacker, *Adventures*, pp. 60–63; Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 92; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 287 and 293–94; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 265.

⁷ My thanks to Barnaby Blacker for this quote from Stewart Blacker’s unedited memoirs.

⁸ *Ibid.*

in some degree still gassed; the men were out of training, there having been no practice marches outside the trenches for many months; and, an aggravating circumstance, the inadequacy of the official rations.⁹ On their return the morning of 2 May, having marched eighty-five miles and fought a battle, Blacker felt they had 'come to the limit, so we thought, of human endurance.'¹⁰

Grenade and Mortar Making

'There is no doubt that long years of fighting under the conditions of the North-West Frontier in India, and of other war theatres in underdeveloped countries', a Royal Engineer of long Indian service considered in the 1940s, 'had created almost a genius for improvisation which stood the Indian Sappers in good stead, certainly during the opening stages of the war, and especially in France.'¹¹ The Indian battalions sailed to the western front in 1914 without grenades and trench mortars, which were particularly useful for short-range trench fighting. They then not only joined a Home Army expeditionary force without grenades and mortars to share, but also faced an enemy with standard-issue versions of both.

In late October 1914, IEFA's companies of the 1st and 3rd Sappers and Miners were quick to respond. Among them were officers and men who had taken part in the pre-war sappers' tests with Hale's grenades and designing of hand and rifle grenades. At a commandeered iron-works factory at Béthune, a French village behind the Indian Corps' initial line, they used those pre-war experiences to make their own-pattern 'jam-tin bombs' – hand grenades made out of empty jam tins packed with high explosive, inserted in whose tops were naked fuses the thrower had to light with a match or cigarette end. They also used their pre-war mortar designs in imitation of Japanese models to improvise trench mortars. They made their mortar barrels out of steel piping found on site and wood, which they bound together with metal wire, and the bombs for them either out of empty jam tins packed with timed dynamite, or out of sawn-off 18-pound shell cases filled with nails, stones and three and a half pounds of explosive. The bombs were propelled by black-powder charges, and had a range of around 200 yards.

By late November, the Indian factory at Béthune was producing 400 jam-tin bombs a day, and had turned out several mortars with many

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Sandes, *Sappers*, p. x.

bombs, all of which were issued to Indian Corps battalions. The jam-tin bombs were problematic in the frontline because their fuses were difficult to light when wet. The mortars were also awkward. Their bombs were prone to detonating in their barrels as they were fired, they gave off black smoke that betrayed their position and invited German fire, and they were often inaccurate. Still, the jam-tin bombs and the mortars were frequently used in the Indian line during November and December 1914. They were very welcome: nothing better was available at the time.¹²

Small Group Tactics

Unmistakably the Indian battalions applied their pre-war training in small group hill warfare tactics to the Flanders battlefield. They frequently fought in the small, flexible and modern rifle-using groups, replete with initiative-taking Indian officers and men, which the Indian army had used in small wars between 1897 and 1914. They did so in two main ways while on the defensive: first, without artillery support; second, with it. Before looking at exactly when and where in Flanders the Indians made use of their pre-war small group tactics, it is helpful to look briefly at some of the underlying circumstances, concerning, among other things, artillery and Pathans.

The western front was ostensibly no place to flex north-west frontier tactical skills. But circumstances conspired in late 1914 to allow the Indian infantry to use their pre-war training to fight in small groups. When the Indian battalions first arrived in the BEF's trenches, they were not required to carry out combined large formation attacks according to detailed plans and orders. Rather, they were unfurled along a defensive line in small regimental groups left largely to their own tactical devices, as their senior commanders coped with an emergency not permitting of detailed tactical direction from on high. The landscape at First Ypres and shortly afterwards was mostly in its peacetime form; infantrymen were not yet as restricted as they would become with the emergence of complex trench systems whose earthworks and barbed wire greatly impeded free movement in the open. Further, in the Indian battalions' earliest months on the western front it was often their duty to engage the enemy in person – partly in response to German attacks; partly through orders to counter-attack where ground had been lost; partly through orders to pressure the German lines in indirect support of the French; and partly

¹² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 91–92 and 144; and Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 1, pp. 8–11.

through an Indian Corps and BEF-wide ethos of aggressive defence. The upshot was that in 1914 the Indian army was presented with opportunities to fight in small and dispersed groups as best it could on ground where there was significant room for manoeuvre, and therefore with many a chance to fight along the lines of their pre-war small group training. They took these chances, naturally relying on the hill warfare methods they knew.

The issuing to IEFA's Indian battalions at Marseilles of Lee-Enfield Mark IIIs and sharp, metal-jacketed ammunition put them at no great disadvantage. On the one hand, the Indian troops could adapt to the Mark IIIs relatively straightforwardly. They had, after all, used similar modern rifles and ammunition for over a decade, and on their way up to Flanders many of them had time at rifle ranges to practise with their Mark IIIs and to personalise the sightings. On the other hand, the Mark IIIs were marginally superior to the Mark IIs, having a simpler sighting arrangement and an enhanced short magazine. They were at least as good as any other rifle in Europe, whether Belgian, French or German, if not better. The Indian troops comfortably used their Mark IIIs, for which each man was issued 200 rounds at a time, just as they had similar modern rifles in small wars. As for the Indian crews with adjusted Maxim guns, they did of course not have state-of-the-art weaponry on their hands. But their Maxims were machine guns nonetheless, and ones that could put in a heavy fire like the British army's Maxims.¹³

Arriving in France with 108 of the Army in India's Royal Artillery 18-pounder field guns, the Lahore and Meerut Divisions did not have any heavier pieces, unlike the BEF's original Home Army divisions, which had batteries of 4.5-inch medium field howitzers and of 5-inch heavy field guns. To help make up for the Indian divisions' shortfall, the War Office assigned them two Home Army Royal Garrison Artillery batteries of eight 4.7-inch heavy naval guns that fired 45-pound shells. During the last week of October 1914, the Lahore Division's Ferozepore and Jullundur brigades, fighting respectively with the Cavalry Corps and II Corps, had almost no artillery pieces in support of them: they entered the fray before their divisional field and heavy batteries had concentrated, and virtually all the Cavalry and II Corps' artillery pieces were needed to support their own formations. In the first week of November, the Indian Corps' artillery was concentrated behind its line on the BEF right. But well into 1915, compared to British infantry corps, the Indian Corps

¹³ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 40; *47th Sikhs*, p. 10; and Tugwell, *Pioneers*, pp. 180–81.

was lacking in medium field howitzers, and it had slightly weaker heavy batteries.¹⁴

The Indian Corps' artillery fed off the Home Army's shell stocks, yet in late 1914 and early 1915 these were very low. In the war's first three months, the BEF's artillery fired far more shells than had been anticipated when the pre-war British shell stocks had been built up. By early November, its field guns were restricted to firing just ten rounds a day, or not even that. The War Office placed large orders for shells in Britain, Canada and the United States, but not until 1916 were the shells delivered en masse. Consequently the Indian Corps, like the BEF, did not have many shells for daily use.¹⁵

Lastly, seven of the Indian Corps' battalions contained Mohmands, Afridis, Orakzais, Mahsuds and Wazirs recruited from the tribal areas since the 1890s. Yusufzais and Khattaks from NWFP added further Pathan elements. While fighting for the Indian Corps, the Pathans continued to demonstrate their particular flair for skirmishing and scouting work, linked to their tribes' active fighting culture. *The Times* sensed something of this in autumn 1914 as it weighed up the Pathans against their latest European adversaries:

Amongst the Indian troops . . . the Pathan in particular is a fine figure-head. Take the trans-frontier tribesman. Man to man in open country, on the hillside or in forest the German with his two or three years' training on parade grounds or in manoeuvres can be no match for him. These men are cradled in war. Tribal vendettas are the breath of life to them. The young Afridi has been the mark for a bullet from his infancy. [Under fire in hill warfare], without a quickening of the pulse, [he will] lie up like a hare in its form while the lead splashes against the rock by his side. He knows nothing of mass tactics. His every move is instinctive, individual.¹⁶

The first main way in which the Indian battalions used their north-west frontier training to fight in small groups – without artillery support – was seen time and again at First Ypres. On the evening of 27 October, two companies of the 47th Sikhs, in support of II Corps on the BEF right, recaptured a trench near Neuve Chapelle by attacking it from separate directions across 200 yards of open ground, dashing in platoons. As they went, they lost to German fire seven killed and twenty-eight wounded, but they swept onto the trench, driving off its defenders. While crossing

¹⁴ TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (September 1914), 'Report on Changes in Organisation'; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 25; Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1914, vol. 2, p. 92; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 73.

¹⁵ Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, pp. 214 and 217; and Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 994.

¹⁶ *The Times History of the War*, vol. 1, p. 324.

the open ground, one of the Sikh companies had lost its single British officer, but Subadar Thakur Singh had taken over and led his men to drive home the attack.¹⁷

Three days later, on the left of the Cavalry Corps' line near the village of Wyttschaete, the Sikh company of the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) conducted a well-controlled retreat under infantry attack, relying on their hill warfare training to withdraw by alternate groups. Their platoons moved in forty-yard bounds, taking turns to lie down to give one another covering fire, and they shot a number of Germans. With them were two Maxim crews of the 9th Bhopals, which used their guns to devastating effect.¹⁸

At 3am on 1 November, also on the Cavalry Corps' left, the 129th Baluchis stormed a German-held farm. Two of the regiment's half-companies attacked from different directions, rushing the main farm building in small groups. 'The 129th were thoroughly in their element in this kind of fighting', said one of their British officers who had been on the spot. They chased the German defenders from room to room, killing ten and wounding thirteen.¹⁹

That November and December in the Indian Corps' sector, the Indians used their north-west frontier training to make more small attacks without artillery support. On the night of 9–10 November, the 1st/ and 2nd/39th Garhwals raided a German trench some fifty yards from the 2nd/39th's line. In silence, 100 Garhwals crawled on their stomachs up to the trench, using un-harvested turnips and high cabbages for concealment. They arrived unnoticed, and at the signal of an officer's revolver shot leapt into the German line, cheering; they killed a few defenders, in some cases using their khukuris.²⁰ They took the trench, before withdrawing for the loss of four men as a counter-attack beckoned. 'They had learned', Willcocks identified, 'that if they kept low and used their own tactics they could outwit the Hun.'²¹ In the first two weeks of December, the Mahsuds of the 129th Baluchis were of the same mind. At their own request, they formed small raiding parties to use jam-tin bombs in stealthy attacks on German saps (the forward bays in no man's land that protruded from main trenches by way of zigzagging connecting trenches). 'The [Mahsud] parties', wrote Willcocks, 'often went out and bombed

¹⁷ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 69; and *47th Sikhs*, p. 27.

¹⁸ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 59; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 37.

¹⁹ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 63; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 39; and Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 18.

²⁰ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 126.

²¹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 95.

German saps and entirely stopped the Huns working on that particular bit of front.²²

On 16 December, two companies of the 129th Baluchis assaulted two occupied German saps that lay some way apart opposite their trenches. From the 129th's line, one of the saps was twenty-five yards away across open ground on their left; the other was fifty yards away on their right. The two companies rose from their line at 8.30am to rush a sap apiece, going at pace in flexible platoons. They immediately came under fire, but pressed into the saps regardless. They fought their way far up the trenches connecting the saps to the main German line, only to be pushed back by grenades. Once back at the saps, they defended them resolutely for eight hours under fire. In the right sap, after the British officer there had been wounded, Jemadar Mir Badshah, a Pathan from North Waziristan, took command of his company for most of the day. At one point, to relieve the pressure on the sap, a Mahsud made an impromptu charge forward against three nearby German defenders. He pushed them back single-handed. After dark, both of the Baluchi companies were forced to retire to their original line. Their day's work had cost them fifty-five killed and seventy wounded.²³

Near Givenchy in the early hours of 22 December, some Afridi platoons of the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) held a trench at the centre of the Indian line that had been pushed back on the 20th. 'A body of about seventy Germans made a determined attack on the trench [and the Afridis] were thrown back', Merewether and Smith noted, 'but Subadar Arsla Khan collected all his men and charged the enemy, who fled without waiting for the assault. As they bolted, at least thirty of them, including two officers, were killed or wounded by [Afridi] fire.'²⁴

The second main way in which the Indian battalions used their north-west frontier training to fight in small groups – with artillery support – involved their co-operation with British horse, field or heavy artillery to make small, forward defensive attacks. When the Indian Corps was in the frontline on the defensive, Royal Artillery batteries were spread out behind. The batteries initially belonged to the British corps that the Indian units supported up to the start of November 1914, and afterwards to the Indian Corps itself. At short notice, their guns could be called on, usually by regimental or brigade headquarters in touch with them through artillery liaison officers, to fire either individually or in small groups in support of forward defensive forays. Such basic

²² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²³ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 113–15; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 149–51.

²⁴ Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 55; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 203.

infantry-artillery co-operation was in keeping with the Indian battalions' training according to *Frontier Warfare*, and with the Indian army's practice in small wars. Because of shell shortage, the artillery fire was routinely brief and relatively insubstantial – also like in small wars.

Small attacks using frontier training in combination with artillery were made by the Indian battalions with British corps at First Ypres. In the fading daylight of 26 October, the Ferezepore Brigade joined in a wide Cavalry Corps counter-attack towards the village of Gapaard in Belgium. After a ten-minute preliminary bombardment by horse artillery, the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) and 129th Baluchis moved forwards in small skirmishing groups, supported by continuing artillery fire. As the Baluchis advanced several hundred yards over a series of low hills, German shell, machine gun and rifle fire inflicted dozens of casualties, but their platoons stuck together. 'Our men are very cool under fire, don't seem to mind a bit', said one of their British officers of their advance.²⁵ The Baluchis only retired when ordered to, after they had reached assaulting positions near the German trenches. The Frontier Force unit acted similarly.²⁶

On 28 October, two companies of the 47th Sikhs, and the 20th and 21st companies of the 3rd Sappers and Miners (assigned to the Lahore Division), assaulted the German-occupied village of Neuve Chapelle. For Willcocks, they did it in a manner that 'at once established their reputation as first-class fighting men. . . . I have never met a man who saw it, or who was on that part of the Front at that time, who has not owned that it was as brave a show as could be.'²⁷ At 10.30, after a light 15-minute preliminary bombardment by II Corps artillery, the Sikhs and sappers attacked side by side, from trenches west of Neuve Chapelle, across the 600 yards of open ground in front of the village. Under machine gun and rifle fire, they rapidly covered the ground in scattered platoons, advancing in alternating rushes, with pauses for well-controlled bursts of fire. 'In spite of some casualties, the advance continued with parade-ground precision', wrote a British officer with them.²⁸

The Sikhs and sappers drove the Germans from the trenches screening the village and ran on into the streets, all the while under fire from windows and rooftops. They burst into several heavily defended houses, engaging in close-range fire-fights and hand-to-hand scraps. Outside, after a British officer of the 47th Sikhs had been killed in the open

²⁵ V. Kiernan, *European Empires* (Bath: Fontana, 1982), p. 185.

²⁶ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 28–29; and Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. 11–14.

²⁷ Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', p. 14, and *With the Indians*, p. 70.

²⁸ Sandes, *Sappers*, pp. 441–43.

by a German sniper in a house, a Punjabi Muslim sapper calmly got down on one knee in the middle of the street, waited for the sniper to appear for another shot, and shot him dead the moment he did. At the crossroads at the village's centre, the Indians overcame some carefully concealed machine guns. They built a barricade across the main street with furniture grabbed from a house, and held it with good individual fire discipline.

By early afternoon, the village centre was under Indian control. Shortly afterwards, some of the sappers fought their way to the far side of the village, yet they were driven back by German reinforcements. So too were all the Indian troops at the village centre, which they evacuated. They withdrew to their original positions west of the village, having lost 564 casualties. 'The attack was magnificently carried out', Merewether and Smith were sure,

the 47th and Sappers took [Neuve Chapelle] with such superb élan. . . . The stubbornness and bravery with which our men fought can be gauged by the losses. . . . General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien sent his warmest congratulations on the splendid conduct of the troops. The history of the Indian army contains few nobler pages than that of the 28th October 1914.²⁹

That day the 9th Bhopals showed that not all IEFA's Indian battalions had good skirmishing skills. The Bhopals were the Indian Corps' weakest battalion.³⁰ During the Sikhs and sappers' assault on Neuve Chapelle, the Bhopals were supposed to help by attacking from the south of the village. But when they advanced, they showed no inclination to rush forwards in small and flexible groups. Instead, 'they started crawling like great khaki slugs, and about the same pace', a Home Army officer spied from a nearby house. 'Fancy starting to crawl 300 or 400 yards to the enemy's trenches! It was an extraordinary sight. How we longed for them to get up and advance in short rushes.'³¹ The Bhopals were easily picked off on the flat ground by German riflemen. Before long, they gave up, and began to crawl back to their start trench. One of their Indian officers tried to walk back upright, and was shot down after a few steps.³²

The Bhopals' lack of skirmishing skill reflected that they had not ridden the post-Tirah campaign wave of hill warfare training. Their officers had kept a traditional, Lord Roberts-era focus on musketry, and had imparted few of the rules of *Frontier Warfare*. In IEFA, the Bhopals were

²⁹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 61; Sandes, *Sappers*, pp. 441–43; *47th Sikhs*, pp. 27–33; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 66–71.

³⁰ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 5 December 1914.

³¹ Thornton, *Congreves*, p. 238.

³² *Ibid.*

a uniquely old-fashioned unit. They could fire well enough, but could barely move at the same time.³³ Indeed, they generally did not share in the traits of the better Indian battalions. They had not seen action for four decades; they had belonged to the low-quality 8th Division, and only recently had been elevated to the 3rd (or Lahore) Division, it seems by mistake; their commanding officer, Charles Dobbie, was lacking in the aggression and energy of his IEFA peers like Frederick Gray of the Frontier Force (at Neuve Chapelle on 28 October, Dobbie suffered a mental breakdown, ending his career). Moreover, the Bhopals had a company of Brahmins whose British officers had crept so carefully around their caste standards that in Flanders they never stopped complaining about how active service interfered with these, down to last detail: they rejected food that a European shadow had crossed. Willcocks judged the Bhopals' Brahmins to be 'of no use', and was openly relieved after their capture at First Ypres. 'Thank God we are rid of them, they were altogether a very poor and disgruntled lot.'³⁴ The Brahmins soon turned their complaints about caste standards onto their German captors, refusing to eat anything given them during transportation to their prison camp near Berlin.³⁵

In the last two months of 1914, IEFA's commonly high-quality Indian battalions continued to use their north-west frontier training to make small attacks with artillery support. At 9pm on 13 November, six platoons of the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas and fifty men of the 2nd/39th Garhwals attacked a German front trench fifty yards from the Indian line. They went in rushes, with simultaneous supporting artillery fire that lasted fifteen minutes and targeted the German support trenches. Almost as soon as the Himalayan troops began their advance, they were hit by searchlight-guided German machine gun fire that a Gurkha on the right had drawn by cheering against orders. Nonetheless, some of the Gurkha platoons broke into the enemy line and killed thirty Germans at close quarters. For three hours and under pressure, they held a small section of the German trench, with the Gurkha Subadar Dalkesar Gurung taking charge in the absence of British officers. The Gurkhas withdrew at midnight under the cover of prearranged artillery fire. The 2nd/3rd Gurkhas had lost sixty-one casualties and the 2nd/39th Garhwals forty.³⁶

³³ E. Catto and J. Lawford, *Solah Punjab: The History of the 16th Punjab Regiment* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1967), p. 37.

³⁴ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 5 December 1914, and V. Chirol Letter to Hardinge, 5 December 1914; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 72; and W. Doegen (ed.), *Unter Fremden Völkern: Eine neue Völkerkunde* (Berlin: Otto Stohlberg, Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1925), p. 128.

³⁵ Doegen, *Unter Fremden Völkern*, p. 128; and Duffy, *Through German Eyes*, p. 61.

³⁶ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 127; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 97–98; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 97–101.

Three days later, at 8.55pm on 16 November, a 125-strong party of the 6th Jats broke into two occupied German saps around 100 yards from the Indian line. Having declined preliminary artillery support in the interests of surprise, the Jats moved forward in scattered groups. German fire came upon them in the open, but they forced their way into the saps, getting the better of the defenders in rifle fire and bayonet duels. The Indian Corps' heavy artillery then shelled the German support trenches. For an hour, the Jats held the saps under pressure, before retiring under prearranged field artillery fire. 'Great credit is due to the men of the assaulting party', wrote Forbes Macbean, their brigade commander who had been badly wounded at the Dargai Heights in 1897 with the Gordon Highlanders, 'they displayed praiseworthy steadiness and grit.'³⁷ In Willcocks' estimation, the Jats' attack was 'a small enterprise [typical] of the manner in which our Indian troops worked in those days, whilst the ranks still contained some of the fully trained men with which the Corps arrived in France'.³⁸

On 23–24 November, a series of Indian small attacks were made to regain a central stretch of the Indian line near Festubert, hours after it had been captured by German infantry. At 4.30pm on the 23rd, some Indian regiments made frontal assaults on the lost line. They were supported by a preliminary artillery bombardment from all the locally available guns. The shelling killed around 100 German defenders, but was too weak to neutralise them all. The 6th Jats advanced against the heart of the captured line. They rushed forward in small groups, only to be stopped in their tracks by unshelled German machine gunners.

The 2nd/8th Gurkhas fared better. By 8.30pm they had the right of the lost line in their hands, having attacked in scattered groups that broke in at two points, and then worked towards one another along the trench in between. They had cleared the defenders as they went using a novel combination of jam-tin bombs and rushes by small bayonet-flashing parties, and shouting in Gurkhali to check whether or not more Germans lay ahead.

That night the 1st/39th Garhwals retook the left of the lost line in similar fashion, after they broke in at the far-left end. One Garhwali party led by Naik Darwan Sing Negi, and containing the British officer Frederick Lumb, pushed up the trench floor to flush out the German defenders, using bayonets but not jam-tin bombs, their supply of these having run

³⁷ TNA, WO/95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1914), 'Report No. 222', by Major-General F. Macbean; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 101–02; and Hailes, *Jat Regiment*, vol. 1, pp. 77–78.

³⁸ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 112.

out. Meanwhile three other Garhwali parties, on Lumb's orders, moved above ground on either side of the trench, pouring in rapid rifle fire.³⁹ 'Although twice wounded in the head and once in the arm, [Darwan Sing Negi] refused to give in, and continued to fight without even reporting that he was wounded', Merewether and Smith recorded. 'When the struggle was over and the company fell in, his company commander saw that he was streaming with blood from head to foot. For his most conspicuous valour Naik Darwan Sing was awarded the Victoria Cross, being the second Indian soldier to receive this honour.'⁴⁰ By dawn on 24 November, all the lost line had been retaken, at the cost of 1,150 Indian casualties.⁴¹

'The German army is beginning to realize the fighting qualities of the Indian troops', *The Times* reported on 6 December, when it published a German infantryman's letter home from Flanders penned in the aftermath of an Indian attack. 'For the first time we had to fight against the Indians', the letter read,

[They] are not to be underrated . . . those who stormed our lines seemed either drunk or possessed with an evil spirit. [They] rushed upon us as suddenly as if they were shot out of a fog, so that at first we were completely taken by surprise. . . . Truly these brown enemies were not to be despised. With buttends, bayonets, swords and daggers we fought each other, and we had bitter hard work, which, however, was lightened by reinforcements which arrived quickly, before we drove the fellows out of the trenches.⁴²

Further praise came from German troops interrogated as BEF prisoners. 'The Indian troops who attacked the trenches last night showed great determination, and their advance was well conducted', said one soldier of the XIV Corps, after fighting them near Festubert on 23–24 November. Their rifle fire, he added, was 'very accurate'.⁴³ In general, the German prisoners who had fought the Indian Corps 'spoke highly of the Indians'.⁴⁴

While on the defensive in 1915, the Indian battalions' most conspicuous use of their north-west frontier training to make small attacks with

³⁹ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 134; and TNA, WO/95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1914), 'Report 298/A', by Lieutenant-Colonel Swiney.

⁴⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 131.

⁴¹ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 104–08; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 116–37; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 120–36.

⁴² *The Times*, 6 December 1914, p. 1.

⁴³ TNA, WO 157/597: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (November 1914), 'Report I.G. 270, Evidence of Vice-Feldwebel Braun (captured 24 November 1914), 112th Regiment, XIV Corps'.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 'Report on Examination of 97 prisoners of XV Army Corps (25 November 1914)', and 'Report on 3 Prisoners Examined at Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade Field Ambulance (25 November 1914)'.

artillery support was at Second Ypres. In the early afternoon of 26 April, when the Indian units of the Lahore Division counter-attacked across open farmland, several of them were filled with regulars who had been well trained in hill warfare before 1914; many of these regulars were new to the Indian Corps as casualty replacements. The Indians' job was to advance in a wide line, of two brigades side by side, to capture the German trenches 1,500 yards away. The ground before them was open, with very few natural obstacles. It rose 500 yards to a first, slight ridge, sloped down gently for a similar distance towards a small stream in a ditch, and then rose again smoothly for another 500 yards up to a second ridge and the German frontline. The Indians had such negligible artillery support that when they went forwards they were effectively on their own against numerous German riflemen, machine gunners and artillery batteries, all intact and free to shoot.

At 1.20pm, the assaulting Indian line appeared on the crest of the first ridge. Their line presented an easy target because its formation – as had been ordered from above – was flat and slow moving. It was immediately hit hard by German fire, causing many of its Indian companies to change tack. Instinctively, they resorted to their pre-war hill warfare training. Among the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force), the two leading companies had long-serving officers and men of the 57th and three other Frontier Force regiments. One of these companies was a complete unit of Sikhs and Yusufzais of the Guides infantry; the other had Pathans and other men originally of Wilde's Rifles and of the 54th Sikhs and 55th Coke's Rifles. From the first ridge crest, both companies broke into small, scattered groups, darting their way forwards in short rushes. They persisted at great pace under heavy fire to within fifty yards of the German line, a point beyond which they found it impossible to press. They were soon forced to retire, having lost 265 casualties.⁴⁵

The 40th Pathans' two leading companies, meanwhile, one of Punjabi Muslims and the other of Orakzais, had also pushed on in small groups by means of short, pacey rushes, getting right up to the German line. In support, the regiment's two other companies – of Afridis, Yusufzais and Dogras – were led forwards in small groups at pace by Subadar Jehan-dad Khan and Jemadar Lehna Singh. The support companies reached the upwards slope before the German line, where they held on against close-range fire despite having only slight cover. The regiment's machine gun crews tried to establish themselves nearby, but were shot down while

⁴⁵ Condon, *Frontier Force Rifles*, p. 84; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 306–08.

carrying their guns on their shoulders. Like the Frontier Force companies, those of the 40th Pathans were forced back. The toll on them had been 300 casualties.⁴⁶ In the eyes of their divisional commander, ‘the troops did all that it was humanly possible to do.’⁴⁷ Their brigade commander thought likewise: ‘it [was] wonderful that any men were able to reach the enemy’s trenches under such conditions.’⁴⁸ After Haig had analysed reports of the action, he was particularly impressed by the 40th Pathans. ‘The 40th Pathans . . . fought determinedly, [but] the CGS [William Robertson] only gave grudging praise to them! So possibly he may be prejudiced against the Indian troops.’⁴⁹

Scouting

The Indian battalions’ pre-war scouts, armed with their Lee-Enfield Mark IIIs, were especially useful for sniper duties in Flanders. ‘The Pathans are getting to work already’, Philip Howell, a Home Army cavalry colonel formerly of the Frontier Force, wrote on 25 October 1914:

Yesterday we [the 4th Hussars] handed over our position to a native regiment [the 129th Baluchis], mostly Pathans. It was fun meeting them again. . . . A German sniper worried us all day from a hidden position about 800 yards away. So we sent out a wild young Mahsud to stalk him – and he came back in less than an hour with the German sniper’s rifle!⁵⁰

Later that month and through November, many German snipers who had infiltrated the BEF line were operating behind it. To find those behind the Indian Corps’ line, several Indian regiments – including the 15th Sikhs, 41st Dogras and 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force) – sent seasoned scouts to comb the farms, houses and other hiding places. The scouts succeeded in shooting or capturing most of their quarry.⁵¹

As dark approached one evening in May 1915, an Afridi scout of the 57th Wilde’s Rifles (Frontier Force), Lance-Naik Sher Khan, went deep into no man’s land near Neuve Chapelle to kill a well-hidden German sniper. He ventured out unarmed, having concocted a special plan. He

⁴⁶ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 301–04; Waters, *Forty Thieves*, pp. 137–44; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 250.

⁴⁷ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 265, quoting a report by Henry Keary.

⁴⁸ TNA, WO 256/4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 5 May 1915. Quoting Peter Strickland (British army), in command of the Jullundur Brigade.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1 and 5 May 1915. For a similar attack at pace by pre-war Indian regulars at Second Ypres, see Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 336–37, on the 1st/1st and 1st/4th Gurkhas on 30 April.

⁵⁰ KCL/LHCMA, Howell Papers: Howell Letter to His Wife, 25 October 1914 (6/1/1–47).

⁵¹ *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, p. 16; Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, p. 47; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 26 and 49.

crawled softly towards a dead Highlander's body lying in the middle of the sniper's firing zone. On reaching the dead body, he delicately retrieved a loaded Lee-Enfield by its side, before arranging a white spat from its ankle to look like a white face peeking over it. This was to trick the sniper into suspecting a live body might be behind the dead one, and thereby draw a shot to reveal his position. Sher Khan then withdrew to lie alert twenty yards off. Soon the German sniper took a shot at the spat. Sher Khan spotted him and shot him dead. Half an hour later, his British officer said, the Afridi 'returned with the Hun's rifle and the Highlander's under his arm; in his right hand he carried the Hun's helmet, a grisly sight, as his bullet had crashed through the man's brain.'⁵²

In June 1915, Lance-Naik Gul Mast, an Orakzai sniper of the 40th Pathans, detected a camouflaged German sniper in the thick summer leaves of a tree in no man's land. Gul Mast deftly took up a position of his own in front of the Indian line, and, using telescopic sights recently issued to the Indian Corps, shot down his German counterpart.⁵³ Later that summer, a pre-war scout of the 89th Punjabis, Havildar Chiragh Din, shot some German snipers in broad daylight while concealed in the long summer grass of no man's land.⁵⁴

More routinely, the Indian snipers targeted German troops who were not snipers, keeping watch to shoot men who showed themselves. 'An Afridi who had been some days in the trenches', wrote an IMS doctor, 'was most reluctant to leave his trench; he said that lying sniping all day reminded him so much of home life in his village.'⁵⁵ In 1914, even though the Indian snipers had no telescopic sights, their fire was generally accurate.⁵⁶ When they did have telescopic sights in 1915, accuracy, of course, became easier.⁵⁷

The Indian battalions were required to gather intelligence on the German lines opposite, for instance on the names and numbers of battalions, or on trench layout. They had ready-made experts in their pre-war scouts, whether Pathan, Gurkha, Sikh or otherwise. Again and again these crawled right up to the German line unseen to gather

⁵² Candler, *Sepoy*, pp. 78–80. Also see CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 19 May 1915.

⁵³ Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 154.

⁵⁴ N. Geoghegan, *History of the 1st Battalion 8th Punjab Regiment* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1928), p. 19.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 15 December 1914, p. 12.

⁵⁶ TNA, WO 157/598: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (December 1914), see 'Diary of Musketeer Otto Ludwig'. *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, p. 23, and *47th Sikhs*, p. 42.

⁵⁷ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 28 July 1915; *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, p. 46; Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, p. 60–61; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 154.

valuable information.⁵⁸ The Afridi and Mahsud scouts proved especially adept⁵⁹ – even if at times they could not resist revealing their presence: when the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) were in line at Givenchy in December 1914, 'at daybreak on the 21st, Subadar Arsla Khan went out with two [Afridis] and reconnoitred the enemy's position. He ascertained that they were still in a section of the left trench, and succeeded in shooting several of them at their barricade.'⁶⁰ In summer 1915, one private of the Territorials in line alongside a Pathan unit learned that 'these Pathans were masters of scoutcraft':

Dressed in overalls, camouflaged with yellow and green paint splashes, with faces and hands likewise disguised and an upstanding fringe of rushes as headgear, they became part of the undergrowth [in no man's land], through which they could creep without snapping a twig. . . . Sometimes as one of our scouts was creeping along with elaborate caution, his ankle would be seized by a hand, and looking down in alarm he would see the laughing face of a Pathan silently enjoying the success of his little joke.⁶¹

Indian scouts frequently crowned their reconnaissances by thieving trophies. In August 1915, two long-serving scouts of the 47th Sikhs delicately stole a five-foot squared German trench sign boasting of a recent German victory in Poland (it read '*Warschau gefallen!*').⁶²

The greatest single reconnaissance by an Indian scout in Flanders was by Naik Ayub Khan, a Mahsud of the 124th Baluchis, attached to the 129th. For Harold Lewis, his company commander, he was 'the bravest man I ever knew'.⁶³ On his own initiative, Ayub Khan decided to try to enter the German trenches to pick up whatever useful information he could for Indian Corps intelligence. At dawn on 22 June 1915, while out on scouting patrol near Neuve Chapelle, he hid his rifle and ammunition in no man's land and walked up to the enemy wire, where he managed to get into conversation with the Germans beyond. He persuaded them to let him into their trench, and then talked himself not only into a brigade

⁵⁸ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 28 July 1915; IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 140–41; and TNA, WO 157/604: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (July 1915), report on 1st/4th Gurkhas; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 96; *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, pp. 23 and 138; Geoghegan, *8th Punjab*, p. 25; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 62–63, 202 and 392–96; *47th Sikhs*, p. 38–41 and 100; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 88 and 314–16.

⁵⁹ TNA, WO 157/604: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (July 1915), reports on 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force); Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, pp. 48–49; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. 257–58; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 173.

⁶⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 203.

⁶¹ D. Lewis (ed.), *Remembrances of Hell: Remembrances of Hell* (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 1997), p. 68.

⁶² *47th Sikhs*, p. 101.

⁶³ Paice, *Tip and Run*, p. 261.

headquarters, but also into a divisional headquarters at Marquillies, four miles behind the German line. There he was interviewed by a general-leutnant, with whom he struck a cash deal for his return to his regiment to encourage a mass desertion. Once back in the Indian trenches, having retrieved his rifle and ammunition, he made a detailed report on all he had seen, including the numbers of German regiments and the locations of enemy ammunition depots. His information proved accurate and useful; the Indian Corps' artillery promptly shelled and blew up the ammunition depots he had located.⁶⁴ He was recommended for the Victoria Cross, but was handed the Indian Order of Merit instead, seemingly because the War Office did not wish to condone or encourage his style of reconnaissance.⁶⁵ 'The story of his adventures is unique in the history of the war', avowed F. E. Smith, '[it] illustrates . . . a sangfroid under circumstances of concentrated danger which could hardly be surpassed.'⁶⁶

Trench Digging and Explosives

The BEF's trenches in October 1914 were little more than shallow and unlinked ditches. They varied in breadth from twelve to twenty-five feet and provided little cover, in some cases being too shallow to cover a man kneeling. Those that the Indian Corps took over lay on clay ground with a particularly high water table. They were very wet; many were waist deep with water or liquid mud. The Indian non-pioneer battalions, for whom trench digging and setting up field cover had been part of their pre-war training and small war experiences, were prepared to set about improving their ditch-trenches without delay. They did so, with their Sirhind tools proving serviceable. For example, at the start of November in a section of the Indian line running through tobacco and cabbage fields by Neuve Chapelle, the 1st/ and 2nd/39th Garhwals deepened their firing line, and foraged in abandoned houses for wooden doors and beds to use as supports for trench walls and parapets. In other parts of the Indian line, the water in the lowest-lying trenches caused the earth built up at their sides to spread and sink. Where this happened continually, the Indian non-pioneer units set up forward-lying, north-west frontier-style pickets.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ TNA, WO 157/605: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (August 1915), 14 August Report; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 387–90; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 57; and Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', p. 8, and *With the Indians*, pp. 304–09.

⁶⁵ Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 61; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 304.

⁶⁶ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 387.

⁶⁷ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 119 and 122; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 56, 65, 90 and 93–94; Catto, *Solah Punjab*, p. 44; Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, p. 46; and Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 22.

Meanwhile the Lahore and Meerut Divisions' technical units – the 34th Sikh Pioneers, 107th Pioneers and four companies of the 1st and 3rd Sappers and Miners – made good use of their pre-war specialist training, just as they had in Somaliland, Abor country and elsewhere. They helped the non-pioneer battalions to dig; they worked on drainage; they helped to set up fortified machine gun posts; they laid barbed wire in no man's land; they constructed roads connecting different parts of the Indian line and leading to the rear; they joined in several of the Indian small group attacks of November and December, speedily digging forward communication trenches towards Indian troops defending captured German saps, and filling in temporarily occupied enemy trenches with earth.⁶⁸

The sappers and miners also used their pre-war training in explosives. Initially, they blew up houses overlooking the Indian line that German snipers and machine gunners might use.⁶⁹ They then turned their attentions to the German line itself. On the night of 9–10 November 1914, men of the 1st Sappers and Miners hid a fougasse with an electric trigger (a device of the same type used against the Zakkas in 1908) in a temporarily unmanned German trench close to the right of the Indian line. Once the trench had become occupied the following day, they detonated the charge. 'Half a German fell into the Bareilly Brigade trenches', Willcocks recorded in his diary.⁷⁰

Recovering Rifles, Rescuing Casualties and Taking Prisoners

Because the Indian troops had been trained in pre-war India to treasure their rifles, they placed an excessively high value on those they lost in no man's land. They often risked their lives to recover them. Long-serving men of the 47th Sikhs, for instance, did this on several occasions in 1914 and 1915.⁷¹ Another Indian habit carried over from pre-war training was collecting expended rifle magazines; the old Indian regulars looked on disapprovingly at the general practice among the BEF's British army units of freely discarding them. 'To the Indian soldier who had been trained to regard the loss of a clip of cartridges as an offence against God', observed one British officer of the 129th Baluchis, 'Flanders was one continuous blasphemy.'⁷²

⁶⁸ MacMunn, *Pioneers*, p. 409; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 97, 107 and 149–50; Sandes, *Sappers*, pp. 444–45; and Tugwell, *Pioneers*, pp. 184–92.

⁶⁹ Sandes, *Sappers*, p. 444.

⁷⁰ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 103–04.

⁷¹ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 109 and 236–37; and *47th Sikhs*, p. 47. Also see Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 89.

⁷² Moreman, 'Arms Trade', p. 202; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 63.

When the Indian battalions' officers and men were shot down in no-man's land, their bodies, dead or alive, were habitually rescued and brought back to the Indian line by pre-war regulars at great – and often fatal – risk to their own lives. Such instances were more than natural responses on behalf of comrades. They were linked to the hill warfare practice of immediately evacuating casualties, whose strong inculcation in the Indian troops before the war ensured that it was widespread among them on the European battlefield. For example, on the night of 12 December 1914, after a Khattak patrol of the 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force) had been fired on and had retreated, one of the Khattaks was left badly wounded and stranded by the German wire. Two of the others immediately returned under fire to get him, and they brought him in. A week later, a party of the same regiment was killed to a man as they tried to retrieve their British officer in similar circumstances.⁷³

There was more of the same in 1915. During Second Ypres, a Sikh named Bhan Singh, of the Guides and attached to the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force), saw his British officer shot down ahead of him in the open, near the German line and over 1,000 yards from the Indian trenches. 'Although himself severely wounded in the face, Bhan Singh's one thought was to bring him back, alive or dead. Weak as he was from his wound, he staggered along under an appalling fire, carrying his body, until he fell from exhaustion and was forced to give up the attempt, contriving, however, to bring in the dead officer's accoutrements.'⁷⁴

The soldiers of the European armies on the western front often chose to kill potential prisoners, deliberately not bringing them in for interrogation or for medical attention.⁷⁵ It is likely that at times the Indian soldiers did likewise, much as they had in small wars, either because they encountered Germans in the course of battle whom they saw as real threats and fair targets, or because they wanted to mete out reprisals for maltreatment of their own men. There was certainly provocation for the latter: at First Ypres, German troops bayoneted several wounded men of the 2nd/8th Gurkhas;⁷⁶ in April 1915 they suspended two Indian soldiers by the neck from a tree visible from Indian lines;⁷⁷ that May they set fire to some wounded Indians in no man's land.⁷⁸

⁷³ For the 59th Scinde Rifles, see Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 117; and Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, p. 49. For other regiments, see Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 208; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 89 and 301; *47th Sikhs*, p. 110; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 12.

⁷⁴ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 307.

⁷⁵ Beckett, *Ypres*, p. 144.

⁷⁶ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3092: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, February 1915), p. 25 (Appendix 76).

⁷⁷ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 338.

⁷⁸ IWM, 90/37/1: Papers of Lieutenant-Colonel J. Barnett, 34th Sikh Pioneers, Diary Entry for 9 May 1915.

The Germans were not usually so unforgiving towards the Indians, however. For most of the Indian Corps' time in Flanders, German units were ordered to take as many Indian prisoners as possible for Turko-German propaganda purposes. The order may well have led them to treat the Indians, of whom they took prisoner approximately 800, more kindly than they would have otherwise.⁷⁹ There was a brief period in October 1914 when some senior German officers instructed that no quarter be given to the Indians, out of contempt for them as 'uncivilized' or racially inferior troops unworthy of respectful treatment under the Hague Convention.⁸⁰ But quite how much the no-quarter orders were followed is doubtful. 'One story told by a havildar serves to prove that such a thing as a decent German does exist', recalled Herbert Alexander of the 9th Mule Corps:

The havildar and a few of his men lost touch with their company [in the Cavalry Corps line at First Ypres], and were taken prisoners. A German officer who had served in China in the Boxer rising of 1900 . . . spoke to them in Hindustani. He told these men that [he] had [been] directed that any Indians taken prisoner were to have their throats cut, but that he did not intend to carry out this inhuman order. He gave them food, and, when night fell, having relieved them of their rifles and bayonets, told them how to rejoin their unit.⁸¹

The Indian troops – not only as they had been trained to do, and had done, before the war, but also as they were ordered to do within the BEF – regularly took Germans prisoners and treated them humanely, including delivering them for medical treatment. They took 300 prisoners in 1914, and around 1,000 in 1915, bringing them in almost every time they captured positions where Germans surrendered.⁸² 'I could repeat', wrote Willcocks, 'numerous instances of the kind-heartedness of the Indian soldier, which place him on a very high level of humanity, and his discipline throughout the year [the Indian Corps] was in France much impressed our Allies':

Only a week after we first entered the trenches, a party of Sikhs, who had heard that the Boches intended killing all Indians who fell into their hands, were out in

⁷⁹ TNA, WO 157/597: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (November 1914), see reports on documents found on German prisoners. Also see J. French, *1914*, p. 196.

⁸⁰ TNA, WO 157/598: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (December 1914), see 'Report on Examination of Muskettier Richard Kaufmann, 170th Regiment, 3 December 1914'; Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', p. 8, *Romance*, pp. 280–81, and *With the Indians*, p. 91.

⁸¹ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 70–71.

⁸² For Indian prisoner taking in 1914, see Coleman, *Mons to Ypres*, p. 227; P. Maze, *A Frenchman in Khaki* (London: Heinemann, 1934), p. 90; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 39, 89, 104, 163 and 169–70; *47th Sikhs*, p. 31; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 91, 95, 108, 112, 123–24, 130–31, 148 and 154. For 1915, see Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 276, 445 and 456; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 210.

patrol duty in No Man's Land and captured several prisoners. These were brought into our lines, and seemed much surprised at still being alive. The Havildar, in handing them over to an officer, said – 'This is in return for the German threats against us; but we are soldiers, not dacoits.' . . . Again, near Festubert in November, two [Indian soldiers] and a German were lying severely wounded in front of our trenches. They were brought in at night; snow lay on the ground, and a biting cold wind swept over them. On arrival at the aid post one of the [Indians] died, and the German said, 'I am very sorry, because these two men, horribly wounded as they were, crawled up and lay close alongside and put warmth into my body. I felt I must die, but this kept me alive.'⁸³

Reliable evidence that IEFA's Indian troops committed any mutilations or other 'atrocities' calculated to cause unnecessary suffering has not come to light.⁸⁴ The Pathans on the western front continued not to kill or mutilate the wounded and prisoners in the service of their regiment as they might when fighting as a tribal warrior, the circumstances that triggered those ritual actions by them remaining exclusive to war in their tribal areas. Indeed, the Pathans' choice of trench battle trophy was predictable: it was never German body parts, but always the standard-issue Mauser rifle or the Germans' specialist sniper rifles.⁸⁵

As for the Gurkhas, in using their khukuris in trench fighting they seem not to have decapitated Germans as they had occasionally done Pathans before the war, but to have stuck to the letter of orders from their British officers that such conduct was unacceptable.⁸⁶ On 10 March 1915, one captain of the Territorials claimed to have seen 'a Gurkha coming across in front from the German lines, holding something in his hands – and when I looked it was the face of a German! It wasn't his neck or his head, just his face cut vertically down. He was bringing it back as a trophy, and very pleased he was too!'⁸⁷ Yet it may be assumed that the Gurkha would have been carrying something caused by shellfire rather than his khukuri. It was the first morning of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, and his regiment, the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas, had just moved onto some German trenches obliterated by what was then the heaviest bombardment in the Royal Artillery's history.

⁸³ Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', 8–9.

⁸⁴ Though there is some evidence of rough handling – see E. Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, new edition (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 152.

⁸⁵ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 70.

⁸⁶ TNA, WO 157/598: *Indian Corps Intelligence Summary* (December 1914); Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 168 and 218; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 187–88.

⁸⁷ Captain A. Agius, 1st/3rd (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment, Royal Fusiliers (TF), Attached to the Indian Corps, March 1915, quoted in L. Macdonald, *1914–1918, Voices & Images of the Great War* (London: Penguin 1991), p. 66.

The root accusations of ‘atrocities’ by Indian troops in Flanders were in fact written down in Germany before IEFA had landed at Marseilles, as propaganda to discredit the Allied cause by showing that the Indians were morally unfit to serve in Europe. On 21 September 1914, intelligence from the continent reached 10 Downing Street that German propagandists had started to draw up ‘lying legends of [Indian] atrocities’ for publication once the Indian army had joined western front battle. ‘We hear’, wrote the prime minister, ‘that the Germans have already compiled a prospective dossier of the Indian troops’ nameless outrages. After the bombardment of Rheims Cathedral – the worst thing they have done – I doubt if the world will listen to them.’⁸⁸

The BEF’s British Battalions

While the Indian Corps was on the defensive, the tactical conduct of its British battalions from the pre-war Army in India chimed with the old differences between Army in India and Home Army training. Its British units that had been trained with the Home Army between 1902 and 1908, including the 1st/Manchesters and 2nd/Leicesters, were the strongest at fighting in small skirmishing groups. It was the 1st/Manchesters and 2nd/Leicesters who carried out the most effective forward-defensive assaults by the Indian divisions’ British army elements. On 19 December 1914, the Leicesters, on the Indian left, captured 300 yards of German trench by making rushes in small and flexible groups; on the 20th, the Manchesters, on the Indian right, advanced in much the same way to drive back the Germans in the village of Givenchy. The Indian Corps’ British battalions that had been stationed in India since 1900 or so, among them the 2nd/Black Watch and 1st/Seaforths, did not make comparable small attacks, their training in India having not imparted to them a Home Army-style regular warfare skirmishing capability.⁸⁹

None of the Indian Corps’ British army units, however, carried out raids or defensive attacks using flexible small groups as often, or in quite the same style, as its Indian army units did. This reflected that across the high-quality Indian battalions were small group skills of a kind derived from pre-1914 hill warfare training, and which British battalions did not have. Robert Waters, a captain of the 40th Pathans who was wounded at Second Ypres on 26 April 1915, rightly complained to James Edmonds that the BEF’s official history was wrong to claim that in the Lahore

⁸⁸ Brock and Brock, *Asquith*, Letter no. 165 (21 September 1914).

⁸⁹ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 142; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 183–86.

Division's counter-attack that day the British regiments had set an example to the Indian. The 40th Pathans and Frontier Force companies had gone quicker and got closer to the German line than either the 1st/Manchesters or the Connaught Rangers.⁹⁰ When Haig had reviewed the reports of the counter-attack, he found them 'interesting as showing the fighting qualities and determination of certain regiments. . . . The usual proportion of killed to wounded in 1 to 3. The figures of the 40th Pathans seem to show that they fought determinedly. On the other hand, the 244 missing of the Connaughts and only 8 men killed looks bad! Perhaps there may be an explanation!'⁹¹

IEFA's Indian battalions' displays of scouting skills were not matched by its British battalions. The British army, after all, had not taken scoutcraft so seriously in pre-war India; besides, it had no Pathans. In early 1915, the 2nd/Black Watch began to pay fresh attention to scouting, organising its own scouts along new lines. These scouts, one officer of the battalion noted, 'did some fine work, patrolling far in advance of our lines over ground not yet consolidated by the Germans'. Still, he admitted, it was mixed parties of Highlanders and Pathans of the 58th Vaughan's Rifles (Frontier Force), out in no man's land near Neuve Chapelle, that 'formed, in the opinion of Major Wauchope (in charge of the [Black Watch's] scouts), the best patrols he ever worked with. The Pathans were unequalled in 'stalking' and gaining an enemy trench unseen'.⁹²

In France and Belgium in 1914, the BEF's Home Army battalions that had been stationed mostly in Britain since 1902 greatly benefited from their pre-war training for regular warfare, for instance in taking advantage of natural field cover, entrenching, or using the rapid individual rifle fire taught at the Hythe School of Musketry.⁹³ Like their sister battalions of the Army in India, though, they did not have scouting skills comparable to the Indian army's. The Pathans and other Indian scouts got the better of German snipers within hours of arriving at the front in October 1914, but it took the British army until mid-1915 to start treating sniping as a science, or around twenty years after the Indian service. Hesketh Hesketh-Pritchard, a pre-war big-game hunter in the Americas who was

⁹⁰ Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 142.

⁹¹ TNA, WO 256/4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 1 May 1915.

⁹² A. Wauchope, *A History of the Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) in the Great War, 1914–1918*, 3 vols. (London: Medici, 1925), vol. 1, p. 180.

⁹³ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/1759: 'Confidential Report of a Conference of General Officers Held at Delhi, 22 to 24 February 1917', p. 5; M. Connelly, *Steady the Buffs! A Regiment, a Region and the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 48–49 and 52; A. Herbert, *Mons, Anzac and Kut* (London: Arnold, 1919), pp. 17 and 42; S. Jones, 'Tactical Development', pp. 172–83; Maurice, *Forty Days in 1914* (London: Constable, 1919), pp. 183–91; and Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal*, p. 207.

sent to Flanders in February 1915 as a British army press officer, may not have been the British service's first sniping enthusiast, but he was the most influential. That summer, by personal request, he became the inaugural British divisional sniping officer, before he inspired a new system of British battalion sniping officers and army sniping schools from 1916.⁹⁴ As he acknowledged, the Indian army played a part in his efforts:

In 1915 [to make a start] towards that organization of sniping in which I so much desired to have a hand[,] I laid the matter before my [supervising staff] Officer, Lieut.-Colonel A. G. Stuart, of the 40th Pathans, than whom surely no finer officer went to the war [and who was attached to a Home Army division at the time]. He listened with both sympathy and interest. [I said], 'The [British troops] have no idea of concealment, and many of them are easy targets to the Hun snipers. . . . There don't seem to be any proper authorities, sir. The officers know no more than the men.' . . . Colonel Stuart said nothing, so I went on: 'Will you help me to get a job of this kind, sir?' . . . 'Well', said Colonel Stuart at length, 'we will talk to people about it and see what they say.' After that, Colonel Stuart often questioned me, and I pointed out to him our continued and heavy losses, the complete German superiority, the necessity not only of a course of training but, more important still, the selection of the right men to train and also their value to Intelligence if provided with telescopes, and made a dozen other suggestions, all very far-reaching. When I look back now on these suggestions, which came from a very amateur soldier of no military experience, I can only marvel at Colonel Stuart's patience; but he was not only patient, he was also most helpful and sympathetic. Without him this very necessary reform might, and probably would, have been strangled at birth, or would have only come into the Army, if it had come at all, at a much later time. Colonel Stuart not only allowed me to speak of my ideas to various officers in high command, but even did so himself on my behalf.⁹⁵

From Tsingtao to Tanga

The tactical qualities of the Indian regulars who before the war had been well trained in hill warfare were shown against the Central Powers not just on the western front, but also in Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean. In North China in 1914, the 36th Sikhs with their full complement of pre-war regulars helped the Japanese army to besiege the German seaport-fortress of Tsingtao, which was defended by 4,500 German marines, infantry regulars and reservists within an expansive trench system on the city's hilly landward approaches. Landing on the Yellow Sea coast to

⁹⁴ Sheffield (ed.), *War on the Western Front: In the Trenches of the First World War* (Oxford: Osprey, 2007), pp. 237–38.

⁹⁵ H. Hesketh-Pritchard, *Sniping in France: With Notes on the Scientific Training of Scouts, Observers, and Snipers* (London: Hutchinson, 1920), pp. 4–9.

the south of Tsingtao on 23 October, the Sikhs completed in good time a tiring thirty-mile march through typhoon rains and deep mud. They then spent ten days in the water-logged Japanese front trenches, digging with their Sirhind tools, and remaining steady under shrapnel and high explosive shellfire.⁹⁶

In Mesopotamia for thirteen months from November 1914, fourteen Indian battalions of IEFD of the 6th Division and the 30th Indian Brigade (a wartime creation) served against detachments of four Turkish divisions that were supported by field artillery and Arab irregulars. Those fourteen Indian battalions were all high-quality pre-war units, such as the 7th Rajputs and 24th Punjabis. In the deserts, marshes and palm groves around Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf and for 400 miles up the slushy banks of the River Tigris towards Baghdad, they used their pre-war hill warfare skills to win a succession of minor victories, described by Herbert Asquith as 'brilliantly conducted'.⁹⁷ They captured many Turkish trenches by attacking in small, flexible groups backed by mountain and field artillery, with their companies pressing forwards in the face of shell, machine gun and rifle fire. They also made good use of their pre-war scouts.⁹⁸ By November 1915, most of their original troops had become casualties and been replaced by drafts of lesser quality recruited since 1914, and their fighting abilities had significantly weakened. This underpinned their defeat that month at Ctesiphon (or Selmān Pak), twenty miles south of Baghdad, and their subsequent retreat into Kut al-Amara, where they were besieged from December.⁹⁹

At New Year 1916, the 28th Indian Brigade (another wartime creation) was among the Indian reinforcements trying to crack the Turkish trenches before Kut. The brigade had three Frontier Force units: the 51st Sikhs, 53rd Sikhs and 56th Punjabis, all with their pre-war regulars intact. On 7 and 13 January, with minimal support from British field and Indian mountain guns, they relied on their hill warfare training to attack across open ground in small groups, in precisely the same manner as their sister Frontier Force units and the 40th Pathans had at Second Ypres. Thus on the 13th,

⁹⁶ E. Knox, 'The Siege of Tsingtao', *Journal of the United Service Institution of India* 44 (1915), 267–91.

⁹⁷ P. Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers & Men* (London: Purnell, 1974), p. 431.

⁹⁸ Carver, *Turkish Front*, pp. 11–13 and 102–17; Hardinge, *Indian Years*, pp. 120 and 124; and Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, p. 72.

⁹⁹ N. Gardner, 'Sepoys and the Siege of Kut-al-Amara, December 1915–April 1916', *War in History* 11 (2004), p. 312.

The [53rd Sikhs and 56th Punjabis'] attack was pushed forward with speed and determination. Hostile fire was encountered at about eleven hundred yards from [the Turkish trenches], and when they got within about six hundred yards the [Sikhs and Punjabis] began to suffer heavy casualties. But they had been instructed to attack with great vigour and, in spite of these heavy losses, [they] responded grandly. The ground, which was dotted with low bushes, had been cleared within five hundred yards of the [enemy line], the Turks having marked the ranges on it by sticks at every hundred metres; and with the exception of the bushes it was practically destitute of cover except for a shallow irrigation cut some fifty yards short of the [Turkish position]. In a fine rush, the 56th, well supported by the 53rd, reached this irrigation cut and then beyond it . . . but their losses . . . were so heavy, especially in the last fifty yards or so, that they could get no further.¹⁰⁰

'I have never seen individual men behave so well', wrote an onlooking British officer:

I saw men in that deadly [fifty yards beyond the irrigation cut] get up singly and make a dash forward until killed. Not one here and there but man after man and not by order or any leader. Anyone who had once gone to ground . . . knows the courage required to get up and go on even if a leader calls for a party of chaps to dash forward together. I have never seen such heroism.¹⁰¹

For the defence of the Suez Canal in 1914, IEFs E and F provided twenty high-quality pre-war Indian battalions. These dug trenches along the Canal's west bank using their Sirhind tools, and fifteen of them, including four of the Frontier Force units, were holding the frontline at Suez at the end of January 1915. As Charles Callwell acknowledged, 'being [pre-war] regulars, [they] were fully qualified to take part in serious military operations'.¹⁰² When the Turks made their great attack on the Canal by means of eight columns that tried to cross it on the night of 2–3 February 1915, their failure was guaranteed in the early light by the Indian regulars' accurate rifle and machine gun fire, in combination with shelling from Indian mountain guns and a naval flotilla. There were approaching 1,000 Turkish casualties, many of them shot by the Indians; the Indian casualties were almost nil.¹⁰³ 'The morning after the main fight', wrote George Wyman Bury, a British intelligence officer on the Canal,

a little Syrian subaltern passed through my hands. He had been slightly wounded in the leg and still showed signs of nervous shock, so I made him sit down with

¹⁰⁰ Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, pp. 231–33 and 251–52.

¹⁰¹ Mason, *Matter of Honour*, pp. 440–41.

¹⁰² Callwell, *Dardanelles*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ MacMunn, *Military Operations in Egypt and Palestine* (London: HMSO, 1928), pp. 35–37; and Strachan, *To Arms*, pp. 739–42.

a cigarette while I questioned him. He had been in charge of a pontoon manned by his party and said that they had got halfway across the Canal in perfect silence when ‘the mouth of hell opened’ and the pontoon was sinking in a swirl of stricken men amid a hail of projectiles. He and two others swam to our side of the Canal, where they surrendered to an Indian detachment. . . . The dead in the Canal were kept down by the weight of their ammunition for some time, and the shifting sand on the Sinaitic side was always revealing hastily-buried corpses on their line of retreat.¹⁰⁴

‘A great deal of criticism has been flung at this [defence] of the Canal’, Wyman Bury added. ‘There are some who, in their military ardour, would have had [the Indian regiments there] pursue the enemy into the desert.’¹⁰⁵ Had the Indian units done so, they would surely have applied their pre-war hill warfare skills, just as four of them did soon after when they were sent to Gallipoli to fight the Turkish First Army. Ian Hamilton, in command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force that landed at Gallipoli in April 1915, had asked the War Office for some high-quality Indian battalions in light of their specialist skills. The 14th Sikhs, 69th Punjabis, 89th Punjabis and 1st/6th Gurkhas duly arrived. ‘They made my mouth water’, Hamilton told Kitchener, ‘especially the 6th Gurkhas.’¹⁰⁶

Between 10 and 13 May 1915, at Cape Helles on the Gallipoli peninsula’s southern tip where high and jagged cliffs overlooked the Mediterranean beaches, the 1st/6th Gurkhas conducted a north-west frontier-style advance. This was orchestrated by their commander posted from the Frontier Force, the Tirah veteran Charles Bruce. Charged with pushing forwards the left of the British line at the Cape 500 yards against strongly held Turkish trenches on the cliff top, known as the ‘Bluff Redoubt’, Bruce began by sending out his scouts on a difficult night-time reconnaissance. They had not only to move along broken beach ground, but also to climb a steep cliff, right up to the Turkish lines. Once his scouts had brought back the necessary information, Bruce planned a night assault that went in after dark on the 12th, with support from field and heavy artillery. Bruce personally led his Gurkha companies as they attacked in flexible groups. Some swarmed up the cliff faces; others, to their right, moved out of Indian trenches at the top, across level ground. They successfully stormed their target line, knocking out machine gun posts and shooting down several Turkish riflemen, before digging in to consolidate

¹⁰⁴ G. Wyman-Bury, *Pan-Islam* (London: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 28–34.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁶ I. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), vol. 1, see entry for 2 April 1915.

their gains.¹⁰⁷ Hamilton was delighted. ‘The Gurkhas have stalked the Bluff Redoubt and have carried it with a rush! They are absolutely the boys for this class of country.’¹⁰⁸ John Patterson, the renowned hunter of the Tsavo lions in British East Africa and an old friend of Bruce’s, visited the Gurkhas’ trenches in June. ‘Bruce told me of the valuable report brought by [his scouts], on the strength of which he took his men up the . . . cliff’, he wrote. ‘The Gurkhas succeeded owing to good reconnoitring work.’¹⁰⁹

Also that June at Gallipoli, a Gurkha rifleman used his pre-war training in khud racing and hill warfare rearguards to avoid Turkish fire in broad daylight. Having carried out an abortive plan of his own to hide by the Turkish wire (he had meant to add an element of surprise to a Gurkha company attack he had thought was forthcoming, but which never came) he found himself unable to move without drawing Turkish attention. ‘He therefore pretended to be dead and lay absolutely still for hours’, Patterson learned,

not even daring to move his head, except when his neck got very stiff, and then only by pushing his hat up a fraction of an inch, so that he might slowly twist his head inside it without showing any movement. At last he could stand the strain no longer, so he leaped up, raced in a zigzag to his own trenches amid a hail of bullets, and, carefully avoiding a low spot where the Turks had concentrated their fire, expecting him to go in that way, he leaped over the highest part of the parapet and escaped scot-free.¹¹⁰

The other Indian battalions at Gallipoli displayed their pre-war qualities. On 4 June the 14th Sikhs, as part of a wide British advance from Cape Helles towards the village of Krithia, attacked up a ravine against a well-fortified Turkish line. The Sikhs’ platoons rushed forwards determinedly against devastating rifle and machine-gun fire, tearing their way through the barbed wire at the end of the ravine to capture the Turkish front trench. They were soon forced to withdraw, having lost 9 British officers killed and 3 wounded, and over 400 Sikh casualties. This left them only 135 strong. ‘So bang goes one of the finest regiments of the Indian army’, wrote one of their British officers.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Bruce, *Wanderer*, p. 236; and Lucas, *Empire at War*, vol. 5, pp. 247–49.

¹⁰⁸ I. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. 1, see entry for 13 May 1915.

¹⁰⁹ J. Patterson, *With the Zionists in Gallipoli* (London: Hutchinson, 1916), p. 186.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹¹¹ Carver, *Turkish Front*, p. 51; R. Chhina, ‘Their Mercenary Calling: The Indian Army on Gallipoli, 1915’, in A. Ekins (ed.), *Gallipoli: A Ridge Too Far* (Wollombi: Exisle Publishing, 2013), p. 243; and Prior, *Gallipoli: The End of the Myth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 150.

IEFB, as a repository for low-quality Indian units of the 9th Division, was always a likely source of less reliable performance. On the early afternoon of 4 November 1914, during Force B's calamitous attack on Tanga, the 63rd Palamcottahs were easily seen off by the Schütztruppen, the locally recruited bush warfare specialists. Advancing in a flat line through thick bush, tall grass and a rubber plantation, the Palamcottahs moved timidly, wilting in the heat of the sun and unsure of what to do against snipers hidden in the trees ahead. When they neared the main German positions on the outskirts of Tanga, at the first sound of enemy machine gun fire they ceased to exist as a fighting unit. They panicked en masse, lost formation, and fled. The viceroy ascertained that they 'ran away . . . into the sea, throwing away their arms and accoutrements and swimming for the transports'.¹¹² The same afternoon at Tanga, another Indian unit of their brigade, the 98th Infantry, did little better. While moving up behind the Palamcottahs, the 98th were scattered by bees from disturbed hives. Once rallied, they were badly shaken and unwilling to face the battle ahead. They were ordered to attack, but their leading companies moved off only slowly and covered scant ground before giving up. Their reserve companies followed the Palamcottahs towards the sea.¹¹³

On the north-west frontier, meanwhile, mullahs seeking to take advantage of the Indian army's exodus overseas led seven serious jihadist attacks on imperial posts between November 1914 and December 1915. To repel them, there were a good number of well-trained Indian service officers and men on hand – in the 1st Division, the Bannu and other independent brigades, the North Waziristan Militia and the Indian mountain artillery. They inflicted, in George Roos-Keppel's words, 'a series of hammerings'.¹¹⁴ In Waziristan in April, for instance, a gathering of 7,000 Khostwals were comprehensively outmanoeuvred by the 52nd Sikhs (Frontier Force) and 10th Jats, losing 200 killed and 300 wounded.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the absence overseas of so many of the better pre-war Indian regulars ensured that some low-quality Indian units also had to be used on the frontier. This led to some incidents of a kind not seen in the tribal areas since 1897–98. One weak unit, the 8th Rajputs,

¹¹² Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 101; Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 51–52; and Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 583.

¹¹³ Anderson, 'Tanga', 314–15.

¹¹⁴ IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/3, 'North-West Frontier' (25 February 1917).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, D 613/1, 'North-West Frontier' (5 April 1915); Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 131; Indian General Staff, *Waziristan*, p. 31; H. Wilson (ed.), *The Great War*, 13 vols. (London: Amalgamated Press, 1914–19), vol. 7, chapter 128; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, pp. 217–24.

broke down under pressure in open battle against the Mohmands. They fled, abandoning their wounded. Their British officers gave chase to rally them, but in vain.¹¹⁶

The pattern emerges, of course, that from 1914 to 1916, wherever the high-quality Indian battalions were with significant numbers of pre-war regulars well trained in hill warfare, they had fighting powers that set them apart from the pre-war Indian units of lower quality. Duff and Kitchener could tell the difference better than most. They carefully managed which pre-war Indian regulars fought where, ensuring that the frailty shown by the intact pre-war Indian companies at Tanga and in Mohmand was barely seen in Flanders, Mesopotamia or at Gallipoli. 'I am sending two really good divisions', Duff had said of IEFA in August 1914, 'the men are stiff enough.'¹¹⁷ By the end of the year, after the viceroy had read reports on IEFA's Indian troops in action, he was left in no doubt as to what they had been doing. 'I fully realise that some have done better than others, but on the whole they have done extremely well.'¹¹⁸ In the meantime, at the War Office, Roos-Keppel had witnessed the Secretary of State's reaction to the news of IEFB's reverse at Tanga: 'K was savage and spoke angrily of the East African affair.' But Kitchener always had kinder words for IEFA.¹¹⁹

In June 1915, Edmund Barrow, who had commanded the Indian 1st Division for four years up to 1908, was the India Office's well-informed Military Secretary. He wrote a confidential summary of the Indian regiments' wartime performance, concluding with these words:

In spite of certain failures and deficiencies, the Indian army has been of immense assistance to the Empire in this world war, and in France, Mesopotamia and elsewhere not only has its intervention been opportune, but under most trying conditions the fame and prestige of the Indian army has been worthily upheld. Here and there we have had examples of . . . faintheartedness, but these have been immeasurably outweighed by the . . . fortitude of the Indian army as a whole.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge to V. Chirol, 13 May and 19 May 1915; IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/1, 'North-West Frontier' (21 April 1915).

¹¹⁷ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/1618: 'Telegrams between Sir Beauchamp Duff and Earl Kitchener', Duff to Kitchener, 30 August 1914.

¹¹⁸ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge to Willcocks, 6 January 1915; and IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/1, Hardinge Letter to Roos-Keppel, 23 November 1914.

¹¹⁹ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/32, Butler Papers: Roos-Keppel Letter to Butler, 20 January 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 10.

¹²⁰ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/2401: 'Secret Military Department Minute on the Situation in India Consequent on the War' (6 June 1915), p. 11.

The humanity that James Willcocks liked to see in his Indian soldiers in Flanders, however, was not always replicated elsewhere. The Gurkhas at Gallipoli decapitated a small number of Turks with their khukuris in summer 1915: one Royal Marine saw a Gurkha scout return from a night patrol 'carrying the head of a Turk' cut off by a khukuri, and Ian Hamilton recorded that the Gurkhas had 'sliced off a number of [Turkish] heads'.¹²¹ Perhaps these Gurkhas, as had been the case in small wars, had severed heads to confirm scout killings. They seem to have been under the orders of Charles Bruce, who might well have encouraged his scouts to decapitate Turks during the war as they had Pathans before it.¹²² The only Pathans to act similarly did so with the encouragement not of British officers, but of jihadist mullahs. On the north-west frontier in April 1915, the Mohmand bodyguard of a mullah cut off the head of one British officer on the battlefield as an anti-Christian statement. The previous month, the Khostwals had ritually mutilated some Indian troops in Waziristan.¹²³ In any event, the German propagandists would have had a point had they accused Indian troops at Gallipoli of 'atrocities', but they did not.

The Indians beyond the western front routinely took prisoners. In February 1915, those on the Suez Canal took prisoner several hundred Turks.¹²⁴ By April 1917, 7,184 Turks, largely captured by the Indians in Mesopotamia, were held in Burma, of an eventual total of some 10,000.¹²⁵ Yet in Mesopotamia, the Indians became part of a vicious cycle of maltreatment of enemy wounded and prisoners of a kind that did not develop between them and the Germans in Flanders. Many rumours, true and false, took flight within IEFD that the Turks did not treat captive Indians nearly as well as the Germans did, frequently killing or badly maltreating them. According to one Sikh veteran, who had enlisted in 1905 and fought with IEFs A and D,

a number of Indians were taken [in Mesopotamia] by the Turks and massacred; one had his eyes put out with needles, however he lived. This was a havildar.

¹²¹ I. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. 1, p. 359; and M. Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* (London: Ebury Press, 2002), p. 118.

¹²² I. Hamilton, *Gallipoli Diary*, vol. 1, pp. 225 and 359, and vol. 2, p. 161; and Carver, *Turkish Front*, p. 64–67. The Gurkha units concerned were the 1st/5th Gurkhas (Frontier Force) and 1st/6th Gurkhas (both were at Gallipoli with the 29th Indian Brigade).

¹²³ IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/1, 'North-West Frontier' (10 March 1915), and 'North-West Frontier' (21 April 1915).

¹²⁴ Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 742; and Wyman Bury, *Pan-Islam*, pp. 29–33.

¹²⁵ Herbert, *Mons, Anzac and Kut*, pp. 213–15; F. Thormeyer, *Reports on British Prison Camps in India and Burma, Viewed by the International Red Cross Committee in February, March and April 1917* (London: Unwin, 1917); and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroy's*, p. 211.

When the stretcher-bearers came they found these people killed, and found this man with his eyes out. With this experience my regiment then made a very vigorous attack, a couple of days later, and we captured or surrounded a large group of Turks, and we killed them all with vengeance, very bloody. I participated in this . . . ¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Privately Held Transcript of 1970 Interview with Sardar Bahadur Suran Singh Obi (47th Sikhs, aged eighty-five).

10 New Tactics

The 38th Central India Horse landed at Marseilles on 13 December 1914. A week later the regiment was at the front. Its men, recalled one of their British officers, were ‘somewhat bewildered by the novel experience’. In March 1918, however, when they departed France, passing through Marseilles bound for Palestine, they were ‘well-trying veterans, to whom nothing was now strange’.¹ In 1914, the Indian army exchanged its traditional Asian environment of tactical change – the north-west frontier – for a European one of unrivalled intensity. Previously it had shaped its tactics in response to jihadist Pathan lashkars armed with rifles stolen from the Army in India, smuggled in through Afghanistan or crafted by tribal gunsmiths, but in Flanders it faced very different threats from German divisions backed by artillery from the foundries of Krupp at Essen. ‘The Indian troops have a way of adapting themselves to new circumstances’, William Robertson was optimistic in the aftermath of First Ypres, ‘and I daresay may get on better than one would think.’² The western front was the Indian army’s greatest challenge since the Tirah campaign, and it induced an Indian tactical revolution.

The Indian Corps

Before looking at the development of the Indian infantry’s two main types of new tactical skills in Flanders – defensive and offensive skills – it is helpful to bear in mind some of the underlying dynamics. The Indian battalions developed partly through lessons they learned for themselves in the trenches; from First Ypres onwards, they were regularly required to undertake long stretches of frontline duty lasting three weeks or more (stretches of 6–10 days only became the BEF standard from late 1915). They also developed through tactical instruction from above, whether by printed circulars, or by training in reserve. Wherever IEFA’s units

¹ W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, pp. 313–15 and 383.

² KCL/LHCMA, Papers of Field Marshal Sir W. Robertson: Letter to C. Wigram, 21 November 1914 (7/1/2).

had chances to learn new lessons in regular warfare, they paid much more attention than they had at pre-war manoeuvres. Now they had a real regular enemy to deal with, they listened and learned intently. On the subcontinent, meanwhile, the Indian regimental depots were not instructed or sent tactical circulars to prepare their new recruits specifically for the western front; they only provided a basic general training along the lines of the *Field Service Regulations*. Thus the Indian Corps' casualty replacements learned their lessons of trench warfare in Flanders, not India.³

The Indian battalions' upkeep of pre-war officering standards and retention of new tactical knowledge were of course obstructed by their heavy casualties. In 1915, their losses were particularly severe at Neuve Chapelle on 11 and 12 March, at Second Ypres from 26 to 30 April, at Aubers Ridge on 9 May, and at Festubert on the night of 15–16 May – these were the ten days that reduced their numbers of pre-war officers and men to a minority. Inevitably their quality of Indian officer leadership took a turn for the worse, as most of their Indian officers long experienced in acting on their own initiative were replaced by younger men. 'People have said awfully kind things about the behaviour of the Regiment, and I am awfully proud of it', said the commandant of the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas after one costly engagement. 'But oh! I mourn . . . the four Gurkha officers killed. These were my best. It will take years for us to make good the work of the Germans that day.'⁴ The replacement Indian officers had much less time to grow into their new roles, and were not as prepared to lead their men in the absence of British officers. Moreover, from the spring to the summer of 1915, when IEFA's battalions received Indian casualty replacements from up to ten other units and came to contain mixes of drafts from many more villages than previously, an Indian officer no longer had the old prestige and authority as an elder among his own folk, and there was a loss of respect for him among the ranks.⁵

The quality of white officer leadership diminished at the same time as new British officers also had weeks rather than years to build up mutual confidence with their men. Still, they upheld the old paternalistic principles. In the recollection of one Sikh veteran,

[The 47th Sikhs'] British officers [in France up to the end of 1915] were all . . . very good. They had good relations with their men, and looked after them.

³ IOR, Mss Eur B 235, Colonel Harry Ross, 'Indian Army Memoirs, 1892–1924': B 235/3, '1914–19', pp. 9–12; Drake-Brockman, *Garhwal*, pp. 13–16.

⁴ Corrigan *Sepoys*, p. 84.

⁵ Carver, *Turkish Front*, p. 138; and Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 366.

When there was physical work to do they worked alongside them and when it was time for an attack they were in front. None lasted over six months, they were either killed or wounded or perhaps moved somewhere else. In 1915 there were [new officers], some were good experienced men [from battalions in India], some were very young [from the expanded Indian reserve]. [We] had to help the young ones somewhat until they got experience, but the sense of British prestige and the need to maintain British prestige led even the young ones to lead the attacks in the front.⁶

In mid-1915, some of the recently recruited officers of the Indian reserve spoke enough of their men's languages only to give basic instructions to domestic servants. On the 40th Pathans' march away from Second Ypres, the regiment was temporarily without all twelve of its pre-war British officers, and was led by two second lieutenants of the reserve, both completely ignorant of Pashtu and the other South Asian languages of the men behind them. Some of the Pathans, however, had picked up a little French, which briefly became the language of white command.⁷ The issue was resolved as far as was possible through special language classes, mainly in Urdu, at Marseilles for the British officers of the reserve. The classes were run by Alliston Champion Toker, a major-general fished from the Indian mail office at Boulogne, where he was the Assistant Censor. Toker was in fact the Indian army's grand master of Asian languages, unique for his ability to translate and teach in Sanskrit, Hindi, Gurmukhi, Bengali, Arabic, Persian and Urdu.⁸

Nonetheless, each of IEFA's Indian battalions retained a hardcore of approximately 50–200 seasoned officers and men who survived the winter of 1914–15, and served with their battalions for much or all of 1915. Indeed, they all had an ever-present, if small, number of their original British and Indian officers, either because some returned from hospital, like Frederick Gray of the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force), or because some were never wounded, such as Subadar-Major Mehar Sing Khattri of the 1st/9th Gurkhas. The old officers, along with the new ones who settled in under their guidance, kept their units working reasonably well. They acted in tandem with the experienced ranks as regimental keepers of tactical knowledge gained, ensuring that this was passed on to new drafts.⁹

⁶ Privately Held Transcript of 1970 Interview with Sardar Bahadur Suran Singh Obi (47th Sikhs, aged eighty-five).

⁷ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to Willcocks, 10 February 1915; S. Blacker, *Adventures*, pp. 62–63; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 166.

⁸ *The Times*, 13 April 1936: 'Obituary: Major-General Sir A. C. Toker'.

⁹ S. Blacker, *Adventures*, p. 62; Carver, *Turkish Front*, p. 137; Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, vol. 1, p. 271; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 468; and F. Poynder, *The 9th Gurkha Rifles, 1817–1936* (London: RUSI, 1937), p. 123.

The Indian battalions' development of the first main type of their new skills in Flanders – defensive ones, to hold fixed positions against German firepower – began at First Ypres. Their men arrived at the battle familiar enough with rifle fire and the need to take cover from it. 'They don't mind rifle fire (which is much the most dangerous) in the least', Philip Howell noticed of the 129th Baluchis on 24–25 October 1914, in the Cavalry Corps line; as Kenneth Henderson of the 39th Garhwals said, 'we knew it well in savage warfare'.¹⁰ Dealing with shellfire was a different matter. From 24 to 25 October in the shallow front trenches on the left of Horace Smith-Dorrien's II Corps line, the 15th Sikhs, 47th Sikhs and 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force) – all of the Lahore Division's Jullundur Brigade – were specially selected by the Germans for howitzer bombardment. 'I afterwards ascertained what it was that made [the howitzers] concentrate on the Indians, for all our British troops have learnt long ago to avoid offering any targets', Smith-Dorrien wrote in his diary at the time:

It appears that the Indians were walking about in the most unconcerned way, with an absolute disregard of shell-fire, in fact rather enjoying it than otherwise, and I have had to point out to their General that, although I have a great admiration for their bravery, I must ask them to remember that concealment of our positions is one of the most important matters to be considered in this war. It is, of course, all very new to them, and no doubt they will soon settle down.¹¹

The Indian regiments' pre-war training had left them unaware not only of the need to take constant cover in front trenches to minimise casualties against shellfire, but also of the importance of concealing themselves to deny the Germans visible evidence of positions to target. The Jullundur Brigade's Indian service commander, Charles Johnson, was urgently advised of both things by Smith-Dorrien; Johnson spread the word with equal haste among his Indian units, which had already drawn their own conclusions after suffering avoidable casualties through overexposure. By the end of the month, it had become second nature to the 15th Sikhs, 47th Sikhs and 59th Scinde Rifles to take cover and conceal their positions at all times. '[My men] were and felt themselves to be veterans, whose business it was to adapt themselves to circumstances in war, and to teach others to do the like', observed one of the 47th's British officers. The lessons of constantly taking cover and concealing troops in front

¹⁰ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 122 on First Ypres; and KCL/LHCMA, Howell papers: Howell Letter to his wife, 25 October 1914 (6/1/1–47).

¹¹ Smith-Dorrien, *Memories*, pp. 456–58.

trenches were similarly learned and applied within the Indian Corps' other brigades.¹²

Although the Indian battalions' pre-war knowledge of field fortification had readied them to dig trenches, they by no means had the trench construction skills to cope with the full extent of German firepower. In late October and early November 1914, they made the mistakes of digging in daylight under the gaze of German Taube and Aviatik reconnaissance aircraft that directed shellfire onto them, and of constructing their trenches as open corridors without 'traverses' – mud barriers, built at angles and as high as trench walls, dividing a strip of trench into a succession of bays to save casualties by localising the spread of exploding shells, mortar bombs or grenades. The Indian units quickly learned better. They began to dig at night to avoid aerial observation, and they installed traverses.¹³ They also learned not to scoop out alcoves in their trench walls for cover against either enemy fire or the weather. They had been trained to do that on the dry ground of the north-west frontier, but the technique was ill-suited to Flanders. Here the soil was soft, being rich in clay, ensuring that if the parapet was undercut it would soon collapse.¹⁴

The most efficient way for a battalion to hold a front trench under bombardment was to occupy it with just a few men, and to place the rest in reserve trenches. Thereby casualties in the front trench were minimised, and its defenders had men behind ready to help against attackers. On entering First Ypres, the Indian battalions were generally ignorant of this. Some of them overloaded their front trenches with up to 75 per cent of their men. They promptly suffered avoidable shellfire casualties. The mistake was made most conspicuously by the 2nd/8th Gurkhas on 29 October, near Festubert, and by the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas four days later by Neuve Chapelle. Such painful experiences gave the sufferers the wisdom to hold their trenches lightly at the front, and to spread out their men in reserve. On the far right of the BEF line at the end of October, these practices were passed on to some Indian units of the Meerut Division by outgoing Home Army officers of the 5th Division. They were soon encouraged throughout the Indian Corps by divisional and brigade memoranda. By early November, they had become common practice.¹⁵ Different Indian battalions developed their own variations on the theme.

¹² Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1914, vol. 2, p. 209; Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, pp. 46–47; *Memoir of the 2nd Royal Battalion, 11th Sikh Regiment* (Privately Published, 1940), entry for 24 October 1914; and *47th Sikhs*, p. 34.

¹³ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 123. Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, p. 49.

¹⁴ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 122.

¹⁵ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 5 December 1914; KCL/LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers: 'Talk with Sir Claud Jacob, 1932' (LH

The 41st Dogras, having overexposed themselves in their front trench, subtly extracted the majority of their men to reserve positions, leaving a few scouts up front to fire regularly from different places. The intention was to give the impression that the regiment had not adjusted its positioning, and it was successful. For three days, the Germans kept up heavy fire on the Dogra front trenches, which they believed were still held by significant numbers.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Indian troops developed a good ear for the sounds of incoming projectiles. They acquired an instinctive sense of whether, and how urgently, they needed to take cover, for instance against heavy artillery shells (fired from miles away on high trajectories, and sounding like express steam trains as they came in to land) or mortar bombs (heralded by a dull ‘phutt’ sound as they were fired from close range).¹⁷ They also learned not to shoot at aircraft, which were almost always too high in the sky to damage with rifle fire. ‘At first it was very difficult to stop the Indians from firing with the utmost impartiality at every aeroplane, Allied or hostile, which came into sight. By degrees, however, the novelty wore off, until the appearance of an aeroplane hardly excited remark.’¹⁸

Further, the Indian units worked out their own routines for taking watch in the frontline. In one Garhwali company, the two British officers decided to take two-hour night watches in turns. ‘This was fatiguing’, explained Kenneth Henderson, ‘but it was difficult to keep on the go longer, especially at first. During the day we had longer rests. The Indian officers and N.C.O.s arranged similar reliefs among themselves.’¹⁹ By December 1914, as one French army communiqué put it, the Indian army in Flanders had ‘completed its apprenticeship in European warfare’.²⁰

Until that time, the Indian Corps had been disadvantaged, in James Willcocks’ words, by ‘innumerable shortages which were essential to a force suddenly dumped down from railhead into the trenches.’ However, new equipment was ‘supplied in abundance in France as soon as it was possible . . . the excellence and rapidity with which this was done was astonishing to us who remembered the cheese-paring days in India . . . it proved what a fool’s paradise we had been bred in.’²¹ Under the aegis

11/1932/45); *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, p. 14; N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 191–92; and L. Shakespear, *History of the 2nd King George’s Own Gurkha Rifles (The Simoor Rifles)*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1950), vol. 2, p. 19.

¹⁶ *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, pp. 15–16.

¹⁷ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 125; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 152.

¹⁸ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 109.

¹⁹ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 122.

²⁰ *The Times*, 5 December 1914, p. 7.

²¹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 4–5.

of the War Office and GHQ, as the manufacture of war materials gathered pace in Britain, the Indian Corps was issued with ever-increasing amounts of trench fighting supplies from January 1915:

1. The Indian battalions got new machine guns, doubling their individual quota to four. Some of their new guns were Vickers models, of which more came later in the year.²²
2. The Indian jam-tin bombs were phased out and replaced by two types of grenade: first, various patterns made in BEF factories run by the Royal Engineers; second, larger quantities of better quality patterns from England, including the Hales grenade and the ring-pulled Mills bomb, which became standard issue from mid-1915.²³
3. The improvised Indian trench mortars were replaced by more reliable models manufactured in England, finally allowing the Indian troops to reply in kind to German mortar fire.²⁴
4. The Indians received relatively large quantities of picks, spades, shovels, sandbags, dugout frames and barbed wire.²⁵

In New Year 1915, when the new equipment began to descend on the Indian battalions, their defensive skills were improved by a fortnight's formal training under GHQ guidance in the quiet of the countryside behind the frontline. The Indian units practised a range of trench-holding skills, such as trench construction by night and grenade throwing. Their machine gunners were trained with their new guns, which, to maximise their defensive potential, were grouped with the old Maxims in brigade companies. Brigade trench mortar companies were similarly formed.²⁶

The Indian infantry resumed their guard of the right of the BEF line in the last week of January with a feeling of newfound confidence and readiness for defensive work. Now experienced in, and better prepared for, local conditions, they began to perform their routine defensive duties more comfortably.²⁷ For instance, they constructed more sophisticated trenches, bequeathing these Indian names, such as 'Baluchi Road' and 'Ludhiana Lane'.²⁸ At the same time, the 1st Sappers, seeking to emulate

²² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 144; and Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 1, p. 58.

²³ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 134.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92; and Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 391.

²⁵ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 2 September 1915.

²⁶ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 134 and 144; *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, pp. 20–22; Drake-Brockman, *Garhwal*, p. 43; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 207–09; and Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 37.

²⁷ *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, p. 20; and *47th Sikhs*, p. 63.

²⁸ P. Chasseaud, *Rats Alley: Trench Names of the Western Front* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006), pp. 67 and 156.

the German miners' recent success at Givenchy, placed their own explosives beneath the German line. This was a new departure for them; they had not used underground mines on the north-west frontier, where the Pathans never remained long enough in fixed positions worth targeting. From the Indian trenches near Neuve Chapelle, the 1st Sappers drove a thirty-yard mine shaft to a point under an occupied German sap. At the end of January, they successfully detonated their mine at the shaft's end, after a Sikh, Sucha Singh, had put the finishing touches. 'A charge had been placed in position and was being tamped', Merewether and Smith recorded,

when the enemy began bombarding the place with a medium trench mortar . . . A number of the men in the trench [containing the mine shaft's entrance] were killed or buried in debris. Havildar Sucha Singh of the Sappers was in charge of the work in the mine shaft. He temporarily withdrew his party to assist in getting out [of the trench] those who had been buried. Having done this, he again went down the shaft to finish off the tamping and to complete the preparations for blowing up the mine, in spite of the fact that two trench mortar bombs had fallen directly on the roof of the [shaft], breaking two of the supporting frames, and that his party was isolated as our trench had been evacuated. Havildar Sucha Singh finished his work unperturbed and withdrew his men, afterwards receiving the Indian Distinguished Service Medal for his cool courage.²⁹

Up to October 1915, the Indian infantry drafts sent to IEFA learned much of defensive trench fighting through experiencing the frontline direct from Marseilles. Those who joined the Indian Corps' original battalions received pivotal frontline guidance from officers and men who had served in Flanders since 1914 or early 1915.³⁰ In the meantime, the five Indian battalions new to the Indian Corps from Hong Kong and Egypt sent advance parties of British and Indian officers into the trenches for an education in the defensive arts from experienced units. The new drafts and battalions then applied their lessons just as the first Indian troops on the western front had done in 1914.³¹ There was further defensive training behind the frontline, often with fresh equipment, for instance Stokes mortars that fired 1-pound bombs around 800 yards.³² After Second Ypres, the Indians were also trained in the use of primitive gas masks.

²⁹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 210. Also see Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 145.

³⁰ Privately Held Transcript of 1970 Interview with Sardar Bahadur Suran Singh Obi (aged eighty-five).

³¹ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 236; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 468; Waters, *Forty Thieves*, pp. 127–28; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 296; and Woodyatt, *3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles*, p. 121.

³² Catto, *Solah Punjab*, p. 55; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 92 and 226; *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, pp. 45–46; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 394; Geoghegan, *8th Punjab*, pp. 18–23; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. 62; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, pp. 130–36 and 145–67.

These were usually made of flannel or linen with eye and mouth pieces, and they required saturation in the anti-gas chemical solutions that came with them.³³

After the war, Willcocks described IEFA's Indian troops in October 1914 as 'still new to the game . . . [They] had not become versed and seasoned in the intricacies of trench warfare'.³⁴ But by 1915 they certainly had, as Willcocks informed Hardinge in a letter of September that year: 'The men have worked extraordinarily well in the trenches and our defences are worth seeing. . . . No more hastily dug trenches full of slime and water, but model breastworks, drained and defended with skill and care.'³⁵ The Indian soldiers' adaptation to trench warfare is also revealed in their own letters. 'Fighting [here] is now to me nothing more than an ordinary game, and I am never put out', one Punjabi Muslim of the 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) wrote in June 1915. The following month, an Afridi of the 40th Pathans implied something similar: 'We are now resting [but] we prefer being in the trenches.'³⁶ Of facing German artillery at First Ypres and beyond, a phlegmatic Sikh veteran of the 47th Sikhs later said 'there was a little fear at first, but essentially it wasn't too bad.'³⁷

In developing the second main type of their new skills in Flanders – offensive ones – the Indian battalions acquired an increasingly sophisticated sense of how to attack in co-operation with artillery. The Indians were central to the BEF's inaugural offensive strike, by Haig's First Army on 10 March 1915 at Neuve Chapelle. For a month or so beforehand, Haig personally oversaw the planning, right down to brigade level, as he sought a decisive battle by means of a combined arms attack guided by the *Field Service Regulations*' principles. His first aim was to breach the 1.5-mile-wide stretch of German 6th Army trenches bulging in front of Neuve Chapelle village, around 150–200 yards from the BEF line. His next aim was to capture the village and some adjoining ground to the north – together defended by a total of 2,000 troops – before pushing on at least three miles to the Aubers Ridge overlooking the city of Lille. For the First Army's opening assault, Haig wanted a wide line to advance from west of Neuve Chapelle, with two brigades of IV Corps on the left,

³³ *47th Sikhs War Record*, p. 82; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. 62, 91–93 and 105; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 135.

³⁴ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. xix.

³⁵ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 2 September 1915. Also see F. Coleman, *With Cavalry in the Great War* (Philadelphia: Jacobs, 1917), p. 128.

³⁶ Omissi, *Voices*, letter nos. 80 and 102.

³⁷ Privately Held Transcript of 1970 Interview with Sardar Bahadur Suran Singh Obi (47th Sikhs, aged eighty-five).

and one brigade of the Indian Corps on the right. These brigades were to capture the village before digging a new defensive line, from which other brigades could go on.

To enable all the brigades to sweep forwards, Haig encouraged a general emphasis on artillery destroying German front positions, rather than neutralising them in combination with firepower in infantry hands. At the start of 1915, the Indian Corps' artillery had its 108 field guns from India, plus its 2 batteries of 4.7-inch heavy naval guns from England. It was increased for the Neuve Chapelle offensive, GHQ and First Army headquarters attaching two dozen Royal Artillery heavy guns, including 6-inch howitzers. This gave the Indian Corps a total of approximately 150 artillery pieces, of a First Army total of some 550. All the guns drew on the First Army's shell stocks. For the battle, these amounted to around 115,000 shrapnel and high explosive shells – an availability owed partly to the dramatic expansion of UK shell production by Kitchener since the war's outbreak, and partly to the BEF's stockpiling of shells for offensive use since First Ypres. The bedrock of the First Army's attack was to be its preliminary artillery bombardment. Haig and his senior artillery advisers above corps level were the bombardment's principal organisers; they set the preliminary bombardment fire plans, with which attacking infantry divisions had to comply.³⁸

IEFA's complete lack of aeroplanes from India was made up for by the Royal Flying Corps' First Wing. At the start of March, First Army intelligence officers aboard First Wing aeroplanes took photographs of the German lines at Neuve Chapelle. The pictures were then turned into detailed maps to help the planning of the Indian Corps and the other striking formations; never before had aerial photography been so used by the Empire's forces. Meanwhile, the First Wing prepared to drop 100-pound bombs onto railways and roads behind Neuve Chapelle, in order to hinder German reinforcements once the battle began.³⁹

The lead assaulting Indian brigade was the Meerut Division's Garhwal Brigade. In the fortnight leading up to 10 March, it received intensive instruction so that each attacking infantryman had, in Haig's words, 'a certain definite responsibility and a clearly defined objective'.⁴⁰ The Garhwal Brigade was to attack out of its trenches on the 10th at 8.05am, on the heels of the thirty-five-minute preliminary bombardment. It was to go forwards in quick-moving, grenade-throwing and flexible

³⁸ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 2, p. 18; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 204.

³⁹ Raleigh and Jones, *War in the Air*, vol. 2, pp. 90–92; and Robbins, *Generalship*, p. 110.

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 256/3: Haig, Western Front Diary, 27 February 1915.

skirmishing groups, arranged per battalion as two companies forward and two in support, with detachments of pioneers and sappers and miners to consolidate captured ground. There was no doubt about their target positions, which were pointed out on the detailed maps.⁴¹

The preliminary bombardment was delivered as prescribed – for thirty-five minutes, without a second's pause, with a focus on the German frontline. 'All our guns let out', wrote a British officer of the 34th Sikh Pioneers in the Indian trenches, 'most dreadful sound, the air seemed to be one huge scream.'⁴² For another British officer of the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas, 'It was as if one were standing under an enormous railway bridge, over which thousands of express trains were passing at lightening speed.'⁴³ Onto each yard of German front trench slammed 288 pounds of high explosive, blasting earth, trench parts and bodies high into the air. During the bombardment, the British officers of the Garhwal Brigade's 1st/39th Garhwals and 2nd/3rd Gurkhas, on their own initiative, moved with their assaulting companies out of their trenches and onto ground in front that had natural cover; thereby they might reach their objectives at the earliest possible moment. They crawled forwards carefully on their bellies; as they did this, the shells flew so low that one Gurkha rifleman's raised head was taken away.⁴⁴

At 8.05am, when the bombardment lifted, the Garhwal Brigade's skirmishing groups rushed forwards without hesitation. They worked largely as intended, benefiting from the generally successful shelling to capture most of their target positions. Those on the left of their line – of the 2nd/39th Garhwals and 2nd/3rd Gurkhas – descended rapidly onto the German front trenches, pouncing on the few still active defenders and overwhelming them. One Garhwali, Rifleman Gobar Sing Negi, 'behaved with very distinguished courage':

He was one of a bayonet party accompanying [a grenade party], and was the first man to go round each traverse in face of a most determined resistance by the enemy, of whom he killed several, driving the remainder back until they surrendered. This brave soldier was afterwards unfortunately killed, but for his most conspicuous gallantry he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Jemadar Pancham Sing Mahar won the Military Cross by his dashing leading of a party which advanced across the open in face of a severe fire, capturing a machine gun and a number of prisoners.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Drake-Brockman, *Garhwal*, p. 49; and Woodyatt, *3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles*, p. 122.

⁴² IWM, 90/37/1: Barnett Papers: Diary Entry for 10 March 1915.

⁴³ Woodyatt, *3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles*, p. 122.

⁴⁴ Beckett, *Great War*, p. 225; Drake-Brockman, *Garhwal*, p. 48; and Woodyatt, *3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles*, pp. 120–26.

⁴⁵ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 230.

The Garhwal Brigade pressed on to the village. At the outskirts, Arthur Tillard (the co-organiser of the Gurkha scouts in the Tirah campaign, and who in 1897 had also led the initial charge at the Dargai Heights shot to a standstill by the Orakzais) burst forwards with 2nd/3rd Gurkhas. Following his lead, they stormed a brewery to knock out some German machine gun posts, which had not been picked up in the pre-battle planning and had been left unscathed by the artillery. Tillard's capture of the brewery helped the Indian companies to run across the open ground into Neuve Chapelle, where they fought from building to building, entering through windows or shell holes, scrapping from room to room and floor to floor, firing through ceilings and grenading landings. Havildar Bahadur Thapa of the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas headed a grenade party into one house, storming a barricade as it went, killing sixteen Germans and capturing two machine guns. Meanwhile, Rifleman Gane Gurung,

observing that heavy fire was being kept up from a particular house, most gallantly entered it by himself, cowed into surrendering and brought out single-handed eight Germans at the point of his bayonet. At this moment the 2nd/Rifle Brigade [on the far right of IV Corps' advance] came on the scene, and on seeing the little Gurkha driving eight burly Germans out of the house, gave him three ringing cheers. . . . Sir James Willcocks subsequently remarked that there was probably no other instance in English history of an individual Indian soldier being cheered for his bravery by a British battalion in the midst of a battle.⁴⁶

'The question as to which unit, British or Indian, was the first to enter Neuve Chapelle', Merewether and Smith added, 'has been much argued. The honour would appear to belong to the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas; it was only after the Gurkhas . . . were fighting among the houses that the Rifle Brigade came up and witness the incident just described.'⁴⁷ The Garhwal Brigade and the troops on IV Corps' right secured the village by 11 am. By the early afternoon, they had dug a new trench line along the village's eastern edge, in front of a small wood, the Bois du Biez.⁴⁸

For the remainder of the battle – up to 10pm on 12 March – the First Army made no further progress. From the morning of the 10th, the Germans quickly established a new frontline, bringing up 16,000 reserves that the Royal Flying Corps, despite damaging some railways junctions and bridges, had neither the aircraft nor the firepower to stop. The First Army's artillery wholly failed to neutralise the new German line. It was unable to recreate anything like the intensity or accuracy of the preliminary bombardment. On the one hand, it had used up most

⁴⁶ *The Times*, 24 September 1938: 'Obituary: Colonel A. Tillard'; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 228–32.

⁴⁷ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 232.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

of its shells; on the other, its gunners were lacking in experience and range-finding equipment to lock onto fresh targets at short notice. Thus, when further Indian battalions equipped with no more than rifles and grenades came forward in successive waves to make their assaults, they were, like the British units of IV Corps to their left, scythed down by German fire. Communications were another problem. The British and Indian signals units supporting the infantry were unable to maintain real-time communications either up and down or across the battlefield because their telegraph wires were cut by shellfire; besides, they had no portable radios. In the afternoon of 10 March, it took around two hours for messages to move from corps headquarters to a battalion in the frontline, seriously delaying the second wave of assaulting infantry.⁴⁹

On the 10th and 11th, the Indian brigades used their recently acquired defensive skills to consolidate the new Indian line in front of the Bois du Biez, with twenty of their machine guns being spread out and carefully sited by an officer of the 2nd/3rd Gurkhas.⁵⁰ At 6am on the 12th, the 6th Bavarian Reserve Division counter-attacked out of the Bois du Biez through light fog. Its men, wearing grey greatcoats and pickelhauben, advanced at a jog-trot. They only had cursory artillery support, their gunners also having not mastered the challenges of bombarding new positions at short notice. The Bavarians became clearly visible at around sixty yards from the Indian line. At that point, said one of them, they were suddenly ‘wrapped in an extraordinary sea of fire’.⁵¹ This was not shellfire so much as Indian machine gun and rifle fire; indeed, many Indian riflemen rose onto the parapet to shoot all the more rapidly and accurately. Most of the Bavarians were cut down in the water of a stream in front of the wood. ‘The Indian troops had a real taste of killing’, wrote Willcocks. For one Indian soldier, ‘it was like a hot-weather dust storm in India that looked as if it must pass over us; but at the very moment of reaching us, it was as if a fierce rain had suddenly extinguished it’.⁵² Another German counter-attack failed at 9am. By then, the ground between the wood and the Indian position was strewn with around 3,000 Bavarian dead and wounded.⁵³

⁴⁹ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, 146–71; Drake-Brockman, *Garhwal*, pp. 48–53; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 385; Robbins, *Generalship*, p. 99; Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Aurum, 2011), pp. 107–11; Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, pp. 97–109.

⁵⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 262.

⁵¹ J. Williams, *Corporal Hitler and the Great War 1914–1918: The List Regiment* (Oxford: Frank Cass, 2005), pp.87–94.

⁵² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 224–25.

⁵³ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 261–62.

Overall at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, the First Army advanced 1,000 yards on a front of 1.5 miles, all captured on the morning of the 10th. 'If we did not get as far as we had hoped to do', Willcocks reflected, 'we taught the Huns a very sharp lesson.'⁵⁴ The Indians, Haig was satisfied, had 'done very well'.⁵⁵ Yet Haig was frustrated that beyond the first morning the First Army's 'tactical unity to a large extent was destroyed'.⁵⁶ He immediately began to wonder about the reasons why, and about how to do better.

The First Army's second offensive strike, at the Battle of Aubers Ridge on 9 May, formed part of Franco-British attack stretching thirty miles from north of Neuve Chapelle to Artois in the south. Again, Haig planned in terms of a decisive battle.⁵⁷ By April, he had settled on four key variations to his approach at Neuve Chapelle:

1. The Aubers Ridge offensive was to be bigger. It was to be made by assaulting brigades belonging to three corps – IV, the Indian and I Corps – and on a wider front, ten miles end to end. Haig's hoped that more attacking corps would better probe for a weak point to exploit, and that a broader attack would dilute the effect of German reserves.
2. The First Army's artillery was to focus less on the German frontline. Although its preliminary bombardment was to remain short at forty minutes to achieve surprise, it was to fire more shells at strong-points behind or to the sides of the front positions targeted by the infantry. The intention was to help attacking troops who pierced the German frontline to keep up their momentum.
3. Assaulting infantry were to carry more firepower than at Neuve Chapelle, to help them neutralise defenders whom artillery bombardment did not.
4. The first wave of assaulting infantry was not to dig a prescribed defensive line as a platform for further advance by following brigades. Rather, it was to gain as much ground as it could, with the most successful units being reinforced first, and troops pushing on wherever possible to exploit gaps in the German line. This was to avoid a repeat of a problem at Neuve Chapelle on the afternoon of 10 March: brigades of IV Corps and the Indian Corps had stalled while waiting for units held up to their sides, in order to form a wide parallel line to continue the advance; in consequence, some battalions had been

⁵⁴ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 203.

⁵⁵ TNA, WO 256/3: Haig, Western Front Diary, 15 March 1915.

⁵⁶ Bridger, *Neuve Chapelle*, p. 103.

⁵⁷ Robbins, *Generalship*, pp. 118–22.

left at a standstill for hours when they might have gone on through the Bois du Biez before the German reserves arrived in force, and the Germans had been gifted precious time to shore up their defences.⁵⁸

The Indian Corps' artillery was augmented for the Aubers Ridge offensive. It received extra 6-inch howitzers as it had at Neuve Chapelle, plus new attachments of 4.5-inch and 8.6-inch howitzers. The First Army artillery all round had more guns than in March, with 516 field and light guns and 122 heavy pieces. For the preliminary bombardment on 9 May, they had some 45,000 high explosive and shrapnel shells.⁵⁹ To improve on the communications at Neuve Chapelle, the Royal Flying Corps, the artillery and the infantry were to co-operate more closely than before. Thus three aeroplanes carrying radios were assigned to the Indian Corps' heavy guns to observe and guide their fire, and others were detailed to patrol over advancing British and Indian infantry to report on their progress.⁶⁰

This time the Meerut Division's Dehra Dun Brigade would make the initial Indian assault, to the south of Neuve Chapelle and at the centre of the First Army advance. Haig closely supervised the assaulting Indian troops' divisional and brigade commanders – Charles Anderson and Claud Jacob respectively – to ensure that his variations to the First Army's methods of attack filtered down. In the first week of May, Anderson and Jacob gave their assaulting battalions detailed attacking instructions and training. The Indian troops were to move as close to the enemy line as the preliminary bombardment permitted, the Garhwalis and Gurkhas' improvisation at Neuve Chapelle now being elevated to standard Indian Corps practice. Each assaulting Indian battalion was again to advance with two skirmishing companies forward and two in support, and with rifles and grenades. But also, to help knock out difficult pockets of resistance, they were to go forwards with considerably more back-up firepower in infantry hands than before. To that end, special Garhwali and Gurkha parties were formed, some carrying newly issued 3-pounder Hotchkiss bomb-guns (dubbed 'infantry-artillery' by Haig), and others machine guns and mortars. The assaulting troops were not to fortify ground quickly won, but to push on through cracks in the German defences while pioneers and sappers and miners dug new lines

⁵⁸ Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 168; Robbins, *Generalship*, pp. 30–31; and Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, pp. 97–122.

⁵⁹ I. Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), pp. 90–91; Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 2, pp. 10, 18 and 55; J. P. Harris, *Douglas Haig and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 135; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 204.

⁶⁰ Raleigh and Jones, *War in the Air*, vol. 2, pp. 108–11.

behind them to consolidate their gains. Further, they were to carry flags and white linen markers to pin to the ground for aeroplanes to spot and report. The Indian signallers, meanwhile, were to bury their wires deeper than previously. ‘General Anderson, commanding the Meerut Division, had made every preparation’, wrote Willcocks. ‘He, his Staff, his Brigadiers, and his [regimental] officers had each and all studied every possible situation that could be imagined, and I felt that if success did not attend their efforts, they certainly deserved it.’⁶¹

To the men in the Indian front trenches on 9 May, the preliminary bombardment was audibly weak. It was in fact just one-fifth of the intensity of its antecedent on 10 March. There were fewer shells aimed at the German frontline, and many of those did not detonate because they had defective fuses. In the days leading up to the bombardment, the artillery’s registration had been greatly complicated by bad weather, trees in leaf and worn gun barrels, to catastrophic effect on its accuracy. In the Indian bombardment, only one in four of the shells fired against the German front trenches hit the point aimed at; the 4.5- and 6-inch heavy guns, aiming high explosive at the German parapet, were especially inaccurate. Another problem was that the artillery’s targets had become harder. At Neuve Chapelle, the German trenches had been four feet high and five thick, but now – lessons having been learned – they had been thickened and deepened to give men and machine guns better cover. Indeed, the numbers of men and guns in the German frontline had been significantly increased. ‘The German defences had probably been quadrupled in strength’, Willcocks estimated. The upshot was that the Indian bombardment did almost no damage.⁶²

At 5.25am, in the clear and fine morning light when there were fifteen minutes of the preliminary bombardment to go, the Dehra Dun Brigade’s lead battalions with their rifles and grenades moved out of the start line to creep ahead. However, they were unable to go any appreciable distance, so short were many of the shells falling. When the bombardment ended at 5.40am and the Indians rose to assault, they could see that the enemy parapet was intact and well manned. ‘There could never before in war have been a more perfect target than this solid wall of khaki men, British and Indian side by side’, said one of the German defenders. ‘There was only one possible order to give – “Fire until the barrels burst.”’⁶³

⁶¹ Hancock, *Aubers Ridge*, pp.28–81; Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 118; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 270.

⁶² Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 364; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 269 and 277.

⁶³ A. Clark, *The Donkeys*, new edition (London: Pimlico, 1991), p. 110; and Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 204–08.

As the assaulting units tried to advance,

an appalling machine-gun and rifle fire was opened on us, the machine-guns firing from ground level. On the right, two platoons of the 6th Jats attempted to advance with the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas, but were mown down at once. . . . The men fell in heaps; some survivors dashed forward and gained the cover of the ditch in front of our parapet, where they lay down, thousands of bullets sweeping through the air just above their heads. [Others] in the centre were held up in the same manner. . . . The experiences [on the left] were of an equally harrowing nature. The moment officers and men attempted to advance, they were cut down as if by an invisible reaping machine, the sound of the fire from a distance resembling the purring of a multitude of gigantic cats.⁶⁴

‘Notwithstanding the most gallant efforts to cross the fire-swept ground’, Willcocks wrote, ‘by 6am it was definitely known our attack had failed to reach its first objective.’⁶⁵ The only troops to reach the German line were a few men of the 2nd/2nd Gurkhas. They had discarded their rifles and sprinted via shell holes up to the enemy wire. They ran along it and found a small gap, which they charged through before setting upon some defenders with their khukuris. All of them were soon shot down.⁶⁶

A further Meerut Division assault, by the Bareilly Brigade, went in at 4pm. It was also doomed by a hopeless forty-minute preliminary bombardment. The brigade’s battalions, its commander reported later in the day,

saw in front of them the hundreds of men of the Dehra Dun Brigade lying out on our front wounded and dead. They knew the enemy was unshaken, seeing them with their heads over the parapet firing and thoroughly realised that what happened to the Dehra Dun Brigade would in all probability happen to them; but not a man faltered, and as they boldly advanced over the parapet only to be shot down, British and Indian ranks alike did their level best to reach the enemy’s line.⁶⁷

Haig called off the entire offensive at 6pm. None of his attacking corps had secured any ground – IV and I Corps had also had poor artillery support.

For the Battle of Festubert, the First Army’s third offensive, from 15 to 25 May, Haig once again varied his planning. He concluded from 9 May that a more cautious approach was required. This time the First Army, using three assaulting corps including the Indian Corps, was to make a night attack on the right of its line and on a narrower front.

⁶⁴ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 345–65.

⁶⁵ Sheffield, *The Chief*, pp. 113–16; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 270–78.

⁶⁶ Clark, *Donkeys*, p. 110; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 355.

⁶⁷ *41st Dogras*, vol. 1, p. 40.

The initial assaulting brigades were to establish a new line 1,000 yards ahead of their start trenches, as a platform for further advance. The First Army artillery, using its guns from Aubers Ridge, was to deliver a longer preliminary bombardment, lasting forty-eight hours from 13 May. With 100,000 shells, it was to pound the German defences more deliberately; to improve accuracy, the gunners were to give more attention to monitoring and adjusting their fire.⁶⁸

The Meerut Division's Garhwal Brigade was to lead the Indian attack, from trenches to the south of Neuve Chapelle. Its brigades were again given detailed attacking instructions by senior Indian commanders under Haig's guidance. Again, the assaulting Indian battalions, armed with rifles and grenades, were to advance with two skirmishing companies forward and two in support, having crept forwards during the preliminary artillery bombardment; again they were to push on through any gaps in the German lines to exploit them, and to tackle obstinate German positions by using increased infantry firepower, including not just new mortars, but also a new mobile team of six Indian machine gunners. Other variations included platoons acting as carrying parties for trench-building equipment, and all troops wearing gas masks.⁶⁹

In the opening infantry strike on 15 May, the Meerut Division's preparations came to nothing. The Indian Corps' preliminary bombardment was pitiful. The artillery had more registration problems with cloudy, wet weather and worn barrels, and it had run very low on high explosive shells for parapet-blasting – after 9 May, just 92 per cent of its shells were shrapnel. The Indian battalions that assaulted shortly before midnight on the 15th, and then early on the 16th, were shot down under German flare light as soon as they moved into the open. To their left, IV Corps had a similar experience.⁷⁰

As further assaults were organised, there was a grim indication on 18 May of the rise of the English-made grenade as an Indian weapon, now issued to the Indian Corps in thousands per month. That afternoon, a little to the south of where the failed Indian attacks had gone in, a band of the 15th Sikhs holding an isolated forward post, captured two days earlier by the 2nd Division, was on the verge of being pushed out under German pressure. The company in support, some 250 yards back across a wilderness of collapsed communication trenches filled with water, believed that the forward post had run out of grenades, and took for granted that it

⁶⁸ Brown, *Logistics*, pp. 91–92.

⁶⁹ Hailes, *Jat Regiment*, vol. 1, p. 87; and Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, pp. 122–26.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Logistics*, p. 92; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 209–15; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 365–76 and 383; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 278–93.

must be re-supplied. A British officer and ten Sikh volunteers therefore tried to take up ninety-six grenades, in two boxes that had improvised handles made out of turbans. They pushed and pulled the boxes the entire way under fire so heavy that only the officer and two of the Sikhs survived the journey.⁷¹

Nearby in the early morning darkness of 22 May, the Indian Corps attacked towards a farm to capitalise on gains made by I Corps. After a fourteen-hour artillery bombardment, the Sirhind Brigade advanced in a wide, triple-battalion line of grenade-wielding skirmishing groups, across 400 yards of boggy ground made difficult by ditches and hedges. The 1st/Highland Light Infantry, on the left, and the 1st/4th Gurkhas, on the right, found the German line in front of them intact, and this stopped them going beyond the ditches in no man's land. In the centre, however, where the artillery had cut the enemy wire, the 1st/1st Gurkhas navigated through some farm buildings and into a front trench. They fought hand-to-hand using grenades, bayonets and khukuris, killing fifteen Germans and forcing others to retreat twenty yards or so. Having captured a small area of the front trench, the Gurkhas built barricades to secure it against heavy counter-attacks. 'By 3am', wrote Willcocks, 'all the British officers with the attacking companies of the 1st/1st Gurkhas had been killed or wounded, and Subadar Jit Sing Gurung assumed command, but was shortly afterwards ordered to retire, an order he carried out with coolness and judgment.' Not only had badly needed reinforcements not been forthcoming – communications with brigade headquarters had been cut – but also the artillery support had withered for want of shells and accurate targeting information.⁷²

Haig called off the Festubert offensive on 25 May because the First Army had run out of shells. The First Army had captured 1,000 yards of German frontline on its right where the new, longer preliminary bombardment from 12 May had permitted I Corps to achieve some modest success. 'Our experiences at Neuve Chapelle and [at Festubert] show that it is possible to break through the enemy's defences', John French reported to Kitchener, 'provided sufficient artillery support ammunition of the proper nature is available.'⁷³

⁷¹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 372–74.

⁷² CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Papers Attached to Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 22 September 1915, 'Report by General Anderson on Operations of the Meerut Division, 9–22 May 1915 (3 June 1915)', p. 10 on Subadar Jit Sing Gurung; F. Petre, *The King George's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Malaun Regiment), 1815–1921* (London: Royal United Services Institution, 1925), p. 143; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 377–83; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 290–91.

⁷³ Sheffield, *The Chief*, pp. 116–18.

Haig's fourth First Army offensive, at Loos to the south of Festubert from 25 September, formed the far left of a Franco-British attack on a fifty-five-mile front. Haig allotted the Indian Corps a subsidiary role on the First Army's left, at the Moulin de Piètre near Neuve Chapelle. The corps was to make a one-day diversionary strike, designed to occupy German reserves that might otherwise be sent as reinforcements against Haig's main advance by twelve British divisions. The Meerut Division's Bareilly and Garhwal brigades were selected for the Indian attack; they were to assault side by side on a front of 1,500 yards. Haig prescribed a preliminary bombardment lasting four days, in four twelve-hour spells. Compared to May, the artillery was to concentrate more on the German frontline. The Indian Corps' heavy guns were increased: it now had 60-pounders. It also had more shells. Its heavy guns, for instance, were allocated 10,000 rounds, drawn from the BEF's total supply of 1.18 million built up over the summer.⁷⁴ The Indian bombardment's accuracy was to be helped not only by a new system of artillery and Royal Flying Corps co-operation, involving the quicker relaying of information between artillery batteries and First Wing aircraft through new light radios, but also by a new British observation-balloon section, shared with III Corps.⁷⁵ Moreover, on an original suggestion from within the Indian Corps, two 18-pounder field guns were sneaked up to the Indian frontline; the idea was to bombard the German parapet from point-blank range.⁷⁶

Senior Indian commanders once again readied the Indian battalions with detailed preparation on their specific roles in lead and support skirmishing companies with rifles, machine guns and grenades. They instructed the assault troops to do many things as before, such as advancing into no man's land during the preliminary bombardment, wearing gas masks, carrying flags to aid aerial and artillery observation, and pressing forwards to exploit any success. On that last point, a Meerut Divisional order of 20 September left the regiments of the Bareilly and Garhwal brigades in no doubt: 'Assaulting troops are not to delay in the enemy's front line trenches, but will push on and capture the supporting line. Bodies of infantry are not to halt if portions of the line are held up but will press on [and will make] vigorous [grenade] attacks... If the opposition is slight full advantage is to be taken.'⁷⁷

Meanwhile, there were more Haig-inspired variations to the Indian attacking style. To intensify the preliminary artillery bombardment,

⁷⁴ Brown, *Logistics*, p. 96; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 326–28.

⁷⁵ Raleigh and Jones, *War in the Air*, vol. 2, pp. 117–27.

⁷⁶ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 321.

⁷⁷ Merewether, *Indian Corps*, p. 458.

Indian battalions were to pour in their own fire from mortars, grenades, Hotchkiss guns and machine guns. They were also to make a feint attack by waving Indian dummies from their trenches to trick the Germans into coming out from cover and into the Indian fire. Further, their opening assault was to be assisted by the explosion of a one-ton gun-cotton mine laid by the 1st Sappers and Miners; by the release of poison gas introduced to the First Army to help offset shell shortages; and by smoke from smoke-candles and phosphorus bombs, which were to be hand-thrown or catapulted onto the flanks of the Indian attackers to veil the advance.⁷⁸

All these things came into play shortly before and after the Indian brigades made their assault at 6am on 25 September. From 21 September, the Indian Corps' preliminary bombardment was its most accurate and powerful since the first day of Neuve Chapelle. The artillery wrecked several target trenches, benefiting from an improved quality of shells from British manufacturers.⁷⁹ The two 18-pounders in the Indian front-line proved particularly effective in the few minutes before 6am. One of them fired forty-seven rounds of high explosive before its breech mechanism broke, and the other fired seventy-six rounds. 'The first five rounds of the latter gun were observed to be direct hits, which did enormous damage to the enemy's parapet. . . . Further observation proved impossible, but from the reports subsequently received from the infantry, there was no doubt of the complete success of this novel departure in trench warfare.'⁸⁰ The waving of the dummies did not fool the Germans, and the gas was barely used due to the wind. But the collective grenade, mortar, Hotchkiss gun and machine gun fire was effective, as were both the mine, which left a crater ninety-two feet wide, and the phosphorus smoke. The overall effect was to allow a largely successful initial Indian advance. Amidst the phosphorus smoke's dense clouds, the gas-masked and grenade-throwing troops of the two leading Indian brigades captured much of the first and second German lines. For Claud Jacob, as the Meerut Division's commander,

The outstanding feature [of their advance was their] extraordinary keenness, spirit, élan and dash shown by all units. It was very marked in the period preceding the day fixed for the attack, and the way all ranks worked to make the operations a success was most gratifying. The vigour with which the different battalions made the assault left no doubt as to their determination to get through the German lines at all costs.⁸¹

⁷⁸ TNA, WO 256/4-5: Haig, *Western Front Diary*, 25 June-25 September 1915; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 406; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 328-29.

⁷⁹ Callwell, *Wilson*, vol. 1, p. 246.

⁸⁰ Merewether, *Indian Corps*, p. 411.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 456.

Yet the two leading Indian brigades failed to consolidate the ground they won. They came under flanking attack, which they lacked the firepower in their own hands and the artillery support to repel. They were gradually pushed back to their start line. In the heavy smoke, and with several attacking units widely spread about the battlefield – the 2nd/8th Gurkhas were the furthest forwards, having pushed on to the German third line – they did not have the communications to do much more.⁸² The root of their failure was overcompensation for the lesson drawn from Neuve Chapelle on 10 March of pushing on to exploit weak points. ‘So strongly had a continued offensive been insisted upon’, wrote Charles Norie, an Indian service officer who in 1897 had lost his left arm to the Afridis in the Tirah and at Loos led the Bareilly Brigade, ‘that it is not surprising that troops who already were so full of offensive spirit should have been misled into going forward too fast and too far. In doing so, they omitted to examine thoroughly the enemy’s trenches for lurking Germans [and] they did not sufficiently deal with possible approaches for counter-attacks.’⁸³ ‘The Indians did very well in this last business’, Walter Lawrence told Kitchener on 12 October. ‘In fact, they did too well and went too far; but the Indian wounded who come into hospitals are very pleased with themselves.’⁸⁴ The main British attack at Loos experienced similar problems to the Indian Corps. It was wound down after British divisions had lost early gains to counter-attacks.⁸⁵

The Indian Corps’ failure to secure more ground in its four offensives should not obscure the underlying Indian tactical transformation. This amounted to a revolution: the Indian battalions had arrived in France as specialists in hill warfare, but they departed in December 1915 as specialists in the most intense kind of regular operations. From First Ypres they had quickly developed a range of new defensive practices as the best means to hold their trenches, learning their lessons in company positioning, trench construction or shell sounds. Through 1915, a clear set of new offensive practices had become ingrained in them: for instance, precise pre-battle instruction with maps of target German positions; arrangement in four companies, with two assaulting and two supporting; creeping forwards out of trenches to make the most of preliminary artillery bombardments; or using Mills grenades, Hotchkiss guns, bomb-guns and other new means of infantry firepower beyond the rifle to deal with defenders not put out of action by artillery. Equally, as

⁸² Corrigan, *Sepoys*, pp. 224–36; Merewether, *Indian Corps*, pp. 403–60; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 326–43.

⁸³ Merewether, *Indian Corps*, p. 459.

⁸⁴ TNA WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 12 October 1915. Also see Omissi, *Voices*, letter nos. 151, 154 and 155.

⁸⁵ Sheffield, *The Chief*, pp. 122–30.

Merewether and Smith stressed in their account of the 2nd/8th Gurkhas' advance to the third German line at Loos, 'since the battle of Neuve Chapelle no opportunity had been lost of impressing on the [Indian] troops the necessity of pushing forward when opposition was found to be slight.'⁸⁶

Up to the end of 1915, the British army had adapted to the western front like the Indian army. From August to December 1914, its pre-war regular battalions learned lessons much as the Indian troops did about how to hold trenches. Whether they were drawn from the Home Army or the Army in India, they frequently made the same mistakes overexposing themselves to German fire, before they improved through common sense, discussion with more experienced officers and men, and tactical circulars.⁸⁷ 'I did not notice', the 39th Garhwals' Kenneth Henderson wrote of late 1914,

that the Indian units adapted themselves less quickly than the [Indian Corps'] British units – composed entirely of mature and seasoned soldiers – whom the trench fighting took equally by surprise. . . . It is not surprising that the Indian troops fought and died merely as did all our other gallant soldiers. We of the Indian army never for one instant imagined the Indian troops the equals of the British soldier, [but] we claim that there is precious little difference for practical purposes. We are perhaps overweeningly proud of our men, and being in the know, we feel we have reason to be. The record of the Indian Corps in France is one of which any British corps would be proud.⁸⁸

Indeed, the Canadians made mistakes in their trenches before improving like the Indians. Those who had been trained in England in 1914 arrived in Flanders in February 1915, to join Henry Rawlinson's IV Corps. 'I am very pleased with the Canadians', Rawlinson wrote on 6 March, 'they are very quick to pick up new conditions, and to learn the tricks of the trade of trench warfare.'⁸⁹

In 1915 William Robertson was the Chief of Staff at GHQ and then the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. During that year, he commented after the war,

Units, large and small, were coming out from [Britain to the BEF] indifferently trained in their common military duties, and knowing next to nothing about the conditions attaching to trench warfare. The war of trenches had brought up new problems for which our accepted methods of instruction made little provision, and [Kitchener's] New Armies, as well as the drafts, were still being trained on

⁸⁶ Merewether, *Indian Corps*, p. 458.

⁸⁷ N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 101–02; Marshall, *Four Fronts*, pp. 2–65; and Robbins, *Generalship*, p. 85.

⁸⁸ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 120–21.

⁸⁹ Maurice, *Rawlinson*, p. 126.

much the same lines as the old regular army had been. It was essential to set up machinery for giving these new arrivals the requisite additional training before they went into the trenches, the machinery to include schools of instruction manned by officers and non-commissioned officers who were specialists in their business; to make similar arrangements for the training of drafts at the bases; bring formations at the front in closer relation with these drafts and cause them to take a greater interest in them; and inaugurate systematic instruction for regimental officers and non-commissioned officers, whose professional standard had fallen to a low level owing to the number of casualties we had suffered.⁹⁰

The rigorous preparations Robertson spoke of only began in earnest after the Indian Corps had been disbanded. The BEF, building partly on its experiences of 1915, but much more on its offensives of 1916-17 under Haig as its Commander-in-Chief, developed new combined arms techniques to defeat the German army in 1918. Using the great quantities of heavy guns, high explosive shells, artillery sound-ranging systems, tanks and other equipment that became available after 1915 – one BEF preliminary bombardment of 1918 accurately rained down 945,000 good quality shells in 24 hours – its offensives seized and kept successive swathes of ground, maintaining a momentum to crush German morale.⁹¹ After the war, Willcocks identified that the Indian Corps' real problem had been a shortage of firepower:

[From 1916] less highly trained troops [than the IEFA's Indian infantry], assisted by an overwhelming Artillery fire, howitzers, etc., were able to carry out their offensives with something approaching mathematical exactitude, but all this was different [for the Indian Corps]; we had then to do our best without these aids and to take the consequences. I have often thought how different might have been the results of some of the many attacks carried out by Indian troops had we arrived 'After' instead of 'Before' unlimited ammunition and all the other helps to victory had come to be looked on as part of the absolute necessities for any advance. A distinguished General said to me in 1917: 'When you were in France it was a crime to say it was necessary to succeed to have a large gun support; now any one volunteering to carry out an enterprise except with an unlimited amount of shells would be looked on as a fool and take his conge at once.' What a pleasant change!⁹²

Had the Indian Corps remained after Loos, it would have become one of the BEF's most experienced formations. It would surely have taken the offensive more successfully than it did – not least by learning from its mistake at Loos of encouraging assault troops to go as far as they could, rather than setting limits on the ground to be covered according to what

⁹⁰ Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal*, p. 220.

⁹¹ Strachan, *First World War*, pp. 307 and 312.

⁹² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 147-48.

could be held against counter-attack. However, its 'learning curve', cut short, involved discovering the problems of trench warfare more than the solutions.⁹³

Nevertheless, the Indian army had competed with the Germans on the western front much like it had with the Pathans before the war: in a tactical cycle of innovations and responses. Take 1914 – that October, the Germans alone had mortars and grenades, so the Sappers and Miners made their own; on the night of 9–10 November, the Germans were taken by surprise by the 39th Garhwals' first trench raid, so they placed searchlights and more machine guns in their front trenches; the sappers and miners promptly improvised their own searchlights out of motor car headlamps powered through wires attached to the German electric plant at La Bassée; the Indian searchlights then drew so much German fire that they were switched off permanently.⁹⁴ Equally in 1915, the success of the Indian Corps' bombardment at Neuve Chapelle encouraged the Germans to give their machine guns more protection by placing them lower to the ground, beneath taller and stronger parapets; after the strength of their new parapets had done much to nullify the Indian bombardment at Aubers Ridge and at Festubert, the Indian Corps responded at Loos by bringing up its two field guns, 'profiting by the lesson learned in the May fighting [and] with a view, by point-blank fire, to destroying machine-guns and their emplacements'.⁹⁵

Beyond the western front, the Indian infantry units formerly of IEFA flexed the regular warfare techniques they had developed with the BEF. At Gallipoli from September to December 1915, the 1st/4th Gurkhas made good use of their defensive skills learned during their nine months with IEFA, for instance in holding front trenches lightly against Turkish artillery.⁹⁶ In early 1916, when the former Lahore and Meerut Divisions fought in Mesopotamia, they had many battalions with officers and men who had served in Flanders. Landing at Basra in early January, they were sent into action outside Kut al-Amara from the 12th. They applied the trench warfare practices they had developed with IEFA, such as trench-construction techniques, advancing in skirmishing groups and using grenades.⁹⁷ In East Africa in 1916–17, a significant minority of the

⁹³ Callwell, *Wilson*, vol. 2, p. 128; and Sheffield, 'The Australians at Pozières: Command and Control on the Somme, 1916', in French and Reid, *British General Staff*, pp. 112–126.

⁹⁴ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 98; and Sandes, *Sappers*, pp. 447–48.

⁹⁵ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 407.

⁹⁶ Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, vol. 1, pp. 270–77.

⁹⁷ Atkinson, *Dogra Regiment*, pp. 60–64; Carver, *Turkish Front*, pp. 137–38; Latter, 'Mesopotamia', 175; and Moberly, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, pp. 229, 255 and 341.

British and Indian officers of 129th Baluchis drew on their western front experiences to arrange efficient machine gun crews and to lead grenade assaults on Schütztruppen trenches. As Harold Lewis, who had fought with the 129th since First Ypres, wrote to his mother from Kibata in German East Africa in 1916:

I fixed up a stunt [at Kibata] with [grenades] and various machine-guns in flank-ing positions to co-operate. We planned it so as to leave our trenches, and creep up to the Huns in inky blackness. . . . Accordingly at 11pm, the line of [grenade throwers] crept over the parapet and formed a line in the darkness. They were followed by the first line, also with [grenades] who formed up behind. Then the second line crept out and formed to the right to guard against counter-attacks. The third line took their place in our trenches, and waited to push up to help the first line. Ayub Khan [the Mahsud who had reconnoitred behind German lines in France], of course, led the bombing line and his first [grenade], which hit the German sentry in the chest, was the signal. [Grenades] were thrown, the guns and machine-guns opened and the still black night became pandemonium.⁹⁸

Further, the 129th's troops who had served on the western front constructed trenches just as they had learned to do with the BEF: 'Our trenches in east Africa had a friendly feel for those who had been in Flanders.'⁹⁹

'I Knew These Troops Would Be No Good'

It was the Indian infantry's misfortune that when they landed at Marseilles in 1914, the racist logic of European minds had already doomed them to a particular conclusion on their military value: white soldiers would naturally do better than them on the European battlefield. After the Indians had retreated at Givenchy on 20 December 1914, one Home Army staff officer noticed that within the BEF's British corps, 'people now at once shake their head and say "I knew these troops would be no good".'¹⁰⁰ Haig heard many such comments. 'The Indians have come in for a lot of criticism', he told a friend in January 1915.¹⁰¹

Throughout that year, at the front and in England, Thakur Amar Singh heard negative remarks continuing to fly thick and fast from British

⁹⁸ Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 259–60.

⁹⁹ Thatcher, *129th DCO*, pp. xv, 74, 78–80, 102, 128, 141–56, 171–72, 194, 234, 270.

¹⁰⁰ Home, *Cavalry Officer*, p. 47. Also see J. French, *1914*, p. 196.

¹⁰¹ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Butler Papers: Haig Letter to Butler, 7 January 1915.

mouths. 'A great trouble under which we [Indians] have laboured', he wrote in his diary in April,

is that whenever we fail in the slightest degree any where people raise a hue & cry whereas if a British troop fails under the same circumstances no one mentions it. The Indian troops have done very well all along but when we had the reverse at Givenchy [on 20 December 1914] there was a hue and cry. However no one at that said that there were British troops it as well. Then again when we had such a brilliant success at [the Battle of] Neuve Chapelle I heard General Blackadder himself say that people are singing the praises of the Indian troops as if there were no Britishers with them. . . . I do not know what is expected of the Indians. After all a man can give up his life & no one can say that the Indians have been sparing themselves in any way. . . . The other day after the attack & capture of Neuve Chapelle . . . I met Graham [a British officer] who . . . told me that the Indians ought to be withdrawn. . . . He said that they can not fight against the Germans. On this I asked him whether they had not beaten the Germans back [at Neuve Chapelle] & whether they had not done so on several other occasions before? . . . If you talk of fears who is not afraid? Even the best troops have it now & then: but have rallied after that.¹⁰²

Amar Singh was asked by Lord Crewe in mid-1915 whether the Indian infantry should be withdrawn from France. 'I replied that this would be the worst thing that could possibly happen':

The reason why I am against it is that the lives of a few thousand is nothing compared to the honour of a nation. [In] future some blighter who has no sympathies with us would fling it in our teeth that we were not considered good enough to fight against the Germans & so were sent back. . . . Lord Crewe [assured me] that [the Indian troops would not be] sent back because they were considered unfit to fight the Germans and it would never be put that way. I said that I know perfectly well what he thought of the Indians but when a man was down on us he would think it in that way.¹⁰³

When on leave in London in 1914–15, James Willcocks detected a prevailing assumption that the Indian army was naturally weak and unsuited to the trench warfare in Flanders. 'I have heard too much the criticisms of [IEFA's] Indian troops by soldiers and civilians, who are without the faintest knowledge of what they talk about', he complained. 'I was always very careful', he added, 'to keep my lips closed as to this phase of the situation when the native officers and men asked me (as they always did) what I had heard about them in England.'¹⁰⁴

Willcocks was so angered by English talk of IEFA's Indian soldiers' natural frailty that he was given to making sarcastic remarks about them,

¹⁰² Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 390–92 and 438.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 381 and 390.

¹⁰⁴ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 194–95.

the irony of which could be lost on his listeners. For example, on returning to the front from London in early 1915, he expressed to Haig 'his sorrow at having wasted so much of his life with such a wretched lot of human beings as the Indians! and said much more in the same strain'.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, the previous November, in conversation with some GHQ staff officers on the question of Indians who might be recommended for the Victoria Cross, Willcocks perceived a grudging GHQ approach to the issue, leading him to say sourly, 'There is no one deserving of such a high honour.'¹⁰⁶ A few days later he told Hardinge what he really felt: 'The [Indians] taken as a whole . . . do extraordinarily well . . . the [Indian] is a very adaptable soldier.'¹⁰⁷

For the most authoritative British voices on the BEF up to the 1940s, it was an article of faith that it had been saved from defeat at First Ypres by 'the matchless pluck of the British soldier' (William Robertson), and that the real explanation for its victory in 1918 was 'not the weapons or the tactics but the superiority of the British soldier over the German on the ground, under the ground and in the air' (James Edmonds).¹⁰⁸ All the while, they believed that the BEF's Indian infantrymen could never have fought as well as its white soldiers, and therefore that the Indians had fought worse. Although their racial reasoning has gone the way of the Empire, their conclusion has proved much more durable.

The Indian Cavalry Corps

'Various new ways of fighting have been introduced', wrote an Indian cavalryman in France in September 1916, 'shells and machine-guns and bombs are mostly employed. No one considers rifles nowadays, and serviceable rifle ammunition is lying about as plentifully as pebbles. [A]fter two years' experience, we have grown used to . . . the trenches.'¹⁰⁹ Like those of its Indian infantry, the skills of IEFA's Indian cavalry – above all dismounted skills – were revolutionised through a mix of frontline experience, new equipment and lessons from above. Unlike the infantry, however, most of the Indian cavalry regiments served with the BEF for around three years, and they maintained their pre-war senses of internal cohesion because they attacked less and had far fewer casualties. They

¹⁰⁵ TNA, WO 256/4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 4 March 1915.

¹⁰⁶ See Gardner, *Trial*, p. 198 for a different interpretation of this remark.

¹⁰⁷ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 5 December 1914.

¹⁰⁸ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, vol. 5, p. 609; and Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁹ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 394.

were able, therefore, to develop and retain their new regular warfare skills with greater consistency.

Starting in November 1914, the Indian cavalry regiments of IEFA, to keep them active, were regularly required to leave their horses in villages behind the lines and to hold trenches on foot. They did this mostly in the Indian Corps line up to April 1915, and then in the Somme and the Aisne valleys up to 1918. For their dismounted duties, the War Office and GHQ gave them an array of new equipment: in 1914–15, bayonets, spades, picks and gas masks; from 1916, steel helmets, Mills bombs, Vickers machine guns and Hotchkiss light machine guns. They were all silladar units; never before had they been supplied with so many of the same things.¹¹⁰

The Indian cavalry units' early experiences of trench holding taught them the lessons of taking cover against shellfire and of trench construction, before GHQ-arranged training in 1915 and early 1916 schooled them in a variety of dismounted skills, including machine gunnery, trench raiding and grenade throwing – 'we learned how to use the different weapons skilfully', said one Sikh veteran;¹¹¹ 'we came to know many new techniques of war', said another.¹¹² From summer 1916, the Indian cavalrymen were clearly experts in dismounted work. In their frequent spells of 2–3 weeks' in the frontline, they capably provided trench-digging parties, built machine gun posts and repelled German raids. Further, they sent out aggressive patrols that dominated in no man's land and made disciplined raids on German lines. Their last raid was made on the night of 12–13 February 1918, by 100 men of the 19th Fane's Horse in the Somme valley.¹¹³

During their rests from the trenches, the Indian cavalrymen improved their already high standards of horsemanship through mounted training exercises. From early 1916, this training focused on rapid offensive movements. The Indians rehearsed moving up the battlefield along cavalry 'tracks' with special bridges laid over trenches, and charging with

¹¹⁰ F. Cardew, *Hodson's Horse* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1928), pp. 161–83; A. Daniels, *Skinner's Horse* (London: Rees, 1925), p. 145–50; D. Kenyon, 'British Cavalry on the Western Front, 1916–18', unpublished PhD thesis, Cranfield University (2007), pp. 33–34; E. Tennant, *The Royal Deccan Horse in the Great War* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1939), pp. 13–16; and Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, pp. 30, 36–44 and 51.

¹¹¹ Privately Held Transcript of 1971 Interview with Rissladar Bakhtaur Singh (2nd Gardner's Horse, aged eighty-five).

¹¹² Privately Held Transcript of 1972 Interview with Mansa Singh (6th King Edward's Own Cavalry, aged eighty).

¹¹³ Corrigan, *Poppycock*, p. 146; Farrar-Hockley, *Goughie*, pp. 181–83; Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, pp. 130–34, 146–56, 166–72 and 191; Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, pp. 141–55; Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, pp. 310–14; 34–39; W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, pp. 315–31 and 355; and M. Wylly, *Poona Horse*, vol. 2, p. 102–26.

lances lowered, in co-operation with artillery and tanks, before dismounting with their Hotchkiss machine guns to fight alongside infantry. Haig planned for mounted Indian cavalry action to rout the enemy in his offensives of 1915, but he did not achieve the infantry success to allow that. Thereafter, he encouraged the offensive use of cavalry in a mounted-dismounted role in support of infantry and tanks. Indian cavalry units played such a part in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme at High Wood (on 14 July) and the village of Gueudecourt (on 26 September), and in 1917 at the Battle of Cambrai at Gauche Wood (on 1–2 December). They went forwards usefully in small groups, covering ground at the gallop – on occasion jumping obstacles, lancing German infantrymen and capturing shocked prisoners – before dismounting to secure ground by setting up machine gun posts, from which they repelled counter-attackers.¹¹⁴ The charge of the 19th Fane's Horse at Cambrai to help capture Gauche Wood had an appreciative audience in the 2nd/Grenadier Guards. 'I must say', a Guardsman told an officer of the 19th, 'everyone admired your fellows as you came up that ridge towards the wood, because the Hun was throwing a good deal of stuff at you. But your fellows came on without turning a hair, and more than one of our men remarked on it.'¹¹⁵

The Indian cavalry's mounted value was also shown during the German tactical retreat of March 1917 to the Siegfried Position (known to the Allies as the Hindenburg line). As the BEF followed up the retreat, Indian squadrons efficiently carried out advanced patrol and reconnaissance duties, pursuing some of the German rearguards. 'In this affair', wrote a Sikh of the 9th Hodson's Horse, 'we got a chance to do our share. . . . Nowadays we get but little leisure, as work is heavy.' He and many other Indian cavalymen were indignant at the state of the abandoned ground. 'The evil deeds of the German have excited universal indignation', reflected a risaldar of the 6th Cavalry. 'He utterly destroyed all the towns and villages, and blew up the roads, and cut down the fruit trees, and has burnt everything. He has seized and taken away the civilian inhabitants. This is not a royal way of waging war.'¹¹⁶

At the start of 1918, the BEF's Indian cavalry regiments were unique to it as a collection of intact pre-war regulars who had served continuously

¹¹⁴ KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Lord Islington Letter to Haig, 28 December 1917; *The Times*, 16 March 1918, p. 6; Badsey, *Doctrine*, pp. 268–71; Corrigan, *Poppycocok*, p. 151–55; H. Harris, *The Irish Regiments in the First World War* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1968), p. 99; Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, pp. 304–10 and 315–30; Sheffield, *The Chief*, p. 114; and Tennant, *Deccan Horse*, pp. 46–51.

¹¹⁵ Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 188.

¹¹⁶ Kenyon, 'British Cavalry', pp. 33–62; and Omissi, *Voices*, letter nos. 497 and 545.

since 1914. They had transformed into highly efficient units for regular warfare. Their Indian officers in particular had, in the words of one British officer of the Central India Horse, become ‘extraordinarily self-reliant’, having grown accustomed to acting on their own initiative, unlike before the war.¹¹⁷

Once IEFA’s Indian cavalry had been sent to Palestine, they used their mounted-dismounted skills developed in France in Edmund Allenby’s offensives up the Mediterranean coast from Jerusalem towards Damascus. Time and again they made effective mounted charges on Turkish positions before dismounting to establish forward machine gun positions, much as they had done at the Somme or at Cambrai. For Henry Gullett, an Australian official historian,

the Indian cavalry [from France] possessed all the qualities necessary for Allenby’s operations. Regular lancers of long training, superbly mounted – most of them on horses of Australian breeding – and efficiently led, they [were] beautiful horsemen and expert with the lance. . . . They were also quick and shrewd observers. . . . Their keenness for action was almost excessive. . . . In their work in the Jordan valley, [they] exceeded all anticipation.¹¹⁸

Victory in Mesopotamia

While the Indian battalions in East Africa developed new bush warfare skills,¹¹⁹ and those at Gallipoli new trench warfare skills,¹²⁰ the Indian army’s greatest feat of arms was in Mesopotamia. Kut al-Amara fell on 29 April 1916, and the 10,000 soldiers within – the majority Indians of the 6th Division – were taken into Turkish captivity.¹²¹ Since January, IEFD relief forces, including the 3rd (ex-Lahore) and 7th (ex-Meerut) Divisions, had made a series of attacks across the flat and muddy desert against the Turkish trenches shielding Kut. They had failed at the cost of approximately 16,000 casualties. The Turkish lines had been skilfully defended by machine gunners, riflemen, snipers, grenadiers, engineers and gunners, and IEFD had neither the firepower nor the front line communications equipment to achieve more than break-ins. In fact, all the artillery that had supported the 3rd and 7th Divisions in Flanders

¹¹⁷ Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, p. 280; and W. Watson, *Central India Horse*, pp. 317, 334 and 383.

¹¹⁸ C. Bean and ors., *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, 12 vols. (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1920–42), vol. 7, pp. 654, 677, 712, 777; Callwell, *Wilson*, vol. 2, p. 126; and Sandhu, *Indian Cavalry*, vol. 1, pp. 344–69.

¹¹⁹ Thatcher, *129th D.C.O.*, pp. xv, 76–80 and 103–87.

¹²⁰ Patterson, *With the Zionists*, pp. 186–88.

¹²¹ Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, pp. 304–23.

had been kept by the BEF, a fatal blow to their chances of relieving Kut. Moreover, those two divisions' Hotchkiss guns, phosphorus bombs and other BEF fighting tools had also been left behind. IEFD, supplied largely from India, had no replacements to offer apart from a small number of grenades.¹²²

The ex-IEFA battalions were at the forefront of the attacks to relieve Kut. They lost heavily. For instance, after four months at Kut, the 1st/9th Gurkhas had only 250 of the 850 men who had landed with the battalion at Basra in January. Compared to their thirteen months on the western front, they had suffered over double their casualties in British and Gurkha officers, and only 150 fewer in riflemen. The other ex-IEFA units had lost from 50 to 90 per cent of their officers and men. Their collective tactical memory from the western front was substantially wiped. There was scarcely any compensation for the survivors in the form of lessons learned. IEFD was so poorly equipped at Kut in early 1916 that the 3rd and 7th Divisions were condemned to repeats of the worst things they had endured at Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge Festubert and Loos: inadequate preliminary and subsequent bombardments, or not enough infantry firepower to repel counter-attacks after capturing first-line trenches. Given the choice, they would probably have chosen to try the Battle of the Somme instead.¹²³

In London, the fall of Kut was seen as the greatest Indian military setback since 1857. 'The Mesopotamian operations during the first year and a half were conducted entirely by the India Office and India', wrote Charles Callwell, at the time the British General Staff's Director of Military Operations:

Up till after Sir W. Robertson had become C.I.G.S. [in December 1915], we had no direct responsibility in connection with them in the War Office. Looking back upon those months in the light of later experience, the attitude which one felt disposed to assume, the attitude that as this was an India Office business with which the War Office had nothing to do it was their funeral, was a mistaken one. [I] have no recollection of ever speaking to [Kitchener] on the subject of Mesopotamia during the period when 'D' Force was working right up into Irak, moving first to Amarah, then to El Gharbi, and then on to Kut [and Baghdad], thus involving the Empire in a regular offensive campaign on an ambitious scale in the cradle of the world. [We at the War Office] made ourselves to some extent

¹²² Carver, *Turkish Front*, pp. 133–58; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 438; Murphy, *Soldiers of the Prophet*, pp. 156–61; Syk, 'Command in Indian Expeditionary Force D: Mesopotamia, 1915–16', in K. Roy (ed.), *Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, pp. 92–102; and Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, pp. 192–248.

¹²³ Moberley, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, p. 276; Poynder, *9th Gurkha Rifles*, pp. 97–117; Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, pp. 242–43.

responsible for the disaster which occurred [at Kut], owing to our not taking a decided line on the subject.¹²⁴

In summer 1916, after the prime minister and Austen Chamberlain had been asked many uncomfortable questions on Mesopotamia in the House of Commons, a special Parliamentary Commission was set up to inquire into India's management of IEFD. To provide evidence, Charles Hardinge, Beuachamp Duff and Percy Lake (the latter having left India in January to take over the command of IEFD from John Nixon) were called to London. Meanwhile, India was stripped of its control of the campaign. The War Office took over.¹²⁵ Asquith appointed Lord Chelmsford as the new viceroy, and the War Office appointed two British army officers to replace Duff and Lake: Charles Monro and Stanley Maude respectively.

Monro had commanded the British 2nd Division, I Corps and First Army in France, before replacing Ian Hamilton at the head of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force in October 1915. At the war's outbreak, Haig had held him in high regard. 'Monro proved himself to be good regimental officer and an excellent Commandant of the Hythe School of Musketry', Haig had written, 'but some years with the Territorials has resulted in his becoming rather fat. There is, however, no doubt about his military ability.'¹²⁶ Maude, a pre-war British General Staff officer, had commanded a brigade on the western front in 1914, the 13th Division at Gallipoli in 1915, and that division at Kut in early 1916. In Callwell's eyes, Maude 'possessed a capacity for taking pains which certainly amounted to genius. [His] bent for punctuality and for the systematic conduct of office duties amounted almost to a passion'.¹²⁷

In late 1916, Monro and Maude transformed IEFD – or the Mesopotamian Field Force, its War Office label – to take the offensive as never before. Their main striking formations were the new 1st and 3rd Indian Army Corps, for which they selected on merit senior commanders with BEF or Gallipoli experience. They raised IEFD's strength to 150,000 men, mostly Indian, by replenishing existing Indian battalions, and by filling new ones with drafts provided by India's freshly widened recruitment system. Through War Office and reinvigorated Indian channels of supply, they oversaw IEFD's provision with large quantities of fighting equipment: machine guns and grenades; field and heavy artillery;

¹²⁴ Callwell, *Experiences of a Dug-Out* (London: Constable, 1920), pp. 179–83.

¹²⁵ Syk, 'Indian Expeditionary Force D', in K. Roy (ed.), *Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, p. 66.

¹²⁶ Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 57, Quoting Haig's Diary from 13 August 1914.

¹²⁷ Callwell, *The Life of Stanley Maude* (London: Constable, 1920), pp. 80 and 107.

shells and gunners' range-finding equipment; and aeroplanes for reconnaissance and bombing. The troops were systematically trained so that new regular warfare practices took shape among them. They were taught to use grenades, advance on limited objectives and consolidate their gains. 'The troops [began] to realise . . . a driving power which emanated from Maude, [and] Monro's appearance amongst them, of which all ranks speedily became aware, served to assure them that the Mesopotamian Field Force was no longer a Cinderella, apparently looked upon with comparative indifference by Government Departments in Simla and in Whitehall.'¹²⁸

From 13 December 1916 to mid-February 1917, Maude masterminded IEFD's recapture of Kut by means of the most powerful sustained advance the Indian army had ever made. With scrupulously well-prepared artillery support, successive waves of largely Indian battalions skirmished their way through the Turkish trench lines, which were significantly better constructed than before, not least because of German technical assistance. The Indian units captured strictly limited objectives, one after another, holding off counter-attacks as they consolidated their gains. 'We have had some very strenuous fighting', Maude wrote home on 21 January,

but it has all been eminently successful, and we have driven the Turks from the whole of their trench system on the right bank of the Tigris north-east of Kut. . . . The 3rd Division did most of the fighting and did it splendidly. As you know, the Turks are very stubborn fighters, especially in trenches; but our men fairly beat them at their own game, and with bomb and bayonet drove them steadily back, foot by foot, till by the morning of the 20th they were all pushed across the river. . . . The men are tremendously pleased with themselves as well they may be, for their conduct has been splendid.¹²⁹

Besides the artillery, the Indian infantry had combined with cavalrymen working on their flanks, and with aeroplanes that had dropped bombs on the River Tigris to disrupt crossing points for Turkish reinforcements.¹³⁰

'The disaster which had befallen [at Kut] ten months before', Callwell reflected,

and the succession of reverses which the [relief forces while Kut was under siege] had met with when engaged on an almost impossible task, were amply avenged. . . . Not often in the history of war has so dramatic a transformation been recorded in the relative positions of opposing belligerents. It is difficult to pick a hole either in the conception or in the execution of this two and a half

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

months' campaign [to re-take Kut], which entirely revolutionised the military situation in Mesopotamia.¹³¹

IEFD captured Baghdad in March 1917.¹³² In the following months, the city and its environs were painstakingly secured against Turkish counter-attacks, and new weapons – the Lewis light machine gun, for example, or the 2-inch trench mortar – were incorporated into Indian platoons. In November, Maude died of cholera in Baghdad, caught there from milk he took with his coffee at a performance of *Hamlet* in Arabic. His replacement was William Marshall (British army), a commander of western front, Gallipoli and Mesopotamian experience who was possibly even more deliberate and careful than Maude himself. Marshall led IEFD into northern Mesopotamia and Kurdistan, overseeing a succession of actions in which Turkish lines were carried by Indian infantry using their new weapons in tandem not just with artillery, cavalry and aeroplanes, but also with armoured Ford vans. Meanwhile, some of the best trained and most experienced Indian companies in Mesopotamia were sent to Palestine to spread their practices among freshly raised Indian units.¹³³ IEFD's victory was sealed at the end of October 1918, when Marshall accepted the Turkish surrender at Mosul.¹³⁴ He had seen through what Callwell described as 'one of the greatest campaigns ever undertaken by a European Power in a region beyond the seas'.¹³⁵

In India by mid-1916, 'frontier warfare was a forgotten art', wrote a colonel of the 7th Gurkhas.¹³⁶ Virtually all the high-quality pre-war Indian battalions either had been deployed overseas and suffered heavy casualties (89 of the Indian infantry's 138 pre-war battalions were sent abroad), or had stayed on the subcontinent but released the bulk of their pre-war officers and men as casualty replacements. The new recruits in India had been only indifferently trained in the *Field Service Regulations*' principles; the same could be said of the Territorial units that had been shipped there from England, in exchange for most of India's pre-war British battalions. In May 1916, Army Headquarters opened the Mountain Warfare School at Abbottabad for Territorial officers, but this did very little to replace the well-trained pre-war Indian regulars that had fallen on battlefields from Ypres to Kut al-Amara.¹³⁷

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264. Also see Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, pp. 288–303 and 337–59.

¹³² Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, pp. 360–68.

¹³³ Callwell, *Dug-Out*, pp. 182–88.

¹³⁴ See Latter, 'Mesopotamia'; K. Roy, 'Indian Army in Mesopotamia'; and Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, pp. 387–439.

¹³⁵ Callwell, *Dug-Out*, p. 179.

¹³⁶ Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroy's*, p. 226.

¹³⁷ Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 102; Moreman, "Passing it On", p. 278; and Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroy's*, pp. 226–36.

The Mohmands declared a jihad in late 1916 against the Indian government. The latter, however, did not have enough units trained to invade Mohmand in response like it had in 1908. As an alternative to protect Indian administered territory, it set up a seventeen-mile trench line before the Mohmand border, fronted by a deadly electrical wire with a current of 4,200 volts, and fortified by armed block-houses every 800 yards.¹³⁸ In 1917, the Mahsuds committed so many crimes in Indian territory that the government felt compelled to send in the South Waziristan Field Force, despite being extremely reluctant to do so because it had on hand no regular battalions fully trained for the tribal areas – the last regiment with intact pre-war companies expert in hill warfare, the 19th Punjabis, was in Persia.¹³⁹ The South Waziristan Field Force's units were poorly prepared for their tasks, and their performances were the worst seen on the frontier since the Tirah campaign. For instance, the 1st/4th Gurkhas, who had served with IEFs A and G, had only one remaining pre-war British officer, and most of their men were new recruits since Gallipoli. On 10 May 1917 at Sarwekai, in the heart of Waziristan, they opened fire on a lashkar of 450 Mahsuds they had found cooking breakfast in a ravine. According to an Indian General Staff account, 'the Mahsuds were caught completely off their guard – no ordinary occurrence – and at first lost heavily, but there was no panic amongst them, and in an incredibly short time they were counter-attacking with extraordinary ferocity.'¹⁴⁰ In a few minutes, the Mahsuds, armed with .303 rifles, shot 124 men of the Gurkhas, who had not been properly trained to conduct rearguards or to counter-attack in small groups.¹⁴¹ The Zakkas and Mohmands in 1908 had of course met Indian forces of a quite different class. If the old British regular army died at Ypres in 1914, its Indian counterpart did so at Dushakh, in Trans-Caspia (now Turkmenistan) in 1918, when at dawn on 13 October the pre-war companies of the 19th Punjabis went into action against heavy fire for the first time, across open ground towards un-bombarded Bolshevik machine guns and artillery.¹⁴²

Compared to the South Waziristan Field Force's difficulties in 1917, worse was to come in the Army in India's campaign against the Mahsuds in 1919–20. This time the imperial troops went into Waziristan with

¹³⁸ IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/3, 'North-West Frontier' (November 1916).

¹³⁹ S. Blacker, *On Secret Patrol*, p. viii.

¹⁴⁰ Indian General Staff, *Waziristan*, p. 38.

¹⁴¹ Macdonell and Macaulay, *4th Gurkha*, vol. 1, p. 388; Indian General Staff, *Waziristan*, pp. 32, 44, 52, 57, 59 and 62.

¹⁴² S. Blacker, *On Secret Patrol*, pp. 139, 182 and 266; and P. Hopkirk, *On Secret Service East of Constantinople: The Plot to Bring Down the British Empire*, new edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 372–76.

Lewis guns and grenades, and they were guided by aerial reconnaissance. But the Mahsuds had developed new .303 rifle tactics of unprecedented sophistication and started to use grenades of their own. The Indian battalions were comprehensively outdone because the art of hill warfare was still lost to them. The Mahsuds' fire inflicted 2,286 casualties, double those of the Tirah campaign.¹⁴³ 'The desperate nature of the fighting [against the Mahsuds in 1919–20] would have tried highly trained units, even the pre-war Frontier Force or similar regiments with long experience and training on the frontier', the Indian General Staff concluded at the campaign's close:

It is very essential for us, even those who fought in the frontier as late at 1917 . . . to realise to what extent conditions have been altered. . . . The [Mahsuds'] tactical knowledge and training have greatly improved. . . . We must appreciate the standard of individual training that is required for infantry in the conditions that prevail on the frontier today. The standard of training that we had perforce to be content with in France in the later years of the Great War, although it enabled us to gain a final victory, does not suffice on the frontier today, nor are the tactical methods that we adopted suitable in many respects. . . . In an action [in the tribal areas] large bodies of men cannot be used, and a man's fighting value, and his own safety, depend on his own efforts and on his ability to use his weapons.¹⁴⁴

The Indian army's pendulum of tactical development was already swinging back from regular warfare to hill warfare. As the competitive environments of France and Mesopotamia were cooling down, the north-west frontier was getting very hot again. Waziristan in 1919–20 inspired major Indian tactical improvements, just as the Tirah campaign had – and just as the western front had, or Mesopotamia. Ultimately, the Indian army adapted its tactics to its enemies, Afridis, Germans, Turks and Mahsuds alike.

¹⁴³ Indian General Staff, *The Third Afghan War, 1919* (Calcutta: Central Publication Branch, 1926), p. 18, and *Waziristan*, pp. 85–151; Moreman, "Passing it On", pp. 275–80. Also see A. Skeen, *Passing it On: Short Talks on Tribal Fighting on the North-West Frontier of India*, fourth edition (Aldershot: Gale & Polden: 1939).

¹⁴⁴ Indian General Staff, *Waziristan*, pp. 118–19.

11 Commanders and Staff

‘I hear there has been friction between Willcocks and French’, Hardinge confided in an old Foreign Office friend in July 1915. ‘How very tiresome all these Generals are with their petty quarrels! It seems that while our soldiers are fighting brilliantly, our Generals are squabbling and lying about each other.’¹ That February, French’s sixth despatch had blamed Willcocks for the Indian Corps’ retreat at Givenchy on 20 December 1914. The despatch had it that from 16 to 19 December the Indian Corps made a string of small attacks at Willcocks’ behest, not GHQ’s. The implication was that Willcocks was responsible for overtiring his corps’ battalions, leaving them too weary to resist the German mines and infantry attack on the 20th.²

In the opinion of F. E. Smith, writing to his wife from Indian Corps headquarters in February 1915, French’s sixth despatch was ‘most misleading’. He told her that GHQ had prompted the Indian attacks of 16 to 19 December, through a series of muddled orders French now wished to gloss over. ‘French treated Willcocks so badly in his last despatch, and Willcocks didn’t care a damn’, Smith wrote. ‘French came over sheepishly to apologise, but Willcocks said: “Explain what, sir? There’s nothing to explain. I don’t care what you say or don’t say about me, but if you had not done justice to my troops I would have resigned my command.”’³

French’s sixth despatch was part of an avalanche of Home Army criticism that fell upon the BEF’s senior Indian commanders and their staff in 1915. ‘The War has proved that the whole of the senior officers on the Indian establishment are too old for their work’, Haig commented on 9 April.⁴ After the Battle of Aubers Ridge, Haig complained that ‘the commanders of the Indian Corps scarcely realize the great power of

¹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to V. Chirol, 29 July 1915.

² ‘Despatch of Field Marshal Sir John French’, *London Gazette* (16 February 1915).

³ See F. E. Smith Letters of February 1915, in F. Smith, *Frederick Edwin, Earl of Birkenhead*, 2 vols. (London: Butterworth, 1935), vol. 2, pp. 44–47.

⁴ TNA, WO 256/4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 9 April 1915.

modern artillery equipped with high explosive shells.⁵ Robertson was of the same mind: 'We do not get anything like full weight out of the Indian Corps . . . [one of] the chief reasons is want of energy and determination on part of some of its leaders.'⁶

Such views were common among British service officers outside the Indian Corps. In IV Corps, for example, staff officers were prone to cracking genteel jokes about how the Indian commanders were aged invalids in need of bath-chairs. In mid-1915, one IV Corps intelligence officer who had been moved to the Indian Corps judged that his new corps commander was a far cry from his former one, Henry Rawlinson. He cast Willcocks as 'a stately old gentleman, very remote from the rough and tumble of trench life'.⁷

The Indian Corps' senior officers were well aware that their Home Army colleagues tended to hold them in low esteem. They resented it bitterly. 'The fact is that French and Haig hate the Indian Corps', declared Henry Keary in June 1915 as the Lahore Division's commander:

No recognition of anything good and unjust aspersions on every one. I think no one in the Indian Corps feels induced to do his best, there has been much injustice to it done and said. However, I suppose this is a penalty for going into the Indian Army and having the bad luck to be sent to France where we are in a minority.⁸

'In France', wrote another Indian service officer, who was a Quetta p.s.c., 'we came under Higher Commands and Staffs which were, to say the least of it, unsympathetic.'⁹

For Merewether and Smith, Willcocks' departure from the Indian Corps in the first week of September 1915 was an 'irreparable loss. . . . The blow was keenly felt by both officers and men of the Corps.'¹⁰ 'I feel rather distressed at the supersession of Willcocks', Hardinge wrote on hearing the news. 'It is all due to a row with Haig, but knowing the strong prejudices and violence of the latter, I have no confidence that Willcocks has been justly treated. . . . I have heard of other instances where distinguished officers have been unjustly removed from command by Douglas Haig.'¹¹

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 May.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 21 May.

⁷ IWM, 74/9/1: Papers of Lieutenant-Colonel S. Woolrych, 'Recollections', p. 20.

⁸ IWM, Con Shelf: Papers of Lieutenant-General Sir H. Keary: Keary Letter to Captain F. Keary, 11 June 1915.

⁹ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 120.

¹⁰ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 399–401.

¹¹ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letters to W. Birdwood, 29 September, and to V. Chirol, 30 September 1915.

The yardstick for judging the operational performance of all the BEF's senior commanders and staff officers is how well they adapted to western front circumstances. On the whole, the senior Indian commanders and their staff adapted reasonably well – and certainly much better than their Home Army counterparts gave them credit for.

The Indian Corps

In New Year 1915, Henry Watkis, James Bruncker and Forbes Macbean – the original commanders of the Lahore Division (Watkis; aged fifty-four; Indian army), Sirhind Brigade (Bruncker; sixty; Royal Artillery) and Bareilly Brigade (Macbean; fifty-seven; British army) – were removed from their posts. On 20 December 1914, following the German mine detonations, the Sirhind Brigade's retreat had created a large backwards bulge at the centre of the Indian line. That day and into the 21st, Watkis, Bruncker and Macbean oversaw the counter-attacks. Their shared task was to use two infantry brigades, with little artillery support, to regain the trenches the Sirhind Brigade had retreated from. The lost trenches had been freshly fortified by German machine gunners. They lay across a large expanse of boggy and shell-churned ground, criss-crossed by dilapidated and deserted lines filled with icy water. The only hope for the counter-attack was for a careful approach, targeting specific and small objectives, and using assault companies with others in support. Proper preparation called for commanders and staff to gain a detailed picture of the obstacles their men would face, before making a realistic plan for troops and artillery to tackle them in well-thought-out stages.

Watkis, Bruncker and Macbean lacked tactical imagination, however. Watkis, as the senior local commander at his divisional headquarters in the rear, sent forward all his reserves as soon as possible to make all-out counter-attacks. He directed that they should have as much shellfire in support as his artillery could spare, but he did not closely arrange how this should be done. The tactical details he delegated to his brigade commanders. He left too much to chance. By neglecting to guide his brigade commanders to make carefully considered attacks, he drastically reduced the probability that such attacks would be made.

Bruncker and Macbean arranged two frontal counter-attacks on the lost Sirhind Brigade line. They did not acquire any detailed picture of the ground their men were to attack across, neither getting one from their brigade-majors and staff-captains nor venturing out themselves from their headquarters in the rear. When the counter-attacks went in, all the available troops were hastily thrown forwards in wide lines, with the artillery support poorly co-ordinated. The troops attacked with only the

vaguest senses of direction. Many got lost. Those who managed to push through to near the old Sirhind Brigade line found a swampy wasteland bristling with German machine guns; they were forced to retire fully. 'We were hurled against the enemy in a most disgracefully organised way imaginable', wrote Roly Grimshaw of the 34th Poona Horse, 'sheer crass pigheadedness or ignorance, or both, caused an utterly useless series of attacks.'¹²

In pre-war India, Watkis, Bruncker and Macbean had reached their commands through promotion on seniority over merit. They had not thought much about how to fight a future regular war in Europe. These things, and a lack of initiative, resulted in their weak tactical nouses on the western front. French sacked them for incompetence. They deserved to go.¹³ Alfred Glasgow (aged forty-four; British army), Macbean's brigade-major since 1911, was dismissed for not having helped his brigadier to do better.¹⁴

Philip Carnegy and Charles Johnson (both Indian army, aged fifty-six, and respectively the original commanders of the Jullundur and the Dehra Dun Brigades) also left the Indian Corps. On 20–21 December 1914, Carnegy, who before the war had been the commandant of the 2nd/4th Gurkhas, oversaw a counter-attack through the ruins of Givenchy village on the right of the Indian line. His attack was of a kind that Watkis, Bruncker and Macbean should have delivered. He grasped the local situation well, sending in a few small and well-planned assaults that sought to move from one limited objective to another, though ultimately they failed for want of artillery support. He had shown good consideration of the effects of German firepower, and a certain adaptability to trench warfare. He lost his post not for incompetence, but because at Christmas he had been invalided out of the BEF with frostbite, and he was not asked back, GHQ judging him too old to rejoin. Johnson lost his post in similar circumstances. Thus both of them suffered from India's pre-war

¹² KCL/LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers: 'Talk with Jacob, 16 November 1932' (LH 11/1932/45); IWM, Con Shelf: Keary Papers: Keary Letter to Captain F. Keary, 7 March 1915; Coleman, *Mons to Ypres*, p. 297–99; and Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, see diary entries for 19 and 28 January 1915.

¹³ TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War* (December 1914), 'Operations of the Indian Army Corps from 18 to 22 December'; WO 256/2: Haig, *Western Front Diary*, 22 December 1914; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 375–76 and 414; G. French (ed.), *Some War Diaries, Addresses and Correspondence of Field-Marshal the Earl of Ypres* (London: Jenkins, 1937), p. 168; N. Gardner, *Trial*, p. 182; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 187–91; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 163.

¹⁴ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 146; Callwell, *Maude*, p. 199.

promotion system, which had put them in their posts at an age above what was usual among their Home Army peers.¹⁵

James Willcocks arrived on the western front as an energetic fifty-seven year old in good health. In 1913, Hardinge had described him as a 'very rough diamond'.¹⁶ Willcocks did not come from a wealthy background. His father had been a teenage runaway from England, and had fought as a private soldier in the First Afghan War of 1839–42 before finding work with the East India Company. Willcocks himself had been born outside Delhi amidst the chaos of the Indian mutiny. He had been saved from the mutineers by a villager who hid him. 'Willcocks' mother had died at the time', Charles Repington learned,

and later in his life, when Brigade Major at Delhi, the [villager], then old and blind, had come with all his family, had blessed him by all the Christian and Hindu gods, and had prophesied his success in life. [Willcocks] had obtained a high position for the old [villager] and for his children. Later, when he was commanding the Northern Army and was a great swell, the family had come again with all their relatives and he had given them a great reception.¹⁷

'A nomad I was born', Willcocks said, 'and a nomad I have lived.' He spent most of his childhood in India and was educated privately in Somerset. In his late teens, he travelled alone for two years, largely by sea, reading history books and writing poetry as he went. He took a pilgrim ship to Mecca, and months later arrived at Genoa, penniless. 'My last sea adventure landed me in England in sore straits', he wrote. He was initially unsuccessful for the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, taking the entrance exam three times. He was twenty-one when he left the College in 1878, to join an unfashionable Irish infantry regiment, then stationed in the Punjab.¹⁸

Charismatic and without wealth, social connections or a Staff College education, Willcocks rose in the Army in India on his own merits. 'I have never asked those high in office to help me and I have made my own way. . . . I am a soldier who has lived in khaki [in] far-away portions of the Empire, and has seldom been seen on the Downs of Salisbury or in the purlieu of Pall Mall or Whitehall.'¹⁹ In Britain, he was best known for two of the twelve small wars in which he had commanded Indian

¹⁵ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3094: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, April 1915), p. 2; Willcocks, *Indians*, pp. 170 and 175.

¹⁶ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to V. Chirol, 23 April 1913.

¹⁷ Repington, *First World War*, vol. 1, p. 342.

¹⁸ J. Weaver (ed.), *The Dictionary of National Biography, 1922–1930* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 908–09.

¹⁹ F. Smith, *Birkenhead*, vol. 2, p. 32; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 50.

troops – the so-called War of the Golden Stool in West Africa in 1900, when Willcocks had led 3,500 men, including some Sikhs, through the jungle to relieve the fort at Kumassi; and the Zaka campaign of 1908, whose rapid conclusion earned it the nickname ‘Willcocks’ weekend-war’ in the British press.²⁰

‘Camberley may turn out Napoleons’, Willcocks wrote, ‘but it cannot provide them with the knowledge which is an absolute essential in dealing with Indian troops. . . . Personal command of troops is the sole test of leadership, and no Staff experience can compare with it.’²¹ He claimed that the Indian ranks’ ‘religion, habits, castes and languages are as familiar to me as my own religion and language. . . . From long and sometimes perhaps weary toil I have acquired a knowledge of many of the dialects of the [Indian] army.’²² He also said that ‘you will not get from the Indian troops their best, unless they recognise that they are understood. . . . To deal with them justly and as friends, we must first look on them as they are, and not only as we think they should be.’²³

According to a brother officer of Willcocks’ regiment, ‘he was greatly beloved by Indians of every class, from Maharajahs to muleteers, and had a wonderful knack of winning their confidence’:

This was due partly to his kindliness and generosity, but more to his intimate knowledge of their social and religious customs and his complete mastery of Hindustani. He was one of the very few general officers who could address an Indian regiment in idiomatic Punjabi or Hindustani with such fluency and raciness of speech as to be perfectly understood by all. He had the art of throwing into these speeches homely little touches which stimulated the soldierly pride of the troops – whether Sikhs, Hindus, or Muslims – and made them realize that here was a general who knew their tongue and could stir their hearts. Though occasionally hasty and vehement in his criticisms, he would champion the reputation of his officers and men, and make their interests his own, whenever he thought that they were treated unfairly, or denied the consideration that he believed to be their due.²⁴

‘Having been brought up in India as a boy’, William Birdwood observed of Willcocks, ‘he knew the language well, and I have heard no other British service officer – and indeed, few of the Indian army – who could address Indian troops as he did.’²⁵ On 17 May 1908, the day after the Mohmands had shot several men of the 22nd Punjabis in the glare of

²⁰ *The Daily Mirror*, 8 April 1908, p. 1; and *The Times*, 2 March 1908, p. 2.

²¹ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 219.

²² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 2.

²³ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 51.

²⁴ *The Times*, 23 December 1926, p. 12.

²⁵ Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, p. 190.

lightning flashes, Willcocks consoled the regiment in a speech he delivered in fluent Urdu. A watching journalist was impressed: Willcocks was ‘a soldier’s friend . . . they love him’.²⁶ As Willcocks showed the 22nd Punjabis, the Indian commanders on the frontier did not take for granted the fighting commitment of their men; rather, they saw it as their duty to care for each individual soldier’s life.

As India’s Northern Army Commander from 1910 to 1914, Willcocks became well known to the battalions of the 3rd and 7th Divisions as ‘Wil Kak Sahib’.²⁷ Besides supervising their training, he regularly attended their regimental celebrations, at which he talked, sang, drank and smoked with the men:

The winter of 1913–14 was one bidding farewell to my old comrades [before my intended retirement]. The British officers I could meet again, but the Indian ranks, except perhaps a very few, never. I remember each such meeting, but the one that impressed me most was a dinner, followed by sword-dancing, fireworks and Eastern songs, given in my honour by the Indian officers and men of the 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force), at Jalandar [in the Punjab]. There was no mistaking what they meant; they were genuinely sorry I was leaving, and I was still more so as bidding them goodbye. They had served under me in two frontier campaigns, and little we thought that evening that we would meet again in the very near future on the bloody fields of Flanders.²⁸

Willcocks was chosen to lead the Indian Corps on grounds of seniority; he was India’s highest field commander. His corps headquarters staff was hastily cobbled together between August and October 1914 by Beauchamp Duff and Percy Lake at Simla, India having had no formed corps headquarters in peacetime. His senior General Staff officers were drawn mostly from the pre-war group of older Indian GSOs who had been born in the 1860s and not been to Staff College, and his junior ones from the pre-war group of younger Indian GSOs who had been born since 1870 or so and were generally p.s.c.²⁹ ‘It is perhaps no exaggeration’, *The Times* commented in its review of IEFA’s arrival in France with Willcocks, ‘that every Indian officer serving in the Indian Corps was known to him personally.’³⁰ Willcocks went further: ‘I was in the happy position of having with me troops all of whom I had helped to train at one or other of the numerous military stations of north India, [and] I was

²⁶ C. V. Miles (ed.), *The Zakka Khel and Mohmand Expeditions* (Rawalpindi: J. R. Thapur, 1909), p. x.

²⁷ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 106.

²⁸ Willcocks, *Romance*, pp. 273–74.

²⁹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/1618: ‘Telegrams between Sir Beauchamp Duff and Earl Kitchener’, Duff to Kitchener, 8 September 1914.

³⁰ *The Times History of the War*, vol. 2, p. 333.

personally acquainted with every officer and great many of the N.C.O.s and men.³¹

While the Indian Corps was directly under GHQ in the BEF's chain of command up to Christmas 1914, it was in daily touch with John French through a liaison staff officer, but it was not placed under close control. This left Willcocks and his subordinates substantially to their own devices.³² In striking a balance at Indian Corps headquarters between personally attending to operational bureaucracy and delegating it, Willcocks placed a heavy emphasis on delegation, preferring to spend time not indoors at his desk poring over staff work, but outside on horseback visiting his troops. He rode many miles a day to speak to them in the trenches. 'There alone could one understand the real life the men lived, and appreciate what they were doing.'³³ On 17 November, wrote F. E. Smith, 'I rode round with [Willcocks] to interview the men who had been in our trenches for three weeks. They were splendid. They had been sodden and cold and exposed, and shelled out, and attacked by bombs [but] when we turned up the Sikhs burst into their martial full-throated war-song; it brought the tears into one's eyes.'³⁴ Willcocks recorded another of his trench visits that month. 'A young Indian soldier declared that if the Germans would exchange weapons the war would be over in a week. 'Not if we kept them as clean as you do', remarked a comrade, and all laughed. I discovered our recruit had been reprimanded that morning for having a dirty rifle on parade.'³⁵

Willcocks made a point of visiting every Indian battalion to congratulate them on their efforts. To the 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force), for instance, he 'made many flattering remarks about the regiment, and chatted to all British and Indian officers individually [and] most cordially and kindly'.³⁶ He also visited Indian hospitals and convalescent depots to comfort the wounded. '[One] very severely wounded Indian soldier, whom I was seeing off in the ambulance, asked me for a *nishan* (souvenir) of the war':

I gave him my handkerchief with blue edges . . . he asked me to tie it round his arm as it would be a passport at Bombay, and with a touch of humour he added, 'When they see it the Customs officers will not dare to examine my baggage.' This consisted of a German helmet which he had tied on to his haversack.³⁷

³¹ Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 247.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

³³ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 298.

³⁴ F. Smith, *Birkenhead*, vol. 2, p. 42.

³⁵ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 138.

³⁶ Lindsay, *13th Frontier Force*, pp. 49 and 53.

³⁷ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 100–01.

Willcocks attended his first conference at GHQ on 24 November 1914. 'All the Corps Commanders were present', he recalled,

and although I knew some of them and had casually met others, I felt for the first time in France that I was a stranger. I heard as I came into the hall, 'Who is that?' 'He commands the Indians.' It was as if some foreign general had suddenly dropped into the sacred haunts of Whitehall in pre-war days.³⁸

Old social tensions between Home Army and Army in India officers had resurfaced. In Flanders that autumn and winter, the two groups barely socialised. A side effect was that the Indian commanders and staff did not much discuss with Home Army soldiers problems of, and possible solutions to, the trench fighting. This did not help their adaptation to it. Smith-Dorrien was an exception, in that as a BEF Home Army commander his temperament and pre-war experiences in India led him to communicate relatively openly with the Indian commanders, and at First Ypres he was careful to give them informal advice on trench warfare. But thereafter he stopped doing so because his subsequent BEF service was spent away from the Indian Corps' part of the BEF line.³⁹

Willcocks' operational orders of 1914 were permissive. That November he did not give his Indian battalions precise orders on how they should make their small attacks, he just generally encouraged the use of their hill warfare skills. For example, one of his orders to the Lahore and Meerut Divisions said that he perceived a 'nonchalant attitude' in the German lines opposite, and that he knew well 'those constant enterprises and surprises in which the Indian troops do and must excel . . . I, therefore, desire that constant enterprise be shown, and that every ruse and device which the ingenuity of officers and men can bring into useful play, should be employed to harass the enemy, disturb his rest, and inspire in him a wholesale respect for, and awe of, the Indian Corps.'⁴⁰

From 16 to 19 December, Willcocks ordered several Indian attacks, in line with GHQ instructions for his corps to keep the Germans opposite occupied, as part of a wider BEF effort to pin down enemy reserves to help the French. He did not give any real guidance as to attacking method. The Indian attacks went in with officers on the spot improvising; they captured some trenches, then lost them to counter-attacks, and suffered heavy casualties. After the mine-blasts on 20 December, Willcocks took the same approach. The results – as we have seen – were mixed according to how divisional or brigade commanders happened

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³⁹ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 138, and *Romance*, p. 292.

⁴⁰ TNA, WO 95/1088: *Indian Corps War Diary* (November 1914), Appendix IX, 'Order to the Lahore Division and the Meerut Division' (12 November).

to perform. Roly Grimshaw, who was wounded in Watkis, Bruncker and Macbean's counter-attacks, disapproved. 'Willcocks ought to have seen to it that the attacks were so organised that every factor helping to success was carefully considered. This was not done, and it was obviously a case of "someone had blundered."' ⁴¹

By 21 December the Lahore and Meerut Divisions were exhausted, having fought continuously for two months. ⁴² That afternoon, Haig was sent by French to Indian Corps headquarters at Hinges chateau to assess the local situation. The road to the chateau was blocked; 'evidently staff work bad', Haig sniffed. ⁴³ On entering the chateau, he was surprised to find 'a big salon where tea was still going on. It was now past 5pm'. The officers at Indian headquarters seemed 'pretty well tired out. . . . I thought Willcocks, and those about him, very gloomy. . . . Willcocks [said that his corps] could not fight any more until they had had some rest.' ⁴⁴ Willcocks in fact panicked in front of Haig:

I had seen [Willcocks] early in December when he had just received a reinforcement of 5,000 men and he was in the highest spirits. I found a very different man this last time [at Hinges on 21 December]. Givenchy, an important post on the right of his line had been lost and Bethune (a centre of French mining and industrial activity) was within easy range of the Enemy's guns. Willcocks now said the Indians were done: they would not fight any more and they simply ran away. And he begged me to relieve his Corps at once. ⁴⁵

After Haig had reported to GHQ on the evening of the 21st, at John French's bidding he returned to Hinges on the 22nd to relieve the Indian Corps with his I Corps, which had been resting since First Ypres. He and his staff asked Willcocks for the latest information from the frontline, but Willcocks was unsure, not knowing exactly where any new German strong-points might be. Watkis was even more unhelpful. He provided inaccurate details that contributed to some of I Corps' battalions being badly enfiladed by German fire as they counter-attacked. 'Reports on the situation in these parts were not satisfactory', Haig noted. ⁴⁶

At Christmas, after I Corps had taken over the Indian sector, Haig found that Willcocks had kept Hinges chateau 'in a very dirty state'.

⁴¹ Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 142; Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, p. 64; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 147.

⁴² *The Times*, 18 February 1915, p. 6; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 205; F. Smith, *Frederick Edwin, Earl of Birkenhead*, 2 vols. (London: Butterworth, 1935), vol. 2, pp. 44–47; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 144 and 177.

⁴³ TNA, WO 256/2: Haig, Western Front Diary, 21 December 1914.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Butler Papers: Haig Letter to Butler, 7 January 1915.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 December 1914.

A cellar beneath Haig's writing room at the chateau had to be treated with disinfectant, but 'even so, the smell was so terrible that I retired to write in my bedroom.'⁴⁷ Haig was left with the impression that Willcocks' grip on the Indian sector had been feeble. '[Willcocks'] conduct of the operations at Givenchy deserved dismissal. Luckily for him no one from GHQ was present or had any idea what a mess Sir James made of things!'⁴⁸

From New Year 1915, the Indian Corps was under Haig's close supervision in the First Army. He often visited the Indian commanders, especially during the planning and carrying out of his offensives. He told them his broad intention, and expected them to make the plans to help fulfil it, subject to his approval. It soon became apparent that Willcocks was short on clear or creative answers to the attacking problems. His corps had a far larger gathering of artillery pieces than he or any other Indian commander had had in peacetime, but he never thought of any distinctive solutions or theories about how they might be best used in combination with one another or with assaulting infantry. Equally, in late April, during the preparations for the Battle of Aubers Ridge, Willcocks was confused by several basic aspects of the planning of an assault by the Meerut Division on the Ferme du Biez and Bois du Biez. He failed to think through the orders required to deal with German machine gun emplacements should the preliminary artillery bombardment fail to knock them out, so Haig had to guide him step by step:

His views on how the attacks . . . are to be made did not seem quite clear. I therefore explained [what] in my opinion [were the various options]. I impressed on him the importance of not mixing up his units prematurely, and of avoiding unnecessary loss; attacking frontally on points which the enemy expected us to attack [as Willcocks had suggested] was clearly a mistake.⁴⁹

Throughout his time with the First Army, Willcocks was deeply pre-occupied with the Indian Corps' high Indian casualty rates. On the one hand, up to the summer he fretted that India might not be able to provide enough casualty replacements, and that his Indian battalions might become so drained of men that they came to exist only in name. On the other hand, it was clear to him in the winter of 1914–15 that the intensity of the fighting had brought about widespread depression among his Indian troops, and in the spring he was anxious about their morale. Believing that the Indian ranks had a lower threshold of endurance for the war in Europe than British troops did, he was concerned that for their

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21–24 December 1914; Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ TNA, WO 256/4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 21 April.

own good they should not be pushed too hard. 'The Indians cannot be treated as pure machines', he wrote.⁵⁰

To preserve the Indian battalions' numbers and morale in 1915, Willcocks did his best to limit their fighting duties. At the end of January, he objected to a request from Haig for the Indian Corps to extend its front.⁵¹ Just days before the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, he threatened to pull the Indian Corps out of the offensive, and late on the battle's last day he cancelled an attack by the Lahore Division that had been expressly ordered by Haig.⁵² In August, after Haig had asked Willcocks to report on which part of the German line the Indian Corps might attack for the Battle of Loos, Willcocks raised objections to attacking anywhere.⁵³ All the while, Willcocks' mood remained changeable. In the early summer he worried most about the low numbers of the Indian battalions, as Haig observed on 25 July:

I took all the [Indians] out of the line a fortnight ago to rest, because Willcocks said that they were not fit to resist a determined 'attack' much less take the offensive. The rest has done them good; and by good luck it coincided with Ramadan so they are fairly happy! A few good drafts have also arrived and now Willcocks is in the highest spirits and says that he now has the finest force that ever left India for a campaign!! I wonder how long he will retain these good spirits.⁵⁴

Haig detected in Willcocks a lack of fighting resolve. Time and again Haig tried to cajole him into being more active and aggressive. He stressed that the First Army's duty was to fight the Germans to the full extent of its power, that the Indian Corps must do its share and redouble its efforts at every setback, and that an Indian battalion must defend or attack trenches just like a British battalion.⁵⁵ 'After all is said and done', Haig protested in response to a request from Willcocks for the width of the Indians' front to be shortened, 'is not [fighting the Germans] the reason for the [Indian] Army being here?'⁵⁶

Haig always conveyed his thoughts to Willcocks in a calm manner, without shows of emotion. He appeared to make no special allowance for the Indian battalions' casualty replacement problems. To Willcocks, Haig did not communicate satisfaction for Indian successes, nor sorrow

⁵⁰ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 22 September 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 7.

⁵¹ TNA, WO 256/3: Haig, Western Front Diary, 28 January 1915.

⁵² KCL/LHCMA, Kiggell Papers: Haig Letter to Kiggell, 2 April 1915.

⁵³ TNA, WO 256/5: Haig, Western Front Diary, 30 August July 1915.

⁵⁴ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Butler Papers: Haig Letter to Butler, 25 July 1915.

⁵⁵ Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, pp. 86, 98, 106–07 and 140.

⁵⁶ TNA, WO 256/3: Haig, Western Front Diary, 28 January 1915.

for Indian losses. He never visited the Indian troops to offer kind words of encouragement or consolation, and he sent them no personal messages. Indeed, his First Army orders of the day and general notices often neglected to mention the Indians, referring only to 'British soldiers'. 'Read the remarks of First Army attached to the Order of the Day issued by the Commander-in-Chief after Neuve Chapelle', Willcocks suggested, 'and compare it with similar Orders of later times. But the Indian Corps had not come from the Dominions! Did the words 'British soldiers' include Indians? I wonder.'⁵⁷

Haig was not unsympathetic towards the Indian army. He had an unusually high opinion of the Indian troops for a British service officer,⁵⁸ he thought carefully about solutions for the Indian casualty replacements problems, and his conscience was troubled by the sufferings of all the First Army's men.⁵⁹ But it was not in his nature to make public shows of these things, and he had no strong bond with the Indian service to encourage him to do so. In any case, he did not have the personal touch. 'There were no strong colours in his nature', wrote John Buchan, who knew him better than most:

He had none of the lesser graces which make a general popular with troops. . . . He had not [the] gift of speaking to the chance-met soldier. Once I remember he tried it [in Flanders]. There was a solitary private by the roadside, whom he forced himself to address. *Haig*: 'Well, my man, where did you start the war?' *Private* (pale to the teeth): 'I swear to God, sire, I never started no war.' It was his last attempt.⁶⁰

For Willcocks and the Indian Corps' other senior officers, Haig seemed to make only unfeeling demands of the Indian battalions, and to be ungrateful for Indian efforts. This was not the Indian army way – it had been a point of pride among Roberts, Lockhart, Kitchener, Creagh and other Indian commanders to relate closely to their men, to show they cared personally. The upshot was that the Indian Corps' senior officers widely viewed Haig, and the First Army staff who shared his distance from the Indian troops, as particularly insulting superiors.⁶¹

At Hinges chateau on 3 September, Haig held a First Army corps commanders' conference to go over their plans for Loos. Willcocks had

⁵⁷ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letters to Hardinge, 19 May and 9 September 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 230.

⁵⁸ IOR, Mss Eur F 116/37–38, Butler Papers: Haig Letter to Butler, 7 January 1915.

⁵⁹ TNA, WO 256/3–4: Haig, Western Front Diary, 28 January, 21 April and 21 May 1915.

⁶⁰ Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door: The Autobiography of John Buchan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), pp. 176–77.

⁶¹ IWM, Con Shelf: Keary Papers: Keary Letter to Captain F. Keary, 11 June and 4 November 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 8 and 181.

not spent the previous day at his headquarters trying to improve on his offensive planning from earlier in the year. Rather, he had toured his front trenches to see his men:

One section was held by Pathans, and some of them were singing to a sitar. . . . I had years ago learned their favourite song, 'Zakhmi Dil' (The Wounded Heart), so I joined in and gave them a verse. Men from other parts of the trenches came running over, and presently to dance and music we were having an improvised concert.⁶²

On the 3rd, in front of all the First Army's British corps commanders and their senior staff officers, Haig heavily criticised an incoherent proposal of Willcocks'. He said Willcocks was lacking in tactical skill and initiative; Willcocks said Haig implied he was not fit to command his corps; Haig replied 'anyone who wrote that appreciation is unfit to command.'⁶³ Willcocks offered his resignation, on account of having lost Haig's confidence – though he had done that in pre-war India. Haig accepted without a second thought. 'I have felt from time to time that Willcocks is no support whatever when operations are in progress . . . when I [have] asked him to act vigorously he [has] had a thousand and more reasons for doing nothing.'⁶⁴

In his year of fighting with the BEF, Willcocks did not develop a progressive understanding of trench warfare.⁶⁵ His great strength was personal leadership in the small war manner; his great weakness was the bureaucratic headquarters work of regular warfare. Haig was the other way round. The relationship between the two was not helped by their social differences. Willcocks was a genial Army in India officer who made friends with Indian villagers; Haig was a less forthcoming Home Army technocrat whose social circle included the royal family.

In Buchan's eyes, Haig 'was first and foremost a highly competent professional soldier':

[He] was as slow to learn as any of his colleagues, and he made grave mistakes. But he did learn. . . . Haig cannot enter the small circle of the greater captains, but it may be argued that in the special circumstances of the campaign his special

⁶² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 321.

⁶³ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Hardinge, 22 September 1915; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 323.

⁶⁴ TNA, WO 256/5: Haig, Western Front Diary, 3 September 1915; Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 221.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Willcocks Letters to Hardinge, 9 and 22 September 1915; TNA, WO 256/4–5: Haig, Western Front Diary, 9 May, 21 May and 30 August 1915; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 18; Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, pp. 98 and 142; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 80 and 204.

qualities were the ones most needed – patience, sobriety, balance of temper, unshakable fortitude.⁶⁶

Intellectually as much as temperamentally, Willcocks was not Haig's equal, and thus he never won Haig's favour. 'I had the misfortune', Willcocks reflected, 'to be placed under the command of a man, with whom, and not withstanding every possible endeavour, I could not hit it off.'⁶⁷ Willcocks spent the last months of 1915 and all of 1916 at his house in Essex or his London club. He beseeched William Robertson for a posting, at first to India, and then to Cameroon, East Africa, Arabia or Russia, but he was denied. He next asked for permission to quit the British service, to go to Albania or Romania to enlist as a private soldier, also to no avail. Robertson, partly on Haig's advice, had determined that Willcocks should have no further military employment, and Willcocks did not have any influential Home Army friends to help him. 'I can quite understand that he is not popular with officers of the *British* army', Hardinge commented, 'for he is a rough Indian-bred soldier.'⁶⁸

By the time the BEF was fighting at Third Ypres and Cambrai, Willcocks was the governor of Bermuda (a post not seen as one of the Empire's desirable appointments). 'I have simply been driven from a proud position to degradation', he said of his fate. He spent days at a time in low spirits all by himself on a small island offshore.⁶⁹ He had Hardinge's sympathy. 'I must say I am very sorry for Willcocks, he is heart-broken. . . . Whatever may be his faults, he is devoted to his Indian troops who also have confidence in him, and it is a sad ending to a fine military career.'⁷⁰

Willcocks' successor as the Indian Corps' commander, Charles Anderson (Royal Artillery; aged fifty-seven), was of long Army in India service. He had fought in six small wars, one of which was against the Zakkas in 1908, when he had commanded a brigade of the 1st Division. He had taken over the Indian 7th Division in 1913. He was one of the few pre-war senior Indian commanders promoted on merit, gaining the intellectual respect of his peers and superiors as a meticulous artilleryman. He was a good speaker of Indian languages, and was known for being calm under pressure – in 1906, after a serious fire had broken out at the arsenal of a

⁶⁶ Buchan, *Autobiography*, pp. 176–78.

⁶⁷ TNA, PRO 30/57/52: Willcocks Letter to O. Fitzgerald, 5 October 1915.

⁶⁸ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Willcocks Letter to Crewe, 17 June 1915.

⁶⁹ KCL/LHCMA, Robertson Papers: Letters from General Sir J. Willcocks to Robertson, 3 June, 27 June and 16 September 1916, and Robertson to Willcocks, Letters of 15 and 30 June 1916; Willcocks, *Romance*, p. 316.

⁷⁰ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to W. Birdwood, 29 September 1915.

Punjabi fort, he had placed himself at the heart of the danger and saved 300,000 pounds of gunpowder from blowing up.⁷¹

In his first month on the western front, as the Meerut Division's commander, Anderson did not exert close control over his troops. After small war fashion, he chose to spend much time among his forward battalions. 'I do not believe there was a single General in the Expeditionary Force who so often visited his men in the trenches', Willcocks estimated.⁷² Anderson initially delegated tactical detail to lower levels. This was particularly so on 23–24 November 1914, when the Meerut Division's closing counter-attacks to regain its lost trenches were improvised on the spot; the British officers of the 2nd/8th Gurkhas and 39th Garhwals were ordered to make their assaults in 'any way they liked'.⁷³

From December, however, Anderson began to exert increasingly close control over his brigades. By March 1915, he was paying great attention to combined arms detail, and he arranged all his division's offensive strikes with clear orders, taking into account most of the tactical problems. The Meerut Division's failures at Aubers Ridge and Festubert were largely not his fault. The Indian infantry failed to advance because the preliminary artillery bombardments failed, and those bombardments were arranged principally by First Army headquarters in co-operation with corps-level artillery advisers, leaving divisional commanders to fit in with them rather than shape them.⁷⁴ Haig generally approved of Anderson's performances in the First Army's opening three offensives, and he therefore chose him to replace Willcocks.⁷⁵

In command of the Indian Corps at Loos, Anderson erred in not arranging for his leading battalions to make only a limited advance, restricted to ground that could be consolidated. But the Indian Corps and the BEF were still thinking in terms of 10 March at Neuve Chapelle, when a chance to push on had been given up, and they had yet to experience what happened if an assaulting brigade went too far and lost touch with its support. Overall, Anderson handled the Indian Corps' attack at Loos reasonably well.⁷⁶ Haig kept him in the BEF after the Indian

⁷¹ Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, p. 186; MacMunn, *Behind the Scenes*, p. 76; A. Stanistreet, *Heroes of the Albert Medal: Service Recipients* (Honiton: Token Publishing, 2002), p. 12; and Willcocks, *Romance*, pp. 224 and 234.

⁷² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 52.

⁷³ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, pp. 130–33.

⁷⁴ Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 104; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 52 and 270.

⁷⁵ TNA, WO 256/5: Haig, Western Front Diary, 26 and 27 July 1915; Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 402.

⁷⁶ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1915, vol. 2, pp. 259–62.

Corps' disbandment. In 1916–17, Anderson, a reliable old hand, held four British corps commands – I, XI, XV and XVII Corps.⁷⁷

Up to 1914, Henry Keary (aged fifty-seven, of the Indian service, and the Garhwal Brigade's original commander) had fought in five small wars. He had proved an adaptable and thoughtful leader of light infantry, mounted infantry and military police. In France he oversaw the Garhwal Brigade's first trench raids with good initiative and tactical judgment, prompting his replacement of Henry Watkis at the head of the Lahore Division in January 1915. He organised the division's costly and failed counter-attacks at Second Ypres; nonetheless, the results were virtually thrust upon him. He was duty bound through orders from Smith-Dorrien and GHQ, under French pressure, to make assaults at short notice, at specific times, and with very little artillery. He was thus denied the time and the firepower to plan for much more than his division achieved.⁷⁸ For the remainder of the year, he did not make the sort of mistakes to prompt Haig to remove him from his post, but neither did he do enough for retention in France after the Indian Corps' disbandment.⁷⁹ As he saw things, further promotion within the BEF was denied him by anti-Indian service snobbery.⁸⁰

Claud Jacob (aged fifty in 1914, and the Meerut Division's original chief staff officer) was promoted in 1915, first in January to command the Dehra Dun Brigade, and then in September to take over the Meerut Division from Anderson. Before the war, Jacob had spent almost thirty years' service on the north-west frontier with the 106th Hazara Pioneers, and had joined the headquarters of the 7th Division in 1912, as one of the new Indian General Staff officers selected on merit. In February 1915, Haig thought Jacob 'an excellent officer', and the best in the Indian Corps.⁸¹ This praise was deserved. Jacob regularly showed initiative – for instance on his feet, whether going up to the Indian frontline at Givenchy on 20 December 1914 to help reorganise regiments that had retreated, or visiting adjacent British brigade headquarters during the Battle of Neuve Chapelle to maintain communications between the Indian Corps and IV Corps – and he was good at detail in offensive planning. In Haig's eyes, Jacob's willingness to use his initiative got the better of him at Neuve Chapelle on the evening of 10 March, when Jacob ordered a tactical retreat by the Dehra Dun Brigade from the Bois du Biez. 'The only

⁷⁷ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3101: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, November 1915), p. 14.

⁷⁸ *The Times*, 14 August 1937: 'Obituary: Lieutenant-General Sir H. Keary'; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 53 and 266.

⁷⁹ TNA, WO 256/5: Haig, Western Front Diary, 8 August 1915.

⁸⁰ IWM, Con Shelf: Keary Papers: Keary Letter to Captain F. Keary, 4 November 1915.

⁸¹ TNA, WO 256/3: Haig, Western Front Diary, 27 February 1915.

comment [on the battle] made to me by the First Army Commander', Willcocks affirmed, 'was that if the Brigadier [Jacob] in front of the Bois du Biez had been a tactician, he would never have left the wood once he had gained a footing in it.'⁸² Still, Haig continued to hold Jacob in relatively high regard, keeping him with the BEF after 1915 to lead British formations, including a corps.⁸³

Havelock Hudson, as Willcocks' original chief staff officer in Flanders, faced the difficult task of moulding the hastily thrown together Indian Corps headquarters staff into an efficient bureaucratic machine. This took many weeks. Haig visited Hinges chateau on 29 November 1914, only to find 'an air of dejection and despondency. I came away feeling that things were not altogether in an efficient state in the Indian Corps and certainly very different from what I had expected to see at the Headquarters of an Indian Expeditionary Force on Active Service.'⁸⁴ John Charteris got the same impression on 9 December. 'The general tone is not good. There is much pessimism, even dejection, and they do not seem to be pulling together.'⁸⁵

By March 1915, however, Hudson had used his staff work skills developed as a leading pre-war Indian GSO and his western front experiences to bring about a significant rise in efficiency.⁸⁶ He had an unusually heavy planning burden during the Indian Corps' first three offensives because of Willcocks' delegating tendencies; he managed relatively well. He lived up to Haig's good pre-war opinion of him, and was promoted in summer 1915 to command one of the BEF's British divisions. He left the BEF the following year, to become the Army in India's new Adjutant-General. One Home Army senior cavalry commander carped that the British forces in France were 'well rid of a stupid old Hindu',⁸⁷ but he was unduly harsh. Hudson was a reliable staff officer who coped well enough with western front demands by building on his pre-war training.⁸⁸

Andrew Skeen (24th Punjabis; aged forty-two in 1914) was an Indian GSO who had not been a staff college student, yet had taught at Quetta

⁸² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 217 and 230.

⁸³ KCL/LHCMA, Liddell Hart papers: 'Talk with Jacob' (LH 11/1932/45). *The Times*, 3 June 1948: 'Obituary: Field Marshal Sir C. Jacob'; Bridger, *Neuve Chapelle*, pp. 75–76; Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 192; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 53.

⁸⁴ R. Blake (ed.), *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig, 1914–1919* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1952), p. 78.

⁸⁵ Charteris, *At G.H.Q.*, pp. 63 and 66. Also see Wakefield and Weippert, *Grimshaw*, p. 28.

⁸⁶ TNA, WO 256/2: Haig, Western Front Diary, 21 December 1914.

⁸⁷ Farrar-Hockley, *Goughie*, p. 199.

⁸⁸ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3101: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, November 1915), p. 27; Sheffield and Bourne, *Haig*, p. 106; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 19, 49, 204 and 313–14.

from 1912. He did well in Flanders under Hudson in 1914, and in early 1915 was promoted to a senior staff position with the Australian and New Zealand expeditionary forces, then in Egypt training for the western front.⁸⁹ Another able Indian GSO was Andrew Cobbe (32nd Sikh Pioneers; aged forty-four in 1914; he had been awarded the Victoria Cross in Somaliland in 1902). Like Skeen, he was not p.s.c., and had risen in the pre-war Indian General Staff to become GSO1. After serving as the Lahore Division's chief staff officer in 1914, he moved on in January 1915 to a senior post at Indian Corps headquarters. In July 1915, he was promoted to a higher position at I Corps headquarters, where he remained for six months. His western front experiences earned him the command of the 7th Division in Mesopotamia in June 1916, and shortly afterwards the 3rd Indian Army Corps under Stanley Maude, before Maude moved him to IEFD's 1st Corps. Cobbe was central to IEFD's offensive successes from Kut al-Amara to Mosul, grasping the necessary tactics.⁹⁰

Ronald Charles (Royal Engineers; aged thirty-nine in 1914) stepped into Hudson's shoes in the Indian Corps in summer 1915. Before the war, Charles had served with the 1st Sappers and Miners, and had graduated from the Staff College at Quetta. When the Indian Corps was formed, he was appointed GSO2 under Hudson. Before he replaced Hudson, he was briefly with the Lahore Division as GSO1. He was an efficient officer whose p.s.c. had done much to ready him for the western front. By October 1915, the Indian Corps' headquarters under Charles had become a well-oiled machine, run by ever-improving officers of a year's western front experience. Among these were several Quetta p.s.c. Indian GSOs besides Charles, and a number of competent British service GSOs (Charles Sackville-West, for example).⁹¹ In recognition of Charles' good work with the Indian Corps, he was retained in the BEF up to 1918, working at British corps headquarters, and then commanding a British division.⁹²

These examples of the Indian Corps' senior commanders and their staff officers show that some of them adapted poorly to trench warfare (Watkis, Brunner, Macbean, Willcocks), some of them passably well (Carnegy, Johnson, Anderson, Keary, Hudson, Skeen), and some of

⁸⁹ *The Times*, 20 February 1935: 'Obituary: General Sir A. Skeen'.

⁹⁰ TNA, WO 256/2: Haig, Western Front Diary, 22 December 1914; *The Times*, 1 July 1931: 'Obituary: General Sir. A. Cobbe'; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 50.

⁹¹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3101: *IEFA War Diary* (Simla, November 1915), p. 14; Candler, *The Long Road to Baghdad* (London: Cassell, 1919), p. 40; and Syk, 'Indian Expeditionary Force D', p. 101.

⁹² *The Times*, 28 December 1955: 'Obituary: General Sir R. Charles', and 16 October 1962: 'Obituary: Major-General Sir W. Twiss'; Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 49 and 314.

them well (Jacob, Charles, Cobbe). To each of these categories could be added the Indian Corps' other senior commanders and staff officers – for instance, Raleigh Egerton (Indian service; Ferezepore Brigade 1914–15) did poorly in late 1914 and was lucky to keep his command; William Southey (129th Baluchis) and George Walker (1st/4th Gurkhas) were promoted within the Indian Corps to brigades in 1915, and they did reasonably well; Charles Blackader (2nd/Leicesters), Charles Norie (2nd/2nd Gurkhas) and Peter Strickland (1st/Manchesters) were similarly promoted, and they did better.

One thing the Indian Corps' senior commanders certainly did not do was sacrifice Indians to save white troops. There was never any such British policy, official or otherwise. Willcocks wanted the Indians to fight less than British troops; Haig wanted them to fight as much, which is what they did. The idea that the Indians were required to fight more than their British counterparts was born of a misunderstanding on their part. They knew of their own large losses in the autumn and early winter of 1914, but they did not know of similar or higher British losses at Ypres and elsewhere; the balance between the two was blown out of proportion in their minds, and they began to write home that they were being overused. As Walter Lawrence told Kitchener in December 1915, 'A great deal of the early depression, which was so marked December last, hinged on what happened to the first three Battalions of Indian infantry who went into action':

I have never seen any official papers on the subject, and the observations of the men of those three battalions made to me were not corroborated by General Willcocks, to whom I talked on the subject. I could give you endless quotations from the Indian soldiers' letters suggesting that it was the deliberate policy of Government to use up all the black pepper, i.e. the Indian troops, and to save the red pepper, i.e. the British soldier. This delusion lasted for many months, but I am glad to say that of late one never comes across these passages. It was natural for the Indian troops to think, as they looked on their wounded companions, that the whole world consisted of shattered Indians.⁹³

For the British, there was a time and place for deliberately sending the Indians into battle before British troops: in small wars. Up to 1914 on the north-west frontier, as we have seen, the Indian battalions' specialist tactical skills had often saved British battalions from having to cope with the Pathans. The first Indian regiments to fight in Flanders might well have jumped to the conclusion that once again they were being called for difficult tasks in preference to the British army.

⁹³ TNA WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 27 December 1915.

The Indian Cavalry Corps

Michael Rimington (the Indian Cavalry Corps' commander in 1914; aged fifty-six) had held senior cavalry command and staff positions in pre-war India. Like the Indian cavalry in general, he had developed few ideas on dismounted tactics for the European battlefield. On the western front, Rimington needed to start thinking how cavalry might be used in new ways. But he was not intellectually inclined to do that. He preferred to dwell on the infantry as a means to achieve a breakthrough into open country, exploitable by cavalry for a decisive victory, rather than as an arm that cavalry could help by developing new skills for more limited purposes. By the time Haig had become the BEF's Commander-in-Chief in December 1915, he had significantly changed his own pre-war ideas on the use of cavalry in regular warfare, being convinced that there were important mounted-dismounted roles for well armed horsemen to play. Meanwhile, he detected distinctly stale thinking in Rimington, so he sent him home in January 1916.⁹⁴

Five of the Indian Cavalry Corps' original brigade commanders – Henry Leader (aged forty-nine in 1914), Charles Pirie (fifty-five), William Fasken (fifty-four), Fitz-James Edwards (fifty-three) and Frederick Wadson (fifty-four), all drawn from the Army in India – were also removed from their posts in early 1916, not by Haig directly, but by Hubert Gough, the leading Home Army cavalry commander. Gough considered them to be devoid of energy and fresh ideas, and he replaced them with British service commanders who were more attuned to trench warfare.⁹⁵ Their replacements brought new efficiency to the Indian cavalry, and remained in place until 1918. They led their units reasonably well in BEF offensives, experiencing difficult communications problems that upset their attempts to co-operate with other arms, especially tanks.⁹⁶ George Barrow (Indian service; aged fifty in 1914) was the Indian Cavalry Corps' sole original brigadier who worked efficiently in 1914–15. In command of the 2nd Indian Cavalry Division's Mhow Brigade, he encouraged his regiments to develop their dismounted capability. In December 1915, he was promoted by Haig to become the First Army's chief staff officer.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ KCL/LHCMA, Brigadier E. Beddington Papers: *My Life* (unpublished memoir), pp. 87–89; *The Times*, 20 December 1928: 'Obituary: General Sir M. Rimington'.

⁹⁵ KCL/LHCMA, Beddington Papers: *My Life*, p. 94; Farrar-Hockley, *Goughie*, p. 183.

⁹⁶ Edmonds, *Military Operations*, 1917, vol. 3, pp. 232–39.

⁹⁷ KCL/LHCMA, Beddington Papers: *My Life*, pp. 88; Barrow, *Fire of Life*, pp. 110–94.

Several of the Indian Cavalry Corps' Indian staff officers also performed well. Like Havelock Hudson, Henry Macandrew (aged forty-eight in 1914, of the Indian service, and Rimington's chief staff officer) had to oversee an impromptu Indian corps headquarters. He had served in the Tirah and South Africa, graduated from the British Staff College, and held senior cavalry staff positions in India. Under Rimington in France, he developed an increasingly well working headquarters staff after an uncertain start. In September 1915, he fell out with Rimington, and voluntarily left the Indian Cavalry Corps. Haig recognised him as a strong staff officer with valuable experience, and gave him the command of a British infantry brigade. In 1916, Haig promoted Macandrew to command a BEF Indian cavalry division, which Macandrew led competently at the Somme and at Cambrai. Macandrew came to his greatest prominence under Allenby in Palestine, in command of several attacks by ex-BEF Indian cavalry using their mounted-dismounted skills.⁹⁸

Douglas Baird (aged thirty-seven in 1914) was an Indian service cavalry officer and a Quetta p.s.c. He impressed at Indian Cavalry Corps headquarters as GSO2 in 1914–15, before Haig moved him onwards and upwards to the BEF's British infantry staff.⁹⁹ Edward Beddington (aged thirty in 1914), a British service cavalryman and Camberley p.s.c., also did well with the Indian Cavalry Corps. He was sent to it in June 1915, having served on Allenby's Cavalry Corps staff in 1914. He excelled at Rimington's headquarters, before asking GHQ for a transfer in September 1915 because he felt that continuing under the retrograde Rimington would damage his career. GHQ was sympathetic, posting him to a British cavalry division, from which he was promoted to become one of the BEF's leading staff officers.¹⁰⁰

All the Indian princely and noble staff officers of IEFA were given no meaningful operational duties. As before the war, their potential was wasted, much to their frustration. By mid-1915 Umar Hayat Khan, attached to the Lahore Division, was 'bored and fed up, because he had nothing to do. He wished to return home, if he could do so honourably'.¹⁰¹ Pratap Singh, the commander of the Jodhpur Lancers (with the Secunderabad Brigade), was an honorary staff officer at GHQ. Aged seventy-two, he was the BEF's oldest serving soldier. The

⁹⁸ KCL/LHCMA, Beddington Papers: *My Life*, pp. 87–89; *The Times*, 24 July 1919: 'Obituary: General Sir H. Macandrew'; Kenyon, 'British Cavalry', pp. 69 and 176; Badsey, *Doctrine*, p. 261; and Robbins, *Generalship*, p. 46.

⁹⁹ Badsey, *Doctrine*, p. 255.

¹⁰⁰ KCL/LHCMA, Beddington Papers: *My Life*; *The Times*, 29 April 1966: 'Obituary: Brigadier Sir E. Beddington'.

¹⁰¹ The words of Thakur Amar Singh, quoted in Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 399.

operational emptiness of his posting was made clear on one of his visits in 1915 to Haig's writing room. Haig received him, smiled, and carried on writing. 'Not a word passed', recalled Walter Lawrence, in attendance as a chaperone. 'Sir Pratap sat happy, purring like an old tiger, and after about half an hour we left. It was a silent communion.'¹⁰²

From Flanders to India

IEFA's senior commanders and staff officers may not have been the BEF's best, but it was a commonplace among them – as much as it was among those of the Home Army or the French and German services – for officers from peacetime to prove unfit for war, before being replaced by others who had adapted better to the trench fighting and led improved operations.¹⁰³ Thomas Snow (British army), a Camberley p.s.c., pre-war Home Army commander and western front infantry general up to 1917, even said of the BEF's senior officers in 1915 that 'we were one as bad, or I should say as ignorant, as the other, [since] none of us had the practice in handling such large bodies of troops.'¹⁰⁴

The improvements among IEFA's commanders and staff officers were also typical of the weeding out across Asia and Africa of Indian senior officers from peacetime who failed the test of war. For instance, in May 1915 Charles Blomfield was dismissed from India's 1st Division for mishandling its operations against the Mohmands; he was a pre-war appointment on seniority to the division, and was inexperienced in frontier fighting. Blomfield's replacement, Frederick Campbell, was a colonel of the Guides and a former commandant of the 40th Pathans; he did much better and led the 1st Division until 1919.¹⁰⁵ In East Africa, most of the original Indian commanders within IEFs B and C – notoriously described by one IEFB intelligence officer as 'nearer to fossils than active, energetic leaders of men', and including Arthur Aitken, Michael Tighe and James Stewart – had rightly gone by 1916.¹⁰⁶

For a decade after the First World War, a good record of command or staff work with the Indian Corps in Flanders, and the stamp of heightened professionalism that that signified, proved a passport to the heights of

¹⁰² Lawrence, *The India We Served*, p. 114.

¹⁰³ Edmonds, *Short History of World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 194–95 and 438; and Robbins, *Generalsip*, pp. 55–57.

¹⁰⁴ Robbins, *Generalsip*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to V. Chirol, 19 May 1915; Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁶ R. Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary, 1899–1926* (Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1960), p. 82; and Strachan, *To Arms*, pp. 584–86 and 603.

the Army in India – where merit, not seniority, was now the prerequisite for promotion. From 1920 to 1928, Claud Jacob and Andrew Skeen were both Chiefs of the Indian General Staff, and Ronald Charles was Jacob's Director of Staff Duties, fresh from helping to revive the Staff College at Camberley as its Senior Staff Officer. Jacob, Havelock Hudson, Charles Anderson and Alexander Cobbe all held Army Commands in India; indeed, Jacob, as a field-marshal, and Cobbe were the Military Secretaries at the India Office from 1920 to 1931. Henry Keary, William Southey and Charles Norie also held senior commands in India, as did numerous staff officers from the Indian Corps – John Coleridge, Hubert Isacke and William Twiss to name but three. Officers with good Indian Cavalry Corps records were similarly conspicuous. For instance, George Barrow and Douglas Baird held senior command and staff positions. Henry Macandrew would have joined them but for his accidental death in a fire in Syria in 1919. For Indian senior officers, therefore, India proved less a school for the western front than the western front did for India.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ See 'Senior Army Appointments': retrieved from <http://www.gulabin.com/armynavy/pdf/Army%20Commands%201900-2011.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2012). Also see *The Times*, 14 November 1944: 'Obituary: General Sir Norman Macmullen', 28 July 1949: 'Obituary: Lieutenant-General Sir H. C. Holman', 28 December 1955: 'Obituary: General Sir R. Charles', 16 October 1962: 'Obituary: Major-General Sir W. Twiss'.

12 Administration

In New Year 1916, Nigel Woodyatt, an Indian service infantry brigade commander, was stationed at Abbottabad in NWFP. ‘Strange to relate’, he wrote of India at the time, ‘an extraordinary apathy seemed suddenly to seize the authorities and the European population’:

It was just as if someone had voiced the general feeling by saying: ‘What more can we do? We have denuded India of troops [and] have successfully repelled trouble on the North-West Frontier in several quarters. . . . Heaps of officers have entered the Indian Army Reserve, drafts are preparing for overseas, and the country is full of Territorials from home. True, a division is invested in Kut, but we can send nothing more there. The future is in the lap of the gods, and in the hands of the War Office in London.’ With that feeling existing, life seemed to settle down in large cantonments as if there was no war on at all. People seemed satisfied to do their daily task and live just as they had lived before, simply hoping for the best. There was no real effort to strain every nerve in preparation for a long titanic struggle.¹

Sixteen months earlier, within just two days of Britain’s declaration of war on Germany, the British government had accepted Kitchener’s strategic vision that the war would last at least three years, that over one million new British recruits would be needed for decisive intervention on the continent, and that new contracts with arms firms and other suppliers around the world would be essential to sustain the BEF in the field. Kitchener had swept into the War Office on 6 August to get things going. ‘No one can say my colleagues in the Cabinet are not courageous; they have no Army and they declared war against the mightiest military nation in the world’, he said. ‘Did they remember when they went headlong into a war like this that they were without an army, and without any preparation for equip one?’²

India, meanwhile, had no comparable strategic visionary or war policy. Up to the end of 1915, while the War Office and interdepartmental

¹ Woodyatt, *Under Ten Viceroys*, pp. 225–6.

² Pollock, *Kitchener*, p. 415.

committees in London made a stream of requests of the Army in India in aid of Britain's war effort – requests such as the despatch of IEFs A–F, the return of 85 per cent of the pre-war British battalions on the subcontinent, or the giving up of large quantities of boots, tents and other stores to provide for the new British recruits – the divided nature of the pre-war relationship between British and Indian officialdom remained unchanged. The Indian government was still effectively independent; the India Office was still the only British government department with formal authority over the Army in India; the War Office was still not supposed to communicate directly with Army Headquarters at Simla. After Kitchener had circumvented that last custom in August 1914, by means of secret telegrams with Beauchamp Duff, the practice was soon stopped by the India Office as 'unconstitutional'.³

Hardinge hoped that each of London's requests for Indian resources in 1914–15 would be the last. They all frustrated his viceroyalty's ultimate aim – to maintain subcontinental security – and he opposed many of them. He responded to the events abroad that concerned India in terms of what would be best for domestic security. Day to day, he took the approach of the Edwardian Foreign Office man he was: wary, cautious, no hasty conclusions that would tie his hands, and an incessant and almost imperceptible manipulation of his colleagues and correspondents to help get his way as issues arose. Once IEFD had captured the port of Basra in November 1914, Hardinge quickly saw advantages in annexing the wider Turkish province of the same name, as he explained the following February:

[The] interests concerned, strategic, commercial, political and religious alike are mainly Indian. . . . Commercially the connection of the province with India is closer than that existing in the case of Burma, and Basrah is as near Delhi as Rangoon. . . . The irrigation and Indian colonization of the Basrah *vilayet* open up a vista of endless opportunity and wealth in the not far distant future.⁴

By March, after IEFD's original high-quality regiments had made some successful forward defensive jabs north of Basra, further steps forwards seemed justified to Hardinge, to secure what had been secured. So he ordered such steps, persuading the India Office in the process, until Baghdad itself hove into view.⁵ In the meantime Beauchamp Duff, as Hardinge's main military advisor, stuck to a rigidly conservative

³ Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 103; Moberley, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, p. 30; and Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. 1, pp. 157–58.

⁴ Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*, p. 93.

⁵ Goold, 'Lord Hardinge', 924–38; and Moberley, *Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, pp. 1–11.

interpretation of his role. He saw it as his duty only to serve the viceroy's military policies, and never to question or to shape them.⁶

The upshot was that Kitchener, as an aggressive soldier-administrator, responded to the war by formulating a clear, long-term strategic policy. But Hardinge did not. A cerebral civilian, he preferred to limit India's commitments for War Office purposes as the war progressed, keeping his options open on strategic opportunities in Indian interests. The corollary of Kitchener's approach was immediate and far-reaching reform of the Home Army, yet that of Hardinge's was to rely on the Army in India's pre-war infrastructure – after all, the viceroy was never too sure exactly where, or for how long, the Indian forces under his control would fight beyond the very short term. Therefore drastic administrative reforms for a particular campaign did not suggest themselves to him.

The apathy Nigel Woodyatt sensed in India in New Year 1916 flowed from a government with no grand plan for war. Because IEFA was sent to France, it fell under the care of Kitchener and the Home Army's administrative structure he was reforming. IEFs B, C and D were not so fortunate. They were looked after by Hardinge, under whose leadership, as the officers and men of IEFA came to realise for themselves, the Army in India's administrative systems descended into meltdown.

Curries, Hospitals and Post Offices

On 26 October 1914, *The Times* carried an appeal on behalf of the Indian Soldiers' Fund:

No incident in this world-wide struggle has made a deeper impression upon the Imperial mind than the swift and successful transportation of the picked legions of India from their homes, from their kindred, and from their climate into the strangeness, racial, geographical, and military, of the European battlefield. Our duty towards our Indian troops has but only begun with their arrival on European soil. . . . It ought to be a matter of our first solicitude to see that our Indian soldiers lack nothing that lies in our power to give them. Little reflection should bring home to us how much their efficiency as fighting units, as adventurers on a foreign soil and under a foreign sky, depends on their being liberally and amply equipped with warm clothing and hygienic appliances. . . . Our appreciation of their valour and our sympathy with them in their hour of trial should be at once become manifest in the most practical way.⁷

⁶ TNA, WO 106/1449: 'Correspondence between the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (William Robertson) and Austen Chamberlain, July 1916'; Hardinge, *Indian Years*, p. 86; and Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. 2, p. 48.

⁷ *The Times*, 26 October 1914.

The Fund was to have many donors. It was one of several agents external to the Army in India whose support for IEFA's administrative units ensured that the Indian troops in Flanders received the best administrative care the Indian army had ever had.

The composition of the administrative services that sailed with IEFA – such as its Indian army transport and medical units, regimental Indian followers, or Indian Administrative Staff officers – evolved on the western front. For instance, some of the first-line wheeled Indian transport units were reinforced by detachments from the transport corps of the Indian princes' Imperial Service forces, and some of the Indian pack-mule units were redeployed to Egypt or Gallipoli in mid-1915. Further, from October 1914, via IEFA's base depot at Marseilles, there was a large influx of Indian followers – mostly 'menial' rather than 'higher' – sent by the Indian government to support IEFA's Indian troops in all areas of administrative work, but above all in hospitals. These followers, as had been the case in small wars, were sent in excessive numbers because Army Headquarters failed to keep close control of civilian Indian contractors who signed up as many followers as they could to maximise their own earnings. 'There are bakers, kneaders, packer-men, tin-smiths, coopers at Marseilles, for whom there is no demand whatever, and there are 182 sweepers, half of whom might be returned to India at once', wrote Walter Lawrence in March 1915. Still, like in India's small wars, the excess meant that IEFA's Indian troops had more than enough lower-level non-combatants to help look after them.⁸

Army Headquarters directly oversaw IEFA's main lines of communication between Bombay and Marseilles. It sent to the Indian troops in France supplies that could only be obtained on the subcontinent, from replacement khukuris to Indian cooking equipment.⁹ Meanwhile, IEFA being an Army in India force absorbed into a Home Army one, its administrative services became part of a large Home Army administrative network in France and Belgium. Underneath most types of BEF administrative problems for GHQ were Indian questions on how IEFA's administrative services should fit in with the Home Army's: for example, should Indian supply depots at the front be separate from British depots, or should Indian troops use the same hospital trains as British troops? Ad hoc and fluctuating arrangements were made; sometimes Indian administrative services worked in tandem alongside British, sometimes

⁸ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 10 March 1915; Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, p. 128; Hudson, *Fane's Horse*, p. 151; and M. Rafullah, *Gwalior's Part in the Great War* (London: Hazell, Watson and Viney, 1920), pp. 6–8.

⁹ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/3089–101: *IEFA War Diaries* (Simla, November 1914–November 1915).

not.¹⁰ The French authorities also faced IEFA administrative questions. French staff officers and railway authorities oversaw the rail movements of Indian supplies between Marseilles and Flanders, and French mayors smoothed the way for local buildings – schools, hotels, mental asylums and a tobacco factory – to be taken over for Indian medical use.¹¹

In London, the Indian Soldiers' Fund was run by its General Committee, which was replete with well-connected members. The Committee was chaired by John Hewett, a former governor of UP and the chairman of some investment funds and several tea and rubber companies. It also contained Lord Curzon and a dozen other former or current Indian civil administrators; two ex-vice-reines; two retired Indian Commanders-in-Chief in Lord Roberts and O'Moore Creagh; Arthur Gaselee, who had led the Indian forces in China in 1900; Sultan Mahommed Shah, the third Aga Khan; the wife of the Director-General of the Territorial Force; the Duchess of Bedford, a leading philanthropist in hospital radiography; and Ethel Perrott, the first Lady Superintendent-in-Chief of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. The Committee's fundraising efforts attracted an impressive range of donors: British, American, Egyptian and Chinese banks, financial advisers and insurers with offices in the City of London; General Electric, the P & O Steam Navigation Company, and the United Turkey Red Company; the Burmah Oil Company and Anglo American Oil; motor car and armaments manufacturers, among them the Japanese Explosives Company; major food and tea businesses; the Costa Rica Railway Company and the Mysore Gold Mining Company; the Marylebone Cricket Club; the British royal family, Cabinet ministers and peers; foreign rulers, including the Maharaja and the Prime Minister of Nepal; and members of the public in Britain, Australia, Hong Kong, West Africa, the Caribbean and Fiji. Through all these and other sources, the Fund raised a total £255,511, held at the Mercantile Bank of India on favourable interest rates.¹²

By mid-October 1914, the Fund had spent £53,650 on administrative support for IEFA's Indian troops, along lines agreed on by the General Committee, War Office and India Office.¹³ By December, according to George Allen, a British publisher and Fund donor, the Fund's money 'was being poured out like water everywhere'.¹⁴ Additional charitable

¹⁰ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 41–42 and 117; Brown, *Logistics*, pp. 65–66; Chapman-Huston and Rutter, *Cowans*, vol. 1, p. 269; and Macready, *Annals*, vol. 1, p. 213.

¹¹ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 27 December 1915.

¹² IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1–13: Indian Soldiers' Fund, Proceedings and Reports.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: G. Allen Letter to Hardinge, 17 December 1914.

support for IEFA's Indian troops came from India. The Maharaja of Gwalior paid £20,260 for a complete motor ambulance unit of forty-one ambulance vans, five motor lorries and ten motorcycles; thirty-three other Indian princes footed the bill for a £400,000 Indian hospital ship. Further medical assistance came from the Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance Association.¹⁵

Even greater external administrative support for IEFA came directly from government departments in London. IEFA's Indian troops, Whitehall accepted as a matter of political principle, should receive strong administrative support to encourage general Indian favour for the British; besides, they were so far from home, and so close to British shores, it seemed only fair to look after them well. At the War Office, Kitchener felt a strong residual duty of care to the Indian army as its former Chief, and he was well aware of the Indian administrative shortcomings that IEFA was likely to have. He ordered that state-of-the-art hospitals be set up in France and southern England for the Indians wounded in Flanders, and that the BEF's RAMC personnel must generously assist the IMS in France. He also encouraged the other British government departments to assist IEFA. In consequence, the Foreign Office helped to supply the Indian troops with live goats from French and North African sources, and the Home Office consented to the Indian dead from hospitals in England being cremated in open air, which was against British law. Meanwhile, the India Office gathered retired IMS doctors from around the British Isles to work at the War Office's Indian hospitals in England, and it helped IEFA's Indian Postal Service team to manage unprecedented quantities of Indian army post.¹⁶

In the first days of the war, Crewe and Hardinge's joint sanction had been sufficient for IEFA's despatch for general imperial security purposes. The further sanction required from Parliament – a vote so that any prolonged overseas campaign by IEFA was permissible financially, and thus at all – was given in November 1914. Parliament agreed for India to pay IEFA's 'ordinary' expenses, or those that Indian revenues would have borne had IEFA's troops remained on subcontinental soil, and for the British taxpayer to pay the 'extraordinary' expenses, or all

¹⁵ Rafiullah, *Gwalior's Part*, pp. 47–93; and Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 510–14.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 5 November 1914, p. 5; Magnus, *Kitchener*, p. 299; H. Sams, *The Post Office of India in the Great War* (Bombay: Times Press, 1922), p. 2; Thapar, *Morale Builders*, p. 11; S. White, 'Hindu Cremations in Britain', in P. Jupp and G. Howarth (eds.), *The Changing Face of Death: Historical Accounts of Death and Disposal* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 135–36; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 15 and 28.

the other expenses arising from active duty overseas.¹⁷ This Parliamentary arrangement released IEFA not only from many Indian government financial constraints, but also from squabbling between Indian and British authorities as to who would pay for what. The result was liberal expenditure on IEFA, especially by the War Office.¹⁸

The pre-war Indian expeditionary practice of Administrative Staff officers securing their own supply contracts abroad was discontinued on the western front; the corresponding practice of Indian units receiving supplies for central authority was not. IEFA's Administrative Staff officers were provided with clothes and food for the Indian troops by the Indian and British governments and the Indian Soldiers' Fund. Accordingly, their primary supply job was distribution rather than buying. They were among the Army in India's most seasoned supply staff officers, and they used their experience to arrange the smooth distribution of supplies through the BEF's forward supply depots.

In October 1914, IEFA's administrative staff had some teething problems with the Indian troops' food supply: the goats had yet to arrive from North Africa, and some Hindu troops rejected the tinned mutton served up in lieu. But from November 1914 a settled system of rationing was established. The Indian troops frequently received food, above all curries, prepared in harmony with their religious dietary requirements by Indian cooks.¹⁹ 'Considering all things, it was extraordinary with what regularity the men were fed', Willcocks commented:

By hook or crook the company cooks would manage to send up excellent viands, frequently preparing them under conditions anything but conducive to good cookery; and I do not think GHQ ever had a complaint or any cause for doubt as to the ability of the Indians to feed themselves under all circumstances, at least none ever went though me as Corps Commander.²⁰

'So good are the arrangements that rations of every kind of thing to eat are brought right up to the trenches', one Muslim of the 129th Baluchis wrote to his brother in the Punjab.²¹ 'One thing has struck me in all the Indian hospitals', Walter Lawrence reflected on New Year's Eve 1914, 'and that is the very healthy appearance of the men. They have a good complexion, and they have evidently been very well fed at the front.'²²

¹⁷ IOR, L/PS/20/257: *Mesopotamia Commission, Report*, p. 11.

¹⁸ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 15 December 1914.

¹⁹ IWM, 73/88/1: Papers of Major-General Sir R. Ewart (Deputy-Director of Supply, Indian Corps), Diary 1914-15; Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 194; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 28 and 97-98.

²⁰ Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 62.

²¹ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 32.

²² TNA WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Letter to Kitchener, 31 December 1914.

A British officer of the 39th Garhwals agreed: 'The Indians got noticeably fat on the liberal and good rations.'²³

Within the Indian supply and distribution network at the front, IEFA's Indian animal transport units also experienced teething problems in autumn 1914. Their problems were largely organisational, as the Home Army-provided European wagons and horses – those presented to IEFA at Orléans, and which were supposedly fitter for European duty than the Indian transport units' smaller Indian carts and animals – were incorporated into the first-line Indian transport. By December 1914, the Indian first-line transport had bedded down, and was efficiently performing routine ammunition and other runs between forward supply depots and the rear of Indian trenches, working within divisional lines of communication. This was in keeping with the *Field Service Regulations*' administrative principles, and was much as had been practised at the 1911 Delhi durbar.²⁴

In some respects, the Indian transport units' pre-war carts and animals proved more suitable for western front duty than the larger European wagons and horses. With two wheels, and carrying 800 pounds, they were lighter and smaller, and therefore could work more flexibly in the muddy conditions of the front, where they less often became trapped in boggy ground, and were easier to release when they were. The Indian drivers ('drabis') of the Indian transport units quickly become accustomed to local roads and landmarks to avoid getting lost, and their animals remained in good health; together they benefited from being in pre-war formations that had their own continuing small unit cohesion.²⁵ 'I was surprised to see three [Indian mule carts] swinging down the road, the mules leaning against one another as pack mules will do when trained to the yoke', Edmund Candler, a correspondent of *The Times*, reported from Flanders in the first week of 1915:

The little convoy pulled up . . . [On one of the carts], the red-peaked *kula* [head-band] protruding from the khaki turban of the drabi proclaimed a Punjabi Muslim. [On] seeing me [he] saluted [and stepped down]. As he lifted the curricule bar from the yoke one of the mules stepped on his foot, and he called it a name that reflected equally on his own morals and those of the animal's near relations. He did not address the beast in the tone an Englishman would use, but spoke to it with brotherly reproach. Just then an officer of the Indian army Supply and Transport Corps rode up, and I got him to talk, as I knew I could if I praised the mules and carts enough. He enlarged on the virtues of the most

²³ IWM, DS/MISC/2: Henderson Papers, p. 119.

²⁴ *The Times*, 12 January 1915, p. 7, and 25 July 1921: 'Obituary: Colonel M. Syngé'; Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, see chapters 3–10; and Corrigan, *Sepoys*, p. 44.

²⁵ Candler, *The Sepoy*, pp. 208–16; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 26 and 99.

adaptable, adjustable, and indestructible vehicles that had ever been used in a campaign, and of the most hardy, ascetic, and providentially unaccommodating beast that had ever drun or carried the munitions of war. . . . Nothing ever hurts a mule short of a bullet or shell. Physical impact, heat or cold, or drought, or damp, it is all the same. . . . For hardiness nothing can touch them. . . . The mule and the drabi would rattle along under shellfire as imperturbably as they run the gauntlet of falling rocks on the Kashmir road in the monsoon.²⁶

‘The drivers’, Herbert Alexander of the 9th Mule Corps later said, ‘behaved admirably’:

It seems as though the treatment the men received at Marseilles [on IEFA’s landing in September 1914] influenced their conduct at the front by giving them an unwonted feeling of pride and self-confidence. In their own country, despite the hardships they endure and the risks they run, they are classed as ‘followers’. Here – however they might be classed – they were treated as fighting men. The result could only tend to increased zeal and efficiency.²⁷

The regimental transport drivers and carts from India also worked well, linking reliably with the army transport units at the frontline. Starting in early 1915, they received an increasing amount of new equipment from the War Office, including water carts, to supplement what they had brought from India.²⁸

The French railways moved the Indian supplies and casualty replacements from Marseilles to Flanders, and the wounded Indians from Flanders to the Channel ports or Marseilles. This transport was organised by the French in co-operation with BEF staff officers, among them some Indian Administrative Staff officers specially selected for their peacetime experience on Indian railways. They ensured that the Indian rail movements in France were fairly prompt.²⁹

IEFA’s original Indian field ambulances and field hospitals, because they had not been well funded for regular warfare up to 1914, struggled to cope with the heavy demands placed on them at First Ypres and soon after. They had neither the capacity nor the equipment to deal fully with the numbers of Indian wounded and the seriousness of many Indian wounds. They became overcrowded, and could not by themselves maintain high medical standards. The strain on them, however, was quickly relieved. They were dramatically improved by the War Office, by the BEF’s medical staff and by charities, all of which combined not only to

²⁶ *The Times*, 12 January 1915: ‘Indian Soldiers of The King: Transport by Mules, Campaigning in Rain-Soaked France’, p. 7.

²⁷ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 30–31.

²⁸ Hudson, *Fane’s Horse*, pp. 129–35.

²⁹ Henniker, *Transportation*, p. 90.

provide them with new equipment and staff, but also – and more importantly – to establish by December 1914 a new and increasingly efficient system of medical care for the Indian wounded. This system involved a chain of well-maintained medical posts and hospitals between the Indian trenches and southern England or Marseilles. It guaranteed that the Indian troops received a standard of medical care previously unknown to them.³⁰

IEFA's Indian medical personnel at the front – mainly IMS doctors and Indian stretcher bearers – worked with dedication and skill, adapting themselves to trench warfare routines.³¹ The Indian Corps' Principal Medical Officer, Surgeon-General Francis Treherne, had been one of pre-war India's best surgeons. '[He] lived to save lives; he was one of the most conscientious men I know', Willcocks wrote. '[He] had served with me on the Indian Frontiers, [and in France] arranged the medical side of the operations with a thoroughness that could not have been exceeded.'³²

In 1914–15, a total of 14,185 Indian troops wounded in Flanders were moved by six state-of-the-art hospital ships to the Indian hospitals in England run by IMS doctors and surgeons. In East Sussex, the Brighton Pavilion, a former royal residence, was opened as an Indian hospital on 14 December 1914. With 724 beds, it had been converted by the War Office, with support from the IMS and the Indian Soldiers' Fund. So too had the Kitchener Indian Hospital, also in Brighton. Opened on 13 January 1915, it was in a large four-storey Victorian workhouse commandeered from the Brighton Poor Law Institution. Along with 2,000 red-blanketed beds, the Kitchener Hospital had operating theatres, X-ray rooms, a laboratory, electrical and orthopaedic departments, and a water supply providing 77 gallons for each patient daily.³³

The Lady Hardinge Hospital, named in her memory after she had died in July 1914, was built with a £50,000 Indian Soldiers' Fund grant in Hampshire, in the New Forest. It was made up of interconnected huts containing twenty-four wards, each of twenty-four beds. Through Ethel Perrott, the wards were provided with matrons and sisters of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, some of whom spoke Urdu. Running through the hospital was the Winter Garden, an area enclosed within a 1,000-foot corridor connecting all the huts, filled with Indian furniture and carpets and decorated with paintings. Here the Indian patients could chat and

³⁰ A. Ghosh, *History of the Armed Forces Medical Services, India* (Hyderabad: Longman, 1988), pp. 105–14; Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 44–57; and Thapar, *Morale Builders*, pp. 4–39.

³¹ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. 503–09; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 27, 97–100, 118, 133 and 204.

³² Willcocks, *With the Indians*, pp. 50 and 204.

³³ IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1–13: Indian Soldiers' Fund, Proceedings and Reports.

smoke, play board games and cards, and flick through illustrated magazines. The Indian Soldiers' Fund provided the Lady Hardinge patients with blue-and-gold silk turbans, and specially tailored loose-flowing, collarless Indian-style hospital shirts. In addition, blue dressing gowns with red lapels were donated by the Rothschild family. Meanwhile, there were smaller Indian hospitals at Milford-on-Sea, New Milton and Netley (in Hampshire), and at Bournemouth (in Dorset).³⁴

The Indian hospitals had 'caste committees', run by the IMS and the Indian Ambulance Corps (a wartime volunteer body, founded in London by M. K. Gandhi, which gave basic military-medical training to 198 Indians drawn from British universities and the Inns of Court, and sent them to help IMS doctors as interpreters, dressers and clerks). The caste committees made sure that all areas of the Indian hospitals adhered to the Indian troops' various religious and social customs. For each religious group, caste or clan, there were separate slaughterhouses, kitchens, storage rooms, cooking utensil washrooms, laundries, drinking taps, places of worship and squatting latrines. To guide the patients towards the correct parts of each hospital, numerous signposts in Urdu, Hindi and Gurmukhi were put up.³⁵

'Considering that these were improvised Hospitals, and improvised under circumstances of great stress and urgency', Austen Chamberlain wrote in July 1915 after visiting Indian soldiers' hospitals in Brighton, 'it is I think wonderful how well adapted they are to their purpose and how complete are the arrangements for the comfort and welfare of the patients.'³⁶ The Indian hospitals provided the best medical care then available. They had consistently low mortality rates: of the 2,097 Indians admitted to the hospital at Netley in the 5 months from November 1914, just 0.67 per cent died; in the same period at the Bournemouth hospital, only 0.23 per cent of the 869 patients died.³⁷ As Walter Lawrence observed in December 1914, 'The arrangements are of course very superior to those obtaining in Military Hospitals in India for Indian troops.'³⁸ 'I look upon our Hospitals in England and in France as an antidote to the conditions in the trenches', he added, 'and I feel confident from conversations which I have had with the Indians, and from other

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ R. Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), see chapter 6.

³⁶ IOR, Mss Eur F 143/77: Walter Lawrence Papers: Chamberlain Letter to Lawrence, 11 July 1915.

³⁷ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 27 December 1915, and 'Arrangements Made for Indian Sick and Wounded in England and France, Report by Sir Walter Lawrence to the Secretary of State for War, 8 March 1916'.

³⁸ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 15 December 1914.

indications, that they are really grateful for the hospitality shown to them by the British Government.’³⁹

A wounded Sikh infantryman in hospital in England indicated as much in a letter to his father in the Punjab:

Here the ladies tend to us, who have been wounded, as a mother tends a child. They pour milk into our mouths, and our own parents, brothers and sisters, were we ill, would only give us water in a pot. . . . Here you see the brotherhood of the English, who are kind to us. . . . The ladies even carry off our excrement, so kind are they; and whatsoever we have a liking for, they put into our mouths. They wash our beds clothes every week and massage our backs when they ache from lying in bed.⁴⁰

‘We are very well looked after’, wrote another wounded Sikh, at Brighton. ‘We get very good food four times a day. We also get milk [and] every man is washed once in hot water. . . . Men in hospital are treated like flowers, and the King and Queen sometimes come to visit them.’⁴¹ Other wounded Indians were thankful for the close attention they received from the doctors, for the comfortable beds, and for the novel leg-muscle electro-therapies they referred to as ‘jadu’, or magic.⁴² ‘Seeing the arrangements’, reflected one Indian IMS doctor, ‘I think every one of them must be thanking God for having a bullet in their body.’⁴³

IMS doctors and surgeons, in co-operation with the War Office, made sure that IEFA’s Indian dead were given appropriate death and burial rites. For Hindus, the prohibition of open-air cremations under both French and British law was awkward, but two solutions were found. In north-eastern France, near the seaside Indian hospital at Harellet, arrangements were made with local French officials for an Indian surgeon to oversee Hindu death rites at a burning ‘ghat’ or cremation site. Cremations also took place at Boulogne and Marseilles. In the UK, the Home Office allowed cremations of Hindu soldiers on pyres built on Patcham Downs, five miles from Brighton, and in the New Forest. The ashes of the dead were cast into the Channel. Muslim soldiers who died in hospital in Flanders were buried with full military honours and with headstones inscribed in Urdu. For the Muslim dead in England, a cemetery was specially created near Woking mosque, on a plot

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 March 1915.

⁴⁰ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 24 (20 February 1915).

⁴¹ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 63 (1 May 1915).

⁴² TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 27 December 1915.

⁴³ D. Omissi, ‘Through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914–1918’, *English Historical Review* 122 (2007), p. 378.

of common land chosen by the War Office and the local senior Muslim cleric.⁴⁴

IEFA's Indian Postal Service team had British and Indian civilians of the Indian Post Office. At Rouen in October 1914, they established an Indian Base Post Office, which was moved to Boulogne in December. By early 1915, each week the Indian Base Post Office's postmasters and clerks were handling 20,000 letters home from the Indian troops in Flanders, plus around 3,000 more from the Indian wounded in England, all free of charge for the troops, and almost all written using stationery provided by the Indian Soldiers' Fund. Incoming mail, largely from India but also from émigré relations in Canada and elsewhere, amounted to 10,000 letters per week. While the Base Post Office delivered and collected letters at the frontline at dusk, the War Office kept it informed of which men required deliveries in hospital, and the India Office helped to arrange these deliveries in England. The majority of IEFA's postal team had served in previous Indian expeditionary forces. Although they had never had to deal with such a heavy load of military post before, they used a mix of experience and pragmatism to work efficiently.⁴⁵ 'The arrangements of Government are so good', wrote a Hindu Jat cavalryman, 'that even if a needle is sent by post it is duly delivered.'⁴⁶

IEFA's Administrative Staff officers arranged for the Indian troops in reserve at the front to be billeted on French and Belgian families. This worked well partly because it saved the staff from having to provide camp accommodation in the field, and partly because the locals and the Indian troops happened to forge a warm relationship.⁴⁷ 'The French people welcomed the Indian forces because they knew that the Indians had shed blood for their cause', said one Sikh veteran.⁴⁸ 'The French had a great respect for us and kept us happy', recalled another. 'They kept us in their own houses, so we learnt their language and ways of living. They presented to the Indians many things to eat and to wear. . . . They were our best friends.'⁴⁹

⁴⁴ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 14 December 1915; Macpherson, *Medical Services*, vol. 2, p. 131.

⁴⁵ G. Clarke, *The Post Office of India* (London: Lane, 1921), p. 171; Sams, *Post Office of India*, see chapters 1–4.

⁴⁶ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 309.

⁴⁷ Alexander, *On Two Fronts*, pp. 52–54; Ellinwood, 'Indian Soldier', p. 202; and Willcocks, *With the Indians*, p. 178.

⁴⁸ Privately Held Transcript of 1971 Interview with Rissladar Bakhtaur Singh (aged eighty-five).

⁴⁹ Privately Held Transcript of 1971 Interview with Dafadar Dukhbhanjan Singh (aged seventy-eight).

The all-silladar Indian cavalry regiments on the western front had many administrative problems as their traditional self-sufficiency in supply clashed with centralised wartime supply. Soon after their arrival in France, some of their pre-war equipment, which had not been centrally supplied, such as saddlery, required replacement as part of their general upkeep. A muddle ensued because Army Headquarters in India failed to find consistency between replacing old equipment on individual regimental lines and issuing new general equipment. From 1916, the silladar regiments in France began to be supplied along the same lines as British cavalry units, suspending much of their pre-war silladar organisation. The silladar administrative problems within the BEF were never entirely solved, and they guaranteed the silladar system's abolition shortly after the war.⁵⁰

'The food, clothing and necessities for the Indian Corps have been of the very best', Willcocks notified Kitchener in January 1915, 'no army from India has ever been so generously treated and all ranks realise this fully.'⁵¹ 'Our men are really awfully well done all round', an Indian cavalry brigade commander told the Indian Soldiers' Fund that February, 'and we (Indian Cavalry officers) appreciate with all our hearts the generosity of all the kind people at home. Even the followers are having the time of their lives. One, when asked the other day how he was getting on and how he liked it, replied 'Sir, it is a perpetual wedding feast!'⁵² '[I] can testify', F. E. Smith later remarked, 'that it was impossible to visit [the IEFA] trenches, billets or hospitals without meeting at every turn evidence of the solicitude with which the comfort and well-being of the Indian soldier were considered in every detail.'⁵³

On 4 November 1915, once the Lahore and Meerut Divisions had been ordered to leave the western front, Henry Keary was uneasy about the level of administrative attention their transfer to Mesopotamia appeared to be getting. 'Nothing seems to be of an urgent nature', he wrote at the Lahore Division's headquarters in Flanders.⁵⁴ From 6 August 1914, when IEFA's original troops, widely spread about the Indian plains, the north-west frontier and the Himalayas, had been summoned by the war council at 10 Downing Street, it had taken fifty-one days for them to land at Marseilles. But from 23 October 1915, when the Lahore and Meerut Divisions were concentrated in a small area of France and another council of war at Downing Street decided they would go to Mesopotamia, it

⁵⁰ Government of India, *Army in India*, p. 96.

⁵¹ TNA, PRO 30/57/52: Willcocks Letter to Kitchener, 13 January 1915.

⁵² IOR, Mss Eur F 120/1: Indian Soldiers' Fund, Proceedings and Reports, Appendix III.

⁵³ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, p. 514.

⁵⁴ IWM, Con Shelf: Keary Papers: Keary Letter to Captain F. Keary, 4 November 1915.

took seventy-one days for them to reach Basra. Having arrived promptly in France owing to careful planning and prioritisation by the Indian and British authorities, the two divisions left the country slowly, as the same authorities took no such pains to co-ordinate their movements. The contrast was only the thin end of the wedge of the administrative problems they were to suffer from their move from IEFA to IEFD, as they exited the War Office's bubble of control and re-entered the Indian government's.⁵⁵

'Where all those Nice Things?'

IEFD's operations in 1914–15 exposed the Army in India's pre-war administrative weaknesses to the full. As Force D crept forwards from Basra, it used pre-war Indian transport and medical units that struggled without enough equipment for regular warfare. Its staff officers, lacking in field experience of administering anything larger than a division, were predisposed to run into, rather than to foresee, large-scale administrative problems. Its commanders treated their administrative services as inferior branches that should simply join in the pursuit of their operational goals, rather than advise on the setting of these. Beauchamp Duff and his staff chiefs at Army Headquarters were weighed down by India's highly centralised military bureaucracy, which they let tie them to their offices, leading them to lose perspective on events on the Mesopotamian front. All this might have been forestalled had IEFD had a political leader who did not push it into Mesopotamia with unreformed administrative services. Unfortunately, it had Hardinge, who had known of the Army in India's fault lines since 1910, but whose political ambitions in wartime got the better of his military judgment. Thus did IEFD make small attack after small attack along a 400-mile line of advance between Basra and Ctesiphon without due consideration of the administrative consequences. Its limited supply, transport and medical units became overstretched, and in November 1915, around the time of its defeat at Ctesiphon, they began to collapse.⁵⁶

Quite what that meant on the ground was discovered by the Indian battalions transferred from the western front. They landed in Mesopotamia in January 1916. They did not bring their medical units from France and England, piling heavy logistical strains onto IEFD for which no proper

⁵⁵ Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. 2, pp. 42–53.

⁵⁶ Anderson, 'Logistics of the Indian Expeditionary Force D in Mesopotamia: 1914–18', in K. Roy (ed.), *Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, pp. 111–17; Syk, 'The 1917 Mesopotamia Commission', pp. 94–101; and Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. 2, pp. 42–53.

provision had been made. They found that to get from Basra to the front at Kut, there were no railways, only an inadequate number of filthy and overcrowded steamers on the Tigris. As they arrived at the Kut front from late January, there were no roads leading to welcoming billets or camps, only desolate plains knee-deep in mud from heavy rain and hail storms, and ill-organised bivouacs that had virtually no tents or waterproof sheets for protection from the high winds and sub-zero temperatures at night. Up to the summer there was no functioning system of centralised supply with dependable depots and first-line transport through which clothes, curries and other essentials flowed, only a muddle of insufficient Indian mule packs and Army Transport transport carts, and severe shortages of everything. Drinking water, vegetables and other rations were in such short supply that the troops were left to fight dehydrated and on empty stomachs; many lost weight they had put on in Flanders and developed vitamin deficiency diseases. There was barely any frontline medical support, leaving the wounded either to be carried from the battlefield on Army Transport carts from which precious rations had to be discarded, or to make their own way to the rear. Many of the walking wounded got lost in the desert marshes about Kut, where they were often robbed and murdered by local Arabs. There was in fact not a single modern hospital or convalescent depot to speak of in all of middle and lower Mesopotamia, let alone any influx of charity gifts or a reliable postal service.⁵⁷

‘I had a letter from my brother Sadikall Khan from Basra’, a Punjabi Muslim wrote in March 1916 from India to a friend serving with the 3rd Skinner’s Horse in the Somme valley:

He says he is constantly ill, and that every few days his health changes. He says also the heat is unbearable and that the country is the very opposite of France; that he is neither fit to fight nor ill enough to return to India; that except dates and the heat, nothing is to be found. Where, he asks, is that France, and those courteous people; where those fine open roads, where all those nice things?⁵⁸

‘I have met many men who were formerly in France’, a Muslim serving with IEFD informed another Indian cavalryman still with IEFA. ‘From them we have heard all about France. In truth you must be very comfortable there.’⁵⁹ ‘Definitely the fighting in Mesopotamia was the toughest because there was lack of rations and a lack of clothing,’ a Sikh veteran

⁵⁷ Anderson, ‘Logistics of the Indian Expeditionary Force D in Mesopotamia: 1914–18’, pp. 117–22; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 430–39; and Poynder, *9th Gurkha Rifles*, pp. 97–119.

⁵⁸ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 271 (18 March 1916).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, letter no. 261 (7 March 1916).

of IEFs A and D said in 1970.⁶⁰ Indeed, it was the consensus among the officers and men switched from Force A to Force D that that the Mesopotamian theatre was ‘the worst’.⁶¹

Thus Kitchener and the Indian Soldiers’ Fund insulated IEFA against India’s pre-war administrative weaknesses, but Hardinge failed to protect IEFD from getting badly burned by them all. It was only once the War Office had taken control of IEFD by mid-1916 that the administrative conditions in Mesopotamia began to resemble those in France. The Mesopotamia Commission published its report the following year. It found that ‘what is in default is not the fighting capacity and efficiency of the combatant forces of the Indian Army, but the system of military administration in control of that Army’.⁶² In terms of individual culpability, the Commission spread the blame for IEFD’s ill-fated advance on Baghdad and its administrative failure between John Nixon, Hardinge, Beauchamp Duff, Edmund Barrow and Austen Chamberlain. This obscured that Hardinge was the most responsible of all. As he put it himself, ‘after all is said and done it is the Viceroy who is the head of the Army.’⁶³ For all the Army in India’s systemic administrative shortcomings, Hardinge was its keeper from 1910 to 1916, throughout that time he attempted no major reforms to it despite many warnings from military quarters, and he was the one person with a decisive say over every step that IEFD took up to mid-1916. Indeed, as he encouraged London in October 1915 to back the bid for Baghdad, he preferred not to draw attention to recent reports from Mesopotamia of the administrative troubles brewing there.⁶⁴ Administrative considerations did not govern his treatment of the Army in India in peace or in war. They in fact had nothing to do with his request for the Lahore and Meerut Divisions to join IEFD; if they had, it is difficult to see how he could have made it.

Kitchener, on the other hand, had kick-started reform of the Home Army’s administrative services as soon as he took over at the War Office. The BEF only ever had one real moment when an administrative breakdown comparable to IEFD’s was on the cards – on the Aisne in late summer 1914, where its pre-war medical units were pushed close to their limit after the retreat from Mons. Thereafter, the BEF, and IEFA with it, never verged on administrative collapse like IEFD did; the Home Army’s

⁶⁰ Privately Held Transcript of 1970 Interview with Sardar Bahadur Suran Singh Obi (47th Sikhs, aged eighty-five).

⁶¹ For instance, see *47th Sikhs War Record*, p. 94; Syk, ‘Indian Expeditionary Force D’, p. 70; or Townshend, *When God Made Hell*, p. 224.

⁶² IOR, L/PS/20/257: *Mesopotamia Commission, Report*, p. 115.

⁶³ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to G. Allen, 12 January 1914.

⁶⁴ Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. 2, p. 46.

administrative services were too well equipped and adaptive for that to happen.⁶⁵

IEFB also suffered from poor Indian administrative support. Its problems of supply and medical care in East Africa proved intractable. After the 40th Pathans, 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force) and 129th Baluchis had joined Force B straight from France in 1916, they were soon worn down by sickness and malnutrition. By early 1917, the 40th were only fit for duty on the lines of communication. 'What one wouldn't give for the food alone in France, for the clothing and the equipment!', one of the regiment's British officers (who had been wounded at Second Ypres) told his sister that year in a letter from Allied-occupied German East Africa. 'I am perfectly ready to be killed, but if that is to happen, please, I want to die a strong man, with all my faculties intact, not a half-starved weakling.'⁶⁶ Of the total Indian combatant casualties in East Africa of 4,500, the majority were from disease, and their death rate was 55 per cent. These things, of course, reflected the great gulf in standards between IEFB's administrative care and IEFA's.⁶⁷

It was not only in Mesopotamia and East Africa that ex-IEFA soldiers missed their administrative backing on the western front – they did so wherever they were sent. In 1917–18, Stewart Blacker of the Guides was serving in the Persian desert and Trans-Caspia alongside several IEFA veterans of Indian regiments including his own:

A young Yusufzai of the 19th Punjabis had been in France, where he had been twice wounded whilst attached to another regiment. When he rejoined his own unit in Trans-Caspia, he was somewhat supercilious and inclined to jeer at side-shows and 'small wars'. At Artik [in modern Turkmenistan] he collected another slight wound, but stuck to his opinion and his platoon. At Dushakh [on 13 October 1918] he received a nasty one, and publicly recanted in view of an 800-mile camel journey with a compound fracture.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Brown, *Logistics*; Chapman-Huston and Rutter, *Cowans*; Harrison, *Medical War*; Henniker, *Transportation*; Macpherson, *Medical Services*; and Macready, *Annals*.

⁶⁶ Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 298 and 302–03 (letter of March 1917); and Strachan, *To Arms*, p. 587.

⁶⁷ S. Saxena, *Role of Indian Army in the First World War* (Delhi: Bhavna Parkashan, 1987), p. 152.

⁶⁸ S. Blacker, *Secret Patrol*, p. 139.

Conclusion

‘These levies of Indians’, Maurice Barrès remarked as IEFA arrived at Marseilles in September 1914, ‘make up one of the overwhelming surprises in this War of Nations.’ ‘But what do these Indians think, Sikhs and Gurkhas alike?’ he wondered. ‘What conception of this war have they formed? What is it, and what are they fighting for?’¹ On 10 October, James Willcocks’ Order of the Day No. 1 to the Indian Corps showed the kind of sentiments the British hoped were guiding the Indian troops’ thoughts:

On the eve of going into the field to join our British comrades, who have covered themselves with glory in this great war, it is our firm resolve to prove ourselves worthy of the honour which has been conferred on us as representatives of the Army of India. In a few days we shall be fighting as has never been our good fortune to fight before and against enemies who have a long history. But is their history as long as yours? You are the descendants of men who have been mighty rulers and great warriors for many centuries. You will never forget this. You will recall the glories of your race. Hindu and Mahomedan will be fighting side by side with British soldiers and our gallant French Allies. You will be helping to make history. You will be the first Indian soldiers of the King-Emperor who will have the honour of showing in Europe that the sons of India have lost none of their ancient martial instincts and are worthy of the confidence reposed in them. In battle you will remember that your religions enjoin on you that to give your life doing your duty is your highest reward. The eyes of your co-religionists and your fellow-countrymen are on you. From the Himalayan Mountains, the banks of the Ganges and Indus, and the plains of Hindustan, they are eagerly waiting for the news of how their brethren conduct themselves when they meet the foe. From mosques and temples their prayers are ascending to the God of all, and you will answer their hopes by the proofs of your valour. You will fight for your King-Emperor and your faith, so that history will record the doings of India’s sons and your children will proudly tell of the deeds of their fathers.²

¹ Bibikoff, *Marseilles*, p. 3.

² Quoted in *The Times*, 11 November 1914.

In 1917, Lord Curzon gave his view on how the Indians' morale – their will to fight, from their day-to-day mood to their underlying political spirit – had stood the test:

They, who had never suffered heavy shell fire, who had no experience of high explosive, who had never seen warfare in the air, who were totally ignorant of modern trench fighting, were exposed to all the latest and most scientific developments of the art of destruction. They were confronted with the most powerful and pitiless military machine that the world has ever seen. . . . They were plunged in surroundings which must have been intensely depressing to the spirit of man. . . . In the face of these trials and difficulties, the cheerfulness, the loyalty, the good discipline, the intrepid courage of these denizens of another clime, cannot be too highly praised. If disappointment, and even failure, sometimes attended their efforts, their accomplishment was nevertheless solid and striking.³

The Indians' British officers were equally effusive. For Willcocks, also writing in 1917, the Indians at the Battle of Loos had fought 'with no other thought than a determination to do their duty; and their blood shed set the seal on their loyalty, courage, and devotion to their King-Emperor.'⁴ In 1922, Stewart Blacker of the Guides offered his opinion: 'I . . . learnt . . . in the hard schools of Neuve Chapelle, of Ypres, and before the Aubers Ridge, a little of the gallantry and unswerving devotion of the Punjabis and Pathans it was my privilege to serve with.' Some of the IEFA veterans of the Guides serving with Blacker in Trans-Caspia in 1917–18 were Yusufzais who remained with him on active service there until 1920. One of these Yusufzais was Awal Nur, 'a boy in years, but a veteran in wars. . . . He had a brilliant war record, having been three times wounded in France, where he went through the murderous ordeal of half a dozen Flanders battles.' They also included Havildar Aslam, 'my much-scarred young veteran of Artois and Africa. . . . Aslam had been thrice severely wounded in France, Belgium, and Africa, once indeed desperately, yet nothing could exceed his ardour for any new fray, even after seven years of fighting.' 'Many people who ought to know better', Blacker added,

seem to think that a Pathan soldier is characteristically undisciplined. My own experience, after having seen him in eight campaigns and in six of the bloodiest battles of the Western Front, is that the Pathan knows what real discipline is. . . . Another superstition about the Pathan . . . is that he is treacherous and unreliable. Historical facts tell us that not even Ulster or New Zealand showed a higher percentage of voluntarily enlisted killed to total population, in the German war, than did the two gallant races of Yusufzai and the Khattaks.⁵

³ Merewether and Smith, *Indian Corps*, pp. xi–ii.

⁴ Willcocks, 'Indian Army Corps', p. 33.

⁵ S. Blacker, *On Secret Patrol*, pp. 108, 159, 172 and 271–72.

The British consensus on the Indian troops' morale was set in stone on 7 October 1927, when the Indian army memorial at Neuve Chapelle was opened. In attendance were thirty Indian representatives of IEFA regiments; they were all veterans of the BEF's first offensive in 1915. 'Eagerly did they point to the names of well-remembered comrades [inscribed on the memorial], which, as they were arranged according to units, were easy to find.'⁶ Charles Anderson gave a speech on the Indian Corps, avowing that its Indians had been 'bound together by the tie of loyalty to their King-Emperor and determined to uphold the honour and the ideals of his Empire.'⁷ Claud Jacob and F. E. Smith, now the Secretary of State at the India Office, then unveiled the memorial's keynote inscription: 'TO THE HONOUR OF THE ARMY IN INDIA WHICH FOUGHT IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM 1914-1918'. Smith gave the closing address:

While all who fought suffered greatly and wrought nobly, the endurance of the Indians was specially to be remarked. . . . They fought thousands of miles from their homes. . . . They fought in a quarrel of which their understanding was less perfect than was that of those by whose side they contended. The Belgian remembered a happy and innocent country which had had almost wholly lost. The French saw all around them the cruel signs of local destruction; and, through the vivid eyes of imagination, must in dark moments have apprehended the loss of Paris, the Incomparable, and the spread of that menacing invasion, into yet further areas, unknown, incalculable. And so, too, in History, those whose valour was rendered immortal by Thucydides fought near to their homes and in a quarrel with known dangers. Nor did the Spartans who perished at Thermopylae offer their lives upon an issue obscurely understood. It would be an insincerity to pretend that in this sense the objects with which this war was waged could have been known, or were known, to the majority of the Indian army. Many a humble soldier, one suspects, must have thought of his far-away village, sun-swept, unmenaced, and wondered what inscrutable purpose of whatever deity he worshipped had projected him into this sinister and bloody maelstrom. It is in all these circumstances the special soldierly virtue of these troops that they met with undefeated eyes the clash of a novel and horrible war, certainly without the clear, perhaps without the discernible, stimulus of a danger to their own homes, or to their own wives and children. Whence came this spirit of endurance and of high endeavour? It came from the twin sources of an inborn and simple loyalty; of an instructed and very perfect discipline. Like the Roman legionary, they were faithful unto death. They had accepted a duty. They discharged it. More cannot be said: more need not be said.⁸

⁶ S. Price, *Neuve Chapelle* (London: Imperial War Graves Commission, 1927), pp. 1-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

Since the 1960s, retired officers of the Indian and Pakistan armies, and of the British army's Gurkha battalions, have largely agreed with the imperial eulogies of IEFA's Indian troops' fidelity and honour. Most historians, however, have dismissed such thinking as wishful. It has become conventional to present the Indians as the BEF's least loyal soldiers. For Geoffrey Greenhut, 'the British view of the Indian soldier as totally obedient, loyal, and devoted' was an 'extraordinary romanticism' and 'seriously out of touch with reality'. The Indian soldier, he argued, 'when confronted with the impersonal horrors of trench warfare, the never-ending squalor, the almost certain probability of wounding or death . . . proved less willing [to fight] than his European counterpart'. The Indians' morale, he continued, underwent a 'dangerous breakdown' in 1914, before it was somewhat restored by their rest from the trenches in New Year 1915, only for it to spiral downwards from February.⁹ Of IEFA's Indian infantrymen, David Omissi has stated that 'the collapse of [their] morale [was] at times unusually complete. [A] general collapse was clearly imminent in the autumn [of 1915]';¹⁰ Tim Moreman that they were 'withdrawn from France . . . after [their] morale cracked under the strain of trench warfare';¹¹ and Nikolas Gardner that they 'undoubtedly recognised the high probability of their own demise in the event of their continued service. Consequently, they collectively demurred [and] did not accept the terms of their service in Europe'.¹²

In truth, the morale of IEFA's Indian troops was by no means as steady as the imperialists professed, but neither did it fail. 'It being a mercenary army', Haig had written in 1911 of the Indian service, 'its loyalty must be bought & cannot be presumed.'¹³ The mercenary in the Indian soldier surfaced in the Indian Corps in January 1915. All classes of its Indian troops but for the Gurkhas demanded a pay raise on the grounds that their basic salary of Rs. 11 per month was 'not sufficient remuneration for the work which they have been called upon to do in France'; they wanted at least Rs. 20.¹⁴ Other grievances abounded. The Indians felt that the British acted in bad faith by imposing the rule that all lightly wounded must return to the frontline; they referred to this new policy as 'zulm', an

⁹ Greenhut, 'Imperial Reserve', pp. 62, 64 and 67–69, and 'Sahib and Sepoy', pp. 16 and 18.

¹⁰ Omissi, *Sepoy*, pp. 114–15.

¹¹ Moreman, Review of David Omissi's *Voices, Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28 (2000), p. 143.

¹² N. Gardner, *Trial*, pp. 197–99. For similar views, see Beckett, *Ypres*, pp. 34–35, or Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 56 and 61.

¹³ NLS: Haig Papers, 1911 Diary, 17 August.

¹⁴ Quoting Walter Lawrence, TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Report to Kitchener, 15 February July 1915.

Urdu term meaning tyranny or something unfairly severe. They despaired at the loss of comrades and at the chances of their own survival. They were homesick, had no home leave, and were left distraught by letters from their families carrying news of plague, famine and village disputes. Meanwhile, as visitors to Republican France and semi-democratic Belgium, they caught thought-provoking glimpses of societies freer and more equal than their own; their resentment of British treatment of them as racial inferiors, and their political self-esteem, grew.¹⁵

Fifty Indian troops are known to have deserted the Indian Corps. Ninety-four per cent of them were Afridis, Orakzais and Mahsuds who had joined up as independent men from the Pathan tribal areas, in most cases in pre-war days to earn money to buy their own state-of-the-art rifle, a motive peculiar to them.¹⁶ British courts of enquiry, Indian regimental investigations and German interrogations were unanimous that these Pathan deserters had personal grievances, such as being overlooked for promotion, which led them to act on their wish to go home from a war of unwelcome intensity, taking their Lee-Enfield Mark IIIs with them across no man's land.¹⁷ They had the self-confidence to gamble on getting back to the Tirah or Waziristan via Germany, safe in the knowledge that the only sanctions available to the British would be cancelling their pay and pension – their homelands lay outside British jurisdiction, and they could freely live there without fear of penal servitude or hanging, the punishments invariably met by deserters enlisted from Indian administered territory. Once IEFA's Pathan deserters had given themselves up to the Germans, they hoped to keep hold of their Mark IIIs for post-war life in the tribal areas. They were to be disappointed in this; the Germans, in sending them on their way to a prison camp outside Berlin, relieved them of their firearms.¹⁸

The vast majority of IEFA's Indian troops, who had no German escape route like the independent Pathans because their home districts were

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 December 1915; Lawrence, *The India We Served*, p. 271; and Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 49.

¹⁶ IOR, L/MIL/17/5/2403: 'Secret Roll of Indian Prisoners of War Suspected of Having Deserted to the Enemy, or of Having Given Information to or Otherwise Assisted the Enemy After Capture'.

¹⁷ CUL/MD, Hardinge Papers: Hardinge Letter to W. Birdwood, 21 December 1915; PAAA, R21245: f. 111, 'Report on Interrogation of Afridi Deserters at Lille, 6 and 7 March 1915'; TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Reports to Kitchener, 27 December 1915, WO 256/3: Haig, Western Front Diary, 4, 7 and 8 March 1915, and WO 95/1089: *Indian Corps War Diary* (March 1915), see entry for 4 March; Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 399; Mason, *Matter of Honour*, p. 418; Omissi, *Voices*, letter nos. 96 and 179; *47th Sikhs War Record*, p. 111; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 163.

¹⁸ IOR, Mss Eur D 613, Roos-Keppel Correspondence: D 613/3, 'North-West Frontier' (13 March 1916).

ruled either by the British directly or by colonial collaborators who would turn them in, stuck to their duty. Much of their motivation came from a pay raise granted by the Indian government in spring 1915, elevating their basic wage to Rs. 19 a month.¹⁹ Their morale was also nurtured by the pride many of them took in themselves as soldiers, whether as professionals, as representatives of their clan, caste, regiment or religion, or as the King-Emperor's men. Their good food, healthcare and postal services also sustained them, as did their faiths and the kindnesses of French and Belgian civilians. They lived each day in the hope that they would go home soon, biding their time, blind to the course the war would take.²⁰

The Indian soldiers' grievances and resentments in France and Belgium caused a few of them to malingering in their hospitals, but there was no Indian mutiny on the western front. Indian discipline within IEFA was generally good. Throughout the Indian Corps' existence, on aggregate its British convictions outnumbered its Indian. From October 1914 to February 1915, for instance, 2.7 per cent of the corps' British troops received court martial convictions, but the Indian rate was 0.3 per cent.²¹ The discipline of IEFA's Indians was most conspicuous in battle. In the main, they never stopped following their orders to fight, whether at First Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, Aubers Ridge, Festubert or Loos – or subsequently at Gallipoli or Kut al-Amara, or in East Africa, Trans-Caspia and elsewhere.²²

What the morale of the Indian infantrymen in Flanders in October 1915 was not about to do was collapse. For most of them, their first impressions of the western front had been from the summer; they knew the Indian sector as a quiet one of sun, long grass and well-built, dry trenches, into which curries came like clockwork. Only two of the BEF's six Indian infantry brigades had assaulted at Loos, fighting for just one day with new weaponry and results that encouraged optimism. The oncoming Flemish winter was the Indian Corps' second, but it was the majority of the corps' Indian troops' first, and they faced it with an abundance of the necessary supplies.²³ As for the Indian Cavalry Corps in late 1915, its Indian troopers were prepared to persevere. 'Whose salt

¹⁹ TNA, WO 32/5110: W. Lawrence Reports to Kitchener, 21 July and 27 December 1915.

²⁰ Omissi, *Voices*, letter nos. 1–199; Thatcher, *129th DCO*, p. xvi; and Waters, *Forty Thieves*, p. 238.

²¹ TNA, WO 154/14–16: see Deputy Judge Advocate General, Indian Corps, War Diaries and Reports, October 1914–December 1915.

²² Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds*, p. 391.

²³ Omissi, *Voices*, letter no. 154 (4 October 1915).

we have eaten, to him the debt must be paid', a Pathan of the 36th Jacob's Horse wrote to his brother in December. 'While I live, I will remain in my valour and will exalt the name of my tribe.'²⁴

Evelyn Howell, a political officer for South Waziristan, was IEFA's Head Censor of Indian mail. He read more of the Indian soldiers' letters than anyone else. Unlike the Indians fighting with the BEF in autumn 1915, he was able to take a bird's eye view of the Indian army's European service since 1914: 'Never since the days of Hannibal, I suppose, has any body of mercenaries suffered so much and complained so little as some of the regiments of Indian infantry now in France.'²⁵ 'The marvel to me, after my many long years of experience', James Willcocks reported to Buckingham Palace shortly before he left the Indian Corps, 'is how much the Indian troops have done and how willingly they have done it':

I have seen them on every kind of service in 3 continents; and in Europe they have done far better than most of us who know them ever expected. They have taken part in many severe engagements [and] have done their full share of the work. . . . The truth is that the Indians have done well, beyond all expectations; they have stood a long test which indelibly stamps them as worthy of their Sovereign's uniform. . . . They have freely given their lives, health, and most cherished ideas for England. Can man do more?²⁶

²⁴ *Ibid.*, letter no. 204 (27 December 1915).

²⁵ Howell's words from an Indian Censor's Report of autumn 1915, quoted in Mazumder, *Indian Army*, p. 266.

²⁶ IOR, Mss Eur F 143/77: Walter Lawrence Papers: Letter from Willcocks to C. Wigram, 10 July 1915.

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