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INDIA AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR – THE FAR EAST AND BURMA

The Editor

*When you go home
Tell them of us and say
For your tomorrow
We gave our today*

Following on from the last edition, I list below the Indian Army recipients of the Victoria Cross and George Cross for Burma and the Far East. Again the information is extracted from "*The Victoria Crosses and George Crosses of the Honourable East India Company and Indian Army 1856-1945*" published by the National Army Museum in 1962.

VICTORIA CROSS

The only VC of the Malayan campaign was won on 3 January 1942 by Lieutenant Colonel A E CUMMING (2/12th Frontier Force Regiment) who, at Kota Bahru when trying to break out, led his men with the bayonet and routed the Japanese. After three days' retreat his feet were raw and he could not move, so he sent his troops ahead and lay down, as he thought to die. But he was cared for and then rescued, whereupon, though weak from wounds, he led his men in a successful attack.

Twenty nine Victoria Crosses were won in the Burma campaign, or on India's north-eastern frontier, of which twenty were won by the Indian Army.

In January, 1943, at Donbaik in Arakan, Havildar PARKASH SINGH (5/8th Punjab Regiment) rescued the crews of two disabled Bren carriers after their ammunition had run out. Two weeks later Parkash Singh again rescued two crews when their carriers had been knocked out by Japanese guns on an open beach. He then towed a carrier in which lay two wounded men.

In May, 1943, during an attack along a knife-edge ridge in the Chin Hills, Havildar GAJE GHALE (2/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles) took his platoon forward under mortar fire and, though badly wounded by a grenade, he led assault after assault until the hill was captured at heavy cost to the Japanese. Only then would he allow his wound to be dressed.

On a steep hillside in Kalapanzin Valley in Arakan, Naik NAND SINGH (1/11th Sikh Regiment) won a VC on 11/12 March 1944 when he carried a position single-handed, although six times wounded in the assault. All his men having become casualties, Nand Singh charged the third trench alone, capturing it, and bayoneted its occupants.

A month later, on 6th April, in the fighting just north of Imphal, Jemadar ABDUL HAFIZ (3/9th Jat Regiment) led his platoon up a bare hillside and though wounded in the leg he went on and seized a Japanese machine-gun. With a Bren-gun he advanced and fought so fiercely

that the Japanese fled. Abdul Hafiz, the first Muslim to win the VC in the Second World War, died from a chest wound. On the southern front at Imphal, on 12 June 1944, Rifleman GANJU LAMA, MM (I/7th Gurkha Rifles) crawled forward on his own initiative and, though twice wounded, knocked out two Japanese tanks with his PIAT gun at thirty yards range. He then killed or wounded every member of the tank crews. Only a month before he had been awarded a Military Medal for destroying an enemy tank with his PIAT.

(This action was re-enacted as part of this Summer's Royal Tournament held in London. According to the programme note, Ganju Lama joined 11 Gurkha Rifles after Independence and in due course was promoted to Subedar Major. In 1965 he was appointed ADC to the President of India, was granted honorary rank of Captain in 1968 while still serving and eventually retired to his home in Sikkim having been appointed Honorary ADC to the President for life).

Two more Victoria Crosses were won by 2/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles in the hand fighting along the Silehar Track south of Imphal. On the night of 25th June 1944, Subedar NETRABAHADUR THAPA died after defeating a vital and isolated position known as "Water Picquet" with exemplary skill and courage for eight hours against a series of night attacks and despite intense artillery fire. When, next day, during attacks to recapture "Water Picquet" and drive the Japanese from "Mortar Bluff" above, Naik AGANSING RAI twice took the initiative when Japanese guns halted the advance. Each time he killed three enemy and enabled his section to silence the gun. Later he rushed a bunker and killed the four occupants.

When on 23rd June, 3/6th Gurkha Rifles were attacking Mogaung in northern Burma, an officer and a rifleman gained the VC. Captain M ALLMAND, killing three Japanese with his kukri, attacked a vital bridge alone and his men, spurred on by his example, captured it. Two days later he forced his way over marshy ground and killed many Japanese in their foxholes. Those of his men who had not become casualties followed him and carried the day. Ten days later, though suffering badly from trench foot, Allmand led his Gurkhas in a dawn attack and was killed when charging a machine-gun post. In the same attack on the Mogaung railway bridge, Rifleman TUL BAHADUR PUN, when his platoon was pinned to the ground by fire, led the two surviving men against the objective. Despite a serious wound he charged alone over deep mud, shell holes and logs and, though a conspicuous target, made sure of his platoon's success.

On 9th July, Major F G BLAKER MC (Highland Light Infantry attached 3/9th Gurkha Rifles) went forward alone to attack a machine-gun post on top of a hill near Taungni, south-west of Mogaung. He was wounded four times, and mortally, but exhorted his men to advance with the words: "Well done, C Company. I am going to die, but you will go on, I know". His men did go on, and overran the Japanese position. Blaker, who had already gained a Military Cross, was posthumously awarded the VC.

After defeating the Japanese at Imphal and Kohima, troops of the 14th Army pursued the enemy through the monsoon. On 25th October, south of Tiddim, Subedar RAM SARUP SINGH (2/1st Punjab Regiment), having led a charge which drove the Japanese from their bunkers, rallied his men when the enemy counter-attacked. Then, after bandaging his wounded thigh with a short puttee, he bayoneted four Japanese in a second fierce charge. Just in front of the enemy's bunkers he was mortally wounded in the chest. So profound had been the effect of Ram Sarup's example that when volunteers were called for to bring in his body

under the heaviest possible fire, the entire company volunteered. The citation for Ram Sarup Singh's posthumous VC was written by Lieutenant Colonel C B Appleby, later Director of the National Army Museum who was then commanding the battalion.

Before the Japanese were finally evicted from the Arakan, four more Victoria Crosses were gained by the Indian Army. On 22 November, 1944, Sepoy BHANDARI RAM (16/10th Baluch Regiment) silenced a machine-gun which had been preventing his platoon from advancing along a narrow ridge, and so enabled the Japanese position to be captured. Though one arm had been wounded, and a Japanese grenade had burst right on him, the Sepoy put a grenade in his mouth, removed the pin with his teeth, and hurled it into the enemy post.

On 15 December, in the Kaladan Valley, Havildar UMRAO SINGH (30th Indian Mountain Regiment, Indian Artillery) displayed great bravery when his gun position was attacked four times. When the final Japanese assault came, he seized a heavy tool and struck down three enemy in desperate hand-to-hand fighting to save his gun. He was knocked senseless, and when a counter-attack later regained the position, the Havildar was found with seven head wounds. Ten dead Japanese lay round him. A month later, on 19 January 1945, in the same valley, Lance-Naik SHER SHAH (7/16th Punjab Regiment) gained a posthumous VC. When, at dusk, a Japanese platoon attacked his post, he stalked alone behind the enemy and broke up the attack. Several hours later he dispersed a second group of Japanese. He was gravely wounded in the leg, but went forward and, firing at point-blank range, once more scattered the enemy. He continued to fire until shot dead. Immediately in front of him were found twenty-three Japanese bodies.

Further south in Arakan, towards Ramree Island, on 5 March 1945, Rifleman BHANBHAGTA GURUNG (3/2nd Gurkha Rifles) stood up and shot a Japanese tree sniper who had caused casualties in his section. When his companions were again held up he went forward and cleared four enemy foxholes with bayonet and grenades. Going for a machine-gun, he jumped on the bunker, threw in smoke grenades and then killed three Japanese and captured the gun.

Earlier, on 2 March 1945, but this time near Meiktila in central Burma, Naik FAZAL DIN (7/10th Baluch Regiment) silenced a Japanese bunker, only to be attacked by six enemy, including two officers. The Naik was wounded in the chest by one officer's sword, but when this officer withdrew his weapon, Fazal Din seized it, killed his opponent and two more Japanese. Waving the captured sword, he encouraged his men, but collapsed soon afterwards and died. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

Another posthumous winner of the Cross was Lieutenant KARAMJEET SINGH JUDGE (4/15th Punjab Regiment). On 18 March, near Myingyan, central Burma, he time and again went forward through heavy fire to bring the tanks forward to deal with Japanese bunkers, which he pointed out. Afterwards, leading a series of infantry charges, he wiped out ten enemy positions which had been battered by the tanks. This gallant officer virtually dominated the battlefield until he was mortally wounded. Naik GIAN SINGH of the same battalion lived to receive the VC which he earned, also near Myingyan on 2 March. Though wounded, he captured single-handed a Japanese anti-tank gun which had fired on our tanks, and he also rushed several enemy foxholes.

A month earlier, on 16 February, during the advance on Mandalay, Jemadar PARKASH SINGH (14/13th Frontier Force Rifles) took command of his platoon when the officer

became a casualty. He had already been wounded, but, propped up by his batman, he fired a mortar, the crew of which had been killed. When he had expended all the mortar ammunition, he crawled round the position collecting ammunition from the dead and wounded and distributing it to his remaining troops. Though hit twice more, he continued to direct the platoon until he died.

On 12 May 1945, near Taungdaw on the Irrawaddy, Rifleman LACHHIMAN GURUNG (4/8th Gurkha Rifles) inspired his platoon when surrounded for three days by Japanese troops, who hurled innumerable grenades into the position. The Gurkha picked up two of those and threw them straight back, but he lost several fingers while holding a third grenade. Nevertheless, he loaded and fired his rifle with his left hand and helped to repulse wave after wave of fanatical attacks.

GEORGE CROSS

- Havildar ABDUL REHMAN, 3/9th Jat, Regiment - Cerem Island, Dutch East Indies, 22 February 1945 (gazetted 10 September 1946).
- Lance Naik ISLAMUDDIN, 6/9th Jat Regiment - north of Meiktila, Burma, 24 March 1945 (gazetted 5 October 1945).
- Naik KIRPA RAM, 8/13th Frontier Force Rifles - Thondebhavi, 12 September 1945 (gazetted 15 March 1946).
- Captain MAHMOOD KHAN DURRANI, 1st Bahawalpur Infantry, ISF - Malaya and Penang, 1943-1945 (gazetted 25 May 1946).**
- Captain MATEEN AHMED ANSARI, 7th Rajput Regiment - Hong Kong (Stanley Jail), May 1942- September 1942 and May 1943 - 20 October 1943 (gazetted 19 April 1946).
- Major H P SEAGRIM, Burma Rifles and 19th Hyderabad Regiment - Karen Hills, Burma, February 1943 - February 1944 and 15 March 1944 - 2 September 1944 (gazetted 12 September 1946).

(** Captain (later Lieutenant Colonel) DURRANI was of particular interest to me in my study of the Indian State Forces, as the most highly decorated ISF soldier. Anyone who has read his book *"The Sixth Column"*, published by Cassell and Company in 1955, can only marvel at the heroism displayed in the face of frightful torture at the hands of both the Japanese and Indian National Army interrogators. He had attended various VC and GC Association gatherings in London over the years and I had hoped we might have seen him again for the VJ Day celebrations over the weekend of 19/20 August. I was sad to read, therefore, his obituary in The Times on 22 August. He died in Pakistan on 20 August 1995 aged 81. Ed.)

I regret that I inadvertently omitted one VC winner in the last issue. In February 1941, in Eritrea, Subedar RICHPAL RAM 4/6th Rajputana Rifles, was killed after leading his company in an assault at Keren, beating back six counter attacks in one night and then, five days later, inspiring his men in another attack, though severely wounded.

We should also not forget those who received other awards.



INDIAN ARMY AWARDS IN WORLD WAR II

Major General Chand Das

Nearly 6,300 awards were earned by the Indian Army for gallantry and meritorious service during World War II. Awards for gallantry alone totalled about 4,800. They include 31 Victoria Crosses, nine George Crosses, 252 Distinguished Service Orders, 347 Indian Order of Merit and 1,311 Military Crosses.

The Infantry earned about 4,000 awards, including 29 Victoria Crosses, five George Crosses, 446 Distinguished Service Orders, while Engineers and Service Corps had about 350 awards each to their credit. Of the 300 awards won by the Armoured Corps 21 were Distinguished Service Orders and 88 were Military Crosses. The invaluable and gallant service rendered by army doctors to the front line troops earned the Medical Service 140 awards for gallantry alone, among them eight Distinguished Service Orders and 70 Military Crosses. Over 100 awards were won by the Signal Corps which included one Distinguished Service Order and eight Military Crosses. The Artillery won 100 awards; one Victoria Cross, six Distinguished Service Orders and 38 Military Crosses.

General Chand Das has also provided a lengthy article about the Indian Divisions in the War. Space does not permit me to use all of it at once and so I shall spread the article over a number of editions.

2nd INDIAN DIVISION



A yellow hornet on a black rectangular background - apparently adopted because of the large number of hornets in the area at the time of its formation.

The formation was raised in Iraq in August 1942 and was based at Basra as the Lines of Communication formation for the forces in the Middle East. It had a very large number of administrative units, transport companies, workshops and medical units.

3RD INDIAN DIVISION (THE CHINDITS)



A golden Burmese Dragon (a *Chinthe* - Pagoda Guardian) on a blue circular background.

The 3rd Indian Division was formed in India in August 1943 as a special force. The first Chindit expedition of Major General Wingate in 1943 was in the nature of a primary effort in the operation behind the Japanese lines. In 1944 the second Wingate expedition consisted of six brigades fighting as infantry columns in long range penetration operations behind Japanese lines in Burma. The special force was inducted into Burma by road and by aircraft to bases established at "Aberdeen" in the Indaw area, "Broadway" east of Mandalay-Myithyina Railway, "White City" on the railway line and later

at "Blackpool" between Hopin and Mogaung to block enemy supply routes and to disrupt its efforts. Having established the bases the force fought its way northwards up the railway valley to assist Stilwell's Force and to force the Japanese to divert forces from the Imphal front. The Japanese, though surprised initially, attacked vigorously. Air supply in enemy territory in thick jungle during the monsoons was unsatisfactory. After Wingate died in an air crash the expedition was withdrawn in August, but not before one brigade was moved to assist Stilwell's forces and to capture Mogaung on 26/27 June during which action 3/6 GR suffered more than 250 casualties killed and wounded. The special force suffered 3628 casualties during these operations.

Four VCs were awarded to the force, of which two were won by 3/6 GR in the fight for Mogaung: Captain Michael Allmand (posthumous) and Rifleman Tul Bahadur Pun.

The Division re-formed in India and trained for a similar role but was disbanded in 1945.

4TH INDIAN DIVISION



A red eagle in flight on a dark blue background. The Division became known as the 'Red Eagles'.

The Division was the first Indian formation to go overseas. It was formed in Egypt in 1939 and was in the van during nine campaigns in the Mediterranean theatre, including the operation by Wavell against Sidi Barrani in December 1940 when it moved across 250 miles of desert to complete one of the greatest victories of all times. In four days four enemy divisions were destroyed and over 20,000 prisoners taken for the loss of 700 men.

It subsequently moved to Kassala in Sudan and fought in Eritrea where, in the battle for Keren, Subedar Richpal Ram of 4th Battalion Rajputana Rifles won the first VC for the Division. One brigade was withdrawn to Syria where French Vichy officials had connived at German infiltration. The remainder returned to the Western Desert and were involved in the no less critical encounter on the Halfaya escarpment. Other major battles included Omars, Benghazi (where it destroyed 12 Junkers troop carriers and captured or destroyed 183 aircraft), El Geebi, Tobruk, Derna airfield, Wadi Akarit, Mersa Matruh, Ruweisat Ridge, Alamein, Mareth Line (where Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa of 1/2 Gorkhas almost won that victory single-handedly and won the VC) and Tunisia (where Havildar Major Chhelu Ram of 4/6 Rajputana Rifles gallantly led the assault at Djebel Garci and made the supreme sacrifice which brought him the posthumous VC). In Italy it fought a desperate battle at Cassino Monastery Hill and Hangman Hill before moving to the Adriatic Coast where it took over a wide front. The breakthrough on the Rapids led to an enemy withdrawal with the Division in pursuit mopping up rearguards and liberating Chaiti, Pascara and Citta San Angelo. In central Italy it stormed Alviri Ridge and severe fighting ensued in the San Maria de Tiberina and Cedrone areas.

East of Arezzo the Divisional engineers built "Jacob's Ladder", a jeep track of outstanding ingenuity. It was in this area that Lieutenant St. J G Young and Sowar Ditto Ram proved their blood brotherhood with Subedar Subramanian who also gave his life on a minefield to win the Division's second and third George Crosses.

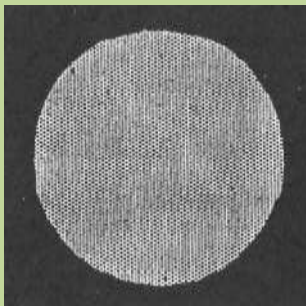
The Division was the first to break through the main Gothic Line positions and Monte Calvo, Tavoletto, Monte San Giovanni, Auditore and Gemmano were captured after 11 previous attacks. At Factano crossing Rifleman Sher Bahadur Thapa of 1/9 Gurkhas, by his daring and cold courage, brought his battalion its first VC. Following up swiftly, San Merino was occupied and the Rimini Line was broken.

After the outstanding achievements the Division was moved to Greece where it was deployed to Macedonia right up to the Yugoslav border.

The Division captured 150,000 prisoners and suffered 25,000 casualties, more than the strength of a whole division. It won over 1000 honours and awards, which included four VCs and three GCs.

Field Marshal Earl Wavell wrote: "The fame of the Division will surely go down as one of the greatest fighting formations in military history, to be spoken of with such as the Tenth Legion, the Light Division of the Peninsula War, Napoleon's "Old Guard". Even beyond its fighting reputation it will be remembered for the spirit of the mutual trust and fellowship maintained between all ranks coming from so many different races and creeds. Jo Hukum"

THE FIGHTING FIFTH



A red circle on a black background

The Division was formed in India from the Deccan District Headquarters and two brigades moved to Sudan in 1940 where they were joined by a British brigade already there. Almost continuously in action or in transit by land, sea or air from one battlefield to another during five years of war, the Division is one of the most travelled formations of the Indian Army and has justly earned the title "The Fighting Fifth".

From the wilderness of the rocky peaks in Afghanistan, over thousands of miles of sands in North Africa, Iraq and Persia to the steaming jungles of Burma, the Division played a leading part in the defeat of the Italians, the Germans and the Japanese in crowning its epic campaigns with the occupation of Singapore and Java on the surrender of the East.

During its successive battles, more than 200 decorations were awarded to the officers and men in the Division, including the Indian Army's first VC to 2/Lt Premindra Singh Bhagat, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, at Gondar, Abyssinia, in January 1941, and three more VCs won by L/Cpl J P Harmen of the 4th Battalion, the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, Jemadar Abdul Hafiz of the 3/9th Jats and Jemadar Ram Sarup Singh, 1st Punjab Regiment.

Lord Mountbatten, South East Asia Supremo, wrote that he was proud to pay his tribute to the Division whose record was "second to none".

On reaching Sudan one Brigade joined the 4th Indian Division which had been sent there to reinforce them. Two remaining Brigades were re-formed to include three British battalions. On 19 January 1941 the Fifth went into full scale action at Gallabat and Fort Dulogoronos

and continued to capture Keren and Amba Alagi where the Duke of Aosta surrendered. They won the battles of Barentu, Teclesan and Massawa and had taken prisoners more than twice their own number.

Transferred to the desert after a brief respite, troops of the Fifth created a diversion from Giarabub towards the Jalo Oasis. Operating from Giarabub it made a cross-desert dash of about 300 miles and captured Jalo taking 700 prisoners. When the Germans started their counter offensive on 21 January 1942, the Fifth fought a series of rearguard actions in which they suffered heavy losses, but took a heavy toll of the enemy. After reforming, the Fifth were in the defensive battle of El Alamein and at Ruweisat Ridge, avenging some of its earlier misfortune, took 2000 prisoners in its last action in the North Africa theatre.

The Division was then moved to Iraq and Persia and was formed into an Armoured Division with 7 Armoured Brigade (Desert Rats) and two infantry brigades. -It also trained as a strong GHQ reserve to protect airlines to India, and the land routes to Russia and the oil fields.

In June 1943 the Division came back to India and in November was in action against the Japanese in the Arakan and later drove them out of Ngakyedauk. In the counter attack by the Japanese, and after more bloody fighting, the Ngakyedauk Pass was reopened, relieving 7 Indian Division which had been cut off. After that battle the Fifth started on an offensive role which led to the opening of the Maungdaw-Buthidaung tunnel routes.

When the Japanese turned their attention to Manipur, the Fifth was moved there where it brought the Japanese to battle and scored conspicuous successes. Two VCs were won in the grim fighting at that period (L/Cpl Harmen and Jemadar Abdul Hafiz).

After three month's siege around Imphal the Kohima road was reopened in June with the meeting of 5th Indian Division and 2nd British Division. The Fifth then pushed the Japanese back from the Imphal Plain down the Tamu road through Kabaw Valley and the Tiddim Road through Chir Hills to Chindwin and Kalemmyo. They held the Japanese at Bishenpur. The Japanese eventually started retreating and the Division was the first to re-cross the Burma border, but the progress was slow. Deploying with patrol detours it took the enemy completely by surprise and it swooped on Tongzang to dislodge the Japanese.

Before the assault on Hill 160 and the last height before Tiddim the tanks were brought up to support the attack and Tiddim was captured. In one of the flanking movements 2/1 Punjab captured the strong enemy position at Sialum Vum overlooking the road from Tiddim to Kennedy Peak. Here, on 25 October 1944, Subedar Ram Sarup Singh of 2/1 Punjab won the VC posthumously. Kennedy Peak fell to the Division which encountered little serious opposition. The Division pushed on to Kalemmyo and linked up with 11th East African Division.

Having fought continuously for 14 months the Division then returned to Assam and rested for two months before emerging again in March 1945. After the capture of Meiktila the Division moved south towards Rangoon and swept forward 180 miles after several stiff actions. It captured a hill feature, Shwempo Bluff, and secured a bridgehead across the Sinthe Chaung, capturing Pyinmana and Toungoo as it advanced towards Rangoon. The Fifth was the first ashore at Singapore on 5 September 1945. After two months it was sent to Java to restore peace and order. It returned to India in 1946.

(to be continued)

THE INDIAN ARMY IN SARAWAK DURING WORLD WAR II

Alan Harfield

Much has been written on the defence and fall of both Hong Kong and Singapore, but little has been recorded concerning the defence of the oil fields in Sarawak. The official history of the war against Japan gives the following description of the island of Borneo:

"...The island of Borneo is a land of primeval jungle. The coasts are fringed with mangrove and swamp, and over nine-tenths of the interior is covered with thick evergreen forests. In 1941 the population was small - that of the whole island was estimated at less than three million - and there were less than a dozen settlements large enough to be called towns..."

In 1941 the island was partly controlled by the Dutch and partly by the British, with the British states being on the northern seaboard. The possessions consisted of North Borneo and Sarawak, and the small protected State of Brunei and the Crown Colony of Labuan Island.

To gain control of the oil fields, and to guard their flank in the offensive against Malaya, the Japanese plan included the occupation of British Borneo and they launched their offensive eight days after the initial attack on Malaya. The oil fields in northern Borneo were in two groups. One group was at Miri in Sarawak and the second at Seria in the neighbouring state of Brunei, with the main refinery being located at Lutong. Movement between Kuching and the oil fields and the refinery was, in the early 1940s, by river and sea.

It was virtually impossible to defend this isolated coastline and plans were made for the destruction of the oil installations in the event of attack. In December 1940 a company of the 2nd Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment was sent to Miri to give protection to the demolition parties. It was decided that no attempts would be made to defend British North Borneo, Brunei or Labuan Island, and the Governor of North Borneo was advised of this decision. The Volunteers and Police in those States were merely to be used on internal security duties.

Following a decision to defend Kuching and its airfield the 2/15th Punjab Regiment was moved to become the garrison troops of that area as from May 1941. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Malet Lane, MC, commanded the battalion and was given overall command of all forces in Sarawak. The force, which was known as 'SARFOR' consisted of:

- 2nd Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment
- Detachment, Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery, with two 6 inch guns
- Detachment, 35th Fortress Company RE.

In addition the following units came under command:

- embodied members of the Volunteer Corps
- Sarawak Rangers
- Coastal Marine Service

- Armed Police.

The country between Kuching, the main town of Sarawak, and the sea was at that time roadless but intersected by a number of winding waterways. There are two main approaches to the town: the Sarawak River is the main approach, which is navigable by vessels up to sixteen feet draught, and the other approach is by the Santubong River which will take vessels up to a draught of twelve feet.

The original plan of defence for Kuching was to attempt to hold the enemy north of the town and to counter attack with a mobile force depriving the enemy the use of the airfield. However, in September 1941, during a conference with the Dutch authorities, it was agreed that the town could not successfully be defended and the whole operation was changed so that the prime concern became the defence of the airfield.

The orders for the demolition of the oil refinery at Lutong reached the Company. Commander at Miri on 8 December and by that evening the demolition was completed. The following day the local airstrip was rendered unserviceable and on 13 December the detached company of the 2/15th Punjab Regiment was withdrawn to Kuching by sea. The Japanese arrived off Miri and Seria (in Brunei) just before midnight on 15 December and began landing troops immediately. Due to delays the news of the landings did not reach the operational headquarters in Singapore immediately and no action was taken against the Japanese force until 17 December when the task force was attacked by Dutch naval and air force units.

On 22 December the main portion of the Japanese invasion force made up of two battalions re-embarked at Miri and set out to attack Kuching. In the meantime another battalion advanced eastwards and occupied Labuan Island on 1 January 1942, then moved on and captured Jesselton on 8 January. On 17 January two companies landed at Sandakan, the seat of the government of British North Borneo, and accepted the surrender from the British Governor on 19 January. He refused to continue to administer the state under the Japanese and was interned with his staff.

The force that was sailing towards Kuching was sighted later on 22 December when it was about 150 miles from its objective. The Dutch, who had an operational airfield at Singkawang, intended to launch an air strike against the convoy but were prevented from doing so when the airfield was badly damaged by an air raid made by twenty four Japanese aircraft.

It was unfortunate that the morale of the local volunteers was not as high as it might have been due to the continued absence of the head of state - Raja Vyner Brooke - who remained in Australia during this time of danger.

The Japanese convoy, although attacked by a Dutch submarine, reached the mouth of the Santubong River at about 6pm on 23 December and two hours later Colonel Lane was instructed by the Defence Chiefs in Singapore to destroy the airfield. Because of former decisions that had changed the plan of defence it was not possible for Colonel Lane to re-establish a mobile defence and he requested permission from Lieutenant General A E Percival to withdraw into Dutch north-west Borneo. Whilst awaiting a reply Lane concentrated his battalion at the airfield, with detachments to the east and north of Kuching. He also established an 18-pounder gun and a 3-inch mortar detachment to cover the river

approaches. The rivers were patrolled by launches manned by a platoon of the Punjabi regiment and men of the Sarawak Rangers and the Coastal Marine Service.

At daybreak on 24 December the Japanese convoy anchored off the mouth of the Santubong River and at 9am twenty enemy landing craft approached the shore. The small gunboat platoon, being completely outnumbered, withdrew up the river without loss. At 11 am the Japanese landing craft approached the town and were engaged by the 18-pounder gun and the mortar detachments. Although four landing craft were sunk the remainder reached their objective and surrounded the two detachments, killing all the men manning those positions. The enemy landed on both sides of the river and by 4.30pm the whole area was in the hands of the Japanese, which included the town of Kuching and Fort Margherita, the headquarters of the Sarawak Rangers. Meanwhile Lane had received instructions from General Percival to hold the Japanese as long as possible and to act in the best interests of Borneo as a whole. Lane withdrew all his force to the airfield and throughout the night sporadic firing continued as the Japanese gradually encircled the airfield. During the early part of Christmas Day, there was a lull in the firing and Lane took this opportunity to send a hospital detachment, together with the women and children, westward into Dutch Borneo.

During the next day the Japanese advance continued and Lane, determined to keep his escape route open, despatched a company to hold the ferry crossing at Batu Kitang. A general withdrawal into Dutch Borneo was commenced at dusk but the Japanese launched a full scale attack on the two companies of 2/15 Punjab Regiment that were covering the retreat. Of these two companies only one platoon succeeded in re-joining the main party. The remainder, consisting of four British officers and approximately 230 Indian soldiers, were cut off and either killed or captured.

The main portion of the battalion reached Batu Kitang to find the village deserted and the ferry abandoned. The crossing was made with difficulty and resulted in the greater part of the transport being left behind. The Japanese renewed their attack on the retreating force and only with great difficulty did the detachment detailed to cover the river crossing escape. They escaped by going southward and after a march of about sixty miles through dense jungle, with little food and water, re-joined the battalion at Singkawang II airfield in Dutch Borneo on 31 December.

The main body of the combined force made its way to Krokong which was where the road ended, and the remaining vehicles and all heavy equipment had to be abandoned. At this point the men of the Sarawak State Forces, which included the Sarawak Rangers, were released from their commitment as they were recruited for service within the State and it was considered preferable to allow them to return to their homes in Sarawak. Therefore from 26 December 1941 'SARFOR' ceased to exist as a combined Indian and State Force.

On the morning of 27 December the main column, mostly men of the 2/15 Punjab Regiment, now greatly reduced in numbers, crossed the border into Dutch Borneo and two days later joined a garrison of 750 Dutch troops on Singkawang II airfield. The women and children were sent on by road to Pontianak on the coast where they embarked on a ship and escaped only four days before the Japanese seized the town.

Lieutenant Colonel Lane placed his battalion under the command of the Dutch for the defence of the airfield. On 31 December Air Headquarters at Singapore arranged for an air drop of supplies to the airfield and three Blenheim bombers carried out a successful air drop

of some 900 pounds of supplies. Due to inclement weather the Japanese advance was held up but on 26 January, having destroyed the stores and barracks, the combined Indian and Dutch force launched an attack which was repulsed. On 27 January orders were given to evacuate the airfield. During the withdrawal, two Platoons of the 2/15 Punjab Regiment were surrounded but they refused to surrender, fighting on under command of their Indian officer. In the late afternoon, only when their ammunition had run out and the enemy were attacking in overwhelming numbers did the determined Indian soldiers surrender. Of the seventy Punjabis engaged in this fight only three managed to escape, the remainder were never seen again. In the published history of the Sarawak campaign it is recorded that reports published by the Japanese showed that these two platoons inflicted heavy casualties on the Japanese with "...between 400 and 500 killed or wounded..."

The Battalion continued to retreat in the hope of escaping by sea to Java where it could join other units to continue to fight the enemy. The retreat was made through Ledo and on 4 February the battalion, with Dutch agreement, split into two columns and made its way through almost unexplored jungles and swamps of southern Borneo. Travelling by forest track and by raft and boat on dangerous rivers, and being continually short of food and clothing, the two parties finally reached the coast. The western column reached Pangkalanbooen on 24 February and, finding that escape was impossible, joined the local Dutch garrison in the defence of the landing grounds. The eastern column arrived at Sampit on 6 March only to find that the Japanese had landed at the mouth of the river on the previous day.

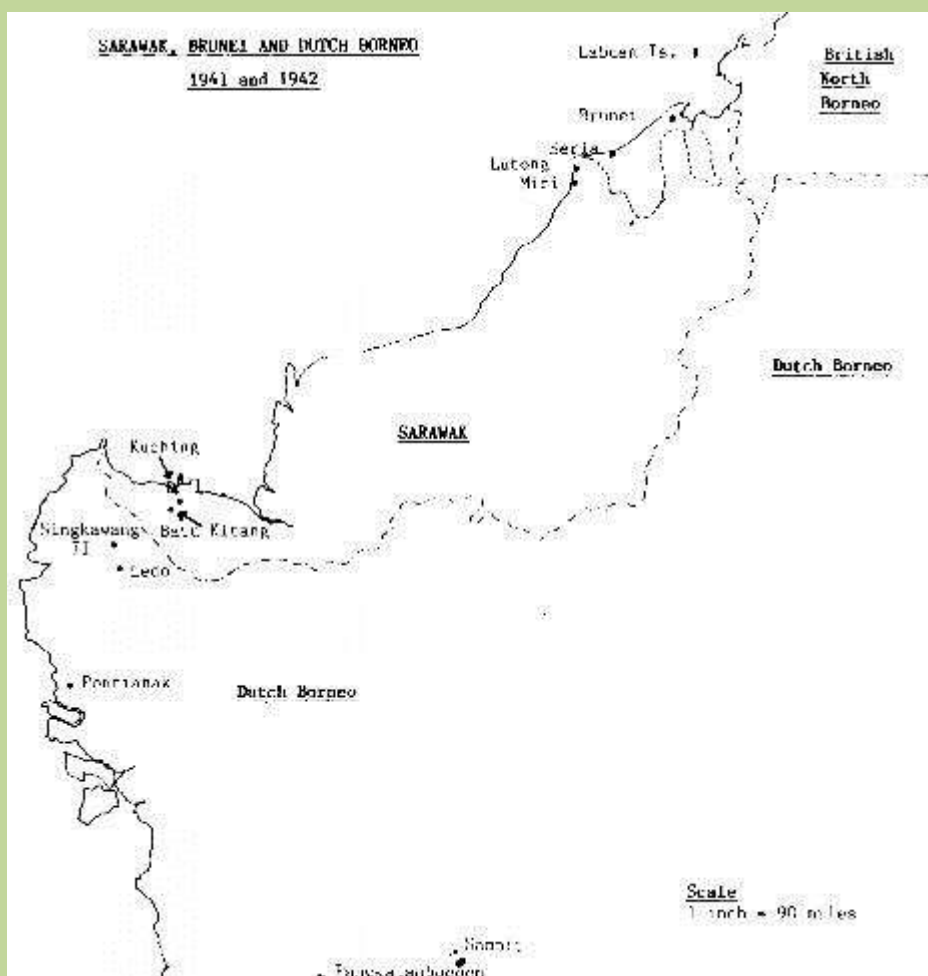
News was received on 8 March that Java had been taken by the Japanese and there was no further need to reach that island. On the following day a Japanese broadcast called on all Allied forces in the Netherlands East Indies to lay down their arms. Retreating into the jungle-covered mountains was considered but the experience of the conditions of the jungle terrain gained during the retreat made this option an impracticable one. The order to surrender was given on the afternoon of 9 March 1942. The 2/15 Punjab Regiment had, in the ten weeks since it left Kuching, fought in many actions and inflicted heavy casualties, and had travelled through extremely difficult country in adverse conditions. The men had carried their light automatic weapons, rifles and ammunition with them and remained as a formed and disciplined battalion throughout. General Percival is quoted as saying "...a feat of endurance which assuredly will rank high in the annals of warfare.....

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- Runciman, Steven. *The White Rajahs*. Cambridge University Press, 1960.
- Supplement to The London Gazette of Tuesday 20 January 1948.



FORT MARGHERITA KUCHING (now the SARAWAK POLICE MUSEUM)



MAP of SARAWAK, BRUNEI & DUTCH BORNEO, 1941 & 1942

A SECOND WORLD WAR RECRUITING MEDAL

Tony McClenaghan

The photographs accompanying this article show the obverse and reverse of a medal which, thanks to the efforts of Brigadier Sukhjit Singh MVC, of Kapurthala, has been identified as a recruiting medal for the Second World War.

The obverse shows the Golden Temple at Amritsar with a fish in the surrounding lake. The reverse has, within a central circle edged by beads, the large letter V with imperial crown above. Superimposed on this in three lines the inscription, in English, AMRITSAR WAR EFFORT MELA 1945, the whole resting on what would appear to be waves. Around the outer edge the inscription, in English, FOR FAMILY SERVICES TO KING & COUNTRY.

The medal is 39mm diameter, of cupro nickel, and has a ring and loop suspender, though I have been unable to identify a ribbon for it. It was issued unnamed.

This commemorative medal was presented by the Amritsar City Corporation in 1945 to prominent families in the district that had assisted in the recruitment of personnel for the war effort. Unfortunately there does not appear to be a surviving record of the presentation, though the descendants of one of the recipients still have his medal. The example photographed by me was in a private collection elsewhere in India.



Obverse



Reverse

LETTERS AND QUERIES

● Edward Matthews seeks help with regard to silver war badges:

I am presently engaged in collecting and researching the above badges which were issued to service personnel discharged with wounds, sickness or other qualifying causes during World War 1. The original idea was to indicate to the public at large that a man had 'done his bit' and was not in uniform for a good reason. Approximately 1¼ million badges were issued between 1916 and 1922.

The badge was 31mm in diameter, produced in silver, individually numbered and issued with a small certificate. The rolls for the British Army and RFC are now available at the PRO and give varying details about the recipients, i.e. dates of enlistment, discharge, cause, whether served overseas and occasionally age on discharge., the amount of additional information varies according to the Regiment.

The British badge numbers are either without a prefix or prefixed with an 'O' or 'B'. The Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Merchant Navy are prefixed RAF, RN and MS respectively. Colonial badges were prefixed as follows:

- Canada 'C'
- South Africa 'SA'
- Newfoundland 'N'
- Australia 'A'
- New Zealand 'NZ'
- India 'I'

I have not personally seen an 'I' prefix badge but I am assured by other collectors that they do exist. To add further confusion I recently purchased a brass version of the badge numbered on the reverse I 19447.

If any member can assist with any information about these 'I' prefix badges or is aware of any rolls in existence for the recipients then I would very much like to hear from them. The accompanying photograph gives a good idea of the badge design.



● I published a request in the last journal from M. Jacques Jost concerning 100 independent Light Tank Squadron. Two members have copied their replies to me. James Dunn replied as follows:

The following is a summary of information contained on pages 196, 281, 293 and 334 of the book in "*Singapore: The Pregnable Fortress. A Study in Deception Discord and Desertion*". Peter Elphick, Hodder & Stoughton, 1995 - ISBN 0-340-61316-5.

- It is possible that the tanks were sent to Singapore in response to a request from the Commander-in-Chief, Far East to the War Office, dated 24 July 1941, for old British or American tanks which were unsuitable for service in the field to protect aerodromes (probably the RAF aerodromes in Northern Malaya)
- 16 tanks were transported by the S.S. Empire Star. This ship was part of Convoy BM 11 which sailed from Bombay on 19 January 1942 and arrived at Singapore on 29 January.
- The Empire Star, unlike the other ships of her convoy, which were all troop-carriers, was a cargo vessel carrying guns, army vehicles and ammunition which had been trans-shipped into her at Ellesmere Port, UK, three months previously and in India.
- Although there was a great need for the 16 tanks and the 2,000 tons of ammunition aboard she spent the first part of her stay in the port anchored in the Dangerous Goods Area. If she had been hit whilst moored alongside the wharfs the resulting explosion would have demolished the entire port. She was not attacked by the Japanese air force whilst so anchored.
- The ship finally berthed under cover of darkness on 6 February. No stevedores were prepared to work the cargo under such dangerous conditions so every crew member helped unload. However no sooner had the unloading begun than the Japanese bombers came in to attack. The ship cast off and moved back to the anchorage. The cargo of the ship was well known and the Japanese air force was being assisted by agents on the ground. It is not stated if the tanks were unloaded at this stage.
- As time passed the ship's cargo was now of the utmost importance and the gravest risks were to be taken to get it unloaded. The ship was brought back alongside some time later on 9 February. Again, the crew had to unload the cargo unaided.
- The 16 tanks, with a detachment of men from the 100th Light Tank Squadron, were not only obsolescent, but most were unserviceable and so were not used at all except as static gun platforms.

●Chris Kempton's reply contains somewhat conflicting dates but more detail as to actual deployment:

In April 1941 the 44th Cavalry was formed at Risalpur with the Jat Squadron provided by 8th Cavalry. This squadron became 100th independent Light Tank Squadron later in 1941 (I have been unable to trace a specific date). Its date of arrival in Singapore seems to be somewhat vague, mention is made that it arrived three weeks before the Surrender which would mean 26 January, but the same source says that on 4 February it had only been in Singapore for four days, which would mean an arrival on 31 January.

On 1 February it was attached to 3rd Cavalry (A & C Squadrons) under 11 Div at Sembawang and on 4 February it was moved to B Squadron, 3rd Cavalry, which was detached under 18 (British) Div at Seletar. At this time B Squadron was reduced to only 30 men and 100th was equipped with 9 obsolescent Carden Lloyd tankettes ex-Middle East which required major overhaul and repair and were, in effect, unserviceable.

B Squadron was moved to McRitchie Reservoir on 13 February under 53 (British) Brigade and took part in the Wireless Hill action on 14 February as well as a night attack that same

night. There is no mention of 100th being involved in any of this though it seems highly probable that at least the personnel remained with B Squadron 3rd Cavalry, bearing in mind its heavily depleted establishment.

'The Indian Armour' states "the 100th was never fully operational and did not get close to the enemy" and I would guess that, as happened with so many units at that time, it simply ceased to exist sometime between 4 and 13 February, with the personnel being absorbed by 3rd Cavalry and the vehicles abandoned.

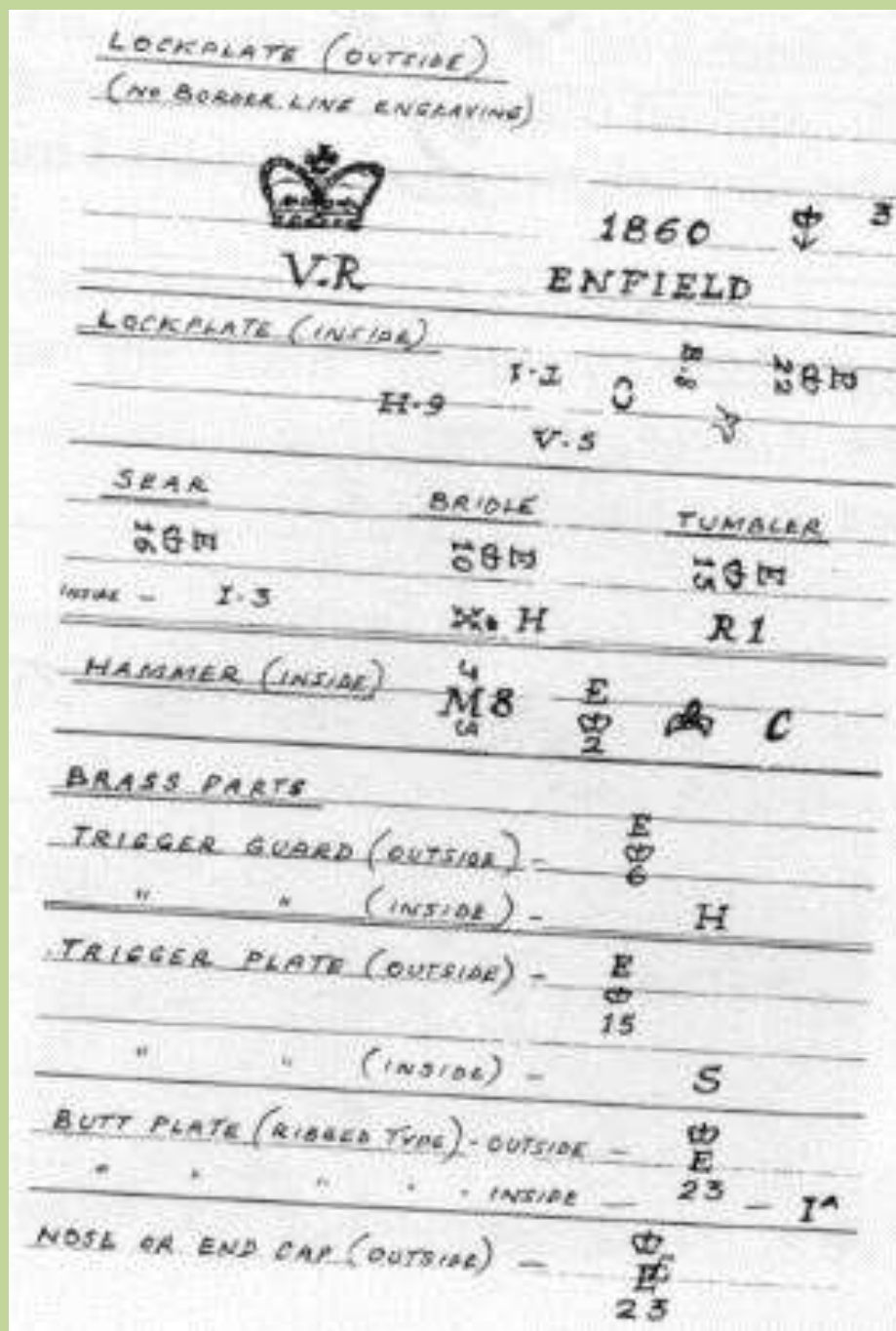
I have been unable to find a record of a specific action on 11 February in which the unit might have been involved and would be most interested to know what the PRO came up with.

● John Weedon of the Muzzle Loaders Association of Great Britain has approached us to see if any member can help with the following query. He writes:

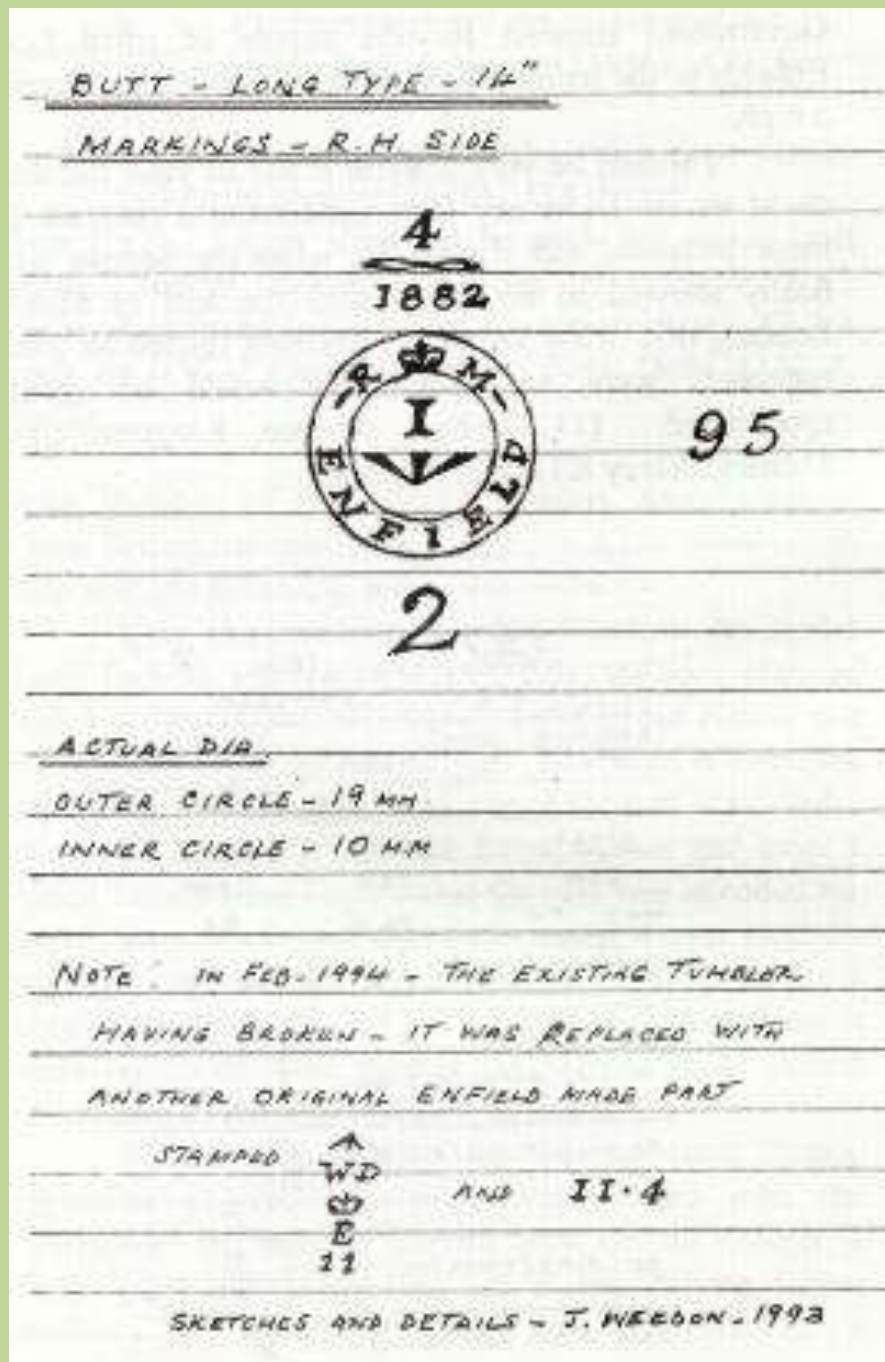
I am in possession of a .577" calibre 4th model Long Enfield, Pattern 1853 M/L rifle, the lock plate of which is dated 1860, with Government Broad Arrow and Crown and VR Crown stampings. The barrel is dated for June 1863. On the right hand side of the butt is a circular stamp - R.M. ENFIELD with Broad Arrow and letter 'I' which I understand implies that the rifle was intended for Indian use. The figures above this stamp, 4 over 1882 do suggest that this is the date of issue, but may be merely a contract or batch number. The style of butt marking is more typical of those used in the Martini Henry period rather than of the Muzzle Loading times.

Knowing that after the Mutiny most Sepoy regiments allowed to remain were issued with the "look-alike" but inferior smooth bore Enfield musket, I made great efforts to find out if the Pattern Room Archives at Nottingham had any reference to a Government contract for the supply of rifled Long Enfields to the Indian Native Infantry, but did not receive a reply.

I should be very grateful if any of your members could let me know any facts concerning a contract for these weapons, and if possible, when the Sepoys were finally allowed to be armed with the sort of Muzzle Loading rifle in my keeping. Anything related to which regiments were to have them would be greatly appreciated.



Reproduction of drawing showing marks on the musket



Reproduction of drawing showing marks on the musket

● Christopher Peterson writes:

Can anyone confirm the identity of the badge shown below which I believe is for the 91st Punjabis (Light Infantry)? The badge is die/cast in brass with white metal XCI in the centre and three lugs on rear.

Web site note - see Vol. 13, No. 4, Winter 1996 – now identified as 91st Manitoba Light Infantry.

Secondly, I have compiled the official MID lists taken from the Gazette of India, October 21, 1916, AD Nos. 1241 & 1242, together a total of 53 pages, for the Siege of Kut (Major General C V F Townshend CB) and the Operations of Indian Expeditionary Force "D" for Mesopotamia (Lieutenant General Sir P H N Lake KCB). The names are listed by regiment with regimental numbers and occasionally notes on wounded or KIA. Copies are available from me at \$20 for both. The pages are standard 8½ by 11 inches, stapled with cover giving particulars.

If there is interest in the above I hope to compile another for the Third Afghan War and Waziristan 1919-20.

